

Jerusalem Perspective

A Monthly Report on Research into the Words of Jesus

Number Ten

July 1988

The Lord's Prayer

by Bradford Young

It is difficult to grasp the full impact of the Lord's Prayer without an appreciation of its Jewish background. Too often, the importance of the Jewish background of this prayer and of the language that Jesus used has been overlooked or minimized.

Jesus was a Jew, speaking Hebrew to his Jewish followers during the difficult days of the Roman occupation of Israel. Today's Christian has quite a different understanding of prayer, Scripture and faith than a Jewish teacher like Jesus, in addition to differences of language, culture and history. One easily can miss the great depth of Jesus' message, even while believing in him.

In the articles of this series, we will try to rediscover something of the original Jewish atmosphere in which Jesus taught his followers how to approach God in prayer.

אֲבִינוֹ שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם

Our Father Who Art in Heaven

Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer does not contain the expression, "who art in heaven" (שבשמים, *she-ba-sha-MA-yim*), but simply records "Father." Luke's Gospel never refers to God as the "Father who is in heaven." Matthew, in contrast, preserved twelve

sayings of Jesus in which he used the Jewish expressions "our Father who is in heaven," "your Father who is in heaven," and "my Father who is in heaven." Mark also used the idiom "your Father who is in heaven"

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The Traveling Rabbi

In the previous issue, we asked whether it was proper to call Jesus a rabbi. We concluded by remarking that to understand the full significance of Jesus being addressed as rabbi, one must know what a rabbi of the first century was and how he functioned. This month we begin a discussion of the rabbi's role in society.

Jewish teachers of first-century Israel lacked the sophisticated methods of mass communication we have today. Consequently the rabbis of Jesus' day spent much of their time traveling throughout the country, much like the Old

Testament prophets, to communicate their teachings and interpretations of Scripture.

The Old Testament prophets traveled with bands of followers called "sons of the prophets" (e.g., II Kings 2:3,5,7,15). These were not

their physical sons, but rather their disciples. The use of "son" as a synonym for "disciple" still persisted in Hebrew during the time of Jesus, as illustrated by this example:

If I cast out demons by [the power of] Beelzebul, by [the power of] whom do your sons cast them out? (Luke 11:19)

Itinerant Rabbis

According to Professor Shmuel Safrai of the Hebrew University, an itinerant rabbi was the norm rather than exception. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of such

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(Mark 11:25). Evidently, Luke felt he had to change the expression for his Greek-speaking readers.

In Luke 11:13, according to the best textual reading, Luke wrote, "The Father will give the Holy Spirit out of heaven...." Other manuscripts read "Heavenly Father...." But Matthew's version has the Jewish idiom which probably is the one Jesus used: "...your Father who is in heaven..." (Mt. 7:11).

These words are filled with rich Hebrew imagery. They describe the disciple's relationship to God, but do not neglect his connection to the family of God.

The Father

אביו (*ʿa·vi·nu*, our Father) emphasizes that we are God's creation and that, as his children, we have a responsibility to him (see Malachi 1:6; Deuteronomy 32:6). "Our" means that no single individual has a monopoly on God and that, as his followers, we have a responsibility to one another. The phrase, "who is in heaven," is an indication of God's supernatural qualities. God is all-powerful; he is able to do all things (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21).

The description of God as "Father" is not coincidental. The father figure was of great significance in the Hebrew family. The father had

a place of honor, dignity and authority, but he also was a loving, caring figure.

Rabbinic parables sometimes provide a window through which we may glimpse the home life of the people of Jesus' day. In these parables, the father is frequently described as displaying affection toward his son. He may place the son on his shoulders, which was considered to be a sign of affection, even an indication of pampering (e.g., *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 3.1).

The importance of the child's need for discipline, however, is by no means forgotten. The idea that a loving father must sometimes chastise his son is a common theme in many rabbinic parables. The father likewise is the provider and protector and, although he may appear remote in the parables because of the great honor and respect in which his children hold him, he still displays love and affection for his children.

All Powerful

The watchful care of "our Father who is in heaven" is emphasized both in the teachings of Jesus and in rabbinic literature. Jesus taught:

...so that you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. (Mt. 5:45)

In the Talmud, the sage Rabbi Abahu said:

The day of rain is greater than the resurrection of the dead, because the resurrection of the dead benefits only the righteous, but rain benefits both the righteous and the unrighteous. (Ta'anit 7a)

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven," and he also made reference to "your Father who is in heaven." However, when Jesus spoke about

God in relation to himself, he often used the noteworthy designation "my Father." The expression "my Father" referring to God is extremely rare in rabbinic literature, although it does appear. This may indicate that to the rabbis it was considered somewhat daring to refer to God as "my Father."

Sonship

During New Testament times, passages from the Hebrew Scriptures which speak about the "son" (II Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7; 89:26-27; 110:3) were interpreted messianically. Jesus' use of the expression "my Father," however, certainly goes beyond a mere messianic claim. It refers to his keen awareness of his sonship. We can sense Jesus' consciousness of his unique task and his special relationship to God.

Perhaps others prayed "my Father" during the Second Temple period. Even so, the fact that Jesus taught his disciples to pray "our Father," and that he spoke of "your Father," suggests that Jesus' use of "my Father" indicates a deeper understanding of himself, his sonship and his special mission.

This profound sensitivity concerning his kinship to his Father emerges from Jesus' words of thanksgiving: "All things have been given to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, or the Father except the Son and to whomever the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:22).

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Jerusalem Perspective

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JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE is an independent report published monthly by David Bivin, director of the Jerusalem School for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels. Unsigned articles are attributable to the publisher. Subscription prices (including airmail postage): one year, US\$36; two years, US\$60; three years, US\$75. Gift subscriptions: US\$30 for first, US\$25 for each additional. Back issues are available at US\$3 per issue. Copyright, 1988, by David Bivin. Printed in Israel. ISSN 0792-1357

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In the last lesson we mentioned that הללויה (*ha-le-lu-YAH*) combines two words: הללו (*ha-le-LU*), the masculine, plural, imperative form of the verb meaning “to praise,” and יה (*yah*), an abbreviated form of the tetragrammaton יהוה (*YHVH*), the unpronounceable name of God.

As we also pointed out, in other contexts ה (*ha*) sometimes represents the definite article “the,” which in Hebrew never stands alone but always is attached to the word that follows. In הללויה, however, *ha* is part of הללו (*ha-le-LU*, Praise!) and has no meaning of its own.

LA·med

The second letter in the word הללויה is ל (*LA·med*). It is the twelfth letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and provides the Hebrew “l” sound. In our system of transliteration, the *LA·med* is represented by “l.”

LA·med was the ancient Semitic word meaning ox-goat. When alphabetical writing was invented, the pictograph ל (*LA·med*) was chosen to represent the “l” sound. Over the centuries the *LA·med* changed its shape to what we know today, an elegant, angular letter with a short extension above the line.

Reading Practice

With the addition of *LA·med* to your repertoire, you now can read the following Hebrew words:

• לול (*lul*), a biblical architectural term, usually understood to be a spiral staircase (I Kings 6:8). Jesus may have used the word in this sense, and he also may have used it as the word for chicken coop, a further meaning that לול acquired in post-biblical times. Modern Hebrew has dropped the earlier meaning, but still employs לול as the word for chicken coops and

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runs. Today it is also the Hebrew word for a baby’s playpen.

• בול (*bul*), meaning piece, lump or block. God ridiculed those who worship idols: “No one has enough sense to say, ‘Shall I bow down to a

Remember that the straight line under the *vet* of יבול is the vowel symbol *pa·TAH*, the “a” sound as in “father.” *she·VA*’

The two vertical dots under the first *LA·med* in הללויה comprise a vowel symbol we have not yet encountered, the only new vowel symbol that we will learn in this word. This symbol is called *she·VA*’. The sound it represents is so short that it often is referred to as a half-vowel. It is pronounced something like the “e” in happening.

Lesson Ten LA·med & she·VA’

“Hallelujah,” the English form of the Hebrew word הללויה (*ha-le-lu-YAH*), was introduced in the previous lesson. We learned the first two sounds of this word — he’, the Hebrew “h” sound, and *pa·TAH* — pronounced as the “a” in “father.” Together, these two sounds make up the first syllable, the ה (*ha*) of הללויה. In Lesson Ten we will present the second and third syllables of this interesting Hebrew word.

block [בול] of wood?” (Isaiah 44:19). The revival of Hebrew as a living language meant finding words for modern objects and concepts. Today *bul* still retains its ancient meaning, but is also the word used for a postage stamp.

Remember that a *bet* without the dot (ב) is a *vet*, pronounced like the English “v,” as in the following word:

• יבול (*yu·VAL*) means “stream, brook.” It is mentioned in Jeremiah 17:8: “Blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.... He will be like a tree planted by the water, sending out its roots by a stream (*yu·VAL*).” יבול is also a biblical personal name. Yuval, the son of Lamech, is mentioned in Genesis 4:21 as “the father of all who play the lyre and the pipe.” You will find many Yuvals in Israel today, as it is one of the most popular men’s names.

In modern Hebrew speech the *she·VA*’ sometimes is as long as the “e” in net, but usually is such a short vowel that it can barely be heard. Thus some systems of transliteration represent the *she·VA*’ by an apostrophe or by the complete absence of any symbol. In our system of transliteration we will indicate the *she·VA*’ sound with the letter “e.”

The *she·VA*’ appears below the letter after which it is sounded. It is too short a vowel to support an accent, so it is never found in an accented syllable. The two sounds of the second syllable, *LA·med* and *she·VA*’, ל, are pronounced *le*.

Another LA·med

The third letter in הללויה, the first letter of its third syllable, is also *LA·med*. It is followed by the “u” sound we learned in the word יבול (*ye·SHU·a*’), the *shu·RUK* (ו). This receives the sound of the “u” in the word “flu.”

If we pronounce just the third syllable, the sound of the *LA·med* and the sound of the *shu·RUK*, we get לו (*lu*). When לו stands alone it can be a word meaning “if” or “if only....”

In Lesson Eleven we will conclude our study of the word *ha-le-lu-YAH*.

The Traveling Rabbi

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rabbis circulated in the land of Israel in the first century. These rabbis did not hesitate to travel to the smallest of villages or the most remote parts of the country. In some instances they would conduct their classes in someone's home, but often classes would be held in the village square or under a tree.

From the Gospels we learn that Jesus likewise moved from place to place a great deal, often accompanied by crowds. Mark 6:6, for example, records that Jesus "went around from village to village teaching." He traveled considerably in Galilee, especially in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee, and there may be evidence in the synoptic Gospels of at least one teaching tour in Judea (see "Jesus in Judea," JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, November, 1987).

Much of Jesus' teaching was done indoors: in homes (Luke 10:38-42), synagogues (Matthew 4:23), even in the Temple (Matthew 21:23; Luke 21:37). But we also find Jesus, like a typical first-century rabbi, teaching outside in impromptu situations. There is a picturesque account in Luke 5:3 of Jesus teaching from a boat. The feeding of the five thousand occurred in "a lonely place" (Mt. 14:13; Mk.

6:32; Lk. 9:12), and the Sermon on the Mount was so named because it was delivered in a rural location.

Disciples

Although classes tended to be crowded, the rabbis were perfectly willing to teach as few as two or three students. The rabbis were sincerely interested in changing people's lives, in leading more and more people to "take upon themselves the yoke of Torah," a rabbinic expression for accepting God's reign in one's life. To accomplish this, they not only trained advanced students as disciples, but also taught the masses.

Jesus had an inner circle of twelve disciples who received special training, but these were not his only disciples. He called others to follow him, including Levi, a tax collector. According to Luke 5:28, when Levi was challenged by Jesus to follow him, he immediately "left everything" to respond.

We hear in Matthew 8:19 of another man who was warned by Jesus of the price he would have to pay after he perhaps too quickly and easily blurted out, "*ra·bi*, I will follow you wherever you go!" Two would-be disciples were rebuked by Jesus when they asked his permission to tend to important family responsibilities before answering his call (Luke 9:59-62). Jesus also

called a rich man, demanding that he divest himself of his wealth before becoming his disciple (Mark 10:21).

The Gospels show that other men and women also studied with Jesus for periods of time. Mary was one such disciple. As Jesus taught in her home, Mary shirked her kitchen duties to learn at his feet. She had chosen the "best portion," Jesus said, referring to her desire to listen to his teaching (Luke 10:42).

Tradesmen

Rabbinic literature contains many prohibitions against charging for teaching the Scriptures, such as the following:

He who makes a profit from the words of Torah has brought about his own destruction. (Avot 4:5)

Do not charge for teaching Torah. Accept no remuneration for it. (Derek Eretz Zuta 3:3)

Because of such interdictions, almost all rabbis practiced a trade. Some were scribes, others sandal makers, leather workers or bakers. Jesus himself, according to Mark 6:3, was a craftsman, and Acts 18:3 notes that Paul supported himself by making tents (or working leather, according to Jackson and Lake's *The Acts of the Apostles*, volume IV, page 223).

Jerusalem School Objectives

The aim of the Jerusalem School for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels is to better understand the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth.

To accomplish this, the members of the Jerusalem School are meticulously investigating the texts of the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. These three books show signs of interdependence and share many parallel passages, whereas the Gospel of John is distinct in content and style.

The Jerusalem School scholars have discovered that translating the Greek texts of the synoptic Gospels into Hebrew usually provides significant insight into Jesus' biography. This has led them to conclude that the first story of Jesus' life was transmitted in Hebrew.

The Jerusalem School hopes eventually to recon-

struct as much as possible of that conjectured Hebrew story. This amounts to an attempt to recover a lost document from the Second Temple period, a Jewish book which like so much Jewish literature of the period has been preserved only in Greek translation. An English version of the Hebrew text also will be prepared.

The primary objective of the Jerusalem School is to create a detailed commentary on the synoptic Gospels which will reflect the renewed insight provided by the School's research. The commentary will appear in two forms, one for scholars and another version abridged for non-specialists. It is hoped that this commentary will offer Christians a better understanding of what Jesus said and did, and also cause them to investigate their own spiritual identity.