BOOK DESCRIPTION:

PRAYER IN THE PERIOD OF
THE TANNAIM AND AMORAIM

by

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Since the standard work of Israel Elbogen in 1913, no comprehensive study in the realm of Jewish liturgy in the Talmudic period has appeared. The book under review attempts to fill this gap. There is ample reason for this: since 1913, not only have methods of research changed but also the very discoveries in the field of early Jewish liturgy have increased. For the first time, original documents from the Second Temple period have come to light, and while these liturgical texts of the Dead Sea community are not typical of the Judaism of their time they still show early beginnings of Jewish liturgy which might have developed in a similar manner in other Jewish communities. The next discoveries date from nearly a thousand years later, but are still several centuries older than any previously known sources. They are synagogue documents of the late Talmudic period, and among these discoveries is the complete prayer book of Gaon Sa'adia.

On the question of method, the greatest significance must be attributed to form-criticism, and the book under review is the first attempt to throw new light on the subject of early Jewish liturgy by the methods of modern form-criticism. Admittedly a whole series of significant individual studies in this sphere has appeared since 1913, but the methods followed are very varied, and mostly inadequate. Textual criticism, for example, which is very important element in attempting to unearth an original text, would fail to help in the case of early Jewish liturgy, because we are dealing here with an oral tradition, which was certainly not written down during the entire Talmudic period. One will be well advised not to seek any single type of text from which all later recensions are derived, but rather to reckon with a plurality from the earliest period. In general, one must, in the case of liturgical texts, be careful in speaking of later additions and modifications when one comes across repetitions, resumption of themes already treated, and the like.

The book under review is based on a series of pieces of research in various aspects of Jewish prayer in the Talmudic period, originally submitted as a thesis. Supervisors of this research work were Professors E. E. Urbach and Ch. Schirmann, respectively the two greatest authorities of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the fields of Talmud and of Jewish religious poetry and liturgy.

In the preparation of the whole as a book, the author added an *ntroductory chapter*, "The Obligatory Prayers, their Nature, Origin and Content", which gives a synopsis of the whole field under review, and has as its theme the arrangement of "the prayer, its nature, origin and content". This service of prayer, which had already crystallised during the Second Temple period, became, after the destruction of the Temple, a genuine alternative to the Temple cult, able to maintain itself independent of place and priesthood,

The development of the prayers and the problem of the original text
(Chapter 2)

Jewish prayers were not created in the study rooms of the rabbis. They came into existence spontaneously in the synagogues and gatherings of the congregations, which explains the great richness in forms and contents. Only later were they collected by the rabbis and made obligatory. It was not until the third century that there was a fixed order of prayers, but even in that period there was no universally identical, or even definitely prescribed, wording; only the sequence of various prayer parts was established, with fixed opening and closing formulae and a fixed order of prayer contents. It must be stated, in opposition to L. Finkelstein and others, that in the Talmudic period not only was there not yet any authoritative and obligatory prayer text for all congregations, but also there was plenty of room for "free prayer". In the Talmud there is a fixed wording for only a few prayers, mostly those for rare occasions, whose wording was fixed so that it could be more easily memorised. The process of development from free prayer to fixed wording may be observed in the Talmud by the repeated summons to express certain thoughts or phrases without fail in certain prayers. Another factor contributing to the establishment of the wording was that a particular paraphrase which had become fixed and was popular would be taken over again and again into other parts of the prayer as well. This double phenomenon of free paraphrasing and the fixing of individual structures, which is typical of Jewish prayer in the Talmudic period, has also been confirmed by scholars who have studied early Christian liturgy.

The patterns of the liturgical Berakhah and their origin (Chapter 3)

It is noticeable in the Blessings *(Berakhot)* that they begin by praising God in the second person *(barukh attah JHWH* – Blessed art Thou, O

God) and very often continue in the third person. As this form is already to be found in the Qumran texts, it is certainly old. The origin of all these blessings is to be sought in the old biblical formula: *barukh JHWH ... asher ...* (Blessed is God ... who ...). After the Name of God, attributes of God appear, as is also the case in the later *Berakhah (Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam* – our God, King of the world). This formula, which in the Bible always stands at the beginning of a prayer, appears in the Second Temple period also as the closing formula of a prayer in the 'Thou' form and followed by a participle. It is probably from here that it also came to the beginning of the prayer, mostly in the 'Thou' form, although the continuation, which is composed in the 'He' form, was not altered. The few exceptions, which also show a 'Thou' form in the continuation, are cited and explained by the author.

The 'Ye' form in prayer (Chapter 4)

Only in giving a blessing to others, or in an invitation to others to take part in one's prayer, is the 'Ye' form conceivable in Jewish prayer. The normal form is 'We', in which the prayer leader includes himself as "ambassador of the congregation". So we find the 'Ye' form in the priest's blessing in the Temple and in the rabbi's speech before the congregation. All other "Ye" passages which appear must be examined to see whether they have been taken over from the Temple service. This is the case, for example, in the Fast Liturgy as it is laid down in Mishnah tractate *Taanit* II. The blessing after the benediction was here originally spoken not by the prayer leader but by the priest.

A further problem is posed by the 'Ye' form at the beginning of the grace after meals when the table fellowship consists of three or more people, in that the one praying invites those sitting at table with him, in the 'Ye' form, to join him in prayer. This grace is probably a successor to the blessing after communal meals of the old *Chavurah* which, as can be seen from the prayers of the Dead Sea community, was organised in tens, hundreds and thousands. Presumably the prayer of the group of ten was transmitted to the rabbinic grace of the group of three. The age of this prayer is shown by the fact that it applies the address *Adonai* (my lords) in a secular way to the table fellowship, and is not a paraphrase of the Divine Name, as would later have been the only conceivable possibility. This stage of development is also reflected in the Qumran Scrolls.

Prayers in the Temple (Chapter 5)

Even if the Temple cult was not originally connected with prayers in any form, by the Second Temple period definite forms of song and prayer were developing, which later remained as part of the sphere of popular culture rather than as integral parts of the Temple cult itself. Several

"Temple Prayers" have come down to us: the priest's blessing, the confession of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, the canticles of the Levites and the *Hallel* (song of praise) on individual feast days. All these are part of the *Avodah*, the Temple worship itself. Alongside this, there is also a list of other elements of prayer which do not show this direct connection with the service of sacrifice: the "short prayer" of the High Priest when he leaves the Holy of Holies, his readings from the Torah on the Day of Atonement and the eight benedictions that follow it, the morning prayer of the priests, the service of the *ma'amadot* (the 'divisions' of priests) and the special New Year prayers which were said when the *Shofar* was blown. All these prayers show a number of characteristics shared with the prayers of the synagogue, such as the use of the liturgical *Berakhah*. The question of whether the synagogue service has influenced the Temple service here, or vice versa, has not, however, been adequately answered by scholars in the past: the former seems more likely, for in the Temple these prayers have only a very marginal function in the worship and on special occasions. Nevertheless, these prayers received a particular form in the Temple which differed from that in the synagogue service; for example, at least in the earlier period, the Tetragrammaton used to be pronounced in the Temple. All prayers have an antiphonal and responsory character, which gives the people the greater part. In addition there are a number of ceremonial accompaniments to some prayers, which are absent from the synagogue service, e. g. the *Proskynesis* (prostration), the blowing of trumpets and the *Shofar*, processions and so on. Also the priesthood retains a special function in some prayers. Some of the responses, as well as closing formulae of several *Berakhot*, show a decidedly doxological character, while in the synagogue they are kept much shorter and less festive.

Piyyutim of Temple origin (Chapter 6)

A series of *Hosha'not* (intercessions with the stereotyped phrase *Hosha'na*) shows a type which differs in some basic respects from otherwise known *Piyyutim* (synagogue canticles): a) they are composed of a long series of short stereotyped lines which, apart from the word *Hosha'na* at the beginning and end of each line (functioning as response) contain only two or three words, appellations, or such-like; b) they mostly have an alphabetical acrostic and a primitive rhythm, based on the same number of words in each line, and a sort of rhyme achieved by the constant repetition of the same suffix-ending; c) they otherwise show none of the characteristics of the Piyyutim known to us.

Primitive poetry of this sort probably depends on improvisation and has its place in processions. Similar hymns are also found in other cultures and nations at all times as accompaniment to processions. The *Hosha'not* had their place in the procession around the altar at the Feast of Taber-

nacles. This custom did in fact eventually find its way, in a modified form, into the liturgy of the synagogue, but only at a comparatively late date, for at the time of the *Geonim* a procession in the synagogue at the Feast of Tabernacles was still unknown. As the great *Paitanim*, Qalir and Saadia, already knew this type, the *Hosha'not* mentioned can come only from the Second Temple period.

Also related to these *Hosha'not* in all typical characteristics are certain *Selichot* (hymns of penitence), which is not fortuitous, for just as the *Hosha'not* pray for rain at the Feast of Tabernacles, so the *Selichot* belong to the liturgy of the fast days which are called after a long period of drought and also pray for rain. These *Selichot* were also sung during processions in the Second Temple period. Some of them appear as both *Hosha'not* with the response "*Hosha'na*" and with the same content as *Selichot* with the response "*'anenu*" (answer us!).

Private prayer and non-obligatory prayer (Chapter 7)

Between spontaneous private prayer and obligatory communal prayer there stands a large group of non-compulsory prayers which have been incorporated into the service. In contrast to the obligatory ones, these prayers are very diverse in form and have never been so strictly revised, so that here one finds exceptions to the rules. One group of these prayers can be fitted into none of the developed forms. Some produce a *Berakhah* at the end but not at the beginning. Instead of the stereotyped introduction to the compulsory prayer, "*Barukh attah Adonai*", one finds also "*Berikh rachmana*" or "*Barukh ha-maqom*", i.e. forms which were not necessarily composed in the second person and which contain a different designation of God; and this is not only the exception in the case of non-obligatory prayers. Particularly popular in prayers of this type is the formula "*jehi ratson milefanekha adonai elohenu ... she ...*" (if it is your will, O Lord our God ... that ...), which expresses the hesitation of the suppliant to turn to God with a private request. These prayers are mostly short and simple and composed in Aramaic. It is clear that the advice which Jesus gives his disciples about how they should pray, and the *Lord's Prayer* itself (Mt. 6:5f.) express Jesus's predilection for this form of prayer, which he prefers to the formal, polished prayer of the synagogues.

Formal patterns from the law courts in prayer (Chapter 8)

We must also assume to belong to the above-mentioned group of individual prayers a type which uses the form of a trial both in content and in form. We can distinguish here prayers uttered in times of need or imminent peril, confessions of sin and thanksgivings. They all have a similar structure: a) address (usually "*ribbono shel 'olam*" – Lord of the world), without additional descriptions and praises of God; b) presentation of the

facts (introduced by "*galui weyadu'a lefanekha*" – it is manifest and known to you, or "*lifneh kise kevodkha*" – before the throne of your glory) and the plea; c) the request (normally introduced by "*jehi ratson milefanekha*". Part b) is particularly characteristic. Part c) can indeed sometimes be omitted because it can, as a matter of course, be derived from part b). One notices here the frequent bluntness of the demands made of God, and even of the complaints against him. One finds none of the submissiveness of an accused who wants to flatter his judge; the supplicant does not beg for mercy, he demands his rights. This style of prayer can only be understood when one takes into consideration the desperation of the suppliant who faces an imminent catastrophe. The personal nature of such prayers precludes their admission into the obligatory prayer of the congregation. Some thanksgivings, following after a confession of sin, have a similar style. They too are expressed in terms of the language of the law courts.

The regular obligatory prayer of the synagogue (Chapter 9)

The *Amidah*, the prayer of the synagogue *par excellence*, has various sources and parallels. A comparison makes it clear that there existed in the second or third century a series of completely different orders of prayer, or orders of *Berakhot*, which, however, show among themselves various related tendencies. So *Berakhot*, or series of *Berakhot*, were chosen by the rabbis from this abundance and edited into an *Amidah*, thereby merging several *Berakhot* into a single one. Gaps and unevennesses resulting from this can still be identified in the *Amidah* today. On the other hand, the work proceeded in such a way that whole series of prayers which fulfilled the same function in various cycles of prayer were taken over unedited but received different functions in the new *Amidah*. For example, the Prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions of the daily *Amidah*, which was collated from several traditions, seems already to have been fixed before the final editing in Yavneh. However, the Sabbath Prayer of the Seven Benedictions seems not to be an abbreviation of the Prayer of Eighteen Benedictions, but rather an independent tradition of another order of prayer. In the same way, the benedictions of the High Priest and the benedictions after the *Haftarah* (reading from the prophets), both of which contain amongst other things a *Berakhah* which commemorates the holiness of the particular day on which they are said, seem originally to have been parts of the order of prayer for that day. The two *Qedushot (Trishagion)* – the *qedushah deyotzer* and the *qedushah de'amidah* – also seem originally to have been parallel traditions of different groups.

The *Amidah* consists of a series of short and pregnant *Berakhot*, all written in the style of the classical liturgical *Berakhah*. There are few literary decorations. Although they are written in prose, they are mostly in the form of a distich consisting of two parallel parts, not in a rhythm of the

biblical kind. Most of the requests are introduced with a verb in the imperative. Thanksgivings begin, as a rule, with the verb in the perfect in the form. This simple form is frequently extended by the addition of clauses 'Thou' which are intended to make clear the reasons why the request should be granted, often in the form of scriptural quotation. After the remembrances of God's actions in the past, there normally comes the request for help and salvation in the future. Most of this material originates from the popular piety of the congregation gathered in the synagogue: only a few particularly artistically constructed *Berakhot* show that they are the work of individual poets or scholars. To this type belong especially *Berakhot* with a mystical background. The Prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions is as a whole written in the form of a plea "of the servant before his Lord". The eulogies are indeed reserved and the lowliness of the supplicants is not exaggerated. God is addressed as 'Thou' and the relationship between him and the one who prays is described as that of a mutual love, such as exists between father and son, as well as one of dependence and awe.

Prayers from the Beit Midrash (Chapter 10)

A series of prayers have their origin in connection with interpretation of the Bible. It was customary to begin and end the *Derashah* (exposition of Scripture) with a prayer. The opening prayer contained a short thanksgiving to God who had given the Torah to his people. The closing prayer asked for understanding of the Torah or, summing up the *Derashah*, for speedy salvation, the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of Heaven. These prayers contain a series of peculiarities. The traditional *Berakhah* form is completely lacking. As a rule, the 'He' style form is preferred, as in the *Derashah* itself, and the divine Name is paraphrased with expressions like "*barukh ha-maqom*" (blessed is "the Place" – i. e. God), or "*yitbarekh shmo shel ha-qadosh barukh hu*" (the name of the Blessed Holy One be blessed). Only in the formula *jehi ratson*, which is borrowed from private prayer, is "*adonai eloheinu*" (Lord our God) to be found. These characteristics enable us to recognise these prayers even when they have become detached from the *Derashah* and have found their way into the prayer-book, where in fact they have been placed near to the readings. But they are also used when an effort is made for a particularly festive style at the opening or conclusion of the obligatory prayers. Some of the compulsory prayers themselves are doubtless prayers which arose from the Scripture readings. This is also to be assumed of the *'alenu* prayer, which seems to be a revision of an old Temple prayer, originally connected with the creation story which was read three times a day by the *ma'amadoth* ('divisions' of priests). The aim of the reading was to show the God of Israel, who dwells in the Temple in Jerusalem, to be the universal God who created the world. In

order to make this thought clear, the Scripture was interpreted with a related Midrash (commentary). The *'alenu* prayer is the ideal summary for this task.

Categories of prayer and their formal characteristics (Chapter 11)

In the last chapter the author gives an account of the results of the form-criticism method in the various fields of the Jewish synagogue. Form criticism cannot draw up any category on the basis of individual characteristics alone, but has as a precondition an analysis of the stylistic forms as a whole. The categories which were drawn up are not mutually exclusive; a precise differentiation between the individual groups cannot be systematically exact, but has only a practical and functional character.

The greatest agreement and uniformity came about in the field of the compulsory prayer in the synagogue. It is composed according to strict rules. Even though it has been compiled from the most varied and diverse stores of tradition, all elements which conflicted with those rules were eliminated when it was united as a single whole. The most important of these rules, which have been crystallised in the course of time, are: no paraphrases are used for *Adonai;* the 'Thou' style is used throughout; the leader in prayer does not address the assembly in the second person; Aramaic is not used; all requests are opened only with the verbal form of the imperfect; and so on. It is only here that the "liturgical *Berakhah*" and the series of *Berakhot* occur and have their fixed position, while the composition of all *Berakhot* takes place according to a completely unified pattern.

But other groups of synagogue prayers also have their particular characteristics, as was shown in previous chapters. When one and the same characteristic appears in several groups, as for example the formula *jehi ratson* in private prayer and in prayer of the law-court style, then we have primarily to consider the mutual dependence or influence between the groups. It turns out that when such sections are taken over they are adapted to the new style, e. g. the second person changes to the third when the *jehi ratson* formula is taken over from private prayer into the prayer of the *beit ha-midrash*. After the fixing of the various forms, all elements which were now acceptable only here, such as the "liturgical *Berakhah*", were excluded from all other prayers which did not belong to the compulsory prayer.

This process of standardisation, however, varied in speed and consistency in different areas. It begins in Babylon; in ancient Palestinian ritual a far greater freedom and richness of variation was preserved. The evolution of a fixed *Siddur* (order of prayer) is therefore the work of the scholars in Babylon, and it was completed in the Gaonic period.

In the Appendix to the book, there are several indices, a bibliography, a list of abbreviations and a 15-page summary in English. The author has taken pains to substantiate what he writes with a profusion of examples

from Jewish liturgy. A list of all those passages quoted, some of which are listed in the book in the most varied versions and with variants, is to be found in the second index. This book by Joseph Heinemann is the standard work on early Jewish synagogue liturgy, which satisfies all requirements of modern scholarship and has utilised the great abundance of new discoveries in this field. No-one in the future who wants to be informed about this field, or who wants to work further in it, either in research into individual phenomena of Jewish liturgy itself, or in the field of contemporaneous early Christian liturgy, can afford to overlook this book.

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Summary by Dr. Michael Krupp

(translated from German by Niki Crane)

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11 Prayer in the Period of the Tannaim and the Amoraim: Its Nature and its Patterns, Jerusalem 1964, 2nd edn 1966; English translation: Prayer in the TalmudForms and Patterns, Berlin/New York 1977. 6. the basis of the particular stylistic features which they displayed, arguing that some forms appeared more congruent with the Temple, others with the nascent synagogue, the law court, the house of study, and so on. Prayer in the Period of the Tannaim and the Amoraim. Joseph Heinemann. 4Q372 1: A text about Joseph.Â In the early phases of research, the scrolls - especially the best-preserved manuscripts from the first cave discovered - were considered to be texts of a remote sectarian (Essene) community living in the buildings of Qumran. Texts found in Cave 4 have changed our understanding [Show full abstract] considerably.This article discusses recent developments in research on the rule documents. The Community Rule and the Damascus Document reveal a wider socio-religious movement with small-group gatherings as its basic structure. The rule documents are not handbooks of any individual community and