

THE MANNA MOTIF IN THE LORD'S PRAYER IN MATTHEW 6: 11 AND LUKE 11: 3 DZIEDZORM R. ASAFO¹

ABSTRACT

It is generally accepted that the writer of the Gospel of Matthew had the Jewish Christian community as his target readers. This paper draws on this basic fact to advance the hypothesis that the author had in mind the provision of daily sustenance to the Israelites in the desert, while on their journey to Canaan. Using the exegetical methods, the paper discusses why the form of this petition is different in the two gospels (Matthew and Luke) in which the payer is recorded; and also why the presentation of the same request is different in a way. The paper looks also at similar statements in the gospel of John and other synoptic writers and other comments in the gospel of Matthew to draw the conclusion that Matthew's Jesus was talking of the manner in which the children of God were fed in the wilderness. The findings are that firstly, Matthew was talking as a Jew to a Jewish community, while Luke wrote as a Gentile to a wider audience made up essentially of Gentile Christians like Theophilus who had already been schooled about Jesus, reminding in both instances that there is a God/Father whose character is to provide the needs of his children daily and always. Secondly, the recordings of the prayer was synthesized through the ethnocentric lenses of the two gospel writers.

KEY WORDS:

Prayer, daily bread, the Gospels (Matthew, Luke, John), give, always.

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is imperative in every substantive religion and Christianity is not an exception. The nature and form of prayer is prescribed by the religion concerned. In Matthew 6: 9-13, Jesus gives the disciples a blueprint on how to pray, which consists of an invocation and six petitions. This model prayer has a shorter version recorded in Luke (11:1-4), but not found in the other synoptic gospel (Mark), neither is it found in John. A similar petition is made, though in John bearing the same circumstantial motif (Jn 6: 34).

In Matthew, the issue of how to pray was initiated by Jesus himself. It was part of his lecture in the popular "Sermon on the Mount" (5: 1-7:29). In Luke, however, it was at the instance of the disciples, having observed Jesus praying in a certain place (Lk. 11:1). The circumstances surrounding the model prayer need to be explained using the appropriate exegetical tools. Although the differences between the statements in the two gospels are not vehemently starked, we need to explain why so. We would not attempt to bring in the explanation based on information gleaned on numerous works on the synoptic problem. Attention will be drawn to the ethnocentric background of the authors which are demonstrated in their writings.²

It is confirmed that the author of the gospel of Matthew "was a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian who possibly had some rabbinic knowledge but who in any case felt obligated to a form of the Jesus

¹ DZIEDZORM R. ASAFO, PhD is an Associate Professor of Theology at Valley View University (VVU), Oyibi-Accra, Ghana.
Email: drasafo@vvu.edu.gh

² W.G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1975, p. 118.

tradition which potentially accommodated the sayings of Jesus to Jewish viewpoints.”³ After all Matthew wrote an expanded version of Mark as a “community book” to satisfy the needs of a particular Christian community.⁴

On the part of Luke it “can be said with certainty..... that, he was a Gentile Christian. ... confirmed by the fact that he has no knowledge of the geography of Palestine and, with the exception of *αμην*, avoids Semitic expressions.”⁵ It is understandable, therefore, that the *sitz im leben*, the cultural circumstances, of the separate origins of the authors will be a major factor in their reports of the Jesus tradition, especially in the case at hand. This raises, on the fringes, the question of inspiration, which we will not take up in this paper. Suffice it to say now that inspiration does not always mean verbatim dictation, whereby the recipients/prophets receive word-for-word messages from God and write down.

Taken for granted that the request for “bread” in the two synoptic gospels has the manna theology behind it, what kind of “manna” was Jesus talking about here? Is it the mundane daily “bread”, nourishment, that humans and other living things need in order to survive, or is he insinuating the “bread of God... who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”? (John 6: 33).

We shall approach this discussion in four segments. This includes the background talk about the statements in question, the cultural circumstances of the writers of the two gospels, the etymological exegesis of the statements in Matthew and Luke, the theological implications of the different statements and the conclusions with possible theological reflections.

Literary Character of Matt. 6:11 and Lk. 11: 3

Kummel⁶ analyzing the milieu of the author of the gospel of Matthew observes that while it may be that Matthew was presenting Jesus as the new Moses, based on the structure of the gospel (4:1-9:34; 9:35-12:50; 13:1-17:27; 18:1-22:46; and 23:1-25:46), resembling the Pentateuch, this opinion is problematic as it does not answer the challenge of cutting off the first four chapters (1:1-4:25) and the Paschal/Passion and Resurrection Narratives (26:1-28:20). It can be argued, however, that the earlier chapters are meant to be introductory chapters where the new Moses is presented, and in the final section where he is shown as the sacrificial lamb in line with the Jewish paschal economy as taught by Moses in the Pentateuch. It is certainly plausible that Matthew reworked Mark’s material to suit his whims and caprices.⁷ Having said that, it is accepted that the author has his Jewish audience in view. Whether the author views Jesus as the new Moses or not, based on the structure of the book, the fact remains that Matthew maintains his Jewish outlook by bringing, and displaying the opinion on the provision of daily food in the same manner as seen in the second book of the Pentateuch (Exod. 16: 4, 5). Here in Exodus the emphasis is on the daily supply of the bread. The Septuagint (LXX) renders it thus:

εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωϋσῆν Ἴδου ἐγὼ ὕμιν ἄρτους ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ἐξελευσεται ἡ ὄλιθος καὶ συλλεξουσὶν **το τῆς ἡμέρας εἰς ἡμέραν**, καὶ ἔσται **τῆ ἡμέρα** τῆ ἑκτῆ καὶ ἑτοιμασουσὶν ὅ ἐάν εἰσενεγκῶσιν, καὶ ἔσται διπλοῦν ὅ ἐάν **συναγαγῶσιν το καθ’ ἡμεραν εἰς ἡμέραν**.

Etymology and Essential Similarities and Differences

Matthew’s (6: 11) Jesus, in his prayer, was reported to have it that

τον ἄρτον ἡμῶν τον ἐπιουσιον δος ἡμιν σημερον.

The Lukan parallel (11:3) says

³ Kummel, *Introduction*, p. 121.

⁴ Kummel, *Introduction*, pp. 105-120.

⁵ Kummel, *Introduction*, p. 149-150.

⁶ Kummel, *Introduction*, pp. 105-106.

⁷ Kummel, *Introduction*, p. 106.

“τον ἄρτον ἡμῶν τον ἐπιουσιν διδου ἡμιν το καθ’ ἡμεραν.”

The Manna Motif

Firstly, the narrative in Exodus 16: 4,5, tells the story of the wonderful way Jehovah gave food to the escaping Jewish nation in the famishing wilderness. A major aspect of providence was the daily supply of “bread” (food) termed *manna*. The expression *αρτος*, *bread*, became synonymous with cake, and generally with food (Gen. 14: 18; Isa. 65:25) by view of the fact that it was the basic form of food for the wandering Jews.⁸ Secondly, there was this divine intervention in the safe-keeping of this daily bread on the Sabbath day, which was to be picked on the day before, Friday, but which would not go bad contrary to picking a double portion on the other days of the week. (Exod. 16: 13-26). It is in the giving of the instruction concerning the picking of the bread that the linking terminologies: “το της ἡμερας εις ἡμεραν” and “το καθ’ ἡμεραν εις ἡμεραν” appear.

Below we graphically give a synoptic presentation of the etymological and essential similarities and differences among the biblical books in reference.

Biblical Book	Word	Parsing	Meaning
Septuagint (LXX) ⁹ Exod 16: 4, 5	(1) ἡμερας εις ἡμερα (2) το καθ’ ἡμεραν εις ἡμεραν	(1) Singular Feminine Accusative (2) Singular Feminine Accusative	(1) today’s/daily portion, every day (2) everyday, always;
Matthew (6: 11) ¹⁰	(1) δος, (2) σημεον	1 st person singular 2 nd aorist Singular neuter dative	(1) Give, (2) For the day, today
Luke (11: 3) ¹¹	(1) διδου, (2) το καθ’ ἡμεραν	(1) 1 st person singular Present imperative, (2) Singular Feminine Accusative	(1) Continue to give; (2) Every/each day, day by day, always
John (6: 34) ¹²	(1) δος (2) παντοτε	(1) 1 st person singular 2 nd aorist imperative (2) Adverb of time	(1) Give, (2) Always

A critical analysis reveals some essential similarities and contrasts between the Matthaean and Lukan reports: these are found in the etymological renditions/word formations. Central to our discussion are the tenses and moods in which the statements were made, as indicated in the above table, which tend to give divergent impressions. In the two synoptic gospels, the request begins seemingly similar, although in the same mood, but with different tenses: aorist in Matthew and present in Luke. We see the request in the imperative mood, in both gospels, which naturally is used subjectively, like the other two remaining moods – *Subjunctive* and *Optative* – to represent the attitude of mind of the speaker. The aorist imperative “represents a command to do something instantly, or once for all; or to indicate simply indifference to the

⁸ Johan Lust, Erik Eyniel and Katrin Hauspie, “αρτος,” *A Greek –English Lexicon of the Septuagint, rev. ed.*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003.

⁹ Lust, et. al., “ἡμερα,” *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

¹⁰ Max Zerwick, and Mary Grosvenor, “Matthew 6: 11,” *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament, rev. ed.*, Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981.

¹¹ Zerwick, et. al., “Luke 11: 3,” *A Grammatical Analysis*.

¹² Zerwick, et. al., “John 6: 34,” *A Grammatical Analysis*.

time-factor; whereas a Present Imperative ought to refer to repeated, or protracted, or to attempted action.”¹³ The variants of διδωμι, “give” is the command. It is second aorist imperative, δοϛ, in Matthew, but present imperative, διδου, in Luke, which becomes iterative to “το καθ’ ἡμεραν” meaning “each day” or, our bread for tomorrow).¹⁴

These nuances are accompanied by the term ἐπι-ουσιος which is derived from ἐπ-εἰμι from -τεναι, and etymologically proposed as, for *the coming day*. This may be understood, therefore, as “today” or “tomorrow”. Ἐπιουσιος is a rare word occurring in the NT only in the two gospels. The word having been used only once in secular Greek makes its meaning more obscure.¹⁵ It may be understood as (i) necessary for existence, (ii) for the present day, (iii) for the coming day, and (iv) for the future.¹⁶ These, taken together should be understood as the “daily supply” of sustenance. Elsewhere, (6:34), Matthew gives the impression of a daily provision enough for life. In other words, Matthew’s Jesus taught that the request for bread should be provided today as usual.

The third significant word is σημερον, *today*, found only in Matthew. In order for Matthew to make it clear that he meant the particular day, he included the definite time frame: σημερον. Taken for granted that Luke had the same mind as Matthew had in this case, why would he fail to make it clear what he meant by “copying” Matthew? Why would he change the tense and the mood of the verb and omitting the specificity of the request in the way he did, assuming this is a Matthaean material? A most plausible explanation that can be deduced is that, Luke saw no need for including Matthew’s σημερον, for the form of the language, tense, explains what he meant: a request for a continual supply of sustenance for today and probably for the future, always.

Luke’s rendering, το καθ’ ἡμεραν, is rather closer to the LXX (Exod 16:5) than Matthew’s. It is suspicious that Matthew deliberately shied away from the LXX in order not to give the Gentile impression of “little” or “no” faith that Jesus will talk about in a few verses to come (6:26-34). It is also perhaps to avoid taking the LXX’s rendering out of context, being a Jew; in contrast to Luke who, we know, had a Gentile background.¹⁷ Luke, a Gentile Christian, may certainly have possessed the LXX and knew, by reading, the daily provision of the bread/manna by God in the wilderness. (Exod. 16: 1-26; Deut. 8: 3). In the rendering of his account, he may have fallen on the LXX formulation, howbeit out of context but linguistically acceptable. Curiously, though, Luke presents, elsewhere, the similar attitude of avoiding anxiety for the daily supply of sustenance as expressed by Matthew (Lk 12:24-31).

The meaning of the statements in both gospels have converged although they used different grammatical formulations. In effect both would like God to provide the meals every day, but essentially for the day of the request.

Beyond the synoptics is a reference to this “manna” motif in John 6: 22-58. In this pericope is a direct request from the audience for the bread of God: “Lord, give us this bread always,” (Jn. 6: 34) to which Jesus reiterated in the next verse: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” The whole pericope smacks of the re-interpretation of the manna miracle in the desert to suit the incarnation and propitiation of Jesus (Jn. 6: 25-40). Our focus in this conversation is the similar request as found in the synoptics, using the same word form “δοϛ” – *give* (thus pro Matthew) and the same/similar underlying time frame of the request, “παντοτε” – *always* (thus pro Luke’s “το καθ’ ἡμεραν” – “each day”). Here in John, the impression is given of the continual supply

¹³ C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, 20.

¹⁴ Zerwick, et. al., “Luke 11: 3,” *A Grammatical Analysis*.

¹⁵ Francis D. Nichol, (ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1980, 5: 347.

¹⁶ Nichol, *Bible Commentary*, p. 106.

¹⁷ Kummel, *Introduction*, p. 147.

of bread, just as the Syro-Phinician (Samaritan) woman requested water that would never exhaust but would forever satisfy her thirst so that she wouldn't have to fetch water from the well again (Jn 4:15).

Implications

In Matthew, the believer should ask God to give us today's sustenance and it shall suffice. For Luke, the believer should ask God today, to give us our sustenance even for tomorrow, which is yet to come. This in the Jewish mind, according to Mathew's Jesus, is gentile/pagan (Matt. 6: 26-34). There is no need to worry about tomorrow; just ask for the present day. To be anxious for tomorrow is a demonstration of lack of faith, for the Lord will take care of tomorrow. The petition in both gospels is one of total reliance on God for the provision of one's physical needs, but in Matthew the request should be made each day contrary to Luke who thinks the request even for tomorrows needs could be made today. Luke's intensions are made known by maintaining the rare expression *ἐπιουσιος*.¹⁸

The dichotomy between the two gospel writers raises the question whether the believer cannot request for future needs. Jesus himself prayed for future needs and encouraged the apostles to do same (Matt. 26:39-44; 24: 20): Jesus prayed for future upkeep, but at the same time cautions believers not to be anxious for the morrow about their lives (Matt. 6: 26-34). The situation we are discussing now seems to appear to request for daily sustenance due to Matthew's adoption of the manna motif whereby the believer's bread *αρτους*, was supplied daily. Matthew's Jesus may have in mind, by stressing on the supply of food each day, the idea of daily reliance on the supernatural provision of one's sustenance. (Matt. 6:25-34).

Similarly, in John's gospel, it is clear that the supply of the daily bread/sustenance, as the audience understood it on one level – mundane, would be always, although misunderstanding what Jesus was conveying to them on the other level – ethereal. It is obvious that the conversation was situated in the context of the daily supply of manna during the exodus of their posterity. As it was in the wilderness so shall it be today. (Jn 6: 34).

There is a vital link between the manna motif in the request for the daily supply of food and the Sabbath commandment (Exod 20: 8-11; Deut 5:12-15). The migrant Jews had to go to the field daily in order to pick the fallen manna, indicating continual daily labour, except on the Sabbath day. The instruction to pick a double portion of the meal in preparation for the Sabbath and the subsequent prohibition to refrain from going to the fields on the Sabbath for the manna, indicate the special place accorded the Sabbath day among the days of the week. This commandment reminds the children of God of the creatorship of God (Yahweh) and his offer of salvific rest through Jesus Christ. Consequently, it is God who supplies sufficiently, the believer's needs, even the rest from the believer's "own works in honour of Christ's saving achievements (Heb 4:9-11)." ¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Jesus taught his followers how to pray in Matthew 6: 9 – 13, parallel Luke 11: 1 - 4. A strand of the prayer requests the supply of food which is supposed to be daily. This sense of daily supply appears to be contrary to the parallel passage in Luke's gospel. Careful exegesis has shown that this contrary view emanated from their religio-cultural background. Matthew is believed to have been a Jew and had Jewish education. Luke on the other hand was a Gentile Christian. In line with Matthew's theological understanding the request for sustenance should be daily and not anxious for the morrow. For Luke also, although one should eschew anxiety, it is appropriate to request tomorrow's bread today. In John's gospel similar request was made by the crowd of Jesus. The form of the request is very similar to the ones in the synoptics and falls well within

¹⁸ Nichol, *Bible Commentary*, pp. 106, 347.

¹⁹ Joseph Olstad, *Bible Study Guide for Second Quarter 2019*, Teachers Edition, Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 15.

the manna theme of the divine supply of daily sustenance in the pericope. Taking John's words, "κυριε, παντοτε δος ημιν τον αρτον τουτον" the impression is given that the children of God can request for things they need tomorrow even today

It is equally important to point out the inference that appears in the request; the association between the commandment to gather the manna daily, except on Friday in anticipation of the Sabbath, and the promise of rest from human salvific work which "God accomplished through the saving life, death, and resurrection of Christ."²⁰

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²⁰ Olstad, *Bible Study Guide*, p. 15.