

## GETHSEMANE: A PRAYER OF FAITH

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Gethsemane reveals a highly personal yet intriguing glimpse into the life of our Lord. It discloses a deep agony gripping the inner person of the God-Man that is difficult to understand. Geldenhuys' warning concerning this passage is typical of many expositors: "No man will ever be capable of sounding the depths of what the Savior experienced in Gethsemane."<sup>1</sup>

Many conflicting interpretations have been offered, serving as a warning to those who would examine it today to proceed with caution and, above all, reverence. A majority of the opinions offered center around a certain common framework: Jesus desired to avoid the cross and expressed this desire to the Father in prayer, but then he readjusted his desire to God's will and in obedience suffered the cross. This interpretation, however it may be embellished, is not without its problems. Questions immediately arise concerning the will (or wills) of Christ in relation to the will of the Father. The sinlessness and impeccability of Christ are questioned. The problem of consistency with Christ's own teaching concerning the necessity of the cross must likewise be adequately explained.

Why did Jesus pray this prayer? What did he mean by it? It is hoped that this paper will contribute to a further investigation of these matters, and that it will do so with the reverence that is demanded and with the humble admission that we see like the three that were with him, from afar off and through dim eyes.

### I. EXEGETICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Gethsemane prayer is recorded by all three synoptic writers.<sup>2</sup> It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze all the problems in the harmonization of these accounts. Only those matters that bear on the meaning of this prayer for Jesus need to be considered. Consequently, attention will be focused on two areas: the events leading up to the prayer, and the form and content of the prayer itself.

1. *Events Preceding the Prayer.* There are three observations concerning the events preceding the prayer that are important clues to its interpretation. First, there is the fact of Christ's awareness of and preoccupation with his imminent death. Second, there is evidence that Gethsemane is a temptation scene, a con-

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<sup>1</sup>N. Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 574.

<sup>2</sup>Matt 26:37-45; Mark 14:33-41; Luke 22:40-46. A somewhat similar incident is found in John 17:1-18, and many expositors see allusions to this prayer in Heb 5:7. The accounts of Matthew and Mark are remarkably similar, almost verbatim. Luke is notably brief, although including the unique accounts of the sweating of blood and the appearance of a comforting angel. Benoit argues for the authenticity of these verses because (1) the earliest MSS that include this section of Luke include this passage (MSS that exclude it are later than 300 A.D.) and (2) it fits the Lukan emphasis on the humanity of Christ and the appearance of angels (in contrast to docetic and gnostic conceptions of Christ that prevailed in the fourth century in areas where MSS omitted this). Cf. P. Benoit, *The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (tr. B. Weatherhead; New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 17-18.

frontation between Christ and Satan. Third, there is the change of mood that comes over Jesus in the garden on his way to prayer.

The synoptics emphasize Christ's preoccupation with his imminent death by locating the account of Gethsemane within a larger pericope that opens with the decision of the chief priests and scribes to put Jesus to death.<sup>3</sup> He is then anointed for his death in the house of Simon the leper. Following this, Judas Iscariot contacts the chief priests and an arrangement is made for the arrest of Jesus. Then is recorded the incident of the last supper. The whole scene is charged with Jesus' knowledge that his death is imminent. He knows that his time is at hand.<sup>4</sup> He declares that it is his last meal before he suffers.<sup>5</sup> He prophesies that one will betray him,<sup>6</sup> and identifies that one as Judas.<sup>7</sup> He recalls and interprets prophecy that he will be struck down that night.<sup>8</sup> The supper itself is interpreted in light of his death.

Jesus' knowledge of his death is consistent with the development of both the synoptic and Johannine narratives to this point. Repeatedly he told them that he would go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised up on the third day.<sup>9</sup> His resolve to see this accomplished confused and bewildered his disciples. Any attempts to dissuade him were sharply rebuked.<sup>10</sup>

The second observation is evidenced by the increasing activity of Satan. After the wilderness temptation narratives<sup>11</sup> Satan is not heard from again until prior to the transfiguration, when Peter suggests that Christ should not have to die.<sup>12</sup> The synoptics attribute this suggestion directly to Satan. Satan evidently tempted Peter to offer it, since Jesus expressly rebukes him, commanding him to withdraw. In the events immediately preceding Gethsemane, it is Luke who calls attention specifically to Satan's actions. While Matthew and Mark record Judas slipping away to bargain with the chief priests for the life of Jesus, Luke notes that Satan had entered him.<sup>13</sup> John also observes that Satan entered Judas but places the event during the passover meal when Jesus identifies him as the

<sup>3</sup>Matt 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2.

<sup>4</sup>Matt 26:18.

<sup>5</sup>Luke 22:15-16.

<sup>6</sup>Matt 26:21 and parallels.

<sup>7</sup>Matt 26:25; also John 13:26-30.

<sup>8</sup>Matt 26:31; Mark 14:27; cf. Zech 13:7.

<sup>9</sup>Matt 16:21-28; 17:9, 12, 22-23; 20:18-19; also parallels in Mark and Luke. In John, references to being lifted up: 3:14; 8:28; 12:32; also see 6:51-52; 7:33; 8:21; 10:11-12.

<sup>10</sup>Matt 16:22-23.

<sup>11</sup>Matthew 4 and parallels.

<sup>12</sup>Matt 16:22-23 and parallels.

<sup>13</sup>Luke 22:3-4.

betrayed.<sup>14</sup> During the passover meal, Jesus discloses to Peter that Satan had been asking to sift him like wheat but that Jesus had prayed for him.<sup>15</sup> As a result Jesus says that his faith would prevail over the satanic attack and instructs him how to help his brothers through it also.

There is no direct mention of Satan in the accounts of the garden, but most commentators agree that his presence is not only detectable but to be expected. R. S. Barbour<sup>16</sup> and E. Best<sup>17</sup> see the passion in Mark as the climax of the struggle between Christ and Satan, light and darkness, good and evil. The struggle is pronounced in Mark, who specifically develops this theme in the confrontation between Christ and the demons. Barbour writes concerning Gethsemane in Mark:

Jesus is here to be thought of as engaged with the power of the evil one. The Gethsemane struggle in Mark points forward through the cry of dereliction and the Cross, to the final overthrow of evil and the appearance of the Son of Man in xiii. 26, with its quotation of Dan. vii.13, to which xiv.62 also points.<sup>18</sup>

The third observation may be made after Jesus and his band of eleven disciples enter the garden. Leaving eight behind, he proceeds a little further with three of his disciples to pray. On his way to pray, however, in the presence of these three men, a change comes over Jesus. Mark describes it using *echthambeisthai* and *adēmonein*. Matthew has *lypeisthai* in place of *echthambeisthai*, meaning to be sad, grieved or sorrowful, but *echthambeisthai* is much stronger, so that in Mark there is a much more graphic picture of what comes over Jesus—a picture of shocking horror, awe and dismay. Cranfield observes that *echthambeisthai* “denotes a being in the grip of a shuddering horror in the face of the dreadful prospect before him.”<sup>19</sup> Rawlinson notes that it “is a strong expression, suggestive of shuddering awe, as of one conscious of being in the presence of a supernatural mystery which excites terror.”<sup>20</sup> Swete calls it a feeling of “terrified surprise.”<sup>21</sup> This feeling of sudden shock and surprise is noted also by Krummacker, who writes:

He [Mark] makes use of a word, the original of which implies a sudden and horrifying alarm at a terrible object. The Evangelist evidently intends to intimate thereby that the cause of Jesus’ trembling must be sought, not in what might be passing in His soul, but in appearances from without which forced themselves upon Him; some-

<sup>14</sup>John 13:27. John sees in the entire passion Satan’s presence whose coming coincides with the arrival of the hour (14:30).

<sup>15</sup>Luke 22:31-32.

<sup>16</sup>R. S. Barbour, “Gethsemane in the Tradition of the Passion,” *NTS* 16 (1970) 231-251.

<sup>17</sup>E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965).

<sup>18</sup>Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 237-238.

<sup>19</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959) 431.

<sup>20</sup>A. E. J. Rawlinson, *St. Mark* (London: Methuen, 1925) 211.

<sup>21</sup>H. B. Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1927) 322.

thing approached Him which threatened to rend His nerves, and the sight of it to freeze the blood in His veins.<sup>22</sup>

The second word, *adēmonein*, appearing in the NT only in Mark 14:33, Matt 26:37, and Phil 2:26, denotes great anguish. Benoit translates it as distress and notes that "it is used of a man who is rendered helpless, disorientated, who is agitated and anguished by the threat of some approaching event."<sup>23</sup> Lightfoot also describes it as "the confused, restless, half-distracted state, which is produced by physical derangement, or by mental distress, as grief, shame, disappointment, etc."<sup>24</sup> Swete adds that it "forms a natural sequel to *echthambeisthai*, representing the distress which follows a great shock."<sup>25</sup>

It is this element of surprise and shock in this distress that provides a clue to the mystery of Gethsemane. Something unexpected, something not previously considered, something outside the conscious contemplation of Jesus at that moment is suddenly thrust upon him, and he shudders in shock and alarm. Whatever it is, it is out of continuity with what Jesus has known, considered or expected up to this time.

It is possible that the sudden shock causes Jesus to change his plans to pray with his disciples. They have already observed the change that has come over him, and he makes reference to it as the reason for leaving them behind to keep watch while he goes on to pray alone. "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch."<sup>26</sup> It is against this background that Jesus offers his prayer.

2. *Form and Content of the Prayer.* The synoptics give five versions of Jesus' prayer, all basically similar except for minor variations.<sup>27</sup> Each is notably brief, expressing Jesus' request that the cup be taken away. It should be noted that the actual prayer lasted for perhaps an hour (Mark 14:37), so that what is offered in these accounts are summaries of that prayer, summaries that describe in essence the petition Jesus was laying before the Father.

Some have tried to interpret the summaries as providing a progression in the meaning of the request Jesus was making during the course of his praying.<sup>28</sup> The

<sup>22</sup>F. W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Savior* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1947) 99.

<sup>23</sup>Benoit, *Passion*, 10.

<sup>24</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1913; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953) 123.

<sup>25</sup>Swete, *Mark*, 322.

<sup>26</sup>Mark 14:34.

<sup>27</sup>Swete, *Mark*, 324.

<sup>28</sup>Plummer, for example, sees such a progression in Matthew's two summaries so that the prayer offered in Matt 26:42 is actually a different request than the one in v 39. He sees in this a progression in Christ's submission to the Father's will so that although he expresses his own will in v 39 he submits to the Father's will in v 42. Plummer goes on to speculate that if Matthew had summarized the third prayer it would have indicated even more strongly Christ's desire to do the Father's will and thus complete the progression. See A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Robert Scott Roxburghe, 1909) 370.

problem with the idea of progression is that it ignores the synoptic insistence that Jesus prayed the same words on both the second occasion, according to Mark, and the third occasion, according to Matthew. Furthermore Mark demonstrates the fallacy in seeing a progression when he summarizes the first prayer twice, once indirectly in conditional form and once directly without the condition. It is more likely that over the course of an hour Jesus repeated the same request in different ways, asking the same thing and including more detail that has not been recorded.

Two aspects of these summary prayers are most crucial to their interpretation. The first is the conditional framework that is common to all with the exception of Mark 14:36. Reserving Matt 26:42 for a special comment later, note the conditional structure of the petitions in Mark 14:35; Matt 26:39; Luke 22:42. In each case the request is stated using a first class conditional clause. "This class of condition assumes the condition to be a reality and the conclusion follows logically and naturally from that assumption."<sup>29</sup> Therefore in the synoptic portrait of the Gethsemane prayer not only does Jesus assume, according to Matthew and Mark, that his prayer is possible, but according to Luke he actually considers it to be the will of God and offers his request on that basis. This harmonizes with the prayer found in Mark 14:36 where the conditional structure is lacking. Jesus states the fact that all things are possible with the Father and on that basis makes his request implying that he assumes the Father is able to grant it.

The second aspect of these prayers to be considered is the final clause, "not what I will but what you will," that appears in Mark 14:36; Matt 26:39; Luke 22:42. An ellipsis is present, and the manner in which it is to be filled will affect the interpretation of the prayer. Lenski expresses what seems to be a popular opinion on this matter when he concludes that this is an objective clause that "lets us supply the verb: 'let that be done.'"<sup>30</sup> This stems in part from the desire to correlate this prayer with the Lord's Prayer.<sup>31</sup> However, the Lord's Prayer was formulated for Jesus' disciples; there is no reason to suppose that he prayed it himself. The main reason for holding this view is that it harmonizes with the interpretation that Jesus was actually requesting what was contrary to the Father's will but that, knowing this to be impossible, he subsequently conditioned it on the Father's will, resolving himself to obedience. As it has been noted, the first class conditional nature of these prayers conflicts immediately with this view. In view of Luke 22:42 in particular, it is impossible to take the last clause as a second petition requesting the Father's will to the exclusion of Christ's will. The first clause clearly assumes that the request that is Christ's will, since he requests it, is precisely the Father's will. A better way to take the last clause would be to see it in a declarative sense, filling the ellipsis with "it is" or "this is." It may then be translated, "But this is not what I will, but what you will." This declaration would be similar to others made by Jesus elsewhere, particularly in John's gospel. For example, when Jesus says he has come down from heaven not to do his own will but to do the Father's will, it means that he is not acting on his own initia-

<sup>29</sup>A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 1007.

<sup>30</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg, 1946) 638.

<sup>31</sup>Swete, *Mark*, 325.

tive. It does not mean that he does not will to do the Father's will; he does. But the initiative belongs to the Father. It is the Father's will first in that sense, and Jesus harmonizes his will to it rather than acting independently. Thus in Luke 22:42, Mark 14:36 and Matt 26:39 Jesus declares his prayer to be not his own will acting on his own initiative but rather the will of the Father, initiated by the Father, to which his own will agrees.

The request itself is expressed in the following ways:

Mark 14:35: *parelthē ap autou hē hōra . . .*

Mark 14:36: *parenengke to potērion touto ap emou . . .*

Matt 26:39: *parelthatō ap emou to potērion touto . . .*

Luke 22:42: *parenengke touto to potērion ap emou . . .*

The two verbs *parerchomai* and *parapherō* are very similar in meaning. When referring to time, *parerchomai* means "to pass." While it can mean "to pass away" as it does when used with *potērion*, it is not possible to understand it this way in reference to time. Thus in Mark 14:35 Jesus is not praying that the hour will not come as if to request that time will suddenly come to an end and the hour, still future, will vanish. Rather, the use of *parelthē* indicates his request to be that the hour pass on by after it comes—that is, that the hour pass by as all hours pass by and not fail to pass by after it arrives. Jesus seems to be concerned lest when the hour comes, then for him time will stop and he will forever be in that hour. In reference to the cup, *parerchomai* is best translated "pass away from." <sup>32</sup> In this sense it is very close to the use of *parapherō* in Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42, which means "take away from." Thus Jesus is requesting here that "the cup" be taken away or removed from him.

At this point it will be helpful to comment on Matt 26:42. From the way this petition is stated it should be clear that Jesus is not concerned so much with the drinking of the cup as he is with its passing away. The first class condition emphasizes that it is not possible for the cup to pass away unless he drinks it. Stated positively, it is possible for the cup to pass away if he does drink it. This is declared to be the Father's will, and it is not incompatible with Christ's willful request in v 39. Both prayers indicate that it is the Father's will to do what Christ requests—that is, to take the cup away. Verse 42 adds the further information that before the Father does this Christ must drink it first.

The two metaphors, cup and hour, are closely related. It is significant that "hour" appears only in Mark's indirect summary of Jesus' prayer, which is followed immediately with the summary attributed directly to Jesus in which the term "cup" is used. This causes Lane to conclude that "the two expressions are synonymous: both are metaphors for the passion in its deeper redemptive significance." <sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup>The use of *parerchomai* with *apo* is noted by Arndt and Gingrich to mean "pass without touching" when referring to suffering. The evidence cited for this is Matt 26:39, Mark 14:35 and a reference from Josephus. This interpretation, however, hinges on whether "cup" and "hour" refer to suffering alone. This will be examined later. It should be noted that *parerchomai* with *apo* is used in Matt 5:18 where it clearly does not mean "pass without touching" but rather "pass away from" or "disappear from." See A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th rev. ed., s. v. "*parerchomai*."

<sup>33</sup>W. L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 517.

The use of *hōra* for the passion is much more frequent in John than it is in the synoptics.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the most interesting use in John for comparison with the Gethsemane prayer is John 12:27. The hour has come, but Jesus says that he does not pray to be saved from the hour but that the Father glorify his name.<sup>35</sup>

There is an eschatological sense to *hōra*. It is used in both the synoptics and in John to refer to the time of the coming of the Son of Man.<sup>36</sup> This has caused some to look for an eschatological meaning in Gethsemane. In this sense the prayer is that the eschatological kingdom come, but through other means than his own suffering.<sup>37</sup> It is best, however, to take *hōra* as referring to the coming passion and as a parallel to the term "cup."<sup>38</sup> The meaning of cup then becomes crucial to the understanding of the prayer. Basically two suggestions have been advanced: Either it is a symbol of human suffering and death, or it is a picture of the wrath of God.<sup>39</sup> Of course the wrath of God when poured out results in human misery and death, but it goes far beyond that to include spiritual (and for Israel in the OT, national) suffering.

Many commentators see human suffering and physical death primarily in view here. Benoit, Lange and Rawlinson are among those who share this view.<sup>40</sup> There are many, however, who regard the view of suffering as incomplete and have offered plausible evidence for understanding the cup as a figure for divine wrath. The figure of the cup of wrath comes primarily from the OT<sup>41</sup> and has been carefully studied by C. E. B. Cranfield, who concludes:

<sup>34</sup>John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:21; 17:1; cf. Matt 26:45; Mark 14:41.

<sup>35</sup>There would certainly be a contradiction between Jesus' attitude in the Johannine account and the Markan record of Jesus' prayer if *parerchomai apo* in Mark 14:35 is taken to mean "pass by without touching." As was noted above, however, it is most proper to take the Markan prayer to be a request that the hour come and go, and this is consistent with the Johannine emphasis that the hour will come and that Jesus does not seek to avoid it.

<sup>36</sup>Matt 24:36, 44; 25:13; Mark 13:32; Luke 12:40; John 5:25, 28.

<sup>37</sup>C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 46-47; also see Barbour, "Gethsemane," 233; K. G. Kuhn, "Jesus in Gethsemane," *EvT* 12 (1952-3) 260-285.

<sup>38</sup>Both Kuhn and Barbour divide the Markan narrative into two pericopes, one containing a reference to "hour" and one to "cup." This author, however, agrees with Lane that this is unnecessary when the synthetic parallelism of the two verses is recognized (Lane, *Mark*, 517).

<sup>39</sup>The choice presented here is between human suffering and divine wrath with respect to the cross. Another view has been raised by J. O. Buswell, Jr., who suggests that the cup is physical death in the garden. Buswell suggests that Christ petitions the Father to take away the threat of death in the garden. The impossibility of this view is clear from the parallel between "hour" and "cup," the former being consistently used of the cross. Also it conflicts with Matt 26:42 where the removal of the cup is dependent on his drinking it. If Jesus had to drink it before it could be removed, then he would have had to die in the garden for God to answer this prayer. J. O. Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 2. 61-65.

<sup>40</sup>Benoit, *Passion*, 11; J. P. Lange, *The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ* (5 vols.; tr. R. E. Wallis and S. Masson; ed. M. Dods; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 3. 210; Rawlinson, *Mark*, 211-212 (see also Swete, *Mark*, 324).

<sup>41</sup>Ps 11:6; 75:7, 8; Isa 51:19, 22; Jer 25:15-16, 27-29; 49:12; 51:57; Lam 4:21; Ezek 23:31-34; Hab 2:16; Zech 12:2; see also Job 21:20; Ps 60:3; Isa 63:6; Obad 16.

It hardly seems adequate to say, as some commentators do in connexion with the N. T. passages, simply that the "cup" is used in the O.T. as a metaphor for suffering. Surely we must go further, and say that in the O.T. the metaphorical use of "cup" refers predominantly to God's punishment of human sin. If Jesus did have the O.T. use of this metaphor in mind, then the O.T. use is of real importance in understanding the significance of these N.T. passages (particularly Mk 14<sup>36</sup> and parallels) as part of the evidence for His own thought about His approaching sufferings and death. The cup, from which He shrinks, is not merely physical suffering, nor yet the spiritual anguish of perfect love met by hate. It is not merely that His heart is wrung by the sight of the wickedness of men. His cup is the cup of God's wrath against sin.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding the usage of cup in Mark 10:39, which some use to support the idea of suffering, Cranfield suggests that while Jesus refers to himself using the OT sense of "cup" he nevertheless used the same metaphor for the two disciples, but in a weakened sense.<sup>43</sup> H. Summerall agrees that the cup before Jesus symbolizes the wrath of God as is typical in the OT. Particularly, he sees Jer 25:27-29 in the background where all the inhabitants of the earth are forced to drink the wine of God's wrath for their sin.<sup>44</sup> Lane and Taylor prefer the imagery of wrath over human suffering, and both have observed that the emotional distress that is described in Mark 14:33 fits better with the cup as a figure for wrath than for human suffering.<sup>45</sup>

There is one more important consideration as to why the cup should be seen in the context of the OT as a cup of wrath. It is the OT that provides the interpretive frame of reference for the request that the cup be removed. The particular passage that speaks to this is Isa 51:21-23. Of the many passages that mention the

<sup>42</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, "The Cup Metaphor in Mark xiv.36 and Parallels," *Exp Tim* 59 (1947-8) 137-138; also see idem, *Mark*, 433. A challenge to this view has been raised by M. Black in "The Cup Metaphor in Mark xiv.36," *Exp Tim* 59 (1947-8) 195. Although he agrees that Cranfield's exegesis of the cup metaphor in the OT is basically sound, Black questions whether Jesus actually used the term in the OT sense. He raises the possibility of a parallel to rabbinic thought and gives as an example the free haggadic paraphrase of Gen 40:23 in *Pal. Tg.* where it speaks of "the cup of death." Black's suggestion is accepted by Barbour, who notes that "we can assume that this is the cup of suffering and death, although not necessarily of the wrath of God" (Barbour, "Gethsemane," 234). Obviously the strength of this view depends on the ability to establish a rabbinic rather than an OT background for Jesus' prayer. The difficulty with Black's view is twofold. First, Jesus' teaching was notably distinct from the traditional rabbinic school, as has been noted by R. Longenecker in *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 51. Second, the entire passion narrative and particularly the immediate context of the Gethsemane account is full of allusions to the OT with a heavy appeal to the Psalms and prophets. This includes a use of the title Son of Man in Matt 26:24, 45 (immediately after the prayer), 64 (a direct reference to Ps 110 and Dan 7). There is expressed concern for the fulfillment of Scripture (Matt 26:54, 56) with the prophecy of Zech 13:7 weighing heavy on the mind of Christ before and during the prayer (note his concern for those who would be scattered; cf. Matt 26:31, 41). This particular prophecy contains a reference to the cup as a figure for divine judgment within its context.

<sup>43</sup>Cranfield, "Cup Metaphor," 138; cf. Lenski, *Mark*, 457, 459; also G. Stahlin, "orgē," *TDNT* (1964).

<sup>44</sup>H. Summerall, Jr., "What was the Cup that Jesus Had to Drink?", *Christianity Today* (July 17, 1970) 11-12.

<sup>45</sup>Lane, *Mark*, 516-517; V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark* (New York: St. Martin's, 1966) 125, 552, 554.



cup of wrath only Isaiah 51 gives the clue concerning its removal.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, please hear this, you afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine: thus says your Lord, the Lord, even your God Who contends for His people, "Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of reeling; the chalice of My anger, you will never drink it again. And I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, 'Lie down that we may walk over you.' You have even made your back like the ground, and like the street for those who walk over it."<sup>47</sup>

The setting for this passage is the Day of the Lord, a day of judgment and wrath on all nations. However, interwoven throughout the larger context is revelation concerning the Servant of God, the righteous Sufferer.<sup>48</sup> It has already been noted that Christ applied Isa 53:12 to himself just before retiring to the garden.

It should be noted that the cup of wrath that will be taken away from the people of God in Isaiah 51 has already been drunk by them even to the dregs (v 17). They are staggering under his wrath with the cup in their hand. The cup remains in their hand even after it has been drunk to symbolize that they continue to be under God's wrath. The removal of the cup from their hand indicates that God's wrath is lifted and they are restored. Note that in this passage, after the cup is removed, God's people will never drink it again (v 22). The cup is then placed into the hands of the enemies of God's people to symbolize the falling of his wrath and judgment on them.

The implication for Jesus' prayer is this: As in this passage, where God will remove the cup of his wrath from his people after they have drunk it, so Jesus prays that the cup of God's wrath for sin, which he drinks for all, will in the same way be removed from his hand by the Father after he has drunk it. Cranfield notes this when he says, "Isaiah li.22 speaks of the cup of God's fury being taken away from Jerusalem. Now Jesus prays that it may be taken away from Him."<sup>49</sup> However, Cranfield misses the point that the cup in Isa 51:22 is taken away only after Jerusalem has drunk it, and so he has the difficulty of explaining how there is not a conflict of wills here. Lane also sees the parallel between Isaiah 51 and the Gethsemane prayer but struggles with the same difficulty as Cranfield when he writes:

The thought that the cup could be removed may have come from Isa. 51:17-23 where God, in a proclamation of salvation, summons Jerusalem to arouse from its drunken stupor and to recognize that "the cup of staggering" has been taken away. Yet Scripture also speaks of those who "did not deserve to drink the cup (but) must drink it" (Jer. 49:12). The tension between these alternate expressions of grace and judgment, respectively, seems to be reflected in Jesus' prayer with its confession of God's ability ("all things are possible to you"; cf. Ch. 10:27) and the firm resolve to submit to God's sovereign will. The metaphor of the cup indicates that Jesus saw himself confronted, not by a cruel destiny, but by the judgment of God.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Jer 25:27 mentions those who try to refuse to drink the cup but are forced by the Lord to drink it anyway. There is no mention here of the cup being taken away.

<sup>47</sup>Isa 51:21-23 *NASB*.

<sup>48</sup>Isa 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-52:12.

<sup>49</sup>Cranfield, *Mark*, 433.

<sup>50</sup>Lane, *Mark*, 517.

When it is noted that the removal of the cup occurs after it is drunk in Isaiah 51, then there is no tension with Jer 49:12, which teaches the necessity of its being drunk. In conclusion, the synoptics indicate that in Gethsemane Jesus prays a prayer of faith, that after he drinks the cup the Father will not abandon him forever to the desolation of wrath and judgment for sin but, as he has promised Israel in the last days, will remove the wrath of God from him, resurrecting and restoring him.<sup>51</sup>

## II. SUMMARY

At this point it may be helpful to summarize the exegetical results that have been enumerated in the study of the prayer itself. There are basically four that are crucial:

1. By the nature of the conditional clause, the request is assumed to be possible and to be the will of the Father.
2. In conjunction with this, the final clause can quite naturally be taken as a declaration that the request is the Father's will, not simply Christ's alone.
3. By the nature of the verb *parerchomai*, Jesus prays not that the hour will disappear but that it will go past after it arrives.
4. The cup is a figure for the wrath of God, which on the basis of Isa 51:17-23 can be taken away after it has been drunk.

On this basis it is the conclusion of this study that the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane was a prayer of faith, in complete agreement with the will of the Father and in total harmony with all that he had taught about himself to this point. As such it reveals the consistent impeccable nature of Christ and His unchanging resolution to do the Father's will.

## III. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Perhaps it may yet be asked why Jesus should pray that the cup be taken away after he had drunk it since he already knew that he would rise from the dead just as surely as he would be put to death. The answer comes primarily from the fact that this is a temptation scene. Satan is present, though not directly mentioned, in the garden. It has already been recorded that Satan tempted Jesus through Peter by suggesting that "this shall never happen to you," when Jesus announced his forthcoming death and resurrection. It is in light of Satan's continuing opposition to his passion for the cross that the suddenness and severity of the shock that comes over Christ in the garden takes on significance. The suggestion is that as Jesus saw the cup of wrath approaching with all its horror and desolation of abandonment by the Father, and as he faithfully contemplated rising from this awesome abyss, Satan, in characteristic fashion and with all his power of deceit, focused his utmost energies at this most precise moment of Christ's contemplation with the suggestion, "This shall never happen to you." The awfulness of this cup, such as no man before or since ever saw prior to death, coupled with the horror of this fiendish lie hit our Lord so forcefully that his human constitution visibly shook with emotional shock. Though filled with dread

<sup>51</sup>Such an allusive use of the OT is characteristic of Jesus. Note for example Matt 13:13 (and parallels) with respect to Isa 6:9-10; Matt 21:33 (and parallels) with respect to Isa 5:1-2; and also Matt 11:5 (Luke 7:22) with respect to Isa 35:5-6; 61:1 (Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 59).

and horror, though he staggered before the cup that threatened to consume him forever, his faith did not waver. He defeated the tempter in his most devastating temptation as he had always done before. He turned to the Word, and he did so in prayer. To Satan's lie that the cup would not pass away as he drank it but would rather consume him forever, Jesus responded, "Father, as you have promised in your Word, take the cup from me after I drink it; yet this is not my will alone, it is your will that this be done." It is a prayer of faith, a full entrusting of himself to the Father's promise and power to raise him from the dead. It is an expression of that faith, a reaffirmation of what he has consistently taught and believed. He does not request this because he has forgotten that he would be resurrected, but precisely because he believes that he will be resurrected. It is a victory over the most deceitful temptation Satan had ever proposed, and it is a victory that reveals the true nature of the impeccable Rock of our salvation.