



TGP: Luke 11:1-13

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OUR

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DAILY

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BREAD

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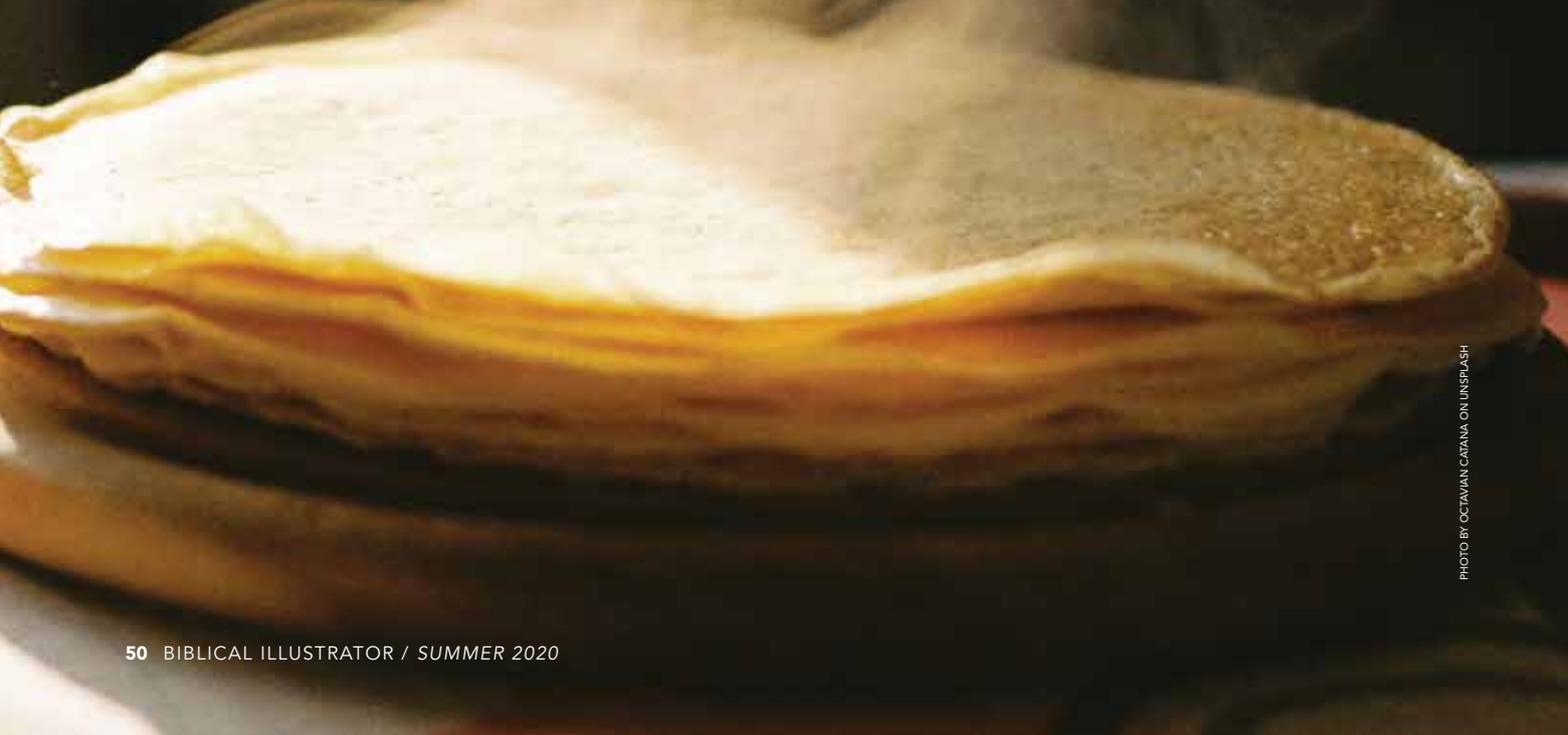


PHOTO BY OCTAVIAN CATANA ON UNSPLASH

## BY MARK A. RATHEL

**A**S A MASTER TEACHER, JESUS REPEATED His teachings in different settings and with different emphases. The Lord's Prayer serves as an example of both repetition and variation in emphases. The most familiar form of the Lord's Prayer is in Matthew 6:9-13. The setting is Jesus' teaching the disciples as a crowd listened. Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount begins, "When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to teach them" (Matt. 5:1-2).<sup>1</sup> According to Luke, an individual disciple overheard Jesus' habit of praying and requested Jesus to teach "us" to pray (Luke 11:1). In response to an individual's request, Jesus taught a prayer for a community of believers. "Whenever you [plural] pray..." The three petitions for bread, forgiveness, and release from temptation are plural (us). Following His instructions about prayer (vv. 1-4), Jesus told a parable about a friend requesting bread (vv. 5-8). He encouraged people to pray because of the nature and character of God (vv. 9-13). Jesus' teaching about prayer in Luke 11:2-13 begins and ends with an emphasis on God as Father.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to different settings for the Lord's Prayer in Matthew and Luke, a slight variation occurs in the request for bread. The prayer in Matthew is a request for daily bread—"Give us today our daily bread" (Matt: 6:11); the verb "give" focuses on the simple act.<sup>3</sup> The prayer in Luke is a request for God's continual giving of bread—"Continually give us each day our daily bread."<sup>4</sup>

In the Bible, bread occurs with both literal and metaphorical usages. Bread was the staple of the Israelite diet. People made bread from either barley or wheat. Because bread was a staple in the diet, the Hebrew term for bread

often referred to food in general<sup>5</sup> or to our material needs.<sup>6</sup> An example of a metaphorical usage occurs in Isaiah 55:2 in which the prophet sets forth a comparison between bread and God's Word.

God's provision of manna in the wilderness provides a likely background to the petition for bread in the Lord's Prayer. "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out *each day* and gather enough for that day'" (Ex. 16:4, emphasis added). The wilderness manna may provide three key connections to the prayer for "daily bread." First, God is the source of both manna and daily bread. Bread is a gift from God. Second, the Hebrews were to gather manna sufficient for one day. Thus, bread as a gift does not mean that humans have no responsibility to work for bread or to hoard God's provisions. Third, daily bread/manna reminded God's people of the importance of proper spiritual diet. "He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat... so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3).

The Greek word translated "daily" (*epiousios*) creates a dilemma. We have no definite evidence of an occurrence of this Greek word outside the Model Prayer.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we cannot examine how people in the first century used the word. Throughout Christian history, interpretation of "daily" has resulted in three broad explanations of the request: a request for an *amount* of bread, a request of the *time* of the bread (today, tomorrow, or at the Messianic banquet), or a request for specific *kind* of bread, that is, physical or spiritual bread.<sup>8</sup>

**Above: Limestone bread stamp with a menorah and a small cross. From Egypt, the stamp dates to the 3rd-**

**4th centuries AD.**

**Below: The Church of the Beatitudes overlooks the Sea of Galilee. The**

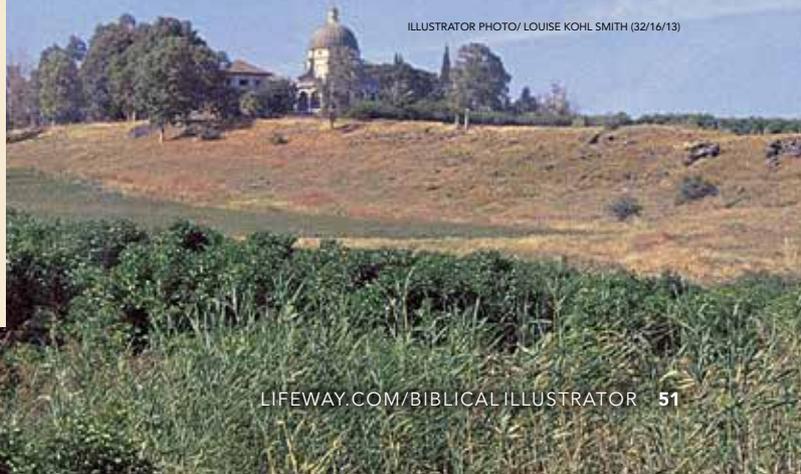
**church is octagonal, representing the eight beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.**



### FAST FACT

**U**NLEAVENED BREAD IS MADE with just flour and water and perhaps a little salt, and is cooked before it has time to attract yeast and rise. The taste and texture were much more like crackers than our idea of bread... Only unleavened bread was offered in sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem."

Source: Douglas E. Neel and Joel A. Pugh, *The Food and Feasts of Jesus: Inside the World of First-Century Fare With Menus and Recipes* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 39.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ LOUISE KOHL SMITH (32/16/13)

**Below:** Coriander seed; the Israelites said that manna resembled coriander seed (Ex. 16:31).

**Right:** Replica of the ark of the covenant. At about 4 feet wide and 2½ feet high and deep, the ark,

made of acacia wood, was covered with gold. A jar of manna was stored in the ark.



ISTOCK PHOTO



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE/ LONG HOLLOW BAPTIST CHURCH/ HENDERSONVILLE, TN (2/19/18)

First, for what *kind* of bread did Jesus instruct His disciples to pray? Daily bread may mean the physical bread and other provisions that are necessary for existence. Key leaders in the early church understood “bread” in a spiritual sense, referring either to the bread of the Eucharist (or Lord’s Supper) or to Jesus as the bread from heaven—the bread of life (John 6:32,35). To understand “bread” as a request for spiritual bread disrupts the symmetry of the prayer—requests for the realization of God’s purposes followed by requests for believers’ personal needs.<sup>9</sup>

Second, for what *time* is a disciple to ask for bread? Does Jesus instruct disciples to request bread for today, the next day, or the eschatological day? Jews practiced morning and evening prayers. If Jesus expected His Jewish disciples to follow this practice, then the morning prayer is a petition for the bread for today and the evening prayer is a request for bread for tomorrow. Authors from the first centuries of the church to the twenty-first century have understood the request as a provision for *the* day—the particular day the kingdom comes, and Jesus hosts the Messianic banquet.<sup>10</sup> In the Greek text the presence of the definite article translated “the” preceding the term for “day” gives some credence to this view. However, the present tense verb “give” and the prepositional phrase “each day” may point in a different direction. The phrase “each day” requests God for daily provisions over a lifetime.<sup>11</sup>

Third, for *how much* bread should a disciple ask? The interpretative options are the bread necessary for mere subsistence—enough bread to survive—or the bread we

need. The second-century Old Syriac version communicates the nuanced meaning of a request for the amount of bread, “Give us today the bread that does not run out.” In the ancient Syriac community, the prayer is a request to meet daily needs and for deliverance from the fear of deprivation based on confidence in God.<sup>12</sup>

What kind of bread did Jesus instruct His followers to request? Jesus encouraged believers to pray for God to meet their daily needs. When should a disciple pray for bread? A believer should pray daily that God will meet his or her needs. Through the process of asking, God may clarify the believer’s understanding of his or her needs. Jesus’ teaching about prayer invites believers to trust God for their daily needs and deliverance from excessive anxiety about the necessities of life. ❦

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

2. John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, vol. 35B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1993), 610.

3. Walter L. Leifeld, “Luke,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

4. Author’s translation.

5. Robert H. O’Connell, “לֶחֶם” (*lehem*; food, bread) in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 790.

6. Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

7. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 325.

8. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 120.

9. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 457.

10. Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*, rev. ed. (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), 134. The definite article precedes the word translated “bread” in the Greek New Testament.

11. Francois Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013), 89.

12. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 121–22.

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