

# END-TIMES ISSUES



**#54** Commandment #1 –  
The obligations it represents.

1

## WHY ALL THIS EMPHASIS ON THE FIRST COMMANDMENT?

⇒ This command is the **FOUNDATION** for everything. ⇐

⇒ Your attitude toward this **FIRST** commandment will influence your attitude toward **ALL THE OTHERS**.

↳ Our understanding of "who God is" will determine how we respond to what he says.

"You shall have **no other gods** before Me."  
Exodus 20:3 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:7.

↳ This command represents all the commands, instructions and teachings about who God is, what he isn't, and the attitude we are to have toward him.

2

"I am **the LORD** your God, ..."  
Exodus 20:2a; Deuteronomy 5:6a (BSB)

"I am **Yahweh**, your God, ..."  
Exodus 20:2a; Deuteronomy 5:6a (LEB)

⇒ This is about the God who created all things, who identifies himself as "Yahweh" – Hebrew: יהוה – "the *absolute self-existent and unchangeable God*," who, in the New Testament, is revealed as "Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

⇒ Your response to this command has **eternal** significance. If you are not willing to stand on this foundation (and live by it), you cannot be saved.

"Turn to me and be **saved**, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is **no other**."  
Isaiah 45:22 (NIV)

[JESUS] HIS "NAME" REPRESENTS WHO HE IS

"**Salvation** is found in no one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given to mankind by which we must be **saved**."  
Acts 4:12 (NIV)

3

⇒ This God is the **only true God**. ALL the gods of the nations are FAKE.

For **all the gods of the nations** are idols, but it is **the LORD [= Yahweh]** who made the heavens.  
Psalm 96:5 (BSB)

REMEMINDER!

↳ When *all* the nations had rejected the true God (Genesis 11), he chose one person who was willing to trust him – Abraham – and made for himself a nation out of that one person [= Israel].

↳ Through this nation, God has:

- ✓ Revealed his will (in Scripture).
- ✓ Raised up Jesus Christ, the source of our salvation.
- ✓ Offered salvation to the nations that rejected him.
- ✓ Offered salvation to the offspring of Abraham, for they also eventually abandoned the true God.

REMEMINDER!

4

**WE ARE GOING TO ILLUSTRATE THE TYPES OF CONCEPTS THAT ARE REPRESENTED BY THIS COMMANDMENT.**  
(In the future, we will do the same with the other commandments.)

⇒ This will be based on the Heidelberg Catechism... **WHY THIS ONE?**

↳ Unlike Scripture, catechisms are *not inspired*; but they can be a *guide* to point us toward Scripture. They can help us to organize our thoughts on these issues. (We can evaluate their accuracy with Scripture, and watch for issues they may have overlooked.)

↳ Several other catechisms exist – some with very short answers and some extremely long. This one is not too long, but provides a good summary of what the commandments represent.

↳ Most of the denomination-specific issues will be found in *other* sections of the catechism, which we will *not* be looking at.

5

**>> COMMANDMENT #1 <<**

Representing the category of commands, instructions and teachings about who God is, and what attitude we are to have toward him.

**Q. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?**

A. That I, not wanting to endanger my own salvation, avoid and shun  
all idolatry, sorcery, superstitious rites,  
and prayer to saints or to other creatures.

That I rightly know the only true God,  
trust him alone,  
and look to God for every good thing humbly and patiently,  
and love, fear, and honor God with all my heart.

In short,  
that I give up anything rather than go against God's will in any way.

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🔗 Initial observations: There are four parts to the answer.

- **A REMINDER:** Our response to this commandment will affect our eternal destiny.
- **THE "NEGATIVE" ASPECT:** Things we must have nothing to do with. We must reject ALL the gods of the nations – and this includes all the demonic forces that are represented by those gods.
- **THE "POSITIVE" ASPECT:** Things we must have everything to do with. We must acknowledge and cling to the true God, who has revealed himself in Scripture, and do so in a way that he is worthy of.
- **A SUMMARY:** We must be willing to give-up anything (if needed), rather than do anything that goes against God's will.

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**PART 1 ⇨ A reminder:** Our response to this commandment will affect our eternal destiny.

That I, not wanting to endanger my own salvation, ...

🔗 What does Scripture say?

- Many things may be given the title "god"; but **there is only one Creator God who can save**. We have already seen some Scripture passages that tell us this – Isaiah 45:22; Acts 4:12.
- The whole testimony of **Scripture** is that it **must be accepted** as true and must be the basis for all of life. ... humbly accept **the word** [= Scripture] planted in you, which **can save you**.  
James 1:21b (NIV)
- We also see that there is a coming judgment, and that God's **well-deserved wrath is against anyone who refuses to obey** this commandment.
- **We cannot reject the God of salvation, and Jesus Christ, who made salvation possible, and be saved.**

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- There is **no hope** for *anyone* who rejects the truth of God, and puts their trust in something else.

When you cry out for help, let your collection of **idols** save you!

The wind will carry all of them off, a mere breath will blow them away.

Isaiah 57:13 (NIV)

Salvation is far from **the wicked, for they do not seek out your decrees**.

Psalms 119:155 (NIV)

Neither their **silver** nor their **gold** will be able to deliver them on the Day of the LORD's **wrath**.

Zephaniah 1:18a (BSB)

The **wrath of God is being revealed** from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of **people, who suppress the truth** by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that **people are without excuse**.

Romans 1:18–20 (NIV)

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**PART 2 ⇨ The "negative" aspect:** Things we must have nothing to do with.

[I must] avoid and shun ...

- I must *totally* have nothing to do with any of the following...

all idolatry,

🔗 What does Scripture say?

- When referring to "idolatry," we typically think of "gods" or deities.
- But the term can also be used in a broader sense, referring to *any* substitute for the true God. For instance, Scripture tells us that *greed* is idolatry – Colossians 3:5.
- (In the future, we will look further at the concept of "idolatry.")

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- The NLT translation emphasizes the *meaning* of the word "idol" in this context. It's more than just a god represented by a statue!

Dear children, keep yourselves from **idols**.

1 John 5:21 (NIV)

Dear children, keep away from **anything that might take God's place in your hearts**.

1 John 5:21 (NLT)

- Paul's warning about people who practice idolatry:

Do you not know that the wicked **will not inherit the kingdom of God**? Do not be deceived: Neither ... **idolaters**, nor [list of examples of wicked people], will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Co 6:9–10 (BSB)

- Israel's failures (including idolatry) should be a warning to us.

... God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the wilderness. ... **Do not be idolaters**, as some of them were. ... Now these things happened to them as examples and were written down as **warnings for us**, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

1 Corinthians 10:5, 7a, 11 (BSB)

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[all] sorcery, superstitious rites,

- This represents the entire category of activities that involve the reliance on spirits, demons, anything from the realm of the dead, and *all* the occult forces of evil, whether visible or invisible.
- Many such activities and practices are mentioned (and condemned) in the Bible. These types of things are considered detestable by God. They defile the person doing them, and bring God's judgment upon them.
- Below are some examples:

🔗 What does Scripture say?

You must not turn to **mediums** or **spiritists**; do not seek them out, or **you will be defiled by them**. I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 19:31 (BSB)

(MORE) →

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- God warned Israel. When they ignored his warning, they were driven out of the land, just as the previous nations had been.

When you enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not imitate the **detestable** ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who **sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, practices divination or conjury, interprets omens, practices sorcery, casts spells, consults a medium or spiritist, or inquires of the dead**. For whoever does these things is **detestable to the LORD**. And because of these detestable things, **the LORD your God is driving out the nations before you**.

Deuteronomy 18:9-12 (BSB)

- It's NOT whether or not these things get "results," but the fact that they are a rejection of the true God. *We are to put our trust in God!*

When men tell you to **consult the spirits of the dead** and the **spiritists** who whisper and mutter, shouldn't a people **consult their God instead**? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

Isaiah 8:19-20 (BSB)

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and prayer to saints or to other creatures.

- ❖ **How should we respond to this?** There is no Scripture passage that says, "Don't pray to people or creatures."

- Rather than simply dismiss this statement as being arbitrary or poor scholarship, we can see if there are reasons for saying this.

- ❖ **If we examine the concept of "prayer,"** we discover that *its very definition* refers to **interaction with deity**. It is **an aspect of worship**. In all of Scripture, *prayer is never directed toward people (dead or alive), or toward other creatures*.

- This catechism focused on the issue that was prevalent at the time it was written. People were *praying* to dead people ("saints"). Since Scripture defines prayer as an act of worship, the catechism focused on the issue at hand, rather than the general issue of "worship."

- [However, the Scripture passages they use to support their statement *do* focus on the more general issue of "worship."]

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- ❖ **For those who might question all this, how can we demonstrate that prayer is an aspect of worship?**

- We could look at all the places where the *English* words "pray" and "prayer" occur in Scripture. This should be sufficient proof for most people.

- For those who are not satisfied with this, we can look at the definitions of the Hebrew and Greek words that are translated as "pray/prayer." We can also research the *history* of the word's usage.

⇒ We will look at some of these definitions, focusing on the N.T. words. We will highlight the words that link to the concept of God/deity.

**Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains:**

**33.178** εὐχομαι<sup>a</sup>; προσεύχομαι; εὐχή<sup>a</sup>, ἥς f; προσευχή<sup>a</sup>, ἥς f: to speak to or to make requests of **God**—'to pray, to speak to **God**, to ask **God** for, prayer.'

... The most generic expression for prayer may simply be 'to speak to **God**.'

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**A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature:**

προσευχή, ἥς, ἡ

① petition addressed to **deity**, prayer

② a place of or for prayer, place of prayer Ac 16:13, 16.

προσεύχομαι ... to petition **deity**, pray

**Thayer's Greek Definitions:**

προσευχή, ἥς, ἡ

1) prayer addressed to **God**

2) a place set apart or suited for the offering of prayer

προσεύχομαι ...

1) to offer prayers, to pray

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**Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words:**

proseuchomai (G4336), "to pray," is always used of "prayer" to **God**, and is the most frequent word in this respect, ...

proseuche (G4335), ... denotes (a) "prayer" (to **God**), the most frequent term, ... (b) "a place of prayer," ...

**Theological Dictionary of the New Testament:**

προσεύχομαι, προσευχή.

1. "To pray," "to pray to," "to ask," "prayer," "petitionary prayer." ... From the very first προσεύχεσθαι means calling on **God**, ...

2. Along with an individual act of prayer or prayer as an expression of piety, προσευχή can also be a "place of prayer," especially the Jewish synagogue.

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**Theological Dictionary of the New Testament:**

**This resource also has an extensive history of the word's usage.**

Here is my summary of what it says:

- ✓ **In the Greek world**, prayer was something that was directed toward the **gods**.
- ✓ **In the Old Testament**, the focus of prayer was **God**, as one aspect of worship, and associated with many other aspects of worship – trust, sacrifice, thanks, praise, vows, repentance and confession of sin, singing, etc. In the case of the surrounding nations, it was directed toward their **gods**.
- ✓ **In the synagogues (after the exile)**, prayer became an even greater aspect of the worship of **God**.
- ✓ **In the New Testament**, prayer had (and still has) an important role in one's relationship with **God**.

18

### ✓ One issue that might create some confusion...

Perhaps the King James Version confuses matters, by often translating the Hebrew word נָא (nā') as "I pray thee," in reference to *humans*, when it should be translated as "Please!" \* *It is not an actual expression of praying!*

And he said unto her, Give me,  
**I pray thee**, a little water to  
drink; for I am thirsty.

Judges 4:19a (KJV)

He said to her, "**Please** give  
me a little water to drink for  
I am thirsty."

Judges 4:19a (CSB)

(There are also a small number of New Testament instances, where a Greek word should be translated as "request," not "pray.")

\* See: Swanson, J. (1997). In Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)

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❖ **Our conclusion?** The confession could have accurately said, "and worship of saints or of other creatures." But at the time this was written, the specific worship issue involved people praying to people ("saints").

- If we wish, we can use the word "worship" – since "worship" includes prayer (as we have already demonstrated).

and worship of saints or of other creatures.

### 🔗 What does Scripture say?

- Scripture forbids the worship of *any* created entity – whether that entity is good or evil. And prayer is one aspect of worship.
  - ✓ Worship God, not Satan – Matthew 4:10.
  - ✓ Worship God, not the holy angels – Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9.
  - ✓ Worship God, not humans – Acts 10:26.

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**PART 3** ➔ The "positive" aspect: Things we must totally pursue.

Without doing these "positive" things,  
we aren't really obeying the first command!

- Even **Atheists** can do the "negative" part of this command. (At least as far as their *visible conduct* is concerned. \*)

- ✓ They can avoid/shun idols, sorcery, and superstitious rites. They don't worship/pray to humans or other creatures.

- The problem is that they don't do the "positive" part of it.

- ✓ They choose to avoid/shun the true God, and everything that is a part of following him, instead of acknowledging and clinging to him!

\* (Their act of rejecting the true God is an exaltation of created entities *above* the Creator. So *spiritually*, they're *still* guilty of idolatry in the *heart*.)

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That I rightly know the only true God, ...

- There is only one true God, and all others are fake. We need to recognize this fact. We must *know* this one true God.

Turn to Me and be saved,  
all the ends of the earth;  
for **I am God,**  
**and there is no other.**

Isaiah 45:22 (BSB)

"Do people make their own gods?  
Yes, but **they are not gods!**"

Jeremiah 16:20 (NIV)

- It's not merely "factual" knowledge. (*Demons have this much*, as seen in James 2:19.) Rather, it's "practical" knowledge – i.e., knowledge applied to life. In this case, we could also call it "saving knowledge."

Do not merely **listen** to the word, and so deceive yourselves. **Do** what it says.

James 1:22 (NIV)

22

- We must know this one true God *rightly*, if we don't want to endanger our salvation; for this *right* knowledge is *inseparably tied* to our salvation.
- Knowledge of this one true God includes knowing *Jesus*. He is the one who reveals to us this right knowledge of the one true God.

### 🔗 What does Scripture say?

Now this is eternal life: that they **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

John 17:3 (NIV)

"... no one **knows** who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him."

Luke 10:22b (BSB)

"If you **knew** Me, you would **know** My Father as well."

John 8:19b (BSB)

Jesus makes access to God possible by his sacrifice (dying in our place) and his resurrection (enabling us to have new life).

23

trust him alone,

- This is a trust that is based on a knowledge of the truth.
- We must rely on him **ALONE**. No substitute or "crutch."

### 🔗 What does Scripture say?

- Whether national crises or daily decisions, the Jews had to choose whether to trust *God* or *something else*. The options, shown below, are relevant in all of life – not only for *Jews*, but for *all people*.

This is what the Lord says:

"Cursed is the one who **trusts** in man,  
who draws strength from mere flesh  
and whose heart turns away from the Lord."

"But blessed is the one who **trusts** in the Lord,  
whose confidence is in him."

Jeremiah 17:5, 7 (NIV)

In this case, they were trusting in alliances with foreign nations for protection.

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and look to God for every good thing

- Total dependence on the God we trust; looking to him with an expectation of receiving. (Also with the right attitude – next page.) →

#### What does Scripture say?

- God is the ultimate source of all good... and this fact does not change (the way shadows do).

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow.

James 1:17 (BSB)

So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Matthew 7:11 (BSB)

- Even *animals* depend on God, both in life and in death (though not consciously, the way humans should) – Psalm 104:27-30.

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humbly and patiently,

- Not only must we wholeheartedly *trust* God, but we must do so with the right attitude: with *humility* and *patience*.

⇒ **Humility** – willing to acknowledge the *truth* of who God is and who we are. *Doing this will influence our attitude!*

#### What does Scripture say?

Do not be quick to speak, and do not be hasty in your heart to utter a word before God. After all, **God is in heaven** and **you are on earth**. So let your words be few.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 (BSB)

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so **My ways are higher than your ways** and **My thoughts than your thoughts**."

Isaiah 55:9 (BSB)

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- The following passage shows us not only our need for *humility*, but we can also see that humility is connected to both *patience* and *trust* in God.

And all of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, because,

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the **humble**."

**Humble** yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, so that **in due time** He may exalt you. **Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.**

1 Peter 5:5-7 (BSB)

CONNECTED TO PATIENCE

CONNECTED TO TRUST IN GOD

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⇒ **Patience** – There are actually *two* attitudes represented in the following Scripture passages. These have to do with:

1. **Our response to PEOPLE:** The self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong (opposed to wrath or revenge). PATIENCE / LONGSUFFERING
2. **Our response to CIRCUMSTANCES (which may include what people do):** An attitude that does not easily give up or surrender under suffering (opposed to cowardice or despondency). ENDURANCE / PERSEVERANCE

GOD MAKES IT POSSIBLE!

#### What does Scripture say?

We also pray that you will be strengthened with all **his glorious power** so you will have all the **endurance** and **patience** you need.

Colossians 1:11a (NLT)

You need to **persevere** so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Heb 10:36 (NIV)

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and love, fear, and honor God with all my heart.

- These three attitudes must permeate our thinking about God. (Note that, in Scripture, the word "heart" focuses on *what we think*.)

⇒ **Love** – The focus of this New Testament word is *not* on romance or emotion, but on *commitment*. It is a *choice* to put God first in all that we do – a choice that results in *action*.

#### What does Scripture say?

Jesus replied: " **Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment."

Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV)

- This is the same attitude that was required of people under the *Old Covenant* – Deuteronomy 6:5.

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⇒ **Fear** – This is the proper attitude of a *created* being, in the presence of the *Creator*. This attitude can be associated with joy and trust (if we are his people), or horror and terror (if we are his enemies).

#### What does Scripture say?

**The fear of the LORD** is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Proverbs 9:10 (BSB)

This *fact* is found in several passages, such as: Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; etc.

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in **reverent fear**.

1 Peter 1:17 (NIV)

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⇒ **Honor/glory** – to have a high regard for God and all that he is, a desire to give God all that is his due. We are to exalt him above all else, to honor/glorify him in all that we do and say.

⇒ **What does Scripture say?**

- We glorify God by living in a way that reflects his holy character. This includes the way we interact with other people.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do it all to the glory of God.**

1 Corinthians 10:31 (BSB)

- This will influence our attitude toward temptation. Who are we to put first in our lives? Self? Satan? No! **God** is to be first!

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and **serve him only.**'"

Matthew 4:10 (NIV); Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13.

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**PART 4 ⇒ A summary:** Willing to abandon anything that goes against God's will.

In short, that I give up anything rather than go against God's will in any way.

⇒ **What does Scripture say?**

- This is the same as what Scripture says about putting Jesus *first* in life.

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and **whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.**

Matthew 10:37–39 (BSB)

- This is serious! If part of our *body* was the cause of our sin, it would be better to *cut off* that part, than for our whole body to be cast into hell – Matthew 5:29-30. (Unfortunately, the problem is worse than this. We have a *heart* problem that only "Surgeon Jesus" can take care of.)

32

**Q. What is idolatry?**

**A. Idolatry is**

having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed himself in the Word.

We plan to look at this question next time, along with the principles related to the *Second* Commandment.

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## OUR MISSION!

Now that we know the significance of the first commandment, we can make this our goal:

I, not wanting to endanger my own salvation, ...

... I give up anything rather than go against God's will in any way.

> Remembering both negative and positive aspects of this command. <

Realizing our imperfections, we can take comfort in this fact:

God does not lower the standard to meet our imperfections. Rather, he grows and raises us to meet the standard.

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## Credits

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Presentation – Dennis Hinks © 2024.

The catechism used here is located at: <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/HeidelbergCatechism.pdf>; but copies can be found in various places across the internet.

35

Here is the list of Greek-English Lexicons used to study the concept of "prayer." In addition to the definitions we quoted, many of these resources contain extensive lists of examples and sometimes history of word usage.

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 408). United Bible Societies.

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). In *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., pp. 878–879). University of Chicago Press.

*Thayer's Greek Definitions*: Published in 1886, 1889; public domain.

*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*: © 1984, 1996, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN

Kittel, Gerhard, et al., editors. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Electronic ed., Eerdmans, 1964–*.

For the Hebrew word translated as "prayer" directed toward humans, in the KJV:

Swanson, J. (1997). In *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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