

Prayer Texts in the Bible

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1. The Dead Sea Scrolls: approximately 900 manuscripts, most only preserved in very fragmentary and damaged state, found 1948–1956 in caves near the Dead Sea

The “library” of a Jewish sect, perhaps the Essenes described by Josephus, Philo and Pliny: Manuscripts were written *c.* 150 BC –70 CE (site of Qumran destroyed in Jewish Revolt)

A large part of this collection is prayers and psalms; over two hundred texts, many of them that we had never known before. There are also many copies of the biblical Psalter.

2. Psalms:

A collection of about 35 **Thanksgiving Psalms** (*Hodayot*), modeled on the biblical psalms of thanksgiving;

⁶I thank you, O my God, that you have acted wonderfully with dust,
and with a vessel of clay you have worked so very powerfully.
What am I that ⁷you have [inst]ructed me in the secret counsel of your truth,
and that you have given me insight into your wondrous deeds,
that you have put thanksgiving into my mouth,
praise upon my tongue,
⁸and made the utterance of my lips as the foundation of jubilation
so that I might sign of your kindness (*hesed*)
and reflect on your strength ⁹all the day?
Continually I will bless your name,
and I will recount your glory in the midst of humankind.
In your great goodness (*tov*) ¹⁰my soul delights.....
In your anger are punishing judgments,
¹²But in your goodness is abundant forgiveness,
and your compassion (*rahamim*) is for all the children of your good favor.
For you have made known to them the secret counsel of your truth
¹³and given them insight into your wonderful mysteries

3. **The Biblical Psalter:** unclear how many scrolls are “full” Psalters; some might be smaller collections or ‘prayerbooks;’ order of the psalms can vary

Peshet/ Commentary on the Psalms: psalms read as prophecy

4Q171 Commentary on Psalms 37:

The steps of the man are confirmed by the Lord and He delights in all his ways;

Interpreted, this concerns the Priest, the Teacher of Righteousness whom God chose to stand before Him, for He established him to build for Himself the congregation of ...

4. Collections of prayers:

Prayers for each day of the week (4Q504)

Rubrics: 'Prayer for the fourth day.' 'Prayer for Sabbath'

Beginning: 'Remember, O Lord'

Narrative retelling: over the seven days, goes from Adam to the exile

e.g. 'Adam, our father, you fashioned in the image of your Glory . . . the breath of life you blew into his nostrils and intelligence and knowledge . . . in the Garden of Eden'

Petition: 'have pity on us ... forgive our iniquity and our sin ... strengthen our heart to do ...'

Blessing: '**[Blessed be] the Lord who taught us**' Communal response 'amen, amen'

(Prayers for each day of the month: morning and evening (4Q503)

Rubrics: "On the x-day of the month in the evening, they shall bless and answer and say ...";

'When the sun goes forth to illumine the earth they shall bless and answer and say ...'

Beginning: '**Blessed be the God of Israel who did**'

Conclusion: '**Blessed be you/your name, O God of Israel**'.

Then someone (perhaps the priest) addresses the congregation directly with the words 'Peace be upon you, Israel' (cf. Pss. 125.5, 128.6).

Prayer for Sabbath from 4Q504

"Song of praises for the day of Sabbath.

Praise [the Lord forever; Bless] the name of his holiness continually.

Pro[claim his praises from day to day] all the angels of the holy firmament and [all the waters above] the heavens, and all its depths, [all fountains of the] great [abyss]....

Give thanks to the Lord all his creatures continually for[ever and ever]

[Bless the name] of his holiness; Sing to God

5. Addressing God in prayer:

Prayer of Joseph: (4Q372)

And for all this, Joseph [was put] into the hands of strangers to consume his strength and break his bones until the time of his end ... he cried to the mighty God that he should save him from their hands. He said, 'My father and my God do not abandon me to the hands of the nations (4Q372 l 15–16).

6. **Prayers inserted in narratives:**

Genesis Apocryphon (retelling in Aramaic of Abraham/Sarah story)

Sarah had been taken away from me by force. That night I prayed, pleaded in my distress, while my tears flowed: Blessed are you, O God Most High, my Lord, for all ages. For you are Lord and Master of everything and rule all the kings of the earth ... now I lodge a complaint before you ... Do justice for me .. that during this night may he not be able to defile my wife

7. **Song of Miriam (4Q365)**

1. you despised [
2. for the majesty of [
3. You are great, a deliverer[
4. the hope of the enemy has perished and is praised[
5. they perished in the might waters, the enemy[
6. Extol the one who raises up , a ransom[
7. The one who does gloriously [

