

The Lord's Prayer: A Guide for the Perplexed

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For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

These words are not original to the Lord's Prayer as taught by Jesus and are not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts of Matthew, nor are they found in any manuscripts of Luke. As a result, they are absent from almost all modern translations of the Bible. Evidently based on the doxology in 1 Chronicles 29:11-13, these words, or words similar to these, were added by the church from a very early time. That the early church would make such an addition is understandable. As observed by J. Jeremias, the normal practice in Judaism was for a supplicant to add his own freely formulated doxology to a prayer that did not already have an appropriate fixed conclusion.⁽⁹⁰⁾ The fact that the Lord's Prayer ends as abruptly as it does explains why early Christians, especially those with Jewish background, may have treated this prayer as an open-ended prayer that required a freely formulated conclusion. Indeed, Tertullian confirms that in his day the practice was for worshippers to append their own private petitions to the Lord's Prayer.⁽⁹¹⁾ As the Lord's Prayer came to be used increasingly in liturgical contexts, however, it may have been deemed preferable to allow one concluding doxology to become standard. Once that doxology became firmly established, early copyists, who often did their work from memory, may have added these words quite inadvertently to the text of Matthew. In any case, these words are found in the King James Version because it was based on the evidence of only fifteen late medieval manuscripts, which happen to include them. Modern translations, which uniformly omit these words, have the advantage of employing the evidence of over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, some of which are as old as the second and third centuries AD.⁽⁹²⁾

So, even though the traditional doxology is not original, the fact that Jesus said, "pray then like this" (Matthew 6:9), indicating that he intended the Lord's Prayer as a flexible model, should allow believers to join the early church in appropriating this superb doxology. In the oldest commentary on the Lord's Prayer, Tertullian rightly affirms that this prayer "is truly the summary of the whole gospel."⁽⁹³⁾ It is fitting that such a breathtaking summary should conclude with the reminder that we ask these things of God because his is the kingdom. He is the one who has the power to accomplish whatever he pleases, well beyond all that we may ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). And to him alone belongs the glory, for which reason we add our "Amen," which in Hebrew means simply "so be it."⁽⁹⁴⁾

Footnotes:

(90) J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 106f. Cf. Mishnah. Berakoth 1.4.

(91) *On Prayer*, 10.

(92) The oldest manuscripts tend to consist of small fragments. So, for example, the Bodmer papyrus (P75), from the 2nd or early 3rd century AD, includes Luke 11 and confirms the lack of a doxology there, but it offers no evidence for Matthew. Unfortunately, none of the earliest manuscripts happens to include Matthew 6. Nevertheless, there are still many high quality, relatively old manuscripts which do include Matthew 6 and support the omission of the doxology, such as two codices from the 4th century AD, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, and one codex from the 4th or 5th century AD, Bezae. The oldest manuscript which includes the traditional doxology is Codex Washingtonianus, from the 5th century AD. The Didache, composed in the 2nd century AD, also includes an abbreviated doxology (lacking both “the kingdom” and “Amen”): “for thine is the power and the glory for ever.” This evidence is of limited use, however, because the only copy of the Didache that has survived from antiquity was written in 1056 AD. Accordingly, one cannot be sure that this doxology was included in the original composition.

(93) On Prayer, 1.

(94) “All the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 1:20). I wish to express my gratitude to my wife, Jane, for her helpful insights and indispensable editorial assistance in the preparation of these notes. “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all” (Proverbs 31:29).