

# Yeshua's Prayer

## The Lord's Prayer and the Amidah: A Comparative Analysis

By R. Levine

NOTE. I am indebted to Dr. Brad Young, who has graciously given me permission to use his Hebrew reconstruction of the Lord's Prayer as it appears in his book, *The Jewish Background to the Lord's Prayer*, 1984, Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, Dayton, Ohio.

What were the disciples asking in Luke 11 when they said to Yeshua, "Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples"? Obviously, they had spent a lot of time with him and were familiar with his methods of prayer and, in addition, were knowledgeable in the religious rituals of their day in synagogue and temple.

Therefore, it would appear that there is an aspect to the question which is not readily apparent from the Gospel account.

Here is where knowledge of the Hebraic background becomes of paramount importance. As a rabbi and group leader, it was Yeshua's responsibility to teach his followers how they were to fulfill the commandments of the faith. A basic tenet of Judaism, then as remains the case today, is the obligation to pray at certain times and in certain forms. The central prayer of Jewish liturgy is known as the Amidah (which means standing) or the Shemoneh Esreh (which means eighteen), which is second only to the Shema, the basic Jewish affirmation of faith, in importance. In fact, so important is this prayer that when the rabbis discussed it among themselves, they referred to it as ha-Tephillah-"The Prayer"-and not by name.

The basic structure of this prayer was well established in Yeshua's day, but it was not until a century later that the form which has been handed down was first canonized: It is possible, through analysis of the discussions in the Mishna regarding the Prayer,

parallels found in pseudepigraphic literature, and contemporary accounts to recreate with a high degree of accuracy the form which the Amidah took in the early part of the first century.

Before doing this, there is another element which must be understood: what constitutes fulfillment of a religious obligation:

Throughout rabbinic literature there is a constant thread of discussion regarding standards of behavior, especially as they pertain to the commandments which G-d enjoined upon His people. While the priests and Levites were the final arbiters of the rites and offerings of the sacrificial cult within the Temple precepts, it was to the rabbis and sages that the people looked for answers to questions not connected with the Temple worship.

It is a historical fact that the synagogue as an institution in Jewish life had been established for more than 400 years by the time Yeshua was born. Within the diaspora communities, the synagogue was the main center for Judaism, and the people looked to its leaders for guidance in the proper conduct of their religious life ... (halakah)

Even in Jerusalem, home of the Temple, which drew Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world, there were in the first century some 480 different synagogues.

With the development of the synagogue and its spread throughout the Jewish world came the development of liturgical forms in addition to those used by the Levites in the Temple service. While most prayers were spontaneous, in response to a particular need, the obligation to say certain prayers was based on passages in the biblical text. These were common even before the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. The twice-daily repetition of the Shema, the basic affirmation of Jewish faith, is based on Deut. 6:7, while the Grace After Meals is derived from Deut. 8:10, to give only two examples.

The synagogue was where the Torah scroll was read to the people, and the custom developed of saying a berakhah, or benediction, both before and after the reading. It became the custom for pious individuals to pray three times a day (see Daniel 6:11, Psalm 55:18), and the form that these prayers took was that of the berakhah, or praise

of G-d, followed by supplications. Indeed, the sages said that all prayer should be in the style appropriate to "a servant making requests of his master" and a man should "praise G-d first and petition for his needs afterwards."

By Yeshua's day, the daily prayers were an integral part of life for the religious Jew. Indeed, there are many recorded instances in the Gospels of Yeshua taking time out for prayer. But the Jew also was very familiar with the concept of obligation as embodied in his relationship with G-d. His ancestors had entered into a covenant with G-d at Sinai which had responsibilities on both sides (see Deut. 11:13-21), and the pious person wanted to be sure that he or she was doing all that was expected in fulfillment of that contract.

The priests were the arbiters for the sacrificial cult; the rabbis fulfilled this function for the people in regards to other aspects of daily life. If one is obligated to pray, one must know what form the prayer should take and, while there can be no limit to the length, there needs to be a minimum set as an acceptable standard.

By the first century, the Amidah, or ha-Tephillah, had become one of the most important series of benedictions. While there was no fixed number as yet (that would come a century later), the Amidah did follow the sages' dictum of praise, petition, thanksgiving. Most authorities feel that there were about 12 to 14 at this time, with several added following the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. to reflect the changes in Jewish life. But in Yeshua's time, the content and exact order of the prayer was still in a state of fluidity.

It is interesting to note that the Schools of Hillel and Shammai both accepted nine benedictions for Rosh Ha-Shanah (New Year) and seven benedictions for the Sabbath as the proper form.

The rabbis also realized that not every person would have enough time every day to say all the prayers in their entirety. Rather than countenance the omission of prayer altogether, the rabbis set minimum standards and said that by their fulfillment a person has discharged his or her obligation. There are many Talmudic discussions as to what this minimum may be in different situations, and it was not until the sixth century C.E. that a consensus was reached.

As the leader of his movement, Yeshua's followers looked to him to tell them what they needed to know and do in order to fulfill their obligations. So when they asked him to "teach" them to pray, they were, in effect, saying, what is the minimum prayer we can say and be confident that we have fulfilled our obligation? Since the Amidah was considered by that time to be in the category of an obligatory prayer, and since there are so many parallels between them, it is safe to conjecture that this is the prayer upon which Yeshua based his reply to the disciples.

The Lord's Prayer starts out with the acknowledgment of the fatherhood of G-d and His place in heaven. While the Amidah talks of G-d as the G-d of our fathers in the opening verses, the fatherhood of G-d is a common phrase throughout Jewish liturgy. Avinu, our father, is a word constantly repeated throughout the various prayers which make up the services.

"Hallowed be your name," or, a better translation by Dr. Young, "may your name be sanctified," relates directly to the third Amidah blessing: "Thou art holy and Thy Name is holy and the holy praise Thee daily. Blessed art Thou O Lord, the holy G-d." In both cases, the Hebrew word used is kadosh, which is translated as either holy or sanctified. In fact, this section of the Amidah is called the kedusha, or "sanctification."

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Dr. Young renders this as, "May you continue establishing your Kingdom; may your will be done in heaven and in earth." In the Amidah we pray, "Reign Thou over us O Lord, Thou alone in lovingkindness and tender mercy and clear us in judgment. Blessed are Thou O Lord the King who lovest righteousness and judgment." And Rabbi Eliezer prayed, "Let Thy will be done in Heaven above; grant tranquility of spirit to those that reverence Thee below; and do that which is good in Thy sight."

"Give us this day our daily bread." A short prayer cited by the rabbis went, "O G-d, the needs of Thy people are many, their knowledge slender. Give every one of Thy creatures his daily bread and grant him his urgent needs." And the ninth Amidah blessing asks, "Bless this year unto us O Lord our G-d together with every kind of the produce thereof for our welfare."

"Forgive us our sins as we also have forgiven those who have sinned against us." Dr. Young's translation here underlines an important Jewish concept, that man cannot ask for forgiveness from G-d until he first makes amends with his fellows whom he may have wronged or been wronged by. Before going to sleep at night, the pious Jew prays, "Master of the universe, I hereby forgive anyone who angered or antagonized me or who sinned against me," while in the sixth Amidah blessing he asks, "Forgive us O our Father for we have sinned, pardon us O our King for we have transgressed, for Thou dost pardon and forgive. Blessed art Thou O Lord who art gracious and dost abundantly forgive."

Do not bring us into the grasp of temptation but deliver us from evil." The seventh blessing is a prayer for deliverance from afflictions of all kinds. Since other blessings specify the physical necessities, this prayer has come to have a spiritual connotation. A modern version is "Look with compassion on all afflicted among us; be Thou our guardian and our advocate, and redeem us speedily from all evil, for in Thee do we trust as our mighty Redeemer." And another Talmudic sage, Rabbi Alexander, prayed, "May it be Thy will O Lord our G-d to place us in light and not in darkness, and may not our heart grow faint nor our eyes dim. Lord of the Universe, it is revealed and known before Thee that it is our desire to perform Thy will but what stands in the way? The Evil Inclination and the Oppression of the kingdoms (secular world). May it be Thy will to deliver us from their hand, so that we may again perform Thy statutes with a perfect heart."

While Dr. Young does not include the closing verse from Matthew's version of the prayer, "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever," he does acknowledge the similarity to David's benediction in I Chronicles 29:10-13. This scriptural passage is part of the daily prayer service and is an essential component of the section called Pesukei D'zimrah, or "Verses of Praise," which immediately precedes the recitation of the Shema, the central affirmation of faith in Judaism. Therefore, whether or not this verse is included with the Lord's Prayer is irrelevant here, as the verse is firmly rooted in Jewish tradition.

The rabbis recognized that not everyone in every circumstance could find time to pray the entire Amidah, so as early as the third century C.E., shortened versions were

gaining widespread acceptance, and as late as the Middle Ages various forms were still being written. Is the Lord's Prayer an early version of the Amidah which Yeshua taught his disciples so they could fulfill their minimum obligations of prayer to G-d? While the evidence remains inconclusive, I strongly believe that enough similarities exist between the two prayers for the theory to be a distinct possibility.

## Our LORD's Prayer

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” (Matthew 6:9)

דָּ (3)	מְ (2)	שׁ (1)	יְתֵ (3)	קַדְשׁ (2)	יֵתֵ (1)	שֵׁ (5)	בַּ (4)	שָׁ (3)	מַ (2)	יֵעֵם (1)	נֹרָא (3)	בֵּי (2)	אֲבִינוּ (1)
sh'·me·khah			yeet·kad·dash			she·ba·shah·ma·yeem					a·vee·noo		
your Name			be sanctified			Who is in heaven					Our Father		

“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

דָּ (4)	נִ (3)	צוּ (2)	רָ (1)	שְׁהָ (3)	עָ (2)	הָ (1)	דָּ (4)	מַלְכוּתְךָ (3)	כֹּהֵ (2)	בְּ (1)	תָּבֵא (2)	תָּ (1)
re·tsoh·ne·kha				ye·'a·seh			mal·khoo·te·kha				tah·voh	
<b>Thy will</b>				<b>be done</b>			<b>Thy Kingdom</b>				<b>let come</b>	
יֵם (4)	מַ (3)	שָׁ (2)	בַּ (1)	שְׁהָ (3)	עָ (2)	הָ (1)	שֵׁר (3)	אֶ (2)	כֵּ (1)	אֶרֶץ (3)	אֶרֶץ (2)	בָּ (1)
va·shah·ma·yeem				na·'a·sah			ka·'a·sher			bah·'ah·rets		
<b>in heaven</b>				<b>it is done</b>			<b>as</b>			<b>on earth</b>		

“Give us this day our daily bread.” (Matthew 6:11)

נָתַן	-	לָנוּ	נָתַן	הַיּוֹם	לֶחֶם	הַיּוֹם	נָתַן	לָנוּ
(1)		(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)
ten		la-nu	hai-yom	le-chem	chuk-kei-nu			
					<b>our daily bread</b>	<b>this day</b>	<b>give to us</b>	

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12)

כְּ	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	לָנוּ	אֲתָם	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	לָנוּ	וְ	סָלַח	לָנוּ
(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(1)	(2)	(3)
just as	ka-'a-she	ash-ma-tei-nu	our sins	'et	and	la-nu	and	u-se-lakh	and	forgive us

לָנוּ	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	לָנוּ	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	לָנוּ	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	לָנוּ
(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(3)	(2)	(1)	(3)	(2)	(1)
sin against us	la-nu	ash-mu	to those who	la-'a-she	a-nakh-nu	we are	so-le-lakhim	forgiving	

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:13)

וְ	אֲלֵנוּ	תְּ	בִי	אֵלֵנוּ	נָתַן	לִי	רֵי	נֹ	סָה	כִּי	אִם	-	הַ	צִי	לָנוּ	
(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(1)		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
and	te-vi-ei-nu	and	lead us not	li-dei	into the hands of	mas-sah	but	ki	'im	deliver us						

מִן	-	הַ	רָע
(1)		(1)	(2)
min		ha-ra	from the evil one