

# JESUS

## CARES ABOUT PRAYER

### PART 2



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Church of the Beatitudes

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**LAST MONTH, I WROTE** about some of the things Jesus (Yeshua) taught about prayer. In this teaching letter, we will continue this study.

## Teach Us to Pray

One of the disciples came to Jesus (Yeshua) asking Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). What followed was the prayer that has come to be known as the Lord's Prayer.

In the book, *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus*, authors Spangler and Tverberg write, "It has been suggested that the Lord's Prayer is a summary of the *Amidah* [one of the central prayers of Jewish liturgy] because it encompasses several of its themes. Other rabbis of Jesus' time taught summary versions of the *Amidah* in order to illustrate what prayer should be like at its essence. Furthermore, the early church prayed the Lord's Prayer three times daily just as the *Amidah* was prayed."

The *Amidah* prayer is a central prayer of Judaism. Even to this day, it is prayed three times daily in the synagogues. The prayer was known in Jesus' time in oral form, although it was not written down until later in the century. Scholar David Bivin also believes that the Lord's Prayer was "apparently an abbreviated version of the *Amidah* prayer." You can find the *Amidah* prayer in English along with Bivin's commentary by searching for 'The *Amidah* prayer at Jerusalem Perspective' in the Google search function.

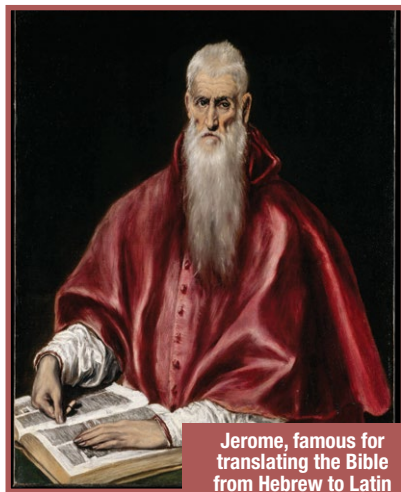


A page from the Siddur

I can see that Jesus would feel at home with many Jewish prayers in the *Siddur* (Jewish prayer book). The Lord's Prayer, probably the most loved prayer in Christendom, is Hebrew in style and flow.

## Was Matthew Written in Hebrew?

In *A Prayer to Our Father*, authors Gordon and Johnson talk about a Hebrew translation of the book of Matthew. According to their research, there were church fathers who reported that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew. For example, they quote the first century church father Papias of Hierapolis as saying: "Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew dialect, and everybody translated it as he was able." And in the fourth century, Jerome, famous for translating the Bible from Hebrew to Latin, said, "The first Evangelist is Matthew, the publican, who was surnamed Levi. He published his gospel in Judaea in the Hebrew language." In the year 1380, the text of Hebrew Matthew was included as an appendix in a book by Rabbi Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut. I cite it here, because there are subtle nuances in the Lord's Prayer from Hebrew Matthew.



Jerome, famous for translating the Bible from Hebrew to Latin

In *A Prayer to Our Father*, Gordon translates the Lord's Prayer from Hebrew Matthew into English as follows:

**"OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN**

**MAY YOUR NAME BE SANCTIFIED**

**MAY YOUR KINGDOM BE BLESSED**

**YOUR WILL SHALL BE DONE IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH**

**GIVE US OUR BREAD CONTINUALLY/DAILY**

**FORGIVE US THE DEBT OF OUR SINS AS WE FORGIVE THE DEBT OF THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US**

**DO NOT BRING US INTO THE HANDS OF A TEST**

**AND PROTECT US FROM ALL EVIL**

**AMEN"**

## Our Father

Did you ever notice that this prayer is written in the plural not the singular? It says “our,” not “my.” This is not unusual, for the Bible often speaks in the corporate rather than the individual. Dr. Marvin Wilson refers to the Jewish emphasis on community. “This deeply rooted biblical emphasis upon folk—that is, the group—is underscored by the fact that most Jewish prayer employs the plural ‘we’ not the singular ‘I.’ Prayer expresses the cry of the whole community. One of the best-known biblical prayers expresses this communal factor in its opening words: ‘Our Father in heaven’ (Matt. 6:9b).”

## God’s Kingdom, God’s Will

*“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).*

There is a difference between the Hebrew Matthew and the Greek Matthew in the prayer. In Greek, the line seems to be referring to the future of the kingdom, while the Hebrew Matthew is referring to the present state of God’s kingdom. As Christians, we live in this tension. We are part of God’s kingdom in the present and we look forward to the realization of all the Messianic prophecies in the future kingdom. Whichever translation is correct, we could happily pray “May your kingdom now be blessed, and may your Messianic kingdom come!”

Many of us, both Christians and Jews, eagerly anticipate the coming Messianic age. In Jesus’ (Yeshua’s) time, the disciples often exposed their eagerness for the kingdom (i.e. Messianic age) to be realized in their time. They envisioned Jesus throwing off the bondage of Roman rule and establishing His earthly rule. Jesus often spoke of the kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven and kingdom of light. In fact, the phrase is one of the most repeated in His ministry. The kingdom of God is both present and anticipated. We should all pray for God’s purposes, plans and righteousness in this present time. I frequently pray for Bridges for Peace to experience God’s blessing. I pray for righteousness to rise up, for godly justice and mercy to be experienced in all spheres of our world today. I pray for God to be with us in the midst of trouble and evil times. At the same time, I long for the day when we will experience the fullness of God’s kingdom with Messiah ruling and reigning.

The next phrase of Jesus' prayer emphasizes both the earthly and heavenly realms. We can and should pray that God's will be done on earth. How can God's will be done on earth? It will happen when godly men and women show His character by their actions. This is a very practical thought. Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matt. 5:16). Again, a combination of prayer and faith with practical action is required.

## Bread

*"Give us this day our daily bread"* (Matt. 6:11).

In Hebraic thought, when bread is referenced, it implies all food. Jesus (Yeshua) said, *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'"* (Matt. 4:4). This is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. The Jewish blessing over the bread: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has brought forth bread from the earth" is considered sufficient as a blessing for the whole meal. Perhaps we could understand Matthew 6:11 as "give us this day our daily food." Many today, fearing an economic collapse, are preparing stockpiles of food.

For the children of Israel, wandering for 40 years in the wilderness, this was not a possibility. God provided for their needs by sending manna. Regardless of what the future holds, we can hold fast to the God who provides our daily bread (food).



## Forgiveness

*"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"* (Matt. 6:12).

In the prayer, Jesus (Yeshua) reminds His followers of the need to forgive others. In *Jesus*, the bibliography on the life of Jesus by the late Professor

David Flusser, a Jewish Second Temple period scholar, he says the following on the topic of forgiveness, “Love of one’s neighbor was regarded as a precondition to reconciliation with God.” Flusser also quotes a rabbi who lived shortly after Jesus as saying, “Transgression between a man and his neighbor are not expiated by the Day of Atonement unless the man first makes peace with his neighbor.” Similarly, we hear Jesus say, “*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (Matt. 6:14–15).

Jesus also said, “*Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift*” (Matt. 5:23–24).

The book *Ecclesiasticus*, also called the *Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach*, which dates from 185 BC, teaches, “Forgive your neighbor’s injustice; then, when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Should a person nourish anger against another, and expect healing from the Lord? Should a person refuse mercy to a man like himself, yet seek pardon for his own sins?”

In Jewish thought, you cannot forgive someone for something you didn’t do or that wasn’t done to you. Many Christians have sought forgiveness for the sins of the Holocaust from modern day Jews. This is an awkward situation because according to their way of thinking, they cannot forgive you, who did not personally commit the sin, for something that wasn’t done to them. Rather, I suggest expressing your great sorrow over the pain caused to the Jewish people throughout history and working to change the future actions of the Church. To understand Jewish thought on forgiveness, especially regarding the Holocaust, I highly recommend reading the *Sunflower* by Simon Wiesenthal.

## Evil, Temptation and Tests

“*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*” (Matt. 6:12).

Jesus (Yeshua) taught us to pray that we would be protected. When thinking of God’s protection, what immediately comes to mind is Psalm 91.

In Hebrew Matthew, the word used is not temptation but rather refers to a test. The Greek word *peirasmon*, which is often translated as temptation in the Lord's Prayer, in other places is translated as test. This is an important clarification. Before understanding this, I would wonder, "Why is God leading people into temptation?" It seems cruel. The Apostle James said, *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death"* (James 1:13–15). The phrase from Hebrew Matthew, "Do not bring us into the hands of a test," is also interesting because it appears as a prayer in the Babylonian Talmud 60b, which says, "Do not bring me into the hands of sin, or into the hands of a test, or into the hands of shame." Many Jews recite these words every morning in their daily prayers. How did the words of Jesus end up in this Jewish prayer?



**"Do not bring me into the hands of sin, or into the hands of a test, or into the hands of shame."**

In *A Prayer to Our Father*, Gordon suggests, "Perhaps the ancient Rabbis were influenced by Yeshua's teachings, or perhaps Yeshua incorporated a phrase from a well-known Jewish prayer. Either way, the concept of asking God not to test us clearly has a place in ancient Jewish sources." While the Scripture clearly says that God does not tempt us, it is also clear that He can test. Abraham was tested, Job was tested and Jesus was tested in the wilderness.

"Deliver [or protect] us from all evil." This is a prayer that all of us are praying in these difficult days. Truly, the only one who can protect us from all evil is God Himself. As Gordon says, "This includes the evil of Satan, the evil that lurks in the human heart, and the evil of natural consequence." What a powerful prayer.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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### TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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