THE LORD'S PRAYER

"And when you pray, do not babble as do the Gentiles for they think that they will be heard merely because of the abundance of their words. Do not be like them in this regard, for your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.
Therefore you are to pray in this manner:
Our father in heaven
Set apart your holy name.
Bring your eschatological kingdom.
Cause your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today the eschatological bread that will be ours in the future.
And forgive us our offenses as we ourselves have forgiven those who will offend us.
And do not bring us into testing, but deliver us from the Evil One.
For if you forgive other people's sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
But if you do not forgive others, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your sins."

Starting notes:

Gentiles is substituted in some manuscripts in lieu of *hypocrites* as the context much more likely concerns their habits. Also *hypocrites* may have been used to avoid Gentile offense in Matthew's church.

The words *"in this regard"* are added to complete the sense of the thought. *"For your Father"* is often phrased as *"your heavenly Father"* or *"your Father in heaven"* which is common in Matthew and fitting to his theology. The phrase *"before you ask him"* can be read as *"before you open your mouth."* The well-known prayer following the phrase: *"You are to pray in this manner"* is deliberately paraphrased and interpretive to help with clarity toward an eschatological Kingdom expectation.

"Cause your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven" can be read as *Cause your will to be fulfilled in heaven and on earth."* The difficult word *"daily"* is rendered differently in various versions and can be read as: *"Daily" – each day / substantial / perpetual / necessary / future* and *tomorrow's*. *"offenses"* is often rendered as *"debt"* or *"guilt"* or *"transgression.* *"Evil One"* is also rendered as *"evil."* *"Forgive you"* is sometimes interpreted as *"forgive your sins."*

This prayer interrupts the neat three-fold pattern Matthew has constructed with *almsgiving, prayer* and *fasting.* It stands rather as parenthetical and given Matthew's formula, it would not be missed if it were omitted.

Compared to Luke's version of this prayer, Matthew's is a more developed form and contains a structure of 7 petitions compared to Luke's 5.

Luke also presents the prayer as a response to a specific request from one of the disciples who asks to be taught to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray.

Matthew presents it as a proper way to pray contrasted to the prayers of the Gentiles or hypocrites.

This prayer interrupts the flow of Matthew's larger passage, but it must do so because Matthew regarded its contents as of great importance. It offers insights not only into the offering of acceptable prayer but for its practical relevance for certain tensions with his Jewish-Christian community.

> *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*
> *Matthew 5:23-24*

The radical content of this passage to a Jewish believer would be that your *"brother"* in Christ could be a Gentile.

Though this pericope on prayer is the second of a three-part formula, it itself is also divided into three parts.

1) The nature of true prayer in vv.7-8.
2) A model of prayer – The Lord's Prayer – in vv.9-13.
3) The added statement about the importance of forgiving others in 14-15.

The traditional ending of the Lord's Prayer – *For thine is the kingdom . . .* – is not found in the earliest manuscripts.

> *"And when you pray, do not babble as do the Gentiles for they think that they will be heard merely because of the abundance of their words. Do not be like them in this regard, for your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.*
> *Matthew 6:7-8*

These verses are more relevant to the Gentiles than to the hypocrites who are the bad examples in the three major illustrations.

What is in view here is the attempt to manipulate God through the repetition of *"much speaking"* and maybe even through the magical phrasing of *"babble"*. The idea of the word *"babble"* here does not address a speech impediment, but a repetition of meaningless syllables uttered at length. In other words, the pagans think that they will be heard by means of their devices.

The disciples are to avoid this kind of praying. Rather than trying to arrest God's attention or manipulate him through utterances and words or magical incantations, they should realize that the omniscient God is not informed in this manner as to their needs.

The Old Testament already places a stress on the economy of praying words.

> *Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth, that is why your words should be few.*
> *Ecclesiastes 5:1 Masoretic Text*

> *When you spread out your hands I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.*
> *Isaiah 1:15*

> *Thrust not yourself into the deliberations of princes, and repeat not the words of our prayer.*
> *Sirach 7:15*

That your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask him presupposes that God will grant the petitioner what they *need.*

> *Therefore you are to pray in this manner:*
> *Our father in heaven*
> *Set apart your holy name.*
> *Matthew 6:9*

And here we have an introduction and the beginning of a model prayer. Indeed, Matthew sets forth in this short prayer a model to be followed.

Note that the introduction is emphatic and serves more as a statement of instruction rather than a suggestion. *"you are to pray in this manner"* distinguishes the prayer of the disciple of Christ from the prayer of those who are not his disciples.

The *Didache* reminds us that praying three times a day was already an established Jewish pattern. Set liturgical prayers were already common in this culture.

> *And do not pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in his Gospel, pray thus: "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy Kingdom come, they will be done, as in Heaven so also upon the earth; give us to-day our daily bread, and forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into trial, but deliver us from the Evil One, for this is the power and the glory forever." Pray thus three times a day.*
> *Didache 8:2-3 (50-120 AD)*

The *Lord's Prayer*, in its eschatological orientation, is similar in a number of ways to the *Qaddish* prayers of the synagogue. This is not only true of the spirit of the entire prayer but especially of the content of the first three petitions.

*note, a *Qaddish* is an ancient hymn of praise in Jewish liturgy. Its purpose is to glorify and magnify God's name.

> *Exalted and hallowed be His great Name in the world which He created according to his will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and in your days, and in the life of the whole house of Israel, speedily and at a near time. And say, Amen.*
> *(from Petuchowski and Brocke, The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy. 37)*

Other petitions in the Lord's Prayer find parallels in various Jewish prayers.

Invocation – "our Father in heaven, reveals that God is transcendent of all that is on the earth. *Father* points to the intimate relationship between God and his children. It is an intimate term of affection in a familial way.

If you give thought to Jesus using the phrase *"Father"* at the time of the First Century and in the context he uses it among a Jewish audience, it stands as unique for him to do so.

Father as a concept, provides the basis for the needs of the children under that Father on earth while *Father in heaven* underlines his all-powerful nature and ability to meet the needs of his children.

And here we have our first of seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer.

First petition – set apart your holy name.

This is an appeal for God in vindication of his *holy name.* In Hebraic thought, the relationship between the name of a person and the person themselves is much closer than we use it. In their thought, the name of God is virtually indistinguishable from the person of God.

> *A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise <u>my name</u>. but you say, "How have we despised your name?"*
> *Malachi 1:6*

> *For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will <u>sanctify my name</u>; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.*
> *Isaiah 29:23*

> *And I will vindicate the holiness of <u>my great name</u>, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. and the nations*

will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.
Ezekiel 36:23

Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heave: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."
John 12:28

I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.
John 17:6

In short, God's name will only be honored when he brings his kingdom and accomplishes his will on earth (reference the Qaddish above). Thus the first three petitions of the prayer are closely linked, referring essentially to the same salvation-historical reality.
Hagner – Matthew, page 148

Bring your eschatological kingdom.
Cause your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Matthew 6:10

Second Petition – bring your eschatological kingdom.

This refers to the eternal and ultimate reign of God which was longed for by the Jewish people. With it comes the consummation of God's purposes in history, the fulfillment of the prophetic pictures of future joy.

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"
Acts 1:6

Above all, the gospel is the announcement that God's promised rule has now begun in and through the work of Jesus the Messiah.

"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."
Matthew 3:2

From that time Jesus began to preach saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
Matthew 4:17

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every

affliction among the people.
Matthew 4:23

The disciples then are encouraged to pray that what has begun in the ministry of Jesus and what they have already begun participating in, may be experienced in all fullness. *"Come, Lord Jesus."*

If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!"
1 Corinthains 16:22

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen, Come Lord Jesus!
Revelation 22:20

The *already-not yet* aspect of the redemptive and fulfilled promises of God can be beheld in the Lord's Prayer as the present and future nature of the prayer is revealed in the kingdom parables of Matthew 13.

Third Petition – cause your will to be fulfilled on earth as it is heaven.

This petition points to the overturning of the present and historic world governments and their rule and thus restoration of the earth as we know it. God's will is done in the realm of his sovereign transcendence: let that sovereignty now be expressed upon the earth.

Nevertheless as it shall be the will of God in heaven, so be it done.
1 Maccabees 3:60

All of reality must finally come under his rule.

The first three petitions focus on God's activity in history yet carry a certain ethical implication for the disciple of Christ in their present through their prayer for the Kingdom to be fulfilled. After all, the disciple already participates in the *already* reign of God brought by Jesus and are therefore representatives of that reign in their present. They themselves cannot bring that Kingdom to pass through their efforts, but they can reflect the good news of its inauguration in and through Jesus.

The disciple is to manifest the reality of the presence of the Kingdom. This is the idea of the disciple being salt and light to their world.

In that sense the first three petitions are a prayer for the disciple to be faithful to their calling – not to bring the Kingdom – but to be faithful in manifesting its prophetic presence through Jesus and the Spirit.

Give us today the eschatological bread that will be ours in the future.
Matthew 6:11

Fourth Petition – give US . . .

Note the shift in this petition from the focus on *"your"* to *"us";* from God to the one praying.

The prayer shifts to the needs of the disciples. The petitions that carried a cosmic scope seem to give way to the meeting of personal needs while maintaining an eschatological perspective at the foundational level. The anticipation of the coming fulfilled Kingdom is still present.

Many manuscripts use the words *"our daily bread"* and this rendering deserves clarity.

"Daily" can mean *"for the present day" – that is, food for the present day.*

Luke 11:3 reads *"Give us each day our daily bread"* meaning *perpetual provision*.

"Daily" can mean *"give us today the bread necessary for our existence" – that is give us only the bread we need to survive.*

"Daily" can mean *"the bread above the substance" – that is, a reference to the Eucharist.*

"Daily" can mean *"the following day or the coming day" – give us tomorrow's ration of food today.*

"Daily" can mean *"give us bread for the day that is beginning" – which seems to be this present day,*

Bread for the coming day or *bread for the day to come* could be interpreted as bread for tomorrow.

Daily" can mean *"our bread which comes upon us from you" – which could well mean the eschatological day to come.*

> *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather <u>a day's portion every day</u>, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my laws or not.*
> *Exodus 16:4*

The idea that in the ultimate sense the eschatological bread of eternity is in view here finds support in a later verse in Matthew.

> *"I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*
> *Matthew 8:11*

"Give us this day our daily bread" then could reflect an imminent eschatological expectation. Such an interpretation is in keeping with the content of the first three petitions.

More importantly, it is the only view to give an adequate understanding of the emphasis of *"this day" – "Give us this day our daily bread"* – at the end of the sentence, as if highlighting *this day* within the framework of the overall petition.

The prayer thus asks for the present realization of the eschaton.

> *The prayer is nevertheless a prayer for bread. And there is a sense in which the bread we partake of daily is in anticipation of the eschatological banquet. The fourth petition, in moving from the cosmic to the particular does not leave behind eschatological concerns. On the contrary, it looks for eschatological benefits in the present, and in this sense it is perhaps the most significant type of petition that the disciples can pray. At the same time, however, the fulfillment of present needs – even in so ordinary a thing as bread – is for the disciples' anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment of needs.*
>
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 150*

Fifth Petition – and forgive us our offenses as we ourselves have forgiven those who offend us.

The *"offenses"* here can be seen as *debts, shortcomings, sins or transgressions.*

The concept of sin as a debt owed to God has an Aramaic background. In rabbinic literature sin can be viewed as a debt to God.

Note that the idea here is that the disciples have *already forgiven* those who offended them.

Some manuscripts do render *"have forgiven"* as *"as we forgive."*

It seems probable that our being forgiven at the future judgment is in view here which would keep this petition in harmony with the prior four petitions which contain an eschatological theme.

Yet there is also a present-day aspect to this petition since divine forgiveness is also experienced in the present in advance of eschatological forgiveness.

> *Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say seven times, but seventy times seven."*
>
> *Matthew 18:21-22*

There is a connection that our forgiving of others is linked with God's forgiveness of us. It is not that our forgiveness of others leads to God's forgiveness of us but rather, since God has forgiven us through Christ, forgiveness should be presupposed and expected on our part.

> *And do not bring us into testing, but deliver us from the Evil One.*
>
> *Mathew 6:13*

Sixth Petition – and do not bring us into testing.

Depending on the context, the key word can either be *"testing"* or*"temptation."*

We will suggest the word *"testing"* since God does not lead anyone to temptation.

> *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*
> *James 1:13*

Tempted implies being enticed to sin whereas *testing* implies being brought into difficult circumstances that try one's faithfulness.

> *My son, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials.*
> *Sirach 7:1*

> *No evil can harm the man who fears the Lord; through trials again and again he is safe.*
> *Sirach 33:1*

The idea of testing in this context concerns the severest kind which can lead to apostasy.

Once again, we need to ask is this petition speaking of *this day* as *today* or does it refer to the *tomorrow* and the *eschaton*?

> *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.*
> *Revelation 3:10*

I would argue that the future is primarily in view but clearly the verse directs us to this present age as well. In fact, it is in the testing of the present time that we glean an expectation of the great final test. The disciple then should pray not to be led into such a situation – a situation where their faith will not be able to survive.

A great time of testing was, indeed, the expectation of the coming of the Messiah and his age. Such testing could not be avoided, therefore, the disciples were to pray to be kept from testing which anticipated the eschatological testing bringing a crisis of faith.

> *then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.*
> *2 Peter 2:9*

Seventh Petition – but deliver us from the Evil One.

The conjunction *but* connects this petition to the prior petition.

It is thus assumed that some testing is inevitable. When it comes, the disciples pray for deliverance which is why we used Sirach 33:1 and 2 Peter 2:9 above.

We will view *Evil One* or evil as one and the same rather than argue over the wording.

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.
2 Thessalonians 3:3

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep from the evil one.
John 17:15

In other places in Matthew evil probably refers to Satan as the evil one.

Let what you say simply be 'Yes' or 'No'; anything else comes from evil.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one.

Matthew 5:37; 13:19; 13:38

The difference between Satan and evil is small in the present petition: to pray to be free from one is to pray to be free from the other.
Hagner – Matthew, page 151

The reason to use *Evil One* as personal rather than the impersonal *evil,* is that Satan desires to use any testing of a disciple to his advantage.

The sixth and seventh petitions together may be paraphrased in the following words:

Do not lead us into a testing of our faith that is beyond our endurance, bur when testing does come, deliver us from the Evi Onoe and his purposes.

For if you forgive other people's sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your sins."

Matthew 6:14-15

This additional statement, *though not part of the prayer itself,* does stress the point of the fifth petition - *and forgive us our offenses as we ourselves have forgiven those who offend us.* Here, human involvement is evident.

Since Matthew inserts this into the proper manner of prayer, we might be led to believe that there is tension within his church community that may very well be centered around Jewish believers and their Gentile counterparts.

If you look at these two verses, one verse simply repeats the other but in a negative form.

Once again, we cannot make the mistake of thinking that God's forgiveness of us depends on our forgiveness of others. While it is clear from these verses that a direct connection is present between God's forgiveness and our forgiveness, it must be understood that God's forgiveness is always prior.

Rather, this passage is a forceful way of making the significant point that is unthinkable – impossible – that we can enjoy God's forgiveness without in turn extending our forgiveness toward others.

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so that you also must forgive.
Colossians 3:13

Prayer is straightforward and simple for those who have experienced the grace of the kingdom of Christ. Short, direct, and sincere prayers are adequate. And when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he follows the pattern of the synagogue prayer of his day. The Lord's Prayer, thus centers on the large issue of God's redemptive program rather than on more mundane matters. The disciples are to pray above all for the realization of God's eschatological program on earth. Most of the petitions in the prayer are dominated by this concern for the end time. Yet, at the same time, the petitions have implications for the present. The one who prays the Lord's Prayer prays thus from a perspective of one who is involved in the great redemptive drama that is beginning to unfold in the Gospel narrative itself. The measure of eschatological fulfillment already realized focuses one's thoughts and desires upon the consummation of God's purposes as well as upon the consciousness and importance of present discipleship.
Hagner – Matthew, page 152

If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
Colossians 3:1-4