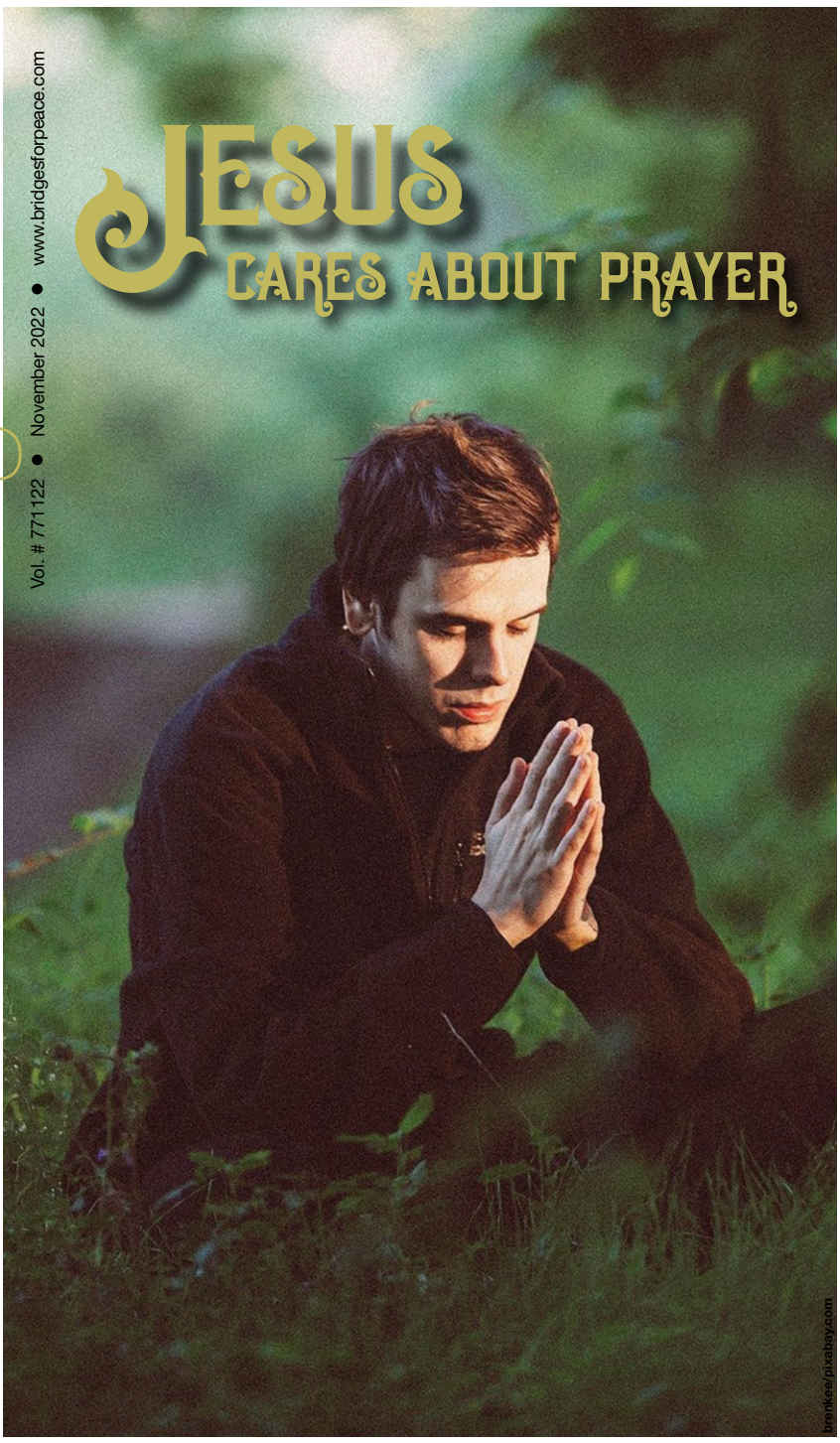


ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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JESUS CARES ABOUT PRAYER



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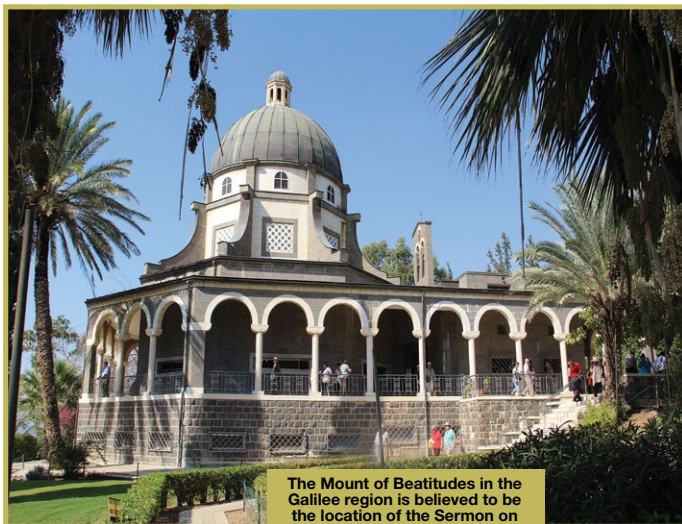
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ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT sermons preached by Jesus (Yeshua)—and the first recorded in Scripture—is the Sermon on the Mount. During this sermon, Jesus talked about prayer several times. Although many other portions refer to Jesus’ teaching on prayer, this teaching letter will look at prayer in Matthew 5 and 6.

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered in the Galilee to the Jewish community of which Jesus was an integral part. His audience was well acquainted with prayer. Since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, it was accepted practice to pray three times a day. The *Tanakh* (OT) had many examples of powerful prayers which sometimes resulted in miraculous

answers (Elijah in 1 Kings 18:30–46 and Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:9–28, for example). The Temple in Jerusalem was called “a house of prayer” (Isa. 56:7b) and fasting was practiced. People in Jesus’ time were looking for miracles and answers as they suffered under the oppressive Roman rule. They knew they needed God. I imagine they eagerly and hopefully listened to every word Jesus taught.

As then, we live in an oppressive time with many threats, and we desperately need God’s intervention. In the time of Jesus, the people must have known the words of God to Solomon at the time of the dedication of the Temple: “*If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land*” (2 Chron. 7:14). The next two verses, referring to the Temple in Jerusalem, says, “*Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. For now I have chosen*



and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually” (2 Chron. 7:15–16).

With this context in mind, let’s consider a few of Jesus’ words.

Pray for Your Enemies (Matt. 5:44–48)

The last thing the people wanted to hear was probably to pray for their enemies. It is hard to pray for those who abuse us, unless the prayer is to keep them away from us. I remember one godly man telling me that he prays for leaders to encounter God like the Apostle Paul did on the Damascus Road. Jesus (Yeshua) says we are not only to pray for them, but to bless them even when they curse us, to do good to them and to love them. This was challenging teaching. Remember that the enemies of Jesus’ audience were the Romans, a brutal people who were destined to try to destroy the Jewish nation. In fact, in AD 70, they would kill a vast number of the Jewish people during the siege of Jerusalem and take the rest into slavery and captivity. How was it even possible to love, bless, do good to and pray for them? If we are honest, it is still challenging to pray for those who are destroying our economy, weakening the moral fiber of our world and who are spiritually out of tune with God.

Prayer from the Heart

The next section on prayer is found in Matthew 6:5–8. Jesus (Yeshua) starts by saying, *“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites”* (v. 5). In his translation of the New Testament



entitled *“The Newer Testament,”* Brad H. Young translates this phrase as, *“Do not be like the pretenders.”* These are people

whose motivation for prayer is in question. Jesus says they are praying to be seen by men. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus said, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*” These are hypocrites, or as Brad H. Young calls them, pretenders. Many religious leaders have fallen in recent years. Perhaps this is why. Maybe they knew how to present themselves well in public, but their hearts were far from righteous. God is looking at the heart, and we cannot fool Him. It is a heart issue.

In Judaism, a concept is taught called *kavanah*. To pray with *kavanah* means to pray from the heart with intention, attention, purpose, devotion and concentration. Rabbi Isaac Abravnel said, “Prayer without *kavanah* is like a body without a soul.” Sadly, it is possible to pray without any heart involvement, but this is not pleasing to God.

The Secret Place

God is looking for the one who has a heart for Him and will pray earnestly in private. Jesus (Yeshua) teaches that we should go in the “*secret place*” (Matt. 6:6) behind closed doors. Some translations call the “*secret place*” a closet. In the time of Jesus, most people would not have had the luxury of extra rooms and closets were not common. What could He have been referring to? I think Jesus was referring to the prayer shawl (*tallit*, a four-cornered garment with knotted fringes of tassels on the corners), that all pious Jewish men wear even to the present day. A *tallit katan* (small *tallit*) is worn under the garments. You may sometimes notice the knotted fringes hanging over the belt. A larger *tallit* is used ceremonially, in synagogue and during prayers. When walking about, it is worn carefully draped over the shoulders, but at certain times of prayer, it will be pulled up over the head, totally enclosing the worshiper within. This is a place of total intimacy with the Lord. The world is shut out, and the prayer is only between the person and his God. Rabbi Goldie Milgram wrote, “The *tallit* is a portable spiritual home.” In the Scripture, it says, “*And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined*” (Num. 15:39).

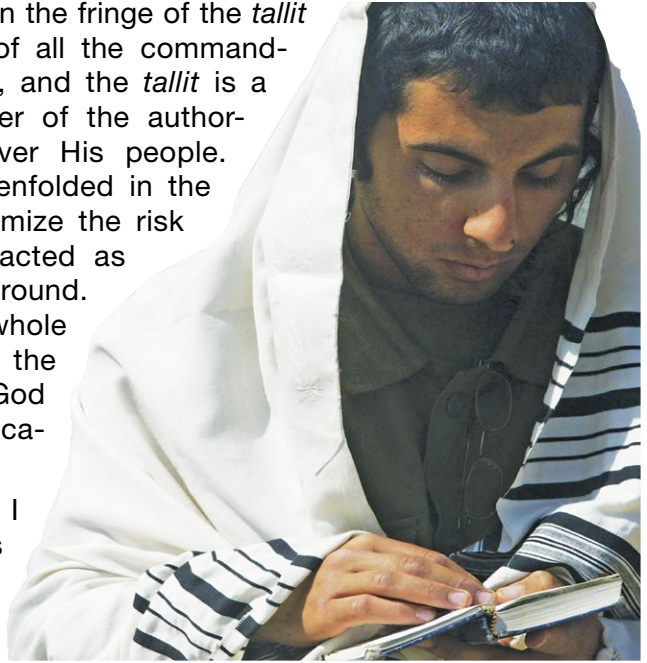
The knots on the fringe of the *tallit* are symbolic of all the commandments of God, and the *tallit* is a visible reminder of the authority of God over His people. When one is enfolded in the *tallit*, you minimize the risk of being distracted as your eyes flit around. Rather, the whole attention is on the Most High God and communication with Him.

In this verse, I believe Jesus is addressing our heart motivation touching on the areas

of pride, hypocrisy and pretense. God is looking for those who will pray intimately, not trying to impress those around. He is asking us to minimize distractions and give Him our full attention. Psalm 91:1 refers to the secret place saying, *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”* The verses that follow are some of the most powerful promises in the Bible. Jesus’ hearers must have thought of this passage as He spoke.

Pagan Prayer

“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Matt. 6:7). Many years ago, my father, Dr. David Allen Lewis, was a mentor to a new Christian, Dora Gugliotta. Before coming to faith in Jesus (Yeshua), she had been involved in Transcendental Meditation (TM). She was personally trained by the leader, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Each proponent of TM is given a mantra word that they are to repeatedly say as they meditate. They are told that each word is unique. She told my father that the mantra words are actually the names of Hindu

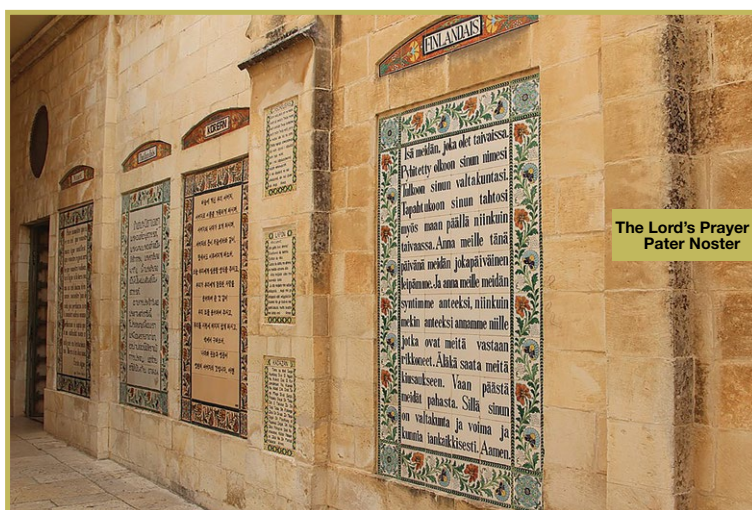


gods. She said that her “god” was a demon who regularly appeared to her when she was deep in a meditative trance. I don’t know if this is the only meaning of “vain repetitions,” but it certainly is a modern-day example of idol or pagan worship. There should be no time in which we pray to pagan gods. This does not refer to praying repeatedly to the one true God. Praying to false gods is totally rejected by God. In fact, it is breaking one of the Ten Commandments. The true believer must only worship and pray to the one true God.

The Lord’s Prayer

The most well-known prayer which is prayed by millions of Christians is called the Lord’s Prayer, the disciple’s prayer or the Our Father. Jesus (Yeshua) gave this prayer to His disciples, saying, “*In this manner, therefore, pray...*” (Matt. 6:9a).

Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, the head of the Israel Bible Center, asked the question: “Does it [the Lord’s Prayer] have some significant conceptual and word-by-word parallels in Jewish liturgical tradition? Does the Lord’s Prayer have Jewish liturgical roots? The answer is clearly yes.” He continues, “First, notice that the content of the Lord’s Prayer is the same as



The Lord's Prayer at Pater Noster

the key Jewish liturgical concept of אבינו מלכנו [pronounced: *Avinu Malkenu*], that when translated means ‘Our Father, Our

King.’ In fact, absolutely everything in the Lord’s Prayer is centered around either the fatherhood or kingship of God.”

I am convinced that when Jesus taught this prayer to the disciples, He taught it in Hebrew. The phrases of the prayer when said in Hebrew flow so beautifully and have so many similarities to Hebrew prayer that it seems almost certain. In Jerusalem there is a church called the Pater Noster, which is dedicated to the Lord’s Prayer. You will find the prayer in over a hundred languages throughout the church. While most languages have only one plaque, there are three in Hebrew, including one large one at the entrance. It is carved in stone and the words are in the ancient Hebrew script used at the time of Jesus. According to tradition, this church sits over the grotto or cave where Jesus taught the prayer.

I want to draw your attention to one phrase: *“Hallowed be Your name”* (Matt. 6:9b). I used to think this meant God’s name is holy, thus making a statement. According to *Strong’s Concordance*, the Greek word is *hagiazō*, and means to make holy, purify or consecrate, to venerate, hallow, be holy or sanctify. The phrase would be better translated as *“May Your name be sanctified.”* God’s name is already holy, but to sanctify God’s name is a call to action. In Judaism, there is a concept called *kiddush haShem*. The opposite is *chillul haShem*. The first meaning is to sanctify God’s name, while the second is to desecrate God’s name. The *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) says, *“Therefore you shall keep My commandments, and perform them: I am the LORD. You shall not profane [chillul] My holy name, but I will be hallowed (kiddush) among the children of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD”* (Lev. 22:31–33).

I am challenged to realize that Jesus’ prayer in this phrase is encouraging us to righteous action in order that those around us will know that our God is holy. We are called to sanctify His name in our everyday actions.

Today, we need to be people of prayer. As we see here, we need to pray with humility, pray in the secret place, pray from the heart and to pray as Jesus taught us. Let us not only be prayer warriors, but those who sanctify the name of the Lord in our everyday life.

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

TERMINOLOGY:

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

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

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