

The Eighteen Benedictions

E Bruce Brooks

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

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I here propose an accretion model for the formation of the Amidah, the eighteen daily synagogue prayers. I accept the Cairo Genizah or “Palestinian” text.

Scenario

In outline form, we have:

#1-3. Praise of God

These three are general, and thus chronologically indeterminate:¹

#4-5. Request for wisdom, repentance for shortcomings

#6. Asking forgiveness

These three are more suggestive of some external disturbance:

#7-9. Deliverance in a time of crisis; affliction and want

These suggest a crisis, quite plausibly the Jewish War, 68-72:

#10-11. Plea for ingathering of the scattered and the restoration of judgeship

The post-70 preservation of judgeship is credited to Yoḥanan ben Zakkai,² and these prayers may thus come from the first Yabneh generation, c70-c80.

#12. Curse on “minim”

Added after c80, in the second Yabneh generation under Gamaliel II (b.Berakot 28b)³

#13. For proselytes

#14 . Plea for Jerusalem and the Temple

For proselytes, see below. #14, like Barnabas 16:4, may imply a Temple rebuilding scheme such as preceded and perhaps precipitated the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135); Bar Kokhba was recognized as the Messiah by the leading figure Rabbi Aqiba.

15. Plea for compassion

In general tone, compatible with 14, and perhaps best grouped with it; see below.

16-18. Prayer for Jerusalem, thanks to God, peace on Israel

Peace, not Messianism, was the theme *after* the revolt, when the Rabbinic center moved far from Jerusalem, to Usha in northern Galilee.

¹Finkelstein **Development 2** finds that some prayers are pre-Maccabean, cf Instone-Brewer **Eighteen** 25f). Bickerman **Civic** 165f is somewhat similar to the restoration proposed here.

²See Brooks **Yoḥanan**, with references to the Mishnah.

³So Torrey **Documents** 98-105, Martyn **History** 46-66. Modern apologetics (eg Langer **Cursing**) focus on mediaeval matters, and ignore the Talmud and the late 1c and early 2c Christian and Roman testimony to an “expulsion from the synagogues” (the new Christian cult of martyrdom is apparent in Revelation). For the other target of #12, see Häberl **Epiphanius**.

The last three, #16-18, with the first three, #1-3, have been thought to be the original Amidah, with other prayers inserted between them according to the occasion. More likely, #1-3 and #16-18, the least circumstantial groups of three prayers, were at some point seen as an acceptable substitute for the recitation of the entire set.

The Proselyte Question

This passage in Matthew has proved puzzling to scholars, who detect no evidence for Jewish proselytism in this period:⁴

Mt 23:15. But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of Gehenna than yourselves.

Zeitlin has noted a requirement for the baptism of Gentile proselytes at a synod of 65.⁵ The existence of a regulation proves the existence of a practice, shortly before the c68 date here assigned to Matthew.⁶ Proselytes to Judaism figure in Amidah 13:

13. To the righteous proselytes, may your compassion be lavished, and give to us a good reward with those who do your will. Blessed are you, Lord, trust of the righteous.

where they are regarded as among the community of the righteous. There is no sign of current proselytizing;; the sense is one of stabilization.

In the period over which Mark was composed, the Jesus movement first ignored, then accepted, and finally emphasized, the conversion of Gentiles.⁷ Apart from its theological divergences, this energy of expansion made the Jesus movement a threat to Rabbinic Judaism. There may well have been a corresponding Jewish effort of expansion. Of that effort, Schoeps has provided evidence from Jewish sources.⁸ Matthew can then be seen as giving corroborating testimony from the Christian side.

A Symmetry Question

Gamaliel. If the daily prayers were expanding in his time, his request for another:

b.Berakot 28b. "Is there one among you who can word a benediction relating to the Minim?" Samuel the Small arose and composed it.

makes sense. And following the curse on the apostates (as the Jesus folk were viewed) it would make sense to add a prayer, for previous converts who had remained faithful: those now being banished distinguished from the rest of those earlier welcomed.

The remaining Benedictions easily form clusters of three, if we follow Babylonian practice and regard #14 as two.

⁴Montefiore 2/300, Beare 453-454, Gundry 461, Hagner 2/668f, Davies 3/288.

⁵Zeitlin **Halaka**. Details are unclear, and the text may be corrupt, but that proselytes were discussed at that time, and at that level, seems to be established.

⁶Gundry **Matthew** 599-609; Gundry **Date**. I recognize two later interpolations, one being the post-70 adaptation in Mt 22:6-7 (Brooks **Acts-Luke** 152), the other being the apostolic adjustment in Mt 16:18-19 (Brooks **Apostolic** 196).

⁷Brooks **Time Depth**.

⁸Schoeps **Proselytes**.

I end by suggesting addition in triplets:

1-2-3, 4-5-6, 7-8-9, 10-11-12+13, 14A-14B-15, 16-17-18

(with #13, part of a diptych with #12, being the one seeming exception) as a major formative device. Grouping in threes is familiar in the Hebrew Scriptures.⁹

The Lord's Prayer. As for the borrowing of wording from the daily prayers (then common to Jesus sect members and other Jews) to form the Lord's Prayer,¹⁰ the present suggestion provides for Prayer #3 being sufficiently early to have been available to Luke (c66) for that purpose.

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⁹As in the three preliminary callings of Samuel, 1 Sam 3:3-8. Liturgical triplets also exist (the Amidah itself is recited thrice daily, though only twice on the Sabbath). As for the six triplets of the final Eighteen, once that number was reached, might they not have been thought to evoke the six days of Creation, facilitating closure at that point? And is not the stabilization of the prayers after Bar Kokhba a counterpart of the closing of the Mishnah in the same period?

¹⁰Webber *Urban* 141.