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Lead Us Not Into Temptation, Deliver Us From Evil (Chapter in The Lord's Prayer, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary)

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LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, DELIVER US FROM EVIL

Introduction

I recall, as a young child, having a number of superstitious assumptions. I remember being afraid of the dark, and at night, as I stood in my doorway, I believed that when I turned off the light switch I had to jump to my bed (for some reason thinking that I would be gobbled up by evil if my feet touched the ground in the darkness). Over time, though, I became less concerned about the dark and also about “evil.” Even today, as an adult, I do not think much about evil powers or spirits. I may make a one-off comment about having an “unlucky day,” but even then I tend to assume most aspects of life are under *my* control.

Of course, throughout history most peoples around the world have had a vivid sense of the power of evil, and they have found various ways to ward off evil and invoke blessings—whether by means of magic or religion. Christians have long prayed, “Deliver us from evil.” I am not sure what most American Christians think as they utter these words; probably, like me, they don’t put much thought into it at all. But for most ancient people (Christian or not), entreating a higher power to ward off evil would have been a common, daily concern. Among archaeological finds from ancient Egypt, we have today significant evidence that the last line of the LP, “deliver us from evil,” was treated as a mantra or holy prayer for protection against malevolent spirits.¹ Some of the Greek papyri scraps from ancient Egypt bear evidence of being folded so as to fit into a pocket, probably indicating that it was carried as a kind of amulet.² Christians believed that their God was the God who safeguards his people.

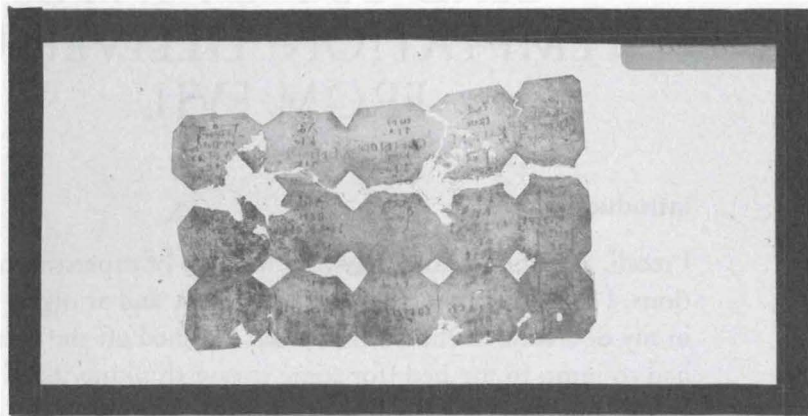
There is a question about whether Matthew 6:13 should be treated as two *separate* petitions or as one petition (“lead us not to temptation”) with a reinforcement (“but deliver us from evil”). It is most likely the latter, serving as a comprehensive prayer that God would protect and not expose to danger.³ [Christian Magical Amulets]

Christian Magical Amulets



Many ancient peoples—Jews, Christians, and pagans—believed that objects and words could be used to ward off evil. We have many extant papyri that appeared to serve as amulets. One fragment from Oxyrhynchus (no. 1077) contains several crosses and the title “Curative gospel according to Matthew” along with the words in Greek of Matthew 4:23-24: “Jesus went through Galilee . . . curing every disease”

St. Matthew's Gospel, iv.
Oxyrhynchus papyri P. Oxy.
1077, (verso). 6 x 11 cm.
c. 501–600 CE. Robert C. Horn
Papyri Collection. (Credit: Image
Courtesy of Muhlenberg College)



This ancient amulet depicts, on one side (top image), Christ on a throne encircled by four angelic creatures. On the other side (bottom image), there is a hunter representing God and an inscription: “One God who conquers evil.” Words from the first verse of Psalm 91 also appear: “He who dwells in the help of the Most High will abide in the shelter of the God of heaven.” The hunter in the picture is attacking a lioness. On the amulet there are also pictures of a lion and snakes. Note that Psalm 91 makes reference to a lion, an asp, and a cobra, creatures that God's people ought not to fear.



(Credit: Magical amulet (front and back), #26119,
Kelsey Museum of Archaeology,
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan)

COMMENTARY

Canonical Context

The notion that the God of Israel can be trusted to protect his people and lead them on a good path is a pervasive theme in the Old Testament. The question of God's goodness and his providential plan was raised by Israel as they went into exile in Babylon.

The prophet Jeremiah is called to bring a word of encouragement to the exiles. Despite the bleak appearance of the circumstances, the Lord tells Israel to settle into life in Babylon ("Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce"; Jer 29:5). Then he foretells his plans for complete restoration that include returning to their land. As a note of reassurance, he proclaims, "For surely I know the plans I have for you . . . plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope . . . I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you" (Jer 29:11, 14).

In terms of specific protection from *evil*, we might turn to Psalm 91; it should be noted that on some of those Christian amulets described above, alongside the LP (esp Matt 6:13) there was also the text of this psalm, apparently a favorite text for recognizing the evil-conquering power of Israel's God.

- ¹ You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
- ² will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."
- ³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
- ⁴ he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
- ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
- ⁶ or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
- ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
- ⁸ You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.
- ⁹ Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,
- ¹⁰ no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
- ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
- ¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
- ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
- ¹⁴ Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.

- ¹⁵ When they call to me, I will answer them;
 I will be with them in trouble,
 I will rescue them and honor them.
¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy them,
 and show them my salvation.

This is a fascinating psalm to study in view of the LP and the context of Jesus' ministry. First of all, Psalm 91:11 is quoted by

Temptation of Christ



Sandro Botticelli (1444–1510). *Temptation of Christ*. Detail. Fresco. Pre-restoration. Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State. (Credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY)

the devil in one of his enticements for Jesus to sin in the temptation narrative (Matt 4:6; “For he will command his angels . . .”). Second, the LXX version of this psalm (LXX Ps 90) contains some small but insightful differences compared to the language of the Hebrew psalm. For example, the LXX text of verse 6 mentions that the one who trusts in God will not fear a “noonday demon.” Overall, this psalm serves to remind

the believer that the God of Israel is stronger than the worst evil forces that lurk around us.

Matthew

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

All along as we have examined the LP in this commentary, it has been observed how—despite the simple length of the prayer—it contains a number of perplexing features, including the *epiousios* conundrum (“daily”?) and the relationship between the two parts of the forgiveness petition. Similarly, when we turn to Matthew 6:13a we are immediately confronted with a dilemma: *does God tempt his people such that one must pray that he not?* Early on in the Christian reflection and instruction on the LP, this petition seemed to imply that God might do something that—according to the book of James—he would never do: “No one, when tempted, should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be

tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one" (Jas 1:13). Thus, there was a bit of a panic to explain this ostensible conundrum in the LP. For example, some early (pre-Vulgate) Latin manuscripts of Matthew have this reading: "Do not permit us to be led into temptation."⁴ As Eugene Boring explains, this modification of the Greek text appears to be a scribe's editorial work to enable this petition to be more theologically palatable—reasoning that God *himself* would never tempt but rather he might *let* believers be tempted.⁵ Cyprian also seems to follow this kind of reading as he cites Matthew 6:13a as "do not allow us to be led into temptation."⁶ Tertullian cites the traditional Matthean version (i.e., "lead us not into temptation") but immediately follows up with his own gloss or interpretation: "That is, do not allow us to be led by the one that tempts."⁷ Similarly, Augustine explains the *meaning* of "lead us not into temptation" as "suffer us not to be led into temptation."⁸ [Temptation in

the Babylonian Talmud]

One way to explain this LP petition is to say that it is more of a rhetorical expression that reinforces the notion that one is dependent on divine protection, and it should not be taken as a scenario that is *possible*. Thus, R. T. France gives the example of when a husband might say to his wife, "Don't ever leave me!" In such a case, it is not so much that the husband is worried about his wife leaving. Rather, he is simply communicating that he deeply appreciates her.⁹ This is, of course, a possible reading, but many scholars and translators have considered *another* explanation. What if the LP is not referring to *tempting* but rather to *testing*? The Greek word in 6:13a that is traditionally translated as "temptation" is *peirasmos*. This word can in fact mean temptation, for example as it appears in 1 Timothy 6:9: "But those who want to be rich fall into temptation (*peirasmos*) and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction."

The same Greek word, *peirasmos* (and the related verb *peirazō*), can also carry the meaning of *testing*. For example, Paul tells the Corinthians, "Put yourselves to the test (*peirazō*) to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!" While the notion that God would willingly *tempt* his people can be theologically offensive, the idea that he might *test* his people proves more comprehensible. Consider Proverbs 17:3: "The crucible for refining silver and the furnace is for gold, likewise the LORD tests hearts." Similarly, the Jewish sage Ben Sira wrote, "My child, when you come to serve

Temptation in the Babylonian Talmud



"Bring me not into the power of sin, temptation or contempt; and let the good impulse have dominion over me but not the evil impulse." —Babylonian Talmud, *b. Ber.* 60b

As cited in J. L. Houlden, "Lord's Prayer," *ABD* 4:356–62, at 359; cf. E. Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer* (trans. J. Bowden; London: Collins, 1965) 193–94, W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew* (London: T & T Clark, 1988) 1:612.

the Lord, prepare yourself for testing" (Sir 2:1). And, of course, you have the famous examples from the OT where God tests his people: in Genesis we learn about the difficult test (LXX *peirazō*; Gen 22:1) put to Abraham regarding whether he would be willing to sacrifice his own son. Tertullian explains that God had no evil intention of harming Isaac, but rather of pressing Abraham to demonstrate his trust, thus serving as an example such that "one should not hold even one's children more precious than God."¹⁰

[Is God Testing Us or Are We Testing God?]

And there is the example of the divine testing of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. In Exodus we are told that the *manna* provision was given to test Israel, "whether they will follow my instruction or not" (Exod 16:4). In Deuteronomy it is explained

Is God Testing Us or Are We Testing God?



The typical way that the temptation petition of the LP has been read presumes that *peirasmos* refers to a request that God not lead us into being tempted or tested. However, Jeffrey Gibson has recently argued that *peirasmos* can be taken in another way, not humans as the recipients of (divine) testing but as the subjects—humans testing God (135–60). While this reading is technically possible, I find it unlikely. (A small textual observation: if the object of *peirasmos* were ambiguous enough to entertain two options, one might expect clarifications to appear as variants in the textual history, such as the addition of an objective genitive [e.g., *tau theou*], but we find no early or prominent variant additions. An argument from silence is not very convincing, but it is still worthy of note.)

The prepositional phrase *eis peirasmon* ("into temptation/testing") is found once in the Septuagint and seven times in the New Testament. In the LXX, it appears in Sirach where the saying is given, "If you come to be subject to the Lord, prepare yourself *for testing*" (2:1 NRSV). Here it clearly means that *the Lord* will do the testing. In Matthew, this phrase is found twice, once in 6:13 (cf. Luke 11:4) and again in 26:41 where Jesus warns his disciples, "Stay awake and pray that you may not come *eis peirasmon*: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (cf. Mark 14:38; Luke 22:40, 46). Again, here it makes the most sense that the command to stay sober implies that otherwise they will succumb to temptation because the flesh is weak. Who is doing the tempting in not clear, but it is probably Satan; after all, in the Lukan account Jesus specifically warns Simon (Peter) that "Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail" (22:31b–32a).

The only other occurrence of *eis peirasmos* in the NT outside of the Gospels is 1 Tim 6:9: "But those who want to

be rich fall into temptation (*eis peirasmon*) and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." Here again, it clearly implies humans being tempted. Now, it is possible that in Matt 6:13 (and Luke 11:4) *eis peirasmos* means "testing God," but the case, in my opinion, would have to be made with compelling evidence. In fact, the weight *against* such a reading is strong. First, it is difficult to see how the translation of the full clause would make sense: "lead us not into testing [you]." (Gibson glosses this as "prevent us, God, from testing your faithfulness" [146], but this seems to require creative interpretation of "lead" [*eispherō*]; see D. Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006] 153.) The uses of *peirasmos* in Matthew and Luke focus on the Satan and divine testing/tempting of Israel, including Jesus (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13) and the disciples (Matt 26:41; Luke 22:40, 46). In the LP, we seem to see a continuation of this pattern of enduring and resisting temptations and tests.

What settles the matter for me in favor of the humans-being-tempted reading is simply the consistency of tradition—from the very earliest interpreters of the LP, we see this phrase (*eis peirasmos*) taken as humans being tempted and no discussion of the possibility that this refers to humans testing God (e.g., Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine). One might presume that if this phrasing *were* ambiguous, at least the Greek Fathers (e.g., Chrysostom, Gregory the Great) would have considered such an option, but they did not. In the end, if *peirasmos* here did include the problem of testing God, the overall meaning is not substantially altered, and thus there does not seem to be a reason to modify the traditional reading.

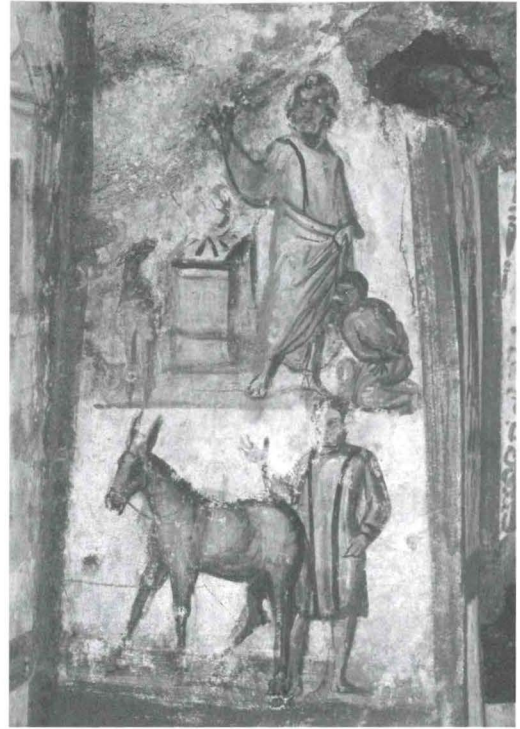
J. Gibson, *The Disciples' Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

that the forty years of wandering served to test their hearts and to do them good (8:2-3, 16; cf. 13:3). Similarly, when Israel entered and settled into Canaan, the book of Judges records that God did not drive out *all* of the former inhabitants of the land so Israel would be *tested* regarding whether they would “take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their ancestors did” (Judg 2:22-23). The psalmist *yearns* for testing: “Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind” (Ps 26:2; cf. 66:10; 139:23).

The early Christians believed that there would be trials and tribulations associated with the end (cf. Matt 24:2-13), and the true faith and fidelity of believers would be tested. Given the interest from some scholars in reading the LP as an eschatologically oriented prayer, it is unsurprising to see that perspective connected to Matthew 6:13. Thus, some translations support the reading, “And do not bring us to the time of trial” (NRSV; NAB: “do not subject us to the final test”). Donald Hagner endorses this translation while being open to the testing as either present (generic) tests or the great (eschatological) test—if it were in reference to the latter, it would concern “a time of severe testing [that] would necessarily precede the dawning of the messianic age.”¹¹

According to Ceslas Spicq, this interpretation of Matthew 6:13 fits well with the biblical use of *peirazō/peirasmos* overall. He explains its meaning as “a trial of virtue by means of affliction or adversity, or even by Satan’s intervention.”¹² Of course, when it comes to testing Israel, God is the “Tester,” the one who puts his people to the test for their own good—as Spicq sums up, *per molestias eruditio* (“teaching through inconveniences,” a phrase associated with Augustine).¹³ Thus, God puts his people through a process of refinement for the sake of their growth and maturity. Such testing

The Sacrifice of Isaac



Sacrifice of Isaac. Ipogeo di Via Latina, Rome, Italy. (Credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY)

demonstrates not only the sincerity and the moral resources of the believer, but is also for the believer a means of perfection because he has to suffer in order to remain faithful to his resolves and his

decision for God; he emerges from the trial purified and more convinced than ever to serve his Lord, whose sovereignty over him he thus confesses to be total.¹⁴

As far as Spicq is concerned, then, Matthew 6:13a involves not the possibility of a “wicked solicitation” but rather “a difficult or painful trial.”¹⁵

While this re-envisioning of Matthew 6:13a and *peirasmós* as “testing” could serve to alleviate concerns that God might tempt his creatures, it also creates another conundrum: if divine testing is *good* (Ps 26:2), why would Jesus tell us to pray that we *not* be tested? Note how 2 Peter 4:12-19 encourages believers to see the benefit of trials (especially persecution): “rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed” (4:13; cf. 4:16, 19). The apostle Paul helped the Romans to reconceive of the role of affliction and adversity in life. In chapter 5 of his letter, he explains to them that suffering can serve an important end: “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us” (Rom 5:3b-5a). Origen comments this way about the problematic idea of praying *against* God testing us: “If the apostles did not obtain what they sought when they prayed, what hope is there for their inferiors to be heard by God when they pray?” By this he meant that the apostles were subject to numerous trials and afflictions including beatings, imprisonment, and public disgrace.¹⁶

So then we are back where we began with Matthew 6:13a—are believers meant to pray that God not lead into *tempting* or into *testing*? To help address this question, we might appeal to the classic situation of Job. When it comes to the trials and tribulations of poor Job, who is responsible? We can clearly affirm in that situation a kind of *dual* agency; Satan had a desire to break Job’s spirit, but God commended Job (Job 1:8). Satan is the one who puts forward a challenge regarding Job, but notice how Satan tells *God* to afflict Job: “But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face” (1:11). The Lord agrees to the proposal to afflict Job’s life, but then presumes that *Satan* will do the cursing: (The Lord says) “very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!” (Job 1:12). Here it is unclear who *actually* enacts the afflicting; both are involved, but Satan obviously defers to the higher power of God. In a similar interaction between God and Job in chapter 2, again Satan has to ask permission to afflict Job (2:6). Here it is clear that Satan is the one who “inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the

Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils

William Blake (1757–1827). *Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils*. c. 1826. Pen and ink and tempera on mahogany. Presented by Miss Mary H. Dodge through the Art Fund 1918. Tate Gallery, London, Great Britain. (Credit: © Tate, London / Art Resource, NY)

sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (2:7). After this verse, though, for the next forty chapters Satan is not mentioned again, and at no point does Job blame Satan for his afflictions.

A similar phenomenon seems to be at work in 2 Corinthians when it comes to Paul’s notorious “thorn in the flesh.” In chapter 12 Paul explains how he had the privilege of experiencing amazing spiritual visions where he was caught up into the glorious heavenly planes. But in order to prevent him from becoming prideful, a “thorn was given me in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7). The language here is one of the *divine passive*, a roundabout way of communicating that *God* gave him this thorn to humble him. Nevertheless, Paul immediately calls it a “messenger of Satan to torment me” (12:7). So which is it? Did God send the thorn, or was it Satan? Paradoxically, it was apparently *both*. A third example could be given, one that hits closer to home on the issue of *temptation/testing*. In Revelation’s “Letter to Smyrna,” the Smyrnan church learns that they will face severe persecution. The writer tells them,

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested (*peirazō*), and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10). These believers are expected to persevere amid the devil's temptations such that they will prove their faith and be rewarded by God.

Joseph Fitzmyer has written a helpful essay reflecting on the conundrum regarding the source, agency, and ethics of temptation and testing. Fitzmyer refers to the "protological" work of God that is often commented on in the Old Testament. We have cases where God is responsible for initiating something that looks like it could do harm towards the recipient, though God himself is not the one doing the tempting or tormenting. For example, Fitzmyer offers the case of Judges 9:22-24 where God sends an evil spirit to divide Abimelech and the men of Shechem (9:23).¹⁷ Similarly, God sent an evil spirit to Saul, which incited him to attack David (1 Sam 18:10-11).¹⁸

This idea that God could be "behind" affliction is disturbing, but Fitzmyer draws attention to a text like Isaiah 45 that seems to state this (in "protological" terms) quite baldly: "I am the LORD, I form light and create darkness, the one who brings about peace and creates calamity, I am the LORD who accomplished all these things" (45:6-7). Fitzmyer cites Old Testament theologian Carroll Stuhlmueller to drive home the relevant point from this Isaiah text: "Evil is no giant staggering through the world at his own whim; somehow, it accomplishes God's will for purifying and disciplining his chosen ones."¹⁹

As Fitzmyer explains, this "protological" way of viewing the work of God "ascribes to God or his Spirit a causality the effect of which could be to the detriment of the persons concerned. God is thought to be somehow the cause of it, even if the temptation or testing does not come from God himself."²⁰ Cyprian seems to have taken a stance on the matter that is similar to what Fitzmyer has argued. He says that Scripture teaches how the "adversary" can accomplish nothing without God's permission: "Thus all our fear and our devotion and our heedfulness should be directed toward God, so that when we are in temptation he allows no power to the evil one apart from that which he grants."²¹ Could there be a noble end to God's permitting of evil to tempt us? Cyprian finds two reasons: chastisement in sin and glory in faithfulness.²² Using an athletic image, Cyprian explains,

For certainly it is not inactivity, an unprofitable delay, or a thankless sloth which render those trained for gymnastic contestants

successful, worthy of honors, and the clapping of hands; but, on the contrary, severe toil. Moreover, it is not in time of peace that one sees the man who is well acquainted with the tactics of war, bold and tried in battle, but he must have shown himself a hardy combatant against the enemy.²³

[Ben Sira on Evil and Free Will] This leads us inevitably back to the matter of interpreting Matthew 6:13a. While the idea of divine “testing” is found in Scripture, *peirasmōs* here does seem to blur into the notion of “temptation,” particularly as the word is used in Matthew. Here it behooves us to consider two key texts related to “temptation” in Matthew—the temptation narrative (Matt 4:1-11) and the warning against temptation (*peirasmōs*) in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:41).

In the former, we see that Jesus is “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (*peirazō*) by the devil” (4:1). He famously faces three tests and succeeds, repelling Satan (4:10). The vulnerability, weakness, and loneliness of Jesus in those forty days in the desert are apparent in 4:11 when—after the devil disappears—the angels swoop in and care for the weary Messiah.

In Matthew 26:36f., Jesus goes to Gethsemane to pray just before he is arrested. Again, in a moment of grief and weakness, he asks his disciples to stay alert (26:38). Jesus goes off to pray and when he returns he finds his disciples sleeping. He warns them, “Stay awake and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (26:41). These two passages serve almost as bookends to the Lord’s Prayer in regard to the challenge of temptation. Just as Jesus faced tests and temptations, so were the disciples tested and tempted (cf. Luke 22:31: “Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat!”). God cannot be imagined to be aloof to these temptations. Calvin recognized that God and Satan could agree on the fact of temptation while wishing for divergent outcomes: “for God tempts the godly for good, but Satan, the flesh, and the world, tempt them for evil.”²⁴

The prayer that we not be *led* into temptation is not a desire to circumvent the trials set up by God. Rather, it is to register awareness of our own frailty and weakness; that we are far more like reticent Israel than intrepid Jesus. So Dunn writes, “It is a prayer of conscious and confessed human weakness; it makes no pretense of

Ben Sira on Evil and Free Will



Jews around the time of Jesus took interest in questions related to the origins of evil and causation when it came to failure. Ben Sira wrote, “Do not say, ‘It was the Lord’s doing that I fell away’; for he does not do what he hates. Do not say, ‘It was he who led me astray’; for he has no need of the sinful. The Lord hates all abominations; such things are not loved by those who fear him. It was he who created humankind in the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own free choice.” (Sir 15:11-14)

confidence in its own strength and commitment; rather it expresses an unconditional abandonment to the will and grace of God.”²⁵

I am particularly partial to Craig Blomberg’s reading of this petition; it is not so much about asking God not to *lead* us into temptation as it is about God not *leaving* us. Thus Blomberg glosses it as “Don’t abandon us to temptation.”²⁶ Similarly, Origen

Cyril of Alexandria on Temptation



“No one should be overconfident or rash in encountering temptations, even though he is brave in mind. But rather, let us reflect upon the infirmity of our mind, and fear with soberness, lest perhaps we prove a cause of ridicule to our tempters, by not being able to bear the brunt of the battle.”

Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Lord's Prayer* (Los Angeles: Saint Paul Brotherhood, 2009) 49.

exhorts, “Let us pray, therefore, that we be delivered from testing, not so that we should not be tested (for this is impossible, in particular for those who are on earth), but so that we should not be overcome when we are tested.”²⁷ Bruce Chilton explains that this petition is not intended to make us lax or lazy in our faith; rather it marks the “appeal of trusting children to remain with their father whatever might come.”²⁸ [Cyril of Alexandria on

Temptation]

Deliver Us from Evil

We can turn now more briefly to the second part of Matthew 6:13: “but deliver us from evil/the evil one.” As noted in the discussion of amulets above, most ancient people had a vivid sense of the power of evil to bring trouble to one’s life. One of the key exegetical concerns pertaining to 6:13b involves the meaning of *tou ponērou*. Most of us have learned the wording of the KJV: “deliver us from evil.” However, a quick glance at most modern translations will show that they view the reference here not to “evil” as a generic entity but rather as a *person*: “deliver us from *the evil one*” (so NIV, NET, NRSV). From a syntactical standpoint, the Greek text leaves this matter unclear, as both the definite article and the ending of the noun could be taken as neuter (generic evil) or masculine (“the evil one”). W. D. Davies and Dale Allison cogently argue that the masculine (personal) interpretation fits the overall use of “evil” language in Matthew.²⁹

In Matthew’s parable of the sower (Matt 13:1-23), Jesus explains that when the seed falls on the path “the evil one (*ho ponēros*) comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart” (13:19). Here the reference is clearly Satan. Similarly, in the parable of the weeds (13:36-43), Jesus divulges that “the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one (*hoi huioi tou ponērou*).” Outside of Matthew’s Gospel, the “evil one” is obviously a reference to Satan (John 17:5; Eph 6:16). Notice even how similar 2 Thessalonians 3:3 is to the

overall concept of Matthew 6:13b: “But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.”

Praying that God would rescue us from the evil one ought not to plunge the believer into fear and hopelessness about the power and hegemony of evil. After all, Jesus proclaims after his resurrection, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18). Rather, to ask for divine rescue from evil is a reflection again of the reality that we all too often become “sleepy” like the disciples in Gethsemane. Krister Stendahl says it perfectly: “we know that if Satan tightens the screws we have no chance. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”³⁰ [Jewish Prayer and Teaching on Evil]

Luke

In the last line of Luke’s LP, we find the prayer about temptation but no mention of deliverance from the evil one. The wording is identical to Matthew 6:13a: “And lead us not into temptation” (Luke 11:4). Luke, like Matthew, includes the temptation narrative, though Luke’s arrangement of the confrontations between Jesus and Satan are not perfectly aligned. Still, Luke also refers to this as *temptations* for Jesus—in particular temptations at the hands of the devil (Luke 4:2; cf. 4:13). In Luke, Jesus also refers to the danger of temptations in his explanation of the parable of the sower. Regarding the seed that falls on the rocks, Jesus teaches that because they have no root, “they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation” (Luke 8:13). For the sake of comparison, in Matthew Jesus explains that these fall away “when trouble or persecution” arise (Matt 13:21).

Luke includes another key explanatory word in chapter 22 as Jesus faces his final hours before his arrest. He commends his closest disciples by noting that “You are those who stood by me in my trials (*en tois peirasmois mou*)” (Luke 22:28). Thus, Jesus pronounces that he bestows upon them a kingdom, just as his Father entrusted him. Peter is called out in particular: “Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). Again, we are reminded in Luke, as in Matthew, that trials and even temptations are not something one can

Jewish Prayer and Teaching on Evil



“Let not Satan rule over me nor an unclean spirit; let neither pain nor the evil inclination possess my bones” —Dead Sea Scrolls, 11QS xix 15-16

“And let not satan have power over me, to make me stray from your path” —Greek *Prayer of Levi*, line 10

“No evil will befall the one who fears the Lord, but in trials such a one will be rescued again and again” —Sir 33:1

See these cited in B. Wold, “Apotropaic Prayer and the Matthean Lord’s Prayer,” in *Das Böse, der Teufel und Dämonen—Evil, the Devil, and Demons* (ed. J. Doehorn; S. Rudnig-Zelt, and B. Wold; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014) 103, 104, 110.

Jewish Prayers against Evil



[Noah] prayed in the presence of God his Lord and he said: "Lord of the spirits which are in all flesh, You, who have shown me mercy and saved me and my sons from the water of the Flood and did not make me perish (as You did to the children of destruction) since Your kindness toward me has been great, and great has been Your mercy to my soul.

May your kindness be raised high over Your children's children, and may the evil spirits not rule over them lest they destroy them from the earth. Now bless me and my sons so we might increase and grow numerous and fill the earth. And you know how Your Watchers acted—the fathers of these spirits—during my days.

Now these spirits who are still alive—lock them up and keep them captive in the place of judgment, so they may not cause corruption among the children of Your servant, my Lord, since they are vicious and were created for corrupting. Do not let them rule over the spirits of the living since You alone know their judgment. Let them have no power over the children of the just from now on and for evermore." —*Jubilees* 10.3-6

J. C. Endres, "Prayer of Noah," in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology* (ed. M. Kiley et al.; London: Routledge, 1997) 53–56, at 55–56.

avoid, and indeed courage, faith, and righteousness in the face of them make one stronger. [Jewish Prayers against Evil]

CONNECTIONS

Christian Life Connections

What Kind of Threat Does Evil Pose to Us Today?

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, most Western Christians today think very little about evil, evil forces, or evil spirits. Yet the LP compels believers to take evil seriously—but *how* seriously? Karl Barth proposes utmost sobriety when it comes to this. Here is Barth's interpretation of this petition:

We pray thee, our Father, to lead us in such a way that it may be given us to avoid this limit on the left, this pernicious boundary. Lead us, for we are thy children, saved through Jesus Christ. Spare us not from the struggle (which we must accept), not from sufferings (which we must endure), but spare us from the encounter with this enemy, who is stronger than all our strength, more clever than our intelligence (including the intelligence we put into our theology), more dangerously sentimental—for the Devil is also sentimental—than we ourselves are capable of being. He is more pious (yes, the Devil is pious too) than all our Christian piety, both ancient and modern, or theological. Shield us from all possibility of evil from which we know not how to preserve ourselves, since it would utterly and irrevocably degrade us to the level of brutes.³¹

Barth is right to warn believers not to underestimate the danger of evils. We are frail creatures, easily led astray. Thus, we pray, "deliver us from evil." Still, it is helpful to acknowledge the perspective of Hauerwas and Willimon, who emphasize that the LP reminds us of the One to whom we pray, knowing that he is stronger than any foe. [C. S. Lewis on Evil]

The power of evil must be admitted and taken seriously, yet not too seriously. Perhaps that is why, though the Lord's Prayer

honestly focuses upon trial, temptation and evil, it never mentions Satan by name. Evil is a threatening power, though a defeated one. Though the battle rages, we know who has won the war.³²

In light of these perspectives, we might approach the problem of evil with these considerations in mind. First, believers should recognize that they are part of an ongoing spiritual battle. As St. Paul instructs, believers are children of light who must have their wits about them because the children of darkness are clever and dangerous (see 1 Thess 5:8; Eph 6:1-10). Second, believers should recognize that evil forces can be very clever—again, Paul warned the Corinthians that Satan himself can be disguised as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:4). Third, the assumption behind the LP is that believers can only withstand temptations and the forces of evil by staying connected to God, relying on his power and mercy. Believers should not fear evil as a power superior to the Triune God, but neither should they dismiss evil as trivial or innocuous.

Prayer Connections

Juvencus's Poetic Version of the LP

Gaius Vettius Aquilinus Juvencus was a Roman-Spanish priest and Christian poet of the fourth century. He penned this poem inspired by the LP.³³ [Tertullian on Vigilant Prayer]

O Creator, who dwells among
the stars in the highest heaven,
O Most High Father, we pray that our veneration of your
name may be made holy in us;
May the peaceful and bountiful
light of your kingdom come
and shine forth in the world.

C. S. Lewis on Evil



In his classic *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis imagines instruction between a senior demon (Screwtape) and his apprentice (Wormwood). In the preface of the book, Lewis offers his own thoughts on the nature of evil and its relationship to our lives. He gives this insight: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Collier, 1982) 3



C. S. Lewis, 1947 (b/w photo, Arthur Strong [1908-2004]). (Credit: Private Collection / Bridgeman Images)

Tertullian on Vigilant Prayer

"Prayer is the buttress of faith, our armor and weaponry against the enemy that watches us from every side. So never let us set out unarmed—let us remember the station by day and the vigil by night. Let us guard the standard of our emperor armed with prayer, awaiting the trumpet of the angel while we pray. Indeed, every angel prays, every creature. The herds and the wild beasts pray and bend their knees, coming forth from byres

and dens looking to heaven, giving movement to the spirit after their fashion with animated mouths. And even now the birds arise, lifting themselves to heaven, spreading out their wings like a cross whilst uttering what appears to be a prayer. What more might be said on the duty of prayer? Even the Lord himself prayed, and to him be honor and might for ever and ever."

Tertullian, *On the Lord's Prayer* (trans., Stewart-Sykes) 64.

May your manifest will be
done on earth as in heaven.
May the sustenance of holy
life-giving bread
be provided for us today
and may your forgiving largess
release us soon from the innumerable debts of our evil
misdeeds.
It is right for us likewise
to forgive the debts of others.
Remove far away from us the
fierce temptation of the vile demon,
and may your right hand lift us
up into the light away from all evil.

Lead Us Not into Temptation—Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 127

"By ourselves we are too weak to hold our own even for a moment. And our sworn enemies—the devil, the world, and our own flesh—never stop attacking us. And so, Lord, uphold us and make us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that we may not go down to defeat in this spiritual struggle, but may firmly resist our enemies until we finally win the complete victory."

See <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/heidelberg-cat.html>.

[Lead Us Not into Temptation—Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 127]

Saint Michael Prayer

As legend has it, Pope Leo XIII experienced a terrifying vision in 1884, one where he saw wicked spirits attacking the church. In this vision he witnessed the glorious power of St. Michael driving the evil forces back. Inspired by that vision, he wrote this prayer:

Saint Michael the Archangel,
Defend us in battle.
Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray;
And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host—
By the Divine Power of God—
Cast into hell, Satan and all the evil spirits,
Who roam throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls.³⁴

[Augustine and Honest Prayer]

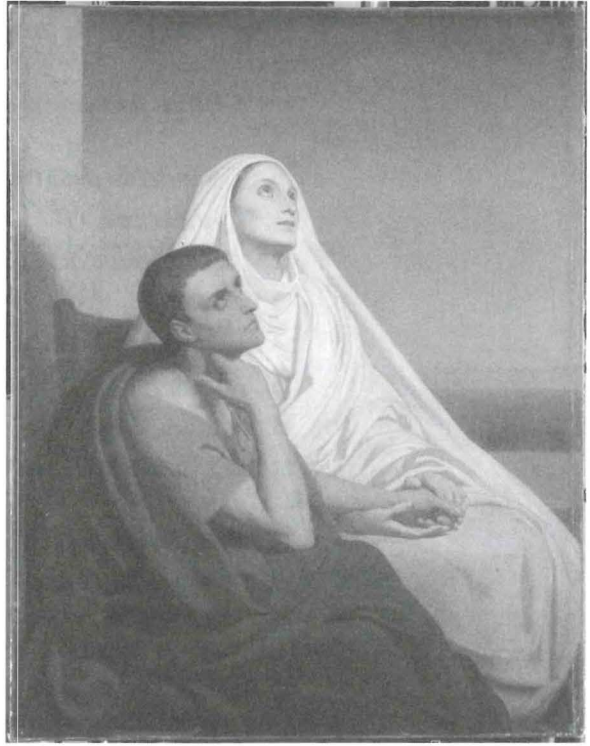
Augustine and Honest Prayer



Famously Augustine prayed as a young Christian “Lord grant me chastity—but not yet!” While this is indeed humorous, Anthony Bloom offers a helpful reflection on the importance of honest prayer. Bloom asks, “How much does my prayer, or the words I use when I turn to God, express my whole being? Or, how much effort am I making to pray for the right thing, while I still long for the wrong thing?”

See A. Bloom, “The Life of Prayer,” *ThTo* 61 (2004): 26–40, at 33.

Ary Scheffer (1795–1858).
*St. Augustine and his Mother
 St. Monica*. Oil on canvas.
 Louvre, Paris, France. (Credit:
 © RMN-Grand Palais / Art
 Resource, NY)



NOTES

1. See B. Wold, “Apotropaic Prayer and the Matthean Lord’s Prayer,” in *Das Böse, der Teufel und Dämonen—Evil, the Devil, and Demons* (ed. J. Dochorn; S. Rudnig-Zelt, and B. Wold; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014) 101–12; cf. A. Paphthomas, “A Greek Papyrus Amulet from the Duke Collection with Biblical Excerpts,” *BASP* 41 (2014): 93–113; J. E. Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Key evidence comes from P.Schoyen 16; P.Oxy.LX 4010; P.Oxy. XVI (208); BGU III 954 (no. 15); P.Duk.Inv.778; PGM 2:235n.04; P.Koln IV 171; P. Koln VIII 336; P.Ant. II 54; P.Vindob. L. 91; *Princ* II 107; *P.land*. I 6. Most of these come from the 4th–6th centuries CE.

2. See E. de Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchments, Ostraca, and Tablets Written with Biblical Texts in Greek and Used as Amulets: A Preliminary List,” in *Early Christian Manuscripts* (ed. T. J. Kraus and T. Nicklas; Boston: Brill, 2010) 145–90, at 153.

3. So Calvin writes, “Some people have split this petition into two. This is wrong: for the nature of the subject makes it manifest, that it is one and the same petition” (*Commentary on Matthew*; <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31.html>).

4. As noted in M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *NIB* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995) 87–505, at 205.

5. Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 205; see also E. Lohmeyer, *The Lord’s Prayer* (trans. J. Bowden; London: Collins, 1965) 192.

6. Cyprian, in *Tertullian, Cyprian and Origen: On the Lord’s Prayer* (trans. A. Stewart-Sykes; New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004) 84.

7. Tertullian, in *On the Lord's Prayer* (trans. Stewart-Sykes), 48.
8. "On the Sermon on the Mount, Book II," *New Advent*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/16012.htm>.
9. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 251.
10. Tertullian, *On the Lord's Prayer* (trans. Stewart-Sykes), 48.
11. Hagner, *Matthew*, 151.
12. C. Spicq, "peirazō," *TLNT* 3:82.
13. *Ibid.*, 3:83.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 3:86.
16. See Origen, in *On the Lord's Prayer* (trans. Stewart-Sykes), 419.
17. See J. Fitzmyer, "And Lead Us Not into Temptation," *Bib* 84/2 (2003): 259–73, at 262.
18. Fitzmyer offers several more examples; see 1 Chr 21:1; Dan 1:1–2 (p. 262).
19. C. Stuhlmueller, "Deutero-Isaiah," in *Jerome Bible Commentary* (ed. R. E. Brown; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968) 366–86, at 373, as cited in Fitzmyer, "Lead Us Not into Temptation," 263.
20. Fitzmyer, "Lead Us Not into Temptation," 263; see similarly U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 323.
21. Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer* (trans. Stewart-Sykes) 84. Note the similarities here with Calvin: "God not only gives us up to the will of Satan, to kindle the flame of lust, but employs him as the agent of his wrath, when he chooses to drive men head-long to destruction, he may be also said, in a way peculiar to himself, to lead them into temptation" (https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/comment3/comm_vol31/htm/ix.liv.htm).
22. Cyprian, in *On the Lord's Prayer* (trans. Stewart-Sykes), 85.
23. *Ibid.*, 48. And again, "Does the Savior and Lord of all wish His friends to be cowardly? Are they to be lazy and abject, and in earnest rather in avoiding the contest than in winning renown?" (47).
24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1863) 62.
25. Dunn, "Prayer," *DJG* 619–25, at 623; cf. J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 292; Fitzmyer, "Lead Us Not into Temptation," 272; Hagner, *Matthew* 151–52. Cf. Cyprian (#26), 85.
26. C. Blomberg, *Matthew* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 120.
27. Origen, *On the Lord's Prayer* (trans. Stewart-Sykes), 196. Later he refers to being "engulfed by testing" (197). Augustine explains that the prayer does not mean that we should not be *touched* by the fire of examination; only that this fire not *consume* us (*Sermon on the Mount*, 2.9.32).
28. B. Chilton, "Jesus' Prayer and the War of the Worlds," *Living Pulpit* 1/4 (1992): 38.
29. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:615.

30. K. Stendahl, "Your Kingdom Come," *Cross Currents* 32/3 (1982): 257–66, at 265. About Matt 6:13, Stendahl also offers this paraphrase: "And see to it that we are not tested beyond our strength, for we know that Satan can destroy us—unless you rescue us out of his ferocious grip" (266).

31. Barth, *Prayer*, 62.

32. W. Willimon and S. Hauerwas, *Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer & the Christian Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002) 94.

33. See R. Hammerling, *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2010) 47–48.

34. "Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel," <https://www.ccel.org/node/4502>.