

The Lord and His Prayer

Based on the book, *The Lord and His Prayer*
by NT Wright.



Biblical texts

The prayer appears twice in the New Testament. A longer version, Matt 6:9-13, is located at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–7:29), in the context of Jesus’ instruction about piety appropriate for his followers (Matt 6:1-21). A shorter version, Luke 11:2-4, responds to his disciples’ request, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

Matt 6:9-13

“Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done, on earth as it is in
heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven
our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time
of trial,
but rescue us from the
evil one.”

Luke 11:2-4

He said to them, “When you pray, say:
Father,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
For we ourselves forgive everyone
indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time
of trial.”

Many scholars believe Luke’s shorter version was earlier, expanded by Matthew. Others consider Matthew’s wording earlier, compressed by Luke.

Historical background

Outside the New Testament this prayer's earliest attestation is in the Didache (8.2), a late first-century manual of Christian instruction. It prescribes the prayer's recitation three times a day, in a form nearly identical to that in Matthew but with a closing ascription: "for yours is the power and the glory forever." By the ninth century, "the kingdom" was added (compare with 1 Chron. 29:11-13). Across the centuries this appendix became even more elaborate and conspicuously Christian: "for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages" (The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, fifth century).

Further notes of interest

The opening address (Matt 6:9-10/Luke 11:2) asks that God's holiness be honoured and God's sovereignty be extended. The address to God as "Father" and reference to God's "kingdom" correspond to Old Testament metaphors; (for example, Exod 4:22, Deut 32:6, Ps 145:13, Isa 64:8). Addressing God as "Father" was not uncommon in the Jewish religion (e.g. the Talmud b. Ta'anit 25b, Akiba, a second-century rabbi, is quoted as praying to "Our Father, our king,"). Equally, such characterizations of God were anticipated in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q216 4.9), Philo (Conf. 170, 175), and the Mishnah (m. Yoma 8.9). In the Bible one's name is no mere label but the repository of one's peculiar essence (Gen 2:19, Gen 32:28). In Ezekiel, God "hallows" the divine name—sets it apart, consecrates it, sanctifies it—to demonstrate supreme divinity over all other authorities: that "the nations shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek 36:22-27; compare John 17:1-12). Jesus was remembered as having customarily addressed God as father (Matt 5:48, Mark 14:36, Luke 6:36, John 6:32). Jesus' distinctive prayer for his followers is presented with alarming intimacy and unfettered access to God, through Christ, and reflects Jesus' own manner of prayers (e.g. John 17). "The kingdom" or "reign and realm" of God was Jesus' oft-used image for God's dynamic sovereignty throughout eternity, which he showed has already entered our world in his person and ministry and impacts on our human history (Matt 13:18-23, Mark 4:21-32 Luke 17:20-21). Matt 6:10 and Luke 11:3 amplify the prayer's previous petition by asking that God's will, unrestricted in heaven, might be reflected in all things on earth.