

# ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου: Interpreting the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:10a) in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian eschatological vision



## Authors:

Ernest van Eck<sup>1</sup>   
Daniel Sakitey<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

## Research Project Registration:

**Project Leader:** E. van Eck  
**Project Number:** 2400030

## Description:

Dr Satikey is participating in the research project 'Hermeneutics and Exegesis' directed by Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

## Corresponding author:

Ernest van Eck,  
ernest.vaneck@up.ac.za

## Dates:

Received: 01 Aug. 2018  
Accepted: 15 Jan. 2019  
Published: 26 June 2019

## How to cite this article:

Van Eck, E. & Sakitey, D., 2019, 'ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου: Interpreting the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:10a) in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian eschatological vision', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(3), a5207. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5207>

## Copyright:

© 2019. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

## Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

This article examines the phrase ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου in Matthew and Luke's versions of the Lord's Prayer in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian eschatological vision. Theoretically, it uses a combination of the historical-critical and indigenous Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutical approaches to explore the implication of βασιλεία for the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian. The article discusses the diversity in the interpretations of the text from the early church to the modern and postmodern periods in Christian history and argues that this diversity has occurred as a result of the fluidity of the eschatological visions in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and that the linear eschatological vision described by the church is inconsistent with the cyclical vision in Ewe cosmology. This dual eschatological vision creates a dilemma in the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian's understanding of the eternal states. Finally, it is argued that to resolve this eschatological dilemma is to clearly define the place of Ewe eschatological vision in Christian eschatology and interpreting the former as replica of the latter.

**Keywords:** The Lord's Prayer; Libation prayer; The kingdom of God; The kingdom of heaven; Christian eschatology; Ewe eschatology; Ewe cosmology.

## Introduction

The phrase ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου [let (it) come the kingdom of you] is the central theme around which Matthew and Luke's versions of the Lord's Prayer revolve. The Lord's Prayer has been described as a liturgical hymn used by the early church 'as an act of obedience and to commemorate the Lord's teaching about prayer' (Lioy 2004:161; Ong 2012–2013:107). It was used in both the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist in the liturgy of the early church (Ayo 1992: 193, Betz 1995:375). It is recorded in the accounts of Matthew and Luke with some variations and in the *Didache* (Betz 1995:370; Ong 2012–2013:106; Sauder 1976:14; Scott 1951:19). The variations in Matthew and Luke may be understood in the context of the Evangelists and their communities. The petition suggests a future advent of the establishment of God's sovereignty on earth (Allen 1907:58). Indeed, the Lord's Prayer in Matthew, Luke and in the *Didache* might have been written to meet the liturgical needs of their respective communities (Brown 1967:870; Scott 1951:23, 25). The word ἐλθέτω in the phrase is the aorist imperative, third-person singular active voice of ἔρχομαι [to come].

Many interpretations have been given to βασιλεία, the main eschatological theme in the phrase ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου (Betz 1995:379; Jeremias 1971:96–103). The noun form, *basileus*, was originally said to have been used to describe a monarch. It then went extinct during the era of the aristocrat (5th–15th century), and its place was taken over by *tyrannos*, a designation for someone who gains power illegitimately (Ernest 1994:256–257; Klapptert 1976:372). The abstract noun, βασιλεία, was developed during the Hellenistic period. It carries the following meanings: the fact of being a king, the position or power of a king that translates to the office of a king, kingly rule. A second meaning is geographical, hence its designation kingdom, suggesting the area or territory over which a king rules (Ernest 1994:260; Klapptert 1976:373).

The term itself appears 162 times in the New Testament with varieties of meanings depending on the context in which they were used in the *logia* [sayings of Jesus] source. It conveys the idea of the office of a king and his domain from an earthly perspective and sharply contrasts the βασιλεία του θεου with the βασιλεία του διαβολου (Lk 19:12, 15, 4:5; Rv 17:12, 16:10; Mt 4:8; Mk 6:23).

**Note:** This article represents a reworked version of aspects from the PhD-thesis of Daniel Sakitey, titled 'Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer in Ewe-Ghanaian context', in the Department of New Testament and Related Literature, University of Pretoria, with Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck as supervisor.

The βασιλεία του θεού, as a term exclusive to the synoptic gospels, also varies in forms (Jeremias 1971:96–97; Klappert 1976:381). Although Mark and Luke speak of the βασιλεία του θεού, Matthew's form is the βασιλεία του ούρανου,<sup>1</sup> with few instances where Matthew reverses to the βασιλεία του θεού formula (Dn 4:23; 1 Macc 3:18–19; Lk 6:20, 15:18, 21; Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17, 5:3, 12:28, 20:1, 21:31, 21:43).

The question of the kingdom coming, as expressed in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, puts the petition in an eschatological mood. Jesus in his proclamation of the kingdom points to its imminence and urgency.

Regarding the imminence of the kingdom, the understanding one gathers is that 'the rule of God is coming' like a volcanic eruption and will happen during the lifetime of the then generation (Mt 24:32f; Mk 13:28f; Lk 21:29). It is within this sudden advent of the kingdom that the *parousia*, for instance, finds its true meaning (Klappert 1976: 382; see also Mt 24:43, 24:45, 25:1–13, 16:28; Lk 12:39, 12:42–46, 9:27, 22:18; Mk 9:1, 14:25). The urgency of the kingdom points to the fact that it is a present reality: 'if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Mt 12:28, 29, 9:15, 11:12; Lk 11:20, 11:21, 10:18, 17:20, 5:34, 12:32, 16:16; Mk 3:27, 2:19; ). The kingdom of God is also understood to be realised in the person of Christ. Thus, the Messianic expectation, expressed in the Hebrew Bible and in many rabbinic literatures, finds fulfilment in Jesus who is viewed in Christian theology as the Messiah. Its ultimate realisation, however, comes to fruition at his second coming (Brown 1961:189). This clarifies Jesus' call to his disciples to pray for the coming of God's kingly rule and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In short, the concept of βασιλεία can be understood in three ways. Firstly, that βασιλεία was initially understood to be the office of a king but was later understood in geographical terms. The geographical definition is 'the land or state governed by a king, and by extension a group of persons or things ruled by a common principle', while the spiritual definition is 'the exercise of royal power, dominion, either absolute personal power or dominating influence' (Ernest 1994:256). It thus appears that the initial spiritual or internal understanding of βασιλεία του θεού developed into a geographical or external meaning as the Greek culture evolved and the Judeo-Christian Scriptures were translated from Greek into the various receptor languages, including the Ewe language.

This article uses a combination of both historical-critical and indigenous Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutical approaches to explore the implication of βασιλεία for the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian. The historical-critical approach is used to bring out the meaning of the text from the source language to the receptor language. This follows Hughson Ong's 'discourse analysis', originated by Dell Hymes in his 'Ethnography of speaking' and adapted by Holmes and Ottenheimers (Coulthard 1977, 1985:34–58; Ong 2012–2013:98–123).

1. According to Ernest (1994:266), 'the formula "kingdom of heaven" does not mean a kingdom that is in heaven but results from Jewish scruples about uttering the divine name'.

The Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutical approach involves the use of a constructive dialogue between the biblical texts and their translations into various languages, taking cognisance of the *Sitze im Leben* [situation in life] that govern them as well as their *Wirkungsgeschichte* [history of effect or influence] and current practical application (Ekem 2007:77). This approach overlaps with Loba-Mkole's (2007) Intercultural Exegesis because both approaches aim at a dialogical reconstruction between the source culture and the receptor culture (Mahlangu & Grobbelaar 2016:99–102). Mother Tongue approach to biblical interpretation, as Ekem argues, is likely to shape the future of biblical studies in Africa. The importance of dialogical exegesis to biblical studies in Africa, he asserts, involves the following:

1. an examination of texts from a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective whereby the biblical and other world views (e.g. African) are brought face to face with each other on the principle of reciprocal challenge (intercultural or cross-cultural hermeneutics)
2. dialogue between the translated texts and their 'originals' with a view to ascertain their points of convergence and divergence as well as their impact on the community of faith (inter-textual dialogue)
3. bringing the insights of points (1) and (2) to bear on the development of context-sensitive Study Bible Notes and commentaries (applied hermeneutics).

In the light of the above approaches, this article carries out an exegetical analysis of the existing Ewe renditions of βασιλεία in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew and Luke's versions. Finally, a dialogical comparison between the source text (Greek) and the receptor (Ewe) is carried out to ascertain their points of convergence and divergence, as well as their implication for the Ewe-Ghanaian eschatological vision.

## Ewe interpretation of βασιλεία του θεού

The translation of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures into Ewe language began more than a century-and-a-half ago when the North German Missionary Society arrived in the southeastern part of Ghana, West Africa, in 1847.

Currently, there are three existing renditions of the Ewe Bible: *Biblia* [Bible] (1931, 2010), *Nubabla Yeye La* [the New Covenant] (1999) and *Agbenya La* [the Living Word] (2006). In these renditions, βασιλεία translates either *fiadufo*, literally, a place of reign, or *fiaduqu*, literally, a reign. Since the missionary and post-missionary eras (1847–1990), ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου, the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, has been translated as *wò fiadufo nava* [your place of reign should come], a notion which is derived from the English word *kingdom*. The Ewe concept of *fiadufo* just like its English rendition views God as a king with a domain. This translation, after about 17 decades of its existence liturgically, was later revised to *fiaduqu* to mean that God's reign is not territorial but spiritual. Situating the rendering of βασιλεία as *fiadufo* in its missionary context

throws more light on the early missionary understanding of the term. The term renders *Dein Reich komme* [your realm come] in the German language and carries the same sense of the domain over which rule or control is exercised.<sup>2</sup> Reich is typically used to designate a kingdom or an empire, especially in the Roman Empire. It is this traditional and imperial understanding of βασιλεία του θεού that informed the choice of *fiadu fe* in the earliest Ewe translation of the term. This rendering is also consistent with the Pietistic theological ideology of the kingdom of God (Meyer 1999:31–35). The term liturgically finds expression in the translation of some German hymns into Ewe which have greatly influenced Ewe Christian eschatological vision. One such hymn is *Yerusalem, du, si wotu de dzi ... Edzro nye luwo veovie ...* (EPHB<sup>3</sup> 261), literally, Jerusalem city, which is built above ... my soul yearns for it earnestly. Although the New Testament concept of a heavenly kingdom contrasts with Ewe cosmology, Ewe converts since early 19th century have conceptualised βασιλεία in an eschatological sense that is geographical – the future manifestation of a holy city.

The translation of βασιλεία as *fiadu du* appears in the 1990 and 2010 translations of the Ewe Bible. The term derives from *fia* [king] and *du* [literally, eat], and carries the idea of a king enjoying his position. The missionary translation, *fiadu fe* from *fia* [king] and *dufe* [literally, eating place], denotes the place where the king is literally enjoying his kingship.

The difference between the two Ewe terminologies for βασιλεία is the suffix *fe* [place], suggesting that βασιλεία is a place where God rules. Thus, although βασιλεία as *fiadu fe* points to the fact that there is a place where God reigns, there is no designate place where God is exercising his rulership in *fiadu du*. This puts βασιλεία in a dualistic situation – material or external and spiritual or internal realities.<sup>4</sup> The external reign of God with its eschatological underpinning is what Tertullian and Cyprian subscribe to in their hermeneutical views on the concept (Souter 1919:24; Stewart-Sykes 2004:24, 46). Although Gregory and Calvin agree with the territorial and eschatological interpretation, they also hold moral or spiritual and dualistic views which they share with Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine and Luther (Brown 2004:156; Graff 1954:11; Hay 1892:255; Kavanagh 1951:243; Lenker 1907:211, 212, 269, 270; McNeill 1977:906; Morrison 1972:208; Pelikan 1956:146; Stewart-Sykes 2004:169–171; Woolsey & Ulyat 1856:107–108). Clement, however, argues further that the βασιλεία του θεού has already been established on earth, but it is not being experienced by all humans because of lack of knowledge on their part.

2. Interview with Rev. H. Menke, general secretary, Bremen Mission, 11 November 2016.

3. Evangelical Presbyterian hymn book.

4. In an interview with Rev. F. Amevenku (on 13 September 2017), senior lecturer in New Testament Studies at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, he stated that the kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future expectation. In other words, the kingdom is already here and at the same time yet to come. Eschatologically, he noted, the Christian history is navigating towards a new heaven and a new earth; a renewal of the cosmos.

Certainly, the interpretation of the phrase ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου used in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer has evolved from its imperial and territorial understanding during the missionary era (*fiadu fe*) to a rather internal (*fiadu du*) connotation, as revealed in the works of scholars such as Dalman (1902:94), Allen (1907:58), Charles (1914:47), Edersheim (1971:269), Jeremias (1971:96–103), Klappert (1976:372–373), Ernest (1994:256–257) and Betz (1995:379). The term, as used in the synoptic gospels and discussed in the works of the above scholars, varies in form and meaning. Its imminence and urgency are both characterised by the *parousia* and the fact of its present reality (Klappert 1976: 381–382). Milavec's (2003:119) assertion that the βασιλεία του θεού is neither to be interpreted as a place, title nor office but 'God acting within society and the world', represents the views of many modern and postmodern scholars. Regarding its Ewe use in the second petition of Matthew and Luke's Lord's Prayer, *fiadu fe* [kingdom] seems to be more popular than *fiadu du* [reign]. The eschatological expectation envisaged in *fiadu fe* is missionary legacy handed down to the Ewe which sharply contrasts with the Ewe eschatological vision.

## The βασιλεία του θεού/οὐρανοῦ and Ewe eschatological vision

In Ewe cosmology, the material world is an integral part of the spirit world. The two worlds are understood as a single unit which is constantly interacting with each other and are ordered in such a manner that events in the material world are replica of the spiritual. The medium of interaction between those in the material world and the spiritual world is through the ritual of prayer, known in Ewe traditional religion as *tsifofodi*, literally, beating or pouring of water. Ewe eschatological concept finds expression in the various libation prayers offered to God (*Mawuga*) through the lesser deities and ancestors. A case in point is the following Ewe libation prayer text:

OM! OM! OM! OM! OM! OM! OM!  
 Wò Ho, Edzi, Edo  
 Wò hoe do ta, wò hoe do xo, wò hoe do anyi  
 Om! Sogbe-Lisa. Wo Mawu Chitikata,  
 Wò Adanmawto, be yewo asi, be ye wo afɔ. Wò mawomawto.  
 Ahe ne to dzi, evɔ ne to dzi, edɔ ne fo mia nu.  
 Eku ne fo mia ta  
 Akoe dagbe vi dagbe, lamese, abɔka, drika.  
 Agoɔ, voduwɔ de, agoɔ ne gbeto fomea. Agoɔ, agoɔ.<sup>5</sup>

The English translation of the Ewe libation prayer, reads:

(Call the whole of existence)  
 Thou who is the heaven, who is the earth  
 I salute thee who is the light of my mind  
 I salute thee who is sitting in the chamber of my heart  
 I salute thee who has built the body  
 Om! Sogbe-Lisa. Thou the Awakener and conscious One. The  
 primal life force and the mind of all existence.

5. The transcribed prayer text is by Dr D. Kumordzi, national president of Yeve/Efa/Sofia system in Ghana, recorded in Accra on 14 October 2015.

Master artist, who made us hands and feet. The Eternal One.  
 May we not be caught in the state of darkness and ignorance,  
 May we not be caught in the state of fear, confusion and  
 superstition.  
 May we not be caught in sickness, disease and squalor.  
 May death and destruction depart from us.  
 May you grant us the blessings of material prosperity.  
 May our children be the source of blessing.  
 May you grant us good health and longevity  
 Peace to the gods, peace to creation, peace unto you.

The above prayer text is organised into three main sections – invocation, petitions and benediction – and is centred on what the Ewe call *Agbe fe kuxiwo*, life's predicaments. The Ewe identifies four cardinal predicaments of life: firstly, *Ahe*, darkness and the state of ignorance; secondly, *Vɔ*, the state of fear, confusion and superstition; thirdly, *Dɔ*, disease, sickness and squalor and finally, *Ku*, death and destruction.<sup>6</sup> The libation begins his prayer by invoking the cosmic trinity, *Sogbe*, *Lisa* and *Chitikata/Kitikata*, and the whole of existence, with the following phrases: *Oom! Oom! Oom! Wo Ho* [third heaven], *Edzi* [sky], *Edo* [earth]. He then follows with his petitions: *Ahe ne to dzi* [may darkness and ignorance pass over]; *evɔ ne to dzi* [may fear, confusion and superstition pass over]; *edo ne fo mia nu* [may sickness, disease and squalor depart from us]; *eku ne fo mia ta* [may death and destruction depart from us]; *akoe dagbe* [blessings and material prosperity]; *vie dagbe* [child blessing]; *lāmese, abɔka, adrika* [good health and longevity].

In the above petition, the libator recognises that man is by nature at the shore of the sea of ignorance and that is why she and/or he must continually climb the ladder of knowledge to free the self from the state of ignorance which creates fear, confusion, superstition, disease, sickness, squalor, culminating in death and destruction. He then ends his prayer with the following benediction: *Agoo, voduwo de* [peace to the home of the gods]; *agoo ne gbetɔ fomea* [peace to humanity]; *Agoo, agoo* [peace, peace].

In Ewe cosmology, it is believed that the entire cosmos is the embodiment of *Sogbe Lisa*, the eternal father–mother God of all creation. It is also believed that *Sogbe-Lisa* emanates from eternal or absolute state of being through seven levels of existence to the embodied state.<sup>7</sup> When a person dies, she and/or he rises from the *Hɔ*<sup>8</sup> state of existence through to the various levels of consciousness depending upon their purity and strength of life's work, that is, how they have used their intellect and material prosperity to help society. The notion of reincarnation in Ewe cosmology, therefore, stems from one's inability to attain a higher level of consciousness, and so must keep appearing in the material world till she and/or he attains the status of an ancestor. It is therefore not for nothing that in Ewe religion ancestors are venerated

6. Interview with Dr D. Kumordzi, 14 October 2015.

7. Interview with Dr D. Kumordzi, 28 September 2015.

8. The *Hɔ* state of existence is where humans and other creatures live.

and sometimes worshipped. Known in Ewe as *Tɔgbeawo*, literally, owners of life, ancestors are believed to be those who have attained higher degree of spiritual knowledge and intellectual understanding of the divine cosmic play, and had material prosperity which they have used to address the needs of society during their life time.

The eschatological vision that the Ewe affirms has something in common with its Greco-Roman counterpart expressed in the theology of Clement of Alexandria. Clement's interpretation of *βασιλεία του θεου* is indicative of the influence of Gnosticism on traditional Christian understanding of Christian eschatology. Clement emphasises the pre-existence of the *βασιλεία του θεου* just as it is with the *logos* in Greek philosophy. In his assertion, the kingdom of God has already been established and therefore praying for it to come is evidence of lack of *γνώσις* [knowledge]. This knowledge, he asserts, is acquired from the law in Judaism and philosophy in Hellenism. This eschatological view, premised on epistemology, resonates with Ewe religious world view of *βασιλεία του θεου* portrayed in the above Ewe libation prayer text. Firstly, they both affirm the existence of God's spiritual kingdom. Secondly, that this kingdom, which purportedly existed in heaven, has already been established on earth and therefore is not to be expected to appear again. Thirdly, that access to this kingdom is through knowledge. In Ewe eschatological view, however, the blessings of material prosperity, childbirth, good health and longevity, in addition to ethical comportment, enhance a person's chance of entering into the kingdom (the state of bliss). Hindrances to this higher degree of spiritual knowledge are immorality, impurity, poverty, ill health, childlessness and sudden death.

The linear Christian eschatological expectation expressed in Matthew and Luke's versions of the Lord's Prayer is in sharp contrast with the cyclical one in Ewe cosmology. The Ewe concept of *βασιλεία* has no geographical boundary; it is spiritual and perpetually cyclical. When a person dies, the soul is absorbed into the spirit world and rejuvenated. She and/or he is then sent back into the visible world after the rejuvenation for life to continue. Thus, the home of the dead, known in Ewe cosmology as *tsiefe* [spirit home] or *avlime/agume* [abyss or underworld], is a spiritual home reserved only for those with good moral conduct. The eschatological orientation of the Ewe is that when she and/or he dies, the *luvo* [soul] goes to the home of the ancestors and continues to be part of the community of the living. When she and/or he fails the test, another opportunity is granted to the soul to return to the material world and continue with an improved life. There is no concept in Ewe cosmology as eternal damnation where there is perpetual punishment in hellfire. When the wicked dies, they become wandering spirits until the necessary atonement rituals are performed for them to be acceptable into the community. It is against this Ewe primal religious world view that the phrase *ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου* can be rendered *na wò fiaququ neva* [your rulership come] instead

of the popularly acclaimed missionary translation of *na wò fiaduŋe neva* [kingdom].

## Implication for Ewe Christian eschatological hope

The concept of βασιλεία used in the second petitions in Matthew and Luke's versions of the Lord's Prayer has both Jewish and Greco-Roman underpinnings. There are numerous eschatological passages in early Jewish prayers and one such passage is found in the *Kaddish*<sup>9</sup> from the Talmud (Hengel 1974:253). Below is the text of the *Kaddish*:

[M]agnified and sanctified be His great Name in the world which He hath created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time. (p. 84)

The central theme in the above *Kaddish* prayer text is the coming of the kingdom of God.<sup>10</sup> However, the eschatological vision in the text has political colouration (Horsley 1992:63–64). Although Garr (2015:63) opines that both Jews and Christians understand the Messiah within an eschatological sense, the latter carries a spiritual function rather than political. It must, however, be pointed out that Jews are divided over the nature of their eschatological expectation. Depending on the Jewish camp one aligns the self to, the Messianic expectation is understood not only from the perspective of this-worldly but also from other-worldly.<sup>11</sup> Friedlander (2008:138), in his reaction to criticism of Jewish conception of the kingdom of God as this-worldly, states that Jewish conception of the kingdom should not be understood only as 'materialistic, particularistic, and permeated by a political spirit' but also in the light of peace, justice, righteousness and the knowledge of God.<sup>12</sup> Oesterley and Robinson (1930), in their earlier work on the origin and development of the Hebrew religion, arrive at the following conclusion:

[E]schatological [...] thought among the Hebrews goes back to an early period and centred in the popular idea that a 'Day of Yahweh' would come, a day on which the national God would show His might by overcoming the enemies of His people and inaugurate a time of well-being and prosperity [*shalom*] for them. (Oesterley & Robinson 1930:386; see also Bucknell (2016:41–57)

Thus, the Jewish Messianic hope, when understood within an eschatological sense, carries an expectation for both this-worldly and other-worldly. The concept in the theologies of the early church projects eschatologies that are cosmological,

9. The *Kaddish* is a Jewish prayer which in Aramaic means 'sanctification' or 'holy'. Its origin, it is believed, is from the exilic period and was used to end a study session in the synagogue. It, however, assumed liturgical use and is recited at the close of Jewish traditional worship service, marking the end of the morning benediction.

10. There is no Jewish benediction in which the sanctification of God's name and the coming of his kingdom is not mentioned because they are the key elements in any form of benediction. See Taylor (2009:124–125).

11. See Petuchowski (1998:95) for further reading. Abraham (1917:136–138) also touched on the personal use of the term 'Messiah'.

12. The following Jewish apocalyptic and apocryphal literature also throws light on the Jewish concept of the kingdom of God: Apocalyptic-Book of Jubilee (135–105 BCE); Similitudes of Enoch 37–71, 49:2 (95–80 BCE); Psalms of Solomon 17 (70 BCE); Assumption of Moses (7–30 BCE); Sibylline Oracles 3:652–795 (ca. 140 BCE); Apocrypha – Tobit 13:11 (2nd century BCE); Book of Wisdom 6:21; 9:18 (1st century BCE).

culminating in the second coming of Jesus Christ (Wilkinson 2010:64–67, 76–84).

Paul in his letter to the church in Thessalonica, for instance, reveals an eschatological vision that centres on the *Parousia* and rapture of the saint, whereas his letter to the church in Rome paints an eschatological picture which hinges on the eager anticipation of creation for the revelation of God's glory in his children and by extension the whole of creation (1 Th 4:13–5:11, Rm 8:18–30). This eschatological position is also highlighted in the apocalyptic literature of John but contrasts Peters eschatology which predicts a new cosmos that will appear to replace this present one which is believed to be burnt into ashes (Wilkinson 2010:67–71, 72–76; see also Rv 21:1–8, 2; Pt 3:10–13).

Modern and postmodern scholars follow the traditional understanding of the New Testament writers on the idea of the coming of the kingdom of God or heaven. Firstly, that βασιλεία finds fulfilment in the incarnation, that is, Christ himself is the kingdom of God. Secondly, that the kingdom of God is God's kingly rule which culminates in the second coming of Christ. The Church Fathers, who took over the ecclesiastical mantle from the Apostles, interpret the coming of the kingdom of God or heaven from territorial, dualistic, eschatological and spiritual perspectives. In other words, God is already ruling in the hearts of humans against the forces of evil. They also emphasise the moral implication of the kingdom in the life of men, that is, righteousness, peace and justice.

The advent of Christianity in Ewe-Ghanaian life and thought introduces him or her to a new eschatological concept which is in conflict with his or her primal religious world view. The eschatological vision envisaged in Ewe cosmology stems from the belief that if one dies, he or she has *to go and join his or her ancestors in the spirit world, considered to be the third level of existence*. However, because of imperfection, she and/or he must keep reincarnating until she and/or he attains that state of perfection. This places a moral obligation on the Ewe to keep living a good life to qualify to join the *Togbeawo* – the owners of life. This moral dimension as criterion for one's place in the company of ancestors continues with both Jewish and New Testament eschatology. It, however, discontinues in terms of its nature. Although the Judeo-Christian eschatology is linear, its Ewe counterpart is cyclical. By linear eschatology, we mean that the Christian having been saved in principle into the kingdom of God or heaven has the moral responsibility to continue to live in a manner worthy of his or her calling in readiness for a day when the Lord Jesus Christ will appear on the earth. When she and/or he dies before the glorious appearance of Christ, the soul is preserved till the day of resurrection. Those who refuse to receive the offer of salvation are sent to eternal damnation. In Ewe-Ghanaian cyclical eschatology, however, one joins the company of the ancestors only when she and/or he is believed to have lived a good life. When she and/or he falls short of this glory, they are offered several opportunities through reincarnation until they attain perfection. Thus, the Ewe traditionalist believes

that they die and go to their ancestors after they have lived a pure and morally upright life. The punishment a person gets when she and/or he dies as an evil person is to become a wayward, restless spirit or ghost, known in Ewe as *ɲoli*. Even after that, atonement rituals are performed, known in Ewe as *busuɖede*, literally, removal of abominable deeds, to make them acceptable by the ancestors.

## Conclusion

The hermeneutical diversity in the interpretation of the concept of βασιλεία, from the early church through to modern and postmodern eras, is as a result of the fluidity of the eschatological visions in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Secondly, the cyclical nature of the Ewe eschatological vision is inconsistent with the linear eschatological vision that the Judeo-Christian Scriptures recommend. This exposes the Ewe convert to a dual eschatological vision which creates dilemma in his or her understanding of life. This dilemma will continue to exist until today's Ewe Christians are given proper education on their traditional religious beliefs and practices to appreciate the points of convergence and divergence with their newly found faith – Christianity. Furthermore, the place of Ewe eschatological vision in Christianity's universal eschatology must be clearly defined and an interpretation of the former as replica of the latter may be one of the solutions.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Author contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

### Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

## References

- Abraham, I., 1917, *Studies in Pharisaism and the gospels*, First series, University Press, Cambridge.
- Ayo, N., 1992, *The Lord's Prayer: A survey theological and literary*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, incorporated, Oxford.
- Allen, W.C., 1907, 'A critical and exegetical commentary on the gospel according to S. Matthew', in S.R. Driver, M.A. Plummer & C.A. Briggs (eds.), *The international critical commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, T & T Clark, 57–60, Edinburgh.
- Brown, R.E., 1961, 'The Pater Noster as an eschatological prayer', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 22(2), 175-208.
- Brown, M.J., 2004, *The Lord's prayer through North African eyes: A window into early Christianity*, T & T Clark International, New York.
- Brown, P.R.L., 1967, 'Augustine of Hippo: A Biography', in M.J. Brown (eds.), *The Lord's Prayer through North African eye: A window into early Christianity*, T & T Clark International, New York.
- Betz, H.D., 1995, 'The Sermon on the Mount', in A.Y. Collins (ed.), *Hermeneia – A critical and historical commentary on the bible*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Bucknell, T., 2016, *Jesus, the Prophets, and the end of the world: An introduction to biblical eschatology*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR.
- Charles, R.H., 1914, *Religious development between the Old and the New Testaments*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Coulthard, M., 1985, *An introduction to Discourse Analysis*, 2nd Edn., Routledge, London.
- Dalman, G., 1902, *The words of Jesus*, T&T Clark, Edingburg.
- Edersheim, A., 1971, *The life and times of Jesus the Messiah*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, MI.
- Ekem, J.D.K., 2007, 'Jacobus Capitein's translation of the Lord's Prayer into Mfantse: an example of creative Mother Tongue Hermeneutics', *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2, 66–74.
- Ernest, J.D. (transl. & ed.), 1994, *Theological lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 1, Hendrickson Publishers, Michigan, MA.
- Friedlander, G., 2008, *The Jewish sources of the Sermon on the Mount*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR.
- Garr, J.D., 2015, *Christian fruit – Jewish root: Theology of Hebraic restoration*, Golden Key Press, Atlanta.
- Graef, H.C. (transl.), 1954, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's prayer – The beatitudes*, Paulist Press, New York.
- Hay, C.A. (transl.), 1892, *Martin Luther, Sermon on the Mount*, Lutheran Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA.
- Hengel, M., 1974, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic period*, vol. 1, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR.
- Horsley, R., 1992, Jesus and Judaism: Christian perspective, in H.W. Attridge & G. Hata (eds.), *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, pp. 53–77, Wayne State University Press, Detroit.
- Idelsohn, A.Z., 1960, *Jewish liturgy and its development*, Dover Publications, New York.
- Jeremias, J., 1971, *New Testament theology: The proclamation of Jesus*, Scribner, New York.
- Kavanagh, D.J. (transl.), 1951, *Saint Augustine: Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with seventeen related sermons*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC.
- Klappert, B., 1976, 'Kingdom', in C. Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 372–389, Paternoster Press, Exeter.
- Lenker, J.N. (transl.), 1907, *Luther's catechetical writings*, vol. 1, The Luther Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Lioy, D., 2004, *The Decalogue in the Sermon on the Mount*, Peter LANG, New York.
- Loba-Mkole, J., 2007, 'The New Testament and intercultural exegesis in Africa', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 30(1), 7–28.
- Mahlangu, E. & Grobbelaar, J., 2016, 'Child theology in Africa: A new hermeneutics', in Grobbelaar, J., & Breed, G., (eds.), *Welcoming Africa's children-Theological and ministry perspectives*, pp. 88–104, Oasis, Cape Town.
- McNeil, J.T., 1977, (ed.), *Calvin: Institute of the Christian religion*, Volume XXI, Westminster Press, Philadelphia.
- Meyer, B., 1999, *Translating the devil: Religion and modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.
- Milavec, A., 2003, *The Didache: Faith, hope, & life of the earliest Christian communities, 50–70 C.E.*, The Newman Press, New York.
- Morrison, A.W. (transl.), 1972, 'A harmony of the gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke', in D.W. Torrance & T.F. Torrance (eds.), *Calvin's New Testament commentaries*, vol. 1, pp. 205–213, W.M.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, MI.
- Oesterley, W.O.E. & Robinson, T.H., 1930, *Hebrew religion: Its origin and development*, The Macmillan Company, London.
- Ong, H.T. 2012–2013, 'Has the true meaning and purpose of The Lord's Prayer been lost? A sociolinguistic study of the Lord's Prayer in dialogue with Wilson – Kastner and Crossan', in L.K. Dow (ed.), *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry*, vol. 14, pp. 98–123, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.

- Pelikan, J. (ed.), 1956, *Luther's work, The Sermon on the Mount (Sermons) and the Magnificat*, vol. 21, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, MO.
- Petuchowski, J.J., 1998, 'On the frontiers of theology', in E.R. Petuchowski & A.M. Petuchowski (eds.), *Studies in modern theology and prayer*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA.
- Sauder, T. (transl.), 1976, *The Didache or the teachings of the twelve apostles: A writing of the early church*, Scroll Publishing, Tyler.
- Scott, E.F., 1951, *The Lord's prayer: Its character, purpose, and interpretation*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.
- Souter, A. (transl.), 1919, *Tertullian's treatises concerning prayer, concerning baptism*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London.
- Steward-Sykes, A. (transl.), 2004, *Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York.
- Taylor, C., 2009, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers: Comprising Pirqa Aboth in Hebrew and English with notes and excursus*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene.
- Woolsey, J.J. & Ulyat, W.C. (eds.), 1856, *The Christian review*, vol. XXI, Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, New York.
- Wilkinson, D., 2010, *Christian eschatology and the physical universe*, T&T Clark, London.