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2001

# Prayer in Jewish Life of the First Century as Background to Early Christianity

Rabbi Asher Finkel, Ph.D., *Seton Hall University*



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INTO

# GOD'S P R E S E N C E



PRAYER  
IN THE  
NEW TESTAMENT

RICHARD N. LONGENECKER, EDITOR

## McMASTER NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

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# Into God's Presence

## *Prayer in the New Testament*

*Edited by*

Richard N. Longenecker

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WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN / CAMBRIDGE, U.K.

BS  
2145  
.P67  
I58  
2001

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Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.  
255 Jefferson Ave. S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503 /  
P.O. Box 163, Cambridge CB3 9PU U.K.

Printed in the United States of America

06 05 04 03 02 01      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Into God's presence : prayer in the New Testament /  
edited by Richard N. Longenecker.

p.      cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0-8028-4883-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Bible. N.T. — Prayers — History and criticism.  
I. Longenecker, Richard N.

BS2545.P67 I58 2001  
248.3'2'09015 — dc21  
2001040311

www.eerdmans.com

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## CHAPTER 3

# Prayer in Jewish Life of the First Century as Background to Early Christianity

ASHER FINKEL

THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES the dynamics that affected the phenomenon of prayer in the Jewish world of the first century CE, as reflected in the early sources of the Second Temple period. This seminal prayer tradition laid the foundation for the profound depths and varied aspects of prayer in the experience of Judaism. And it is this prayer tradition that was captured in the teachings of Jesus and the early Christian writings. For Jesus' ministry was conducted in the synagogues of Second Temple Judaism and culminated during a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem for the Passover. He lived a life of prayer and visited the temple as God's abode. His disciples, as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels, accompanied him as pilgrims "on the road" and celebrated the paschal meal with him prior to his arrest. Furthermore, as presented at the end of Luke's Gospel and the beginning of Acts, they continued to worship in Jerusalem and to offer prayers at the temple, utilizing in their worship traditional Jewish prayers and biblical readings for their understanding of their teacher's ministry.



## PART I. THE WORSHIP OF GOD

### 1. Worship in a Theocratic Society: Avodah

Simeon "the Just," the high priest and head of the Jewish state in the second century BCE, described the theocratic system of Jewish government as follows:

Upon three foundations the world rests: upon the Torah [the Pentateuch], upon *avodah* [the service and worship of God], and upon acts of *hesed* [loving kindness]. (*Mishnah Aboth* 1:2)

The religio-political governmental system of the Jews during the Second Temple period is depicted by Josephus as a "theocracy" (*theokratia*), or a system of government that locates "all sovereignty and authority in the hands of God" (*Against Apion* 2.165).

Torah is the constitution of Jewish society. It was formally accepted as constitutive by the founding representatives of the people during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 10:1-39). And while prior to the Great Destruction of 70 CE there emerged various religious groups among the people, all Jews of whatever party or sect enjoyed a common commitment to the Torah and the Prophets, whatever their differences of interpretation and practice.

Torah served as the legal code that governed the people's life (*halakah*). But Torah also offered paradigmatic stories (*haggadah*) about how God appeared to the patriarchs and Moses in acts of *hesed*. Jews sought to emulate these acts of loving kindness in their lives and society. *Imitatio Dei*, which means the imitation of God or "walking in God's ways," established an absolutist view of altruistic ethics — that is, of an ethic focused on ways of love and *shalom* ("wholesomeness") in human relations. The Torah was read and preached; it was studied and revered. Its laws and values were codified to guide the socio-political order. As stated in Prov. 3:17: "All the paths of Torah lead to *shalom*." Therefore, all areas of human relationship are to be governed for God's people by the Torah: the transpersonal (between God and human beings), the interpersonal (between one person and another person), the intrapersonal (between persons and their own selves), and the subpersonal (between persons and nature).

*Shalom* is the goal of life lived according to the Torah, and it is meant to guide all legislative enactments. *Hesed*, or loving kindness, is reflected in the "thirteen attributes of love" as the way of God, as set out in Exod. 34:6-7a:

The Lord passed in front of Moses and proclaimed: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness [*hesed*] and faithfulness, maintaining loving kindness [*hesed*] to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin, while he cleanses."

*Hesed* thereby opens the door to God's redemptive atonement for human error and sin. And in this context of Torah and *hesed*, a theocratic life of worship is intrinsically related to both ethics and education. Consequently, *avodah*, or the service and worship of God, is a transpersonal engagement that affects all of the other areas of human relations as well. So biblically-oriented Jews experience worship (*avodah*) in God's presence as they enter the heavenly kingdom in the acceptance of God's ultimate authority in their lives via God's Torah and *hesed*.

Paul refers to *avodah* in Rom. 9:4-5a, where he lists as the fifth gift among the seven divine gifts given to the people of Israel: "theirs is *the worship*" (v. 4, *hē latreia*). Biblical worship is antithetical to nature worship, which is polytheistic. The God of Israel is transcendental. He is the creator of nature with its multifaceted powers. The human creature, therefore, can approach God only in meekness as a creature. One cannot petition or coerce God for personal gratification, for God is the creator of all that exists in the vast universe. In polytheistic worship one seeks to placate or coerce the gods of nature so that they will do one's own bidding, which relates to magic. Biblical faith, however, rejects this approach as useless. It rests its worship on the purity of one's heart or intention and on one's deep sense of creatureliness. The biblically-oriented person can only approach the Creator by permission in praise and gratefulness, not with a demand but in hope of being granted a gift.

The Bible, therefore, offers key stories and detailed manuals on how to serve God, with prayer formulations incorporated from various religious persons. The gift of "worship" (*latreia*) relates dynamically to the other six gifts that Paul mentions in Rom. 9:4-5a, with those other gifts, conversely, shedding light on the special meaning of *avodah*. From a hu-

man perspective, the gift of "sonship" (Greek: *huiiothesia*; Hebrew: *banim*) is most significant, for it speaks of the attitude of a child in meeting the heavenly Father in the act of prayer. From God's perspective, however, the gift of "glory" (Greek: *doxa*; Hebrew: *kabhad*) represents how the divine presence revealed God's thirteen attributes of love to Moses (cf. Exod. 33:18, "Show me your glory," which is to be related to the thirteen attributes of Exod. 34:6-7). Only in this manner can the act of penitential prayer signify a "return" (Hebrew: *teshuvah*) to the unique God of Israel.

So the prodigal son of Jesus' parable in Luke 15:11-32, who returned to the love of his father, reflects a model of Jewish prayer. And it is from such a phenomenological understanding that one can examine the types of *avodah* and ways to God in Judaism as a backdrop to the experience of prayer in the teachings of Jesus and the early Christian church.

## 2. Sacrificial and Verbal Services: Temple and Synagogue

*Avodah* represents two distinct forms of the service and worship of God: (1) the sacrificial, which was expressed in the Jerusalem temple, and (2) the verbal, which came to expression mainly in the synagogues. Both of these forms highlight a temporal-spatial setting for "the holy" (Hebrew: *qadosh*, which signifies "set-apartness") in the dimension of human awareness. The temple was the holy abode of God's presence in Jerusalem, where the service was conducted by Levites and priests who followed a strict discipline of purity and holiness. Alongside temple worship, however, there also existed since the time of the Exile communal gatherings for prayer and Torah reading. Jews gathered in cities, towns, and villages, whether in market places or public buildings, for liturgical purposes. Such a gathering was called in Greek a *sunagōgē* or synagogue (Aramaic: *kenishta*; Hebrew: *mo'ade-'el*; cf. Ps. 74:8). Early literary sources and archaeological findings attest to the parallel existence of the temple and the synagogue in the Second Temple period.

Nehemiah 8:1-12 relates how the people, both "men and women and all who were able to understand," gathered "on the first day of the seventh month" at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which was adjacent to the temple, from daybreak until noon of the New Year day (*Rosh Hashshanah*) to participate in the verbal service. The Torah lection pertaining to that holiday was read and translated, interpreted and preached, being accompanied

by a blessing and communal refrain. Then the people returned in joy to their homes to partake of a festival meal. Here in Nehemiah's account of the people assembling to participate in a verbal *avodah* is the earliest portrayal of a Jewish synagogal gathering, where God's words were read and the community prayed — and where the dictates of the day following the service, as recorded in Neh. 8:13-18, were fulfilled. The focus was on the Torah scroll, which contained God's name. And Ezra blessed the "Great Name," which was reverently acknowledged by the assembly with the response "Amen" and prostration.

Likewise "on the first day of the seventh month," after rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, the priests carried on a sacrificial service at the temple's altar, as prescribed in Num. 29:1-6. This service was accompanied by levitical singing and instrumental music. It is called in Num. 4:47 an *avodah* (that is, a "priestly service"). The priest's performance in God's presence produced an awesome drama of symbolic meaning that was to be seen "by the assembled pilgrims three times a year" (Deut. 16:16).

Jewish pilgrims prepared themselves for the sacrificial *avodah* through their experiences "on the road" to Jerusalem. They set aside all the activities of their secular lives in order to enter the sacred site of the temple. Prayers and refrains were then said by the crowds in the temple courts. At the end of the service the Aaronic blessing of Num. 6:24-26 was offered by the priests:

*The Lord* (YHWH) bless you and keep you.

*The Lord* (YHWH) make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

*The Lord* (YHWH) lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

The highlight of the service was the pronouncement of the unspoken name of God, the "tetragrammaton" (i.e., the four sacred letters YHWH), which is repeated three times in the Aaronic benediction. And on hearing the tetragrammaton thrice-repeated, the crowds fell and hid their faces as a reverential act in the presence of the holy and they recited a doxological proclamation of God's kingdom.

Both the sacrificial service of the temple and the verbal services in the synagogues focused on God's presence as revealed in his name. The service itself was offered "in God's name" and had to be endowed by a proper in-



tention. A priest could invalidate the sacrificial service by an improper intent. In the same way, a verbal service was not true prayer if the words spoken were not in harmony with the person's inner thought. "Prayer without intention (Hebrew: *kawannah*)," as the rabbis later said, "is like a body without a soul." In tannaitic lore, prayer represents *avodah* of the heart.

*Kawannah* in Jewish thought consists of three parts: *the person* who faces *God* with *a service*. Prayer represents the hyphen between the person and God in the verbal service. The service is rendered with "purity of the heart" when the inner self is in unison with the words spoken — that is, when the words are directed by true intent.

Prayer among Jews consists of (1) a proper address, (2) words of praise at the beginning, (3) words of thanks at the end, and (4) personal petitions of need and penance, hope or despair, which are inserted in the middle. On sacred days the particular experience being commemorated is introduced into the middle. Coined phrases drawn from the Scriptures, which were formulated by the prophets or priests of the past, are used. In addition, certain addresses and prayers of contemporary charismatic teachers are sometimes acknowledged as being appropriate for public usage.

The liturgy of the Jerusalem temple was collected and kept in the biblical psalms, where musical notations are still to be found and antiphonal or doxological refrains have been retained. The use of instruments to accompany the choral singing is referred to in Ps. 150:3-5. The Dead Sea scroll of the psalms also shows us, in particular, how the Psalter was used. Certain psalms were chanted on particular days, during the festivals, and at some sacrificial services.

The services of the Levites and priests, which were carried out in accordance with the Torah manuals, produced an awesome impact on pilgrims worshiping at the temple. The Levites and priests acted as the people's agents before God, with their actions being symbolic representations on behalf of the people. In their worship, the Levites and priests — by means of oracular gazing and paradoxical wonderment — seem to have experienced a mystical connection with angelic hymnology and enjoyed a spiritual sense of being in correspondence with the heavenly hosts. And as was the case with the covenanters of the Dead Sea community, who also followed a strict discipline of purity and holiness, the Levites and priests of the Jerusalem temple were trained from childhood in the proper use of intent, lived a secluded and strict life, and properly pronounced God's name in the Aaronic blessing.

The liturgy of the people was developed by the scribes, who first appeared in the company of Ezra and Nehemiah as members of "the Great Assembly." It was the scribes who determined the proper forms of address in prayer and who fixed the key phrases having to do with creation, revelation, and redemption, as drawn from passages in the Torah. In addition, they established the proper order for the verbal services. This same council was responsible for the careful transmission of the sacred text for public reading. Under Ezra, however, the scribes produced a significant change in the use of the Assyrian script for the canonical text. A cycle of sabbatical and festival readings emerged in connection with the calendar of the temple and the synagogues, with particular selections — such as the Shema, which is recited twice daily — being designated for both the temple and the synagogue services.

In this manner, the scribes restored the Torah and the Prophets to the center of Jewish life during the Second Temple period. Furthermore, they democratized the service in the Jerusalem temple by their introduction of the *Ma'amadot*, which were weekly "stations" consisting of representative Israelites gathered from various towns and villages to stand watch over the sacrificial services of the priests. It was through their influence that the synagogal tradition of prayer begins with *Ma'amadot* gatherings in a market place for the public reading of the Torah and public prayers. These representatives fasted and offered intercessory prayers for the sick and needy of their communities, which they did as acts of *hesed*.

### 3. The Ways of Awe and Love in God's Service

The Torah describes *avodah* in two ways: the way of awe and the way of love. Both ways are prescriptively set forth in Scripture and tradition for the worship and service of God.

#### *The Way of Awe*

Deuteronomy 6:13 states: "You shall have awe of the Lord your God and you shall serve him." Service, therefore, is rooted in an awe experience of the *mysterium tremendum*. One stands as a creature before the majestic, transcendental Creator with the sense of "I am nothing but dust and



ashes" (Gen. 18:27). The person perceives himself in prayer as a "servant" (*'eved*), a human subject doing God's will. The scribal phraseology of this attitude is captured in the opening and/or closing words of petitionary prayer: "Let it be thy will, O Heavenly Father." So also Jesus at Gethsemane: "Abba, Father . . . not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Furthermore, the Pharisees adopted the formula *baruch* ("blessed be") to introduce all prayer petitions. For the Hebrew passive "blessed be" signifies that God is the ground or source of all blessings. It also captures the related word *berech* ("knee") to express how we face God in the act of kneeling as creatures in his service.

The way of awe was experienced in the Jerusalem temple as Jews acknowledged God at the beginning of the year (cf. *Mishnah Rosh Hash-shanah* 4:5). "Coronation" texts from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms were proclaimed as human subjects faced the Creator. These texts were then followed by "remembrance" texts from the tripartite canon to recall how Israel had enjoyed God's providence through his revelatory acts. Finally, the "shofar" ("horn blast") texts were recited to celebrate the significant redemptive occasions in the nation's history. These three sets of texts related to the theological construct of biblical thought that perceived God as Creator, Provider, and Redeemer, and so a theistic awareness was deepened for both pilgrims at the temple and worshipers in the synagogues.

Jewish pilgrims entered into the arena of the sacred as they witnessed a priestly procession at sunrise on each of the festival days. This procession was, in actuality, a march that protested against idolatry. As the priests moved from the Eastern Gate to the temple, the Holy Sanctuary, they turned away from the rising sun, which was the focus of Roman heliocentric worship. They faced west toward the Holy of Holies, proclaiming, "Our forefathers worshipped the sun, but we worship the Lord and our eyes are focused only on him" (*Mishnah Sukkah* 5:4).

Biblical faith, therefore, is a religion that protests against all forms of mythopoeic thought and astral worship. *Avodah* in the temple was, in fact, a symbolic protest against every kind of religion that was based on fears of natural forces and human powers. Instead, it generated a transformative knowledge of the transcendental God and evoked inner dread and a sense of awe before the Ultimate Reality.

This is why the Gospel of Matthew juxtaposes the last scene of the Temptation story (4:8-11) with the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee

(4:12-17). For in the last scene of confrontation between Jesus and the devil, Jesus cites Deut. 6:13 ("Worship the Lord your God; *serve him only!*") as a denial of the words of Satan, who had shown him the glory of the world's power. In Jesus' days, the world's power was represented by the Roman empire with its heliocentric worship. In the Matthean text, however, the deuteronomic and scribal liturgical formulation — "Worship the Lord your God; *serve him only!*" — lays stress on the uniqueness of God in Jewish worship. In this manner, a new "light has dawned" for the Gentiles in Galilee to receive Jesus' proclamation: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The focus is on a transcendental ultimate authority.

### The Way of Love

*Avodah* of the heart is introduced in Deut. 11:13, where it is said that to obey God's commands faithfully is "to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." True prayer expresses love for God. It results from a paradoxical mixture of inner joy mingled with trembling (cf. Ps. 2:12). Such an experience reflects the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* that Rudolph Otto spoke about in describing the numinous event of humanity's highest relations with the Divine.

True prayer generates a yearning love for God's elusive presence. The way of awe evokes the response of a servant who is subject to the almighty King. The way of love, however, results in childlike response to a merciful Father in heaven. Both sobriquets for God's name — that is, "King" and "Father" — appear in Jewish prayers. Jesus in the Gospels is presented as building on this attitudinal difference, reserving for his disciples the way of love with its appeal to God as *Abba*, that is, "Father."

## PART II. THE EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER

### 4. God's Name: Focus and Address

God's name cannot be pronounced by an individual, for it is "set apart" and hidden. This phenomenon represents a transcendental reality. The four letters of the tetragrammaton (YHWH) produce theistic meanings: "the One who causes all to be," that is, the Creator; and "the One who ex-

ists in all situations," that is, the Provider. They also connote that God is beyond all time and space — that he is "the One who is, was, and will be." Furthermore, God's being is unknown. He is beyond all human thought and affection. Great care, therefore, is given by Jews to pronounce the full name of God with all of its connotations.

In the early Jewish mystical tradition, the tetragrammaton enjoyed seventy-two permutations of vocalized words. Oracular insight could be gained from the way one gazed on — and received on the screen of one's mind the impression of — God's name. Such knowledge was related to the particular readings that the priest received when he viewed the illuminated letters on the twelve precious stones of the Urim and Thummim (i.e., "Lights" and "Completions"), which were on his breast plate. Such an interpretative approach to Scripture, it seems, governed the priestly exegesis.

Public use of God's name was limited to the sobriquets "King" and "Father." The four letters YHWH were substituted by the vocalized term "the Lord" (Hebrew *Adonay*; Greek *Kyrios*). Prayers were addressed to "the Lord (YHWH) our God (*Elohim*)," with each name receiving a sobriquet — that is, YHWH representing the attribute of love (related to "Father"); *Elohim* representing the attribute of judgment (related to "King").

Jesus, who instructed those who would follow him to be like children, taught his disciples to address God as "Father" (*Abba*). The appella-tive "Father" is also found in Jewish prayers, particularly when one seeks forgiveness from the Lord or prays out of despair in time of crisis — as in Isaiah's prayer (Isa. 63:16), Ben Sira's prayer (*Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus* 51:10), and the petition for forgiveness in the *Amidah* (petition 6).

Jews begin the *Amidah*, the major prayer of the synagogue, with the words "O Lord, our God" (YHWH *Elohenu*). The first formulation of praise and prayer in the *Amidah* describes God in terms of his love: God is the God of the patriarchs, "who shows his mercy to them and their descen-dants." The second formulation focuses on God, who, through his creative powers (*dunamis*), sustains all life, heals, and provides the final act of res-urrection. In this second formulation there is attested the Pharisees' belief in life after death, as described by Josephus and as testified to by the tannaitic rabbis. Since the Creator can heal, he can also restore to life: "See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life; I have wounded and I will heal" (Deut. 32:39). Jesus, too, taught his disciples to relate to God as Father when they appealed to his mercy and sought his forgiveness. Yet he also — as is true in Jewish prac-

tice as well — associated God's power (*dunamis*) with resurrection (cf. Matt. 22:29-30) as well as with physical healing (cf. Mark 5:30).

## 5. Pilgrimages and Festivals: The Passover in the Days of Jesus

Deuteronomy 31:10-13 records God's words to the people to gather "at the end of every seven years, at the set time of the year of release, at the feast of booths . . . at the place which he [God] will choose . . . in order to hear [the Torah] and learn how to revere the Lord your God, and to observe all the words of this law." Central to the sabbatical year gathering was a pilgrim-age, which is commanded in verse 12: "Assemble the people — men, women and children; also the alien-residents [the converts] who are living in your towns."

Pilgrimage transforms people "on the road" into a cohesive, holy, reli-gious body. It was practiced by multitudes of Jews from near and far, es-pecially for the Passover celebration at Jerusalem, in accordance with the biblical mandate: "Three times a year shall your males be seen by the Lord your God at the place that he [the Lord] will choose" (Deut. 16:16). The expression "the place that he will choose" of Deut. 16:16 and 31:11 refers to Jerusalem. "The place" also designates the temple in Jerusalem, which was located on Mount Moriah (cf. Acts 6:13-14). Paschal celebration re-quires that the paschal lamb be eaten in Jerusalem. As sacrificial or "sa-cred" food, it cannot be eaten anywhere else but in Jerusalem.

Jesus lived in a socioeconomic order governed by a religious calendar that determined for every individual the proper times for the celebration of the sabbath and the celebration of the festivals. It also determined for the nation the proper times for celebrating the sabbatical years and the year of Jubilee. Such sacred or "set-apart" time is distinct from secular time, for it offers an opportunity to relate to God's presence affectively — that is, it invites both the individual during the week and the entire society during the septennial year to pass into "serenity and peacefulness" by a re-lease from the usual material and physical order, which is filled with work, stress, and anxiety. Such is the invitation of the sabbath day and the signifi-cance of the sabbatical year. No wonder the great pilgrimage to Jerusalem occurred in the fall, after the sabbatical year was completed.

Annual pilgrimages and the great pilgrimage were oriented toward a sacred space and enjoyed by means of a passage into sacred time. It was an



experience that transformed the individual, for by it human awareness was deepened through a qualitative change that affected everything in a person's life. Pilgrimage, of course, generated a religious vocabulary associated with time and space. Such time-space language, however, should not be read as merely geographical or directional language, but as language symbolizing spiritual significance. Thus the fifteen "Songs of Ascent" of Psalms 120–134 depict the movement of pilgrims from their homes, family, and properties toward the temple at Jerusalem. The term "ascent," or "going up," signifies "elevation," which the pilgrims enjoyed as they experienced *shalom* ("wholesomeness") — that is, trust in God, equality and fellowship with others, and acts of loving kindness — and as they gained a sense of redemption. This experience, which was transformational, prepared the pilgrims to enter the discipline of purity and holiness at the Jerusalem temple and to share in the sacred meal of the temple sacrifice with their families or particular groups.

The last part of Jesus' ministry is portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels as commencing with Jesus and his disciples on the road "going up to Jerusalem" (Mark 10:32; Matt. 20:17; Luke 18:31a) — with such a depiction of "going up" (i.e., pilgrimage) introducing Jesus' third prediction of his death and resurrection (Mark 10:33–34; Matt. 20:18–19; Luke 18:31b–33). The intention of all three of the evangelists, it seems, was to link Jesus' pilgrimage experience to the kerygmatic meaning of his coming. For the early Christian tradition saw Jesus typologically as the "holy abode" of the temple (cf. the use of "temple," *היכל* or *ναός*, for Jesus' body in John 2:21–22) and as the ground of serenity (cf. Matt. 11:28–30). Furthermore, the discipline of pilgrimage (cf. *Mishnah Berakot* 9:5) guided Jesus' disciples as they carried out their ministries on their "road of mission," just as their teacher had instructed them (cf. Mark 6:8–9; Matt. 10:9–10; Luke 9:3). And it was also such vectors of time and space in relation to the holy that affected the earliest disciples of Jesus in their understanding of his person, for he is depicted as a paschal lamb in early Christian writings as well as in early Christian preaching (cf., e.g., Melito of Sardis's *Homily on the Passion*).

In setting out a Christian calendar of Holy Week, Mark's Gospel presents three pilgrimage scenes. The first is in Mark 11:9, which portrays Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. This scene reflects how pilgrims were received by the Jerusalemites: they were welcomed by the residents of the city with the psalmic song, "We bless you in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 129:8b), which was preceded by the acclamation "Hosanna" (Ps.

118:25–26). The second scene is in Mark 13:1–3, which describes how Jesus and his disciples engaged in the circumambulatory experience of pilgrims, who would walk around and view the sacred buildings of the Jerusalem temple. They entered from the South Gate of the Temple Mount, whose stairway has recently been excavated, and then left through the Eastern Gate, which led down to Gethsemane. In this act of marching around the sacred precincts they acknowledged the majestic presence of God in the temple, as parabolically depicted by Jesus in his lament, "Like a hen who gathers her brood under her wings" (Matt. 23:37//Luke 13:34).

This circumambulatory experience of pilgrims is portrayed in Ps. 48:12–15, where it produces a lasting impression of beauty and grandeur:

Walk about Zion and go round about her;  
count her towers.  
Consider well her ramparts;  
view her citadels.  
That you may tell it until the final generations.  
For this is overwhelming!  
Our God exists forever,  
and he will lead us beyond death.

After leaving the city through the Eastern Gate and passing over to Gethsemane, Jesus used the occasion of walking about the temple precincts with his disciples to predict the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and to offer his teaching about the End (cf. Mark 13:3ff.; Matt. 24:3ff.; Luke 21:7ff.).

The third pilgrimage scene is in Mark 14:12–16, which portrays the preparations made on the eve of Passover for the celebration of the Passover. The paschal lambs were slaughtered in the temple and then taken by those living in Jerusalem to their homes to be eaten, with the quantity of meat taken regulated by the number of participants expected to be at the meal. Jerusalemites extended invitations to all pilgrims to use the upper chambers of their homes for their celebrations of the paschal meal. So Jesus, who from his early youth had often visited Jerusalem during Passover with his parents (cf. Luke 2:41–42), knew what to expect and how to select the particular house where he might eat the Passover with his disciples. He was looking for a person who kept the strict rule of purity in his quarters — that is, "a man carrying a jar full of water." There in the man's upper

room his disciples ate the paschal lamb, but he declined (cf. Luke 22:15). Rather, he offered his disciples wine and bread, which were symbolic prospects of God's kingdom: symbolic representations of the "sacred" always governed the sacrificial tradition.

Eucharistic worship in the early church as "anaphora" (i.e., an "offering," see Ps. 50 [51]:21 LXX) relates the significance of the items to "epiclesis" (i.e., the bestowal of the Holy Spirit). Sacrificial items in the temple, being holy, were "set apart" by an appeal to the Spirit. So the eucharistic celebrations of the early church reflect the temple tradition of prayer — though in a new christological form. For at the Last Supper Jesus offered his disciples a new symbolic meaning: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Among Jews, the sacred meal of Passover relates the story of the Exodus and invites participants to reenter the experience of that initial generation in sensing God's redemption. For the disciples of Jesus and Christians generally, however, the symbols of the meal now point to Jesus, who provides the invitation to redemptive transformation.

Most significantly, Jesus concluded the Last Supper by chanting the Hallel ("praise") psalms — that is, Psalms 113-118, which Mark 14:26 and Matt. 26:30 refer to as "the Hymn." Psalms 113-114 reflect the redemptive experience of Israel in the past and were sung before partaking of the meal, with a designated "wine-cup of salvation" being also present. Psalms 115-118 were sung after the meal as a psycho-dramatic reading, with both the head of the family or group and those at the meal participating. The *pater familias* ("father of the family") assumed the role of the Messiah while chanting Psalm 116 — which relates the Messiah's love for God (vv. 1-2), his suffering ending in death (v. 3), but expresses, as well, confidence in God (vv. 5-8) and holds out the prospect that "I shall walk before God's presence in the land of the living" (v. 9). The psalm also relates how the Messiah's death is perceived by God — that is, as the passing of the pious one (*hasid*), God's "servant, the son of your [God's] maidservant" (v. 16). In the early memory of his disciples, Jesus identified himself as "the son of Mary." This was in addition to his words of symbolic identification at the Last Supper, which the early church took to be the institution of the Eucharist offering — that is, the *todah* offering of v. 17a, "I will sacrifice a thank offering to you."

Psalm 118, the last of the Hallel psalms, has antiphonal readings, which were used by the participants at the Last Supper, who played the roles of the companions of the Messiah. Especially significant is verse 22,

which Jesus recited at the table: "The stone that the builders despised has become the chief corner-stone." This verse was introduced by the evangelists into their Gospels to explain the delivery of Jesus by the priests and scribes to the Roman procurator (cf. Mark 12:10; Matt. 21:42; Luke 20:17). Likewise, the companions of Jesus recalled how perplexed they were at the time of his arrest — that they ran away, that Peter denied him, and that they were not present at the crucifixion. They also recalled how they responded to Jesus when he spoke of "the stone," using the refrain of Ps. 118:23: "It happened so from the Lord and it is astonishing in our eyes."

All of this led Jesus' disciples after his crucifixion to seek from their canonical Scriptures an understanding of their "wonderment." And this scriptural search led them to the Song of the Suffering Servant of Isa. 52:13-53:12, where the servant is depicted as "causing astonishment to the many" (52:14-15) and the question is asked: "Who can believe what God has unveiled?" (53:1). Such a kerygmatic view of Jesus' death was, therefore, based on Scriptures that speak of sacrificial atonement (cf. Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 15:3).

## 6. Public Readings and Daily Recitations

Since the days of Ezra, the canonical text of Scripture was read and preached. The focus of the Torah, which was viewed as a "set-apart" book, was perceived to be the covenant that God made with Israel in the days of Moses. Torah, therefore, became the guiding constitution that affected all of the educational, legislative, and judicial institutions of the Jewish nation. In the elementary schools children learned to read and write Hebrew, the "set-apart" language of Torah. Such a school was called a "House of the Book." A higher school of learning became known as a "House of Midrash" (i.e., "interpretation of the Book"). In the synagogues a Torah scroll was placed in an ark, whether on wheels or in a fixed niche, and it became the focus of Jewish worship.

### Public Readings

Torah was read publicly in the synagogues every sabbath and at festivals, in addition to every Monday and Thursday during the week. The congregational experience was by means of hearing God's words, which were cor-



rectly and affectively rendered for proper reception. The written text of Scripture contains only consonants. Therefore the text needed to be vocalized and punctuated, with particular stresses and pauses in the reading. An oral tradition — originally, the *Massorah* — fixed the meaning of the biblical texts for the hearers. The community came to hear and receive the words of God, which came to them through the canonical Torah and Prophets and by means of correlative interpretations.

Torah represents the tradition of the past, which was received by Moses, the greatest prophet. The Prophets represent words describing the future, as transmitted until the Persian period. A reading in the synagogues of a Torah lection, which presents the covenant of a correlative past, was followed by a reading of the Prophets, which held the promise of the future. Such public readings affected the people's lives here and now. Their conviction was expressed in the prayer that concludes the public reading: "The words of God are true and righteous, . . . their prospect will be fulfilled, . . . none of the words of the past will become void."

The people's trust in and commitment to the Lord God was displayed in their hearing the words of Torah. But their trust and commitment was also fortified by public preaching. Didactic preaching prescribed a way of life of both praxis and faith, while *proemic* preaching sought to demonstrate scriptural fulfillment in the people's historical setting. The latter form of preaching proclaimed "good news" for communal hearing, especially when it was correlated with particular persons and events. Such preaching, in fact, promoted a consciousness of eschatological reality — as witness, for example, the *peshar* commentaries of the Qumran community.

The preaching of Jesus and his followers embraced this latter approach to scriptural preaching. According to Papias, as recorded by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* III.39), the Gospel of Mark was based on the preaching of Peter in the synagogues, which preaching would have followed the sabbath and festival readings. Mark himself, according to Papias (cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II.15), was a *Meturgemman* or "public translator-ordinator" (Greek *hermēneutēs*). No wonder, then, that Mark's Gospel opens in 1:2-3 with a collating of a text from the Torah (Exod. 23:20a, "Behold, I am sending my angel before you to protect you on the road") and a text from the Prophets (Isa. 40:3, "A voice crying in the wilderness, clear the way of the Lord"). Such a collation of biblical texts was the mark of *proemic* preaching. And it was in this manner that Mark, at the beginning of his work, linked his "good news" (*euangelion*, "gospel") to the Jewish canon.

Luke 4:16-21 portrays a synagogal setting for the initial proclamation of Jesus to his people at Nazareth. In the synagogue at Nazareth he was called on to conclude a reading from the Pentateuch with a prophetic portion from Isaiah 61 that began with the words: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me" (v. 18). And, according to Luke's depiction of this event, Jesus inserted the words of a Torah lection into his *proemic* preaching — that is, he explicated the purpose of his proclamation of "a favorable year of the Lord" by reference to the sabbatical teaching of Lev. 25:10a, "to proclaim liberty on the land to all inhabitants" (v. 19). In so doing, he was proclaiming the kingdom of God as a sabbatical fulfillment for the people. Furthermore, by saying "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21) — which statement captures the essence of his preaching — Jesus used a *peshar* interpretation of the Scriptures in formulating the agenda of his ministry.

### Daily Recitations

In addition to public readings of Scripture, four Torah selections were used by the Jewish worshipping community as didactic forms of prayer — with all adult Jews commanded to repeat these texts both morning and evening, thereby bracketing their waking day by the principal teachings of the Torah. The four passages to be recited daily from the Torah are (1) the Decalogue of Deut. 5:1-21, (2) the Shema of Deut. 6:4-9, (3) the portion on Rewards and Punishments of Deut. 11:13-21, and (4) the concluding lection of Num. 15:32-41 (cf. *Mishnah Tamid* 4:3 [end]–5:1). The recitation opened and closed with the signature, "I am the Lord your God." This is the nuptial formulation of God's covenant, which captures in prophetic thought the marital form of the covenant (cf. Hos. 2:4, whose wording was the original form for the dissolution of a marriage). Daily recitation reaffirms the covenantal experience of the people's forefathers (cf. Exod. 19:6; see also Deut. 5:3 and 29:12). In this manner Jews perform the act of receiving God's kingdom and God's commandments into their lives (cf. *Mishnah Berakoth* 2:2).

The significance of this practice of a daily recitation of these four Torah passages, which were to be recited both in the home and in the synagogue, is to be seen by the way that the practice entered the daily sacrificial service of the Levites and priests in the Jerusalem temple. For the sacrificial

service in the temple came to be interrupted by this recitation, which was performed away from the altar — that is, in the lower chamber of the Hewn Stones, where the Supreme Court of Israel sat in session. The Decalogue of Deut. 5:1-21 was recited to portray how the laws of God govern all areas of human relationship. The Shema of Deut. 6:4-9 declared that ultimate authority rests in the transcendental God of Israel. The reciter accepted such a relationship to God in love as he welcomed the kingdom affectively in his life. The other two selections of Deut. 11:13-21 and Num. 15:32-41 highlight a believer's awareness of eternal rewards and punishments by one's choice of action — and of how one can trigger God's awareness by the use of blue fringes on his garment as a mantra.

Luke's Gospel presents the case of a Jewish scribe who once asked Jesus: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (10:25). In reply, Jesus appealed to the daily recitation of the Shema and the Decalogue: "What is written in the Torah and how do you recite?" (10:26). The scribe answered by first quoting the words of Deut. 6:5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" — which are the opening words of the Shema — and then he continued with the Decalogue of Deut. 5:1-21, which concludes with the words "your neighbor as yourself." The citing of familiar texts by reference to the opening and closing words of those texts, with the intent that those texts be understood in full, was common in the world of Judaism. Jesus confirmed that the scribe's recitation held the key to a person's right praxis and eternal reward by his reply: "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live" (10:28).

In Mark 12:28-34, in response to Jesus' summation of the commandments as being "to love God" and "to love one's neighbor" (vv. 29-31), a scribe is presented as answering in a manner reminiscent of Hillel, the great Jewish rabbi:

Well said, teacher. You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifice. (vv. 32-33)

The transpersonal (i.e., relations between God and human beings) in Judaism is to be conditioned by the interpersonal (i.e., relations between one person and another person), with acts of loving kindness taking priority in the fulfillment of one's transpersonal obligation of pilgrimage.

A particularly interesting illustration of this principle of interpersonal acts of loving kindness taking priority in fulfilling one's transpersonal obligations is to be found in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37. In that parable, even a Samaritan, who was "on the road" to fulfill his own transpersonal obligation of pilgrimage to the city of Shechem, breaks the levitical rule of purity to take care of a seemingly dead body, even though such an interpersonal act of kindness would contaminate him.

In Mark 12:33 the Jewish scribe adds: "To love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifice." In so doing he echoes Hos. 6:6, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and the acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, a disciple of Hillel, applied this passage to the situation of the Jewish people after the destruction of Jerusalem, and so is understood by some to have changed and revolutionized Judaism after the destruction of Judaism by laying stress on the ethical significance of synagogal prayer over the atoning, sacrificial service of the temple. It was not Yochanan ben Zakkai, however, who first used Hos. 6:6 in this manner, as has been claimed by Jacob Neusner (cf. his *Rabban Yochanan* [Leiden: Brill, 1970]). The testimony of Mark 12:33b-34a — both in the statement of the scribe and the response of Jesus — is a clear pre-destruction witness that reveals how the Shema was understood by pre-destruction Hillelites, with whom Jesus seems to have agreed (as I have pointed out in my *The Pharisees and the Teacher of Nazareth* [Leiden: Brill, 1972]).

## 7. Long and Brief Prayers: The Order of Petitions

Daily prayer during the period of Second Temple Judaism consisted of a chain of petitions, with each petition focused on a particular theme and preceded by the opening formula "Blessed art Thou, O Lord." Psalm 136, which is called "the Great Hallel Psalm," consists of twenty-six petitions, with each petition sealed by the repetitive phrase "The whole world is full of his mercy" (my trans.). Likewise *Sirach* (or, *Ecclesiasticus*) 51:12, in an extended verse existing only in Hebrew, sets out a chain of sixteen petitions — most of which begin with an opening formula that expresses thanksgiving to God and conclude with a repeated phrase that extols his mercy (most often, "For his mercy endures for ever"). Furthermore, each of the sixteen petitions of



*Sirach* 51:12 echoes a construct of Pharisaic daily prayer, which constructs became fixed at the Hillelian academy of Yavneh (or Jabneh; Greek: Jamnia) toward the end of the first century CE.

The order of daily prayer was standardized in the eighteen petitions of the *Shemoneh Esreh*: (1) three petitions at the beginning expressing praise; (2) three petitions at the end offering thanksgiving; and (3) the middle part consisting of six existential petitions followed by six formulations of eschatological expectation. This order reflects the way of prayer in synagogal worship while standing (thus the name *Amidah*, which means "standing") before God. It opens with an address to God that recalls his redemptive dealings with the *patriarchs*, which is followed by an address to God the Creator in terms of his *powers*. It closes with an address to the *thrice holy* or "set-apart" God, which is an expression of his transcendental reality.

Communal prayer in times of crisis and individual prayers to be said daily are in the Jewish liturgies usually long prayers. The longest prayer has twenty-four petitions. The *Shemoneh Esreh*, which is the standard prayer of Judaism, consists of eighteen petitions, with these eighteen expanded to nineteen petitions for Jews in Babylonia. There are, however, brief formulas of prayer to be used on the road or in times of danger, which sought to capture the essential appeal made to the "Hearer of Prayer" by travelers and those in danger. Such appeals were worded by charismatic teachers and used by their followers. A later development strung together all the themes of the longer prayers into an encapsulated, brief prayer.

Jesus was asked by his disciples to teach them a prayer for the road as they embarked on their mission (cf. Luke 11:1, which follows the return of the seventy [or seventy-two] in 10:17-24). In the Lucan version of Jesus' prayer in 11:2-4 there are five petitions. The second one, evidently, was originally an epicletic appeal: "Let thy Holy Spirit come and purify us." For this formulation is echoed in the Lucan juxtaposed parabolic lesson of how "the heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" in 11:11-13. To ask, of course, is to pray (so 11:9). The important point to note for our purposes here, however, is that in Luke's Gospel Jesus is portrayed as offering a prayer to guide his apostles on the road, and that he is depicted as doing so without the inclusion of two of the petitions found in Matthew's Pater Noster.

Matthew's version of Jesus' prayer in Matt. 6:9-13 consists of seven petitions. The first part of the prayer opens with "Our Father who art in

heaven" (v. 9a) and closes with the first missing petition in Luke: "Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth" (v. 10b). This first part relates to the transpersonal in prayer with three petitions to God, the eternal Thou. The second part of Jesus' prayer shifts to the plural "us" (vv. 11-13). The fourth petition of this latter part of the prayer relates to the subpersonal need of daily bread (v. 11); the fifth relates to the interpersonal need for forgiveness (v. 12); and the final two relate to the intrapersonal needs for the removal of trial and the release from evil (v. 13). The concluding petition regarding release from evil is also not found in Luke. Matthew's version of Jesus' prayer is given to the *ecclesia* as instruction on how to pray corporately, and not to individual apostles "on the road." Yet even in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' formulation of prayer is relatively brief and is contrasted with the long prayers of the synagogue (cf. 6:5-8; see also *Didache* 8:2).

The formulation of ecclesiastical prayer in Matt. 6:9-13, while brief, touches on all the major areas of human relationships. It begins with the collective address "Our Father," and then from the perspective of this transpersonal focus it goes on to petitions dealing with the areas of nature, humanity, and self. This is in line with how Matthew understands relations between the transpersonal and all other matters to be prayed about, as expressed later in this same chapter in verse 33: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and then all these will be yours as well." Thus Jesus is presented as inviting the community in time of crisis to pray for their existential needs from the perspective of realized eschatology — that is, from the perspective of God's love and the eschatological realization of his kingdom, whose coming on earth is to correspond to the heavenly reality that fulfills God's will.

The arrangement of Jewish intercessory prayer at Yavneh (cf. *Babylonian Talmud Megillah* 17b and *Berakoth* 28b) was related to the people's experiences of suffering under and subjugation to the Roman empire. The rabbis viewed the Jewish people as the Suffering Servant and their exilic situation as their mission to be a "light to the nations." They lived in a yet unredeemed world, and so they anticipated a messianic coming in the future. Thus their collective hopes, as formulated in their petitions, follow their prayers regarding their existential needs. Both Jews and Christians, however, await the final coming of the Messiah at the end of days.

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