

**Ἐπιούσιος——A NEW PROPOSAL FOR
ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE POETIC
STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER
(MATT. 6:9B-13)**

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I. Introduction

It seems strange that in such a familiar, often memorized and seemingly straight-forward prayer, Christians are likely to encounter one of the most enigmatic words in the Scriptures. After nearly two millennia this Greek word ἐπιούσιος still remains a subject of debate today. Unfortunately, despite numerous attempts, brilliant and creative as they may be, no conclusive argument has led to a satisfying solution to the issue. The problem we face, in my opinion, seems to originate in methodology rather than the lack of examples from extra-biblical materials in either before or after the first century CE. In the search for the meaning for ἐπιούσιος, scholars often have overlooked the literary structure of the Lord's Prayer in favour of formulating conjectures solely on the basis of etymology. The primary task of this paper, therefore, is to address this inadequacy, by means of implementing a detailed top-down analysis of the poetic features of the Lord's Prayer.

Using the framework of relevance theory, the main thrust of this paper thus lies in its explanatory force in providing a theoretical account for the significance of ἐπιούσιος.

II. Boundary, Literary Sections, and Parallelism

The conventional way of interpreting ἐπιούσιος is characterized as the "bottom-up" approach. This means that one starts by examining the etymology of the word and then find the co-text (i.e. the surrounding discourse of the word). By contrast the top-down approach will be utilized in this paper. One starts by closely examining the literary structure of the Lord's Prayer found in Matthew 6 (and a considerably shorter version in Luke 11:2-4). The first task is delimiting the perimeter of the focused text. Matthew's text is chosen as the primary text for investigation over Luke's on account of its completeness and consistency in the earliest textual traditions.¹ The familiar ascription at the close of the prayer ὅτι σοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. ἀμήν is a later scribal addition and thus not part of the original form.² The length of the prayer, only five short verses or 57 words, can be explained by Jesus' teaching against long and pretentious prayers in public in previous verses.³

¹ The basic contours of Matthew's text, with a few exceptions in minor variants, is well supported by many of the major ancient witnesses, for example, \aleph BD. Luke's account by contrast contains several latter scribal additions in attempt to harmonize with Matthew's text.

² The ascription, along with a few other variant ascriptions, is supported only by latter manuscripts (with the exception of the *Didache*). It was probably, as Metzger suggests, influenced by 1 Chronicles 29:11-13 to adapt to latter liturgical usage of the prayer. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th Rev. Ed.), 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 14.

³ Word count is based on the text, without considering the variants, of Eberhard Nestle et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

At first glance this prayer is short but to the point. The opening phrase in Matthew 6:9 contains an introductory remark for a new discourse on prayer, Οὕτως οὖν προσεύχεσθε ὑμεῖς. The prayer ends in verse 13 because Ἐὰν γὰρ indicated a beginning of another new discourse, containing a brief interpretive remark on the previous verses, namely, an emphasis on people's need for forgiving one another.

With Πάτερ ἡμῶν, the prayer begins addressing God as Our Father. Immediately following is the phrase ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, an article with a prepositional phrase which describes πάτερ ἡμῶν as one who is in heaven. The prayer then moves to petitions. The first three petitions are short yet they exhibit some prominent poetic features. At first glance, it may seem obvious to identify the parallel structure in the first three petitions (Diagram I): the three subjects, τὸ ὄνομά σου, ἡ βασιλεία σου, and τὸ θέλημά σου, correspond to the three verbs expressed in the aorist imperative, ἀγιασθήτω, ἐλθέτω, and γενηθήτω. Now there are different kinds of parallel relations embedded in these three petitions. First is the syntactic parallelism. Each petition closely follows the word order, verb-article-noun-pronoun. Second is the phonological parallelism. Each petition ends with the personal pronoun σου. The repetition of σου in paratactic style (i.e. the way of linking these three petitions through juxtaposition rather than through the use of the conjunctives such as καὶ and δέ)⁴ may have created what some literary critics call euphonious effects.⁵ Another feature of phonological parallelism is the fact that each petition contains nine syllables.⁶

⁴ Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 157.

⁵ Paul Werth, "Roman Jakobson's Verbal Analysis of Poetry," *Journal of Linguistics* 12 (1975): 64-65, 68. See also Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 10-11; and Adrian Pilkington, *Poetic Effects: A Relevance Theory Perspective, Pragmatics & Beyond*, New Series 75 (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000), 16-21.

⁶ ἀ-για-σ-θή-τω-τὸ-ὄ-νο-μά-σου (9); ἐλ-θέ-τω-ἡ-βα-σι-λει-α-σου (9); γε-νη-θή-τω-τὸ-θέ-λη-μά-σου (9).

Parallelism is one of the most important features of poetic structure. Professor Adele Berlin from the University of Maryland has done some extensive work on the dynamics of parallelism. In her monograph which appeared in 1985, she was among the first biblical scholars to apply Roman Jakobson's linguistic insights and literal criticism specifically to the poetic features of the Hebrew Bible. According to Jakobson, "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination."⁷ By equivalence is meant stressing the sameness of comparable terms.⁸ In Jakobson's analysis, the equivalence often refers to resemblance in sound patterns (e.g., metre, rhyme, alliteration, etc.), syntactic parallelisms, and grammatical categories and classifications recovered by linguistic analysis.⁹ Borrowing Jakobson's ideas, Berlin's research on biblical parallelism is not restricted to poetic or wisdom literature in the canon, but inclusive of many narrative passages in the Hebrew Scripture. She has come to the conclusion that "parallelism is to be equated with the poetic function."¹⁰

At the end of verse 10 one encounters an adverbial subordinate clause ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς modifying the verb γενηθήτω. ὡς is to be taken as a discourse disjunctive marker which, with its subordinate clause concludes the three petitions concerning our heavenly father on the basis of the evidence in the following verse which suggests a deliberate shift of concern to the petitioner (ἡμῖν). The petition of bread, therefore, marks the beginning of the second section (Section B) of the prayer, and, the previous three petitions can now be identified as the first (Section A).

⁷ Roman Jakobson, "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry," *Lingua* 21 (1968): 603. For summary of Jakobson's analysis, see for example, Pilkington, *Poetic Effects*, 16-20.

⁸ Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 156.

⁹ Pilkington, *Poetic Effects*, 17.

¹⁰ Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 7, 140. See also Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language [The Proceedings of an Inter-Disciplinary Conference on Style Held at Indiana University, 1958.]*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge, MA: John Wiley & Sons; New York, London: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology,

Another disjunctive feature is the change of word order in Section B. Notice in the first section (Section A), the verbs are uniformly placed at the beginning of each petition, whereas in Section B the object of the petition, the bread, comes first. Also, the longest simple sentence is found in verse 11 as well as the first occurrence of a noun in the accusative case.

In verse 12 word order returns to the same format found in three petitions in Section A: καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν. The phenomenon that characterizes the resemblance in word order is an example of syntactic parallelism.¹¹ It marks a new section of the literal structure of the prayer, because the person praying is now petitioning God to forgive his/her *own* debts. Notice how the use of conjunctive καὶ instead of juxtaposition marks a change in paratactic style previously employed in Sections A and B. This petition is modified by a subordinate clause: ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν. This ὡς, like the previous one we encountered in verse 10, functions as another disjunctive marker, thereby concluding the third section (Section C) of the literary unit in the Lord's Prayer.

The fourth and last section (Section D) of the literary unit of the prayer exhibits some remarkable poetic features. Beginning in verse 13, the petitions to God concerning our dealing with temptation and evil in this world are phrased in two antithetical statements καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ. The two oppositional prepositions, εἰς and ἀπό, intensify the antithesis already expressed in the verbs "Do not lead...but deliver..." (Diagram I)¹² and are reinforced by the two conjunctives, καὶ and ἀλλὰ. Notice

1960), 358. Jakobson puts it slightly differently: "One may state that in poetry similarity is superimposed on contiguity" in Jakobson, "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry," 602.

¹¹ Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 150-51.

¹² Note that hortatory subjunctive μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς vs. the aorist imperative ῥῦσαι.

the syntactic parallelism here: the word order in this section exhibits the same patterns as in all previous sections except for Section B in verse 11. Another closer look reveals another parallel structure between the two petitions: both have twelve syllables, another case of phonological parallelism.¹³

At this point I wish to return to look at more parallel structures of the prayer. I have noted earlier that in Section A, ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς functions as modifier of Πάτερ ἡμῶν. Similarly in Section B, the petition for bread, τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν is modified by the following τὸν ἐπιούσιον (v. 11). In other words, both ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and τὸν ἐπιούσιον serve as modifiers for the proceeding nouns. Because the prepositional phrase ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς is preceded by an article ὁ, it functions as an adjective to Πάτερ ἡμῶν (thus translated as "Our heavenly Father").¹⁴ This construction parallels that of τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν...τὸν ἐπιούσιον, the phrase which is now commonly translated as "our daily bread."

III. The Problem

This brings one to the core of the discussion, in search of the meaning of τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον (v. 11). In the top-down approach, one has now reached the "bottom" where he must engage discussions proposed by etymologists. Unlike the

¹³ καὶ-μῆ-εἰ-σε-νέγ-κης-ἡ-μάς-εἰς-πει-ρασ-μόν (12) and ἀλ-λά-ῤῥυ-σαι-ἡ-μάς-ἄ-πὸ-τοῦ-πο-νη-ροῦ (12). For Greek syllable division, see A. M. Devine and Laurence D. Stephens, *The Prosody of Greek Speech* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 33.

¹⁴ For a brief treatment on attributive apposition in a simple sentence, see, e.g., Georg Benedikt Winer, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek, Regarded as a Sure Basis for New Testament Exegesis*, trans. W. F. Moulton, 3d rev. (9th English) ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1882), 657ff.

common phrases such as ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, the word ἐπιούσιον (or ἐπιούσιος in its nominative case) occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in Luke's account of the Lord's Prayer (11:3). The unelided iota of the preposition ἐπί in the word had initially puzzled many etymologists who attempted to solve the problem. This puzzle can be easily dismissed on the basis of the following reasons. First, there are numerous examples of Greek words containing unelided iota before vowels (e.g., ἐπιετής, ἐπιορκεῖν).¹⁵ Second, it is an indisputable fact that "ἐπιούσιος" does not appear anywhere at any period of Greek literature.¹⁶

In his treatise on prayer, Origen makes a convincing and well-received comment:¹⁷

We must now also grasp the meaning of ἐπιούσιος. And the first thing to be realized is this, that the word ἐπιούσιος is not used by any of the Greeks, or philosophers, nor is it in general use in the customary vocabulary of ordinary people, but it seems to have been invented by the Evangelists. At least, both Matthew and Luke agree about it without any difference at all and use it.¹⁸

¹⁵ Examples are from Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, trans. William Urwick, 4th English (with supplement) ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), 239.

¹⁶ Based on the search in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG below; University of California, Irvine, 1972-2004).

¹⁷ See for example, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 376.

¹⁸ τί δὲ καὶ τὸ "ἐπιούσιον," ἤδη κατανοητέον. πρῶτον δὲ τοῦτο ἰστέον, ὅτι ἡ λέξις ἢ "ἐπιούσιον" παρ' οὐδενὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων οὔτε τῶν σοφῶν ὠνόμασται οὔτε ἐν τῇ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν συνηθειᾷ γένηται, ἀλλ' εἴκοι πεπλάσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν εὐαγγελιστῶν. Origenes Theol. *De Oratione* 27.7.1-4. Translation is provided by Eric George Jay and Origen, *Origen's Treatise on Prayer: Translation and Notes with an Account of the Practice and Doctrine of Prayer from New Testament Times to Origen* (London: S.P.C.K., 1954), 170-71.

If this is true, what prompted the Evangelists to coin the word ἐπιούσιος, as Origen suggests, under a unique circumstance such as the Lord's Prayer? It seems to me that according to the above observations, its prominent position in the prayer deserves our attention. A closer examination reveals the outstanding fact that the word ἐπιούσιος is the 29th word in the prayer of 57 words, that is to say, ἐπιούσιος stands exactly in the middle of the Lord's Prayer. Not only this, ἐπιούσιος lies also right in the middle of verse 11. Are these simply coincidences? Could it be possible that Matthew suggested something significant but less obvious?

Perhaps one has asked the wrong question. Suppose one should ask what kind of bread it is in a greater scheme. What could explain the motivation for the Evangelists to coin a new word set aside from ordinary use? Along this line of reasoning there are many commentators who theologize the petition for the bread in the prayer. Commentator Hermann Cremer has included various interpretations suggested by many: some associate the bread with Jesus, drawing heavily from his statement "I am bread of life" in John's Gospel (6:48).¹⁹ Others connect the ἄρτος in Matthew 6:11 with the Showbread in the Old Testament.²⁰ While these suggestions are interesting, their explanations are based on questionable grounds and false assumptions. Hence along theological lines one cannot find a satisfactory answer to the problem.

¹⁹ Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon*, 239-42.

²⁰ 2 Maccabees 1:8 in Codices Sergii. Cited in Adolf Deissmann and A. J. Grieve, *Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), 124.

IV. A Proposal

While prominent position within the literary structure of the Lord's Prayer is undeniable, it remains to this day a tremendous daunting task for any exegete to find the original meaning of ἐπιούσιος. As I argued earlier, τὸν ἐπιούσιον clearly functions as a modifier of τὸν ἄρτον, just like ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς does of πάτερ ἡμῶν. It is in fact an important poetic feature in the prayer, and, in my opinion, holds the key to our understanding of the meaning of ἐπιούσιος.

Let us take the first lines of Section A (v. 9b) and of Section B (v. 11) for a closer look. The parallelism in these two lines does not stop at the functional or semantic level, but continues to further degrees of morphological and syntactic parallelism, namely, the agreement in the prepositions and word order (see Diagram II).²¹ Despite disagreement in case endings perhaps due to the nature of the prayer language,²² the parallelism between πάτερ ἡμῶν and τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν, when

²¹ See Berlin's discussions on morphological and syntactic parallelism. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 32-63.

²² Passive voice is often used in prayer to avoid the divine name; this explains the nominative (instead of accusative) cases of the three petitions. See e.g., Friedrich Wilhelm Blass, Robert Walter Funk, and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. [by] F. Blass and A. Debrunner. *A Translation and Revision of the Ninth-Tenth German Edition, Incorporating Supplementary Notes of A. Debrunner*, by Robert W. Funk (Cambridge; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 130. The verb forms in prayers are usually in aorist imperative (less frequent in the present imperative, e.g., Luke 11:3, τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν in the 27th ed. Nestle-Aland text) or subjunctive (e.g., Matt. 6:13, εἰσενέγκῃς). F. W. Mozley points out that, in the Septuagint and New Testament, God is addressed almost always with aorist imperatives. F. W. Mozley, "Notes on the Biblical Use of the Present and Aorist Imperative," *Journal of Theological Studies* 4 (1903): 279ff. Quoted in Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion, Oxford Classical Monographs* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1997), 221. In this title Pulleyn includes his evaluation of Willem Frederik Bakker's volume (Willem Frederik Bakker, *The Greek Imperative. An Investigation into the Aspectual Differences between the Present and Aorist Imperatives in Greek Prayer from Homer up to the Present Day* [Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1966]).

juxtaposed, is clearly visible. A closer look at the modifying phrases shows that both ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and τὸν ἐπι-ούσιον²³ follow the same pattern: article + preposition + noun/adjective.²⁴

V. Relevance Theory

At this point I wish to look at our present problem from a different perspective. The difficulty of finding a conclusive solution to the word ἐπιούσιος, I will argue, is the lack of general conceptual framework in biblical exegesis. I will now turn to the cognitive framework of relevance theory provided by Sperber and Wilson.²⁵

Relevance theory (RT) was designed to be a communication theory by French cognitive scientist Dan Sperber and British linguist Deirdre Wilson in the mid 1980's. RT has an audacious aim, that is, without exception, it seeks to provide a universal account for *all* phenomena in human communication. Because of this aim, it has been described as "the first radically new theory of communication since Aristotle."²⁶ Relevance theory assumes the ostensive-inference nature of communication, that is to say, people communicate their intention to each other not only by verbal utterances but more importantly by using existing sets of *assumptions* in human cognitive environment, known as *context*.

²³ Considering the fact that in those days there was no division in writing, and since ἐπιούσιος was a newly coined word in the first century CE, it is legitimate to put a hyphen there after the preposition as we do in English for such purposes (e.g., "post-Chomskyan").

²⁴ The disagreement in the case endings may be explained by the lack of verb (although presence of the unexpressed εἰμί is understood) in Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

²⁵ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

²⁶ Alasdair Fowler, "A New Theory of Communication," *London Review of Books* 30 (1989): 16.

In a nutshell, RT operates on two fundamental interplays between *contextual effects* and *processing effort*. The principle of relevance states that "every ostensive stimulus communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance."²⁷ This means that it is a universal fact that when people communicate, whether they like it or not, they always aim at the maximization of relevance. The audience can expect to that the communicator will yield a large enough contextual effects (*benefits*) without putting them into unjustifiable processing effort (*costs*). Likewise, the communicator presumes that if he or she wants to communicate successfully, he or she must create large contextual effects to the audience at a minimum effort. In such way relevance is understood as the *cost-benefit* relation of processing effort spent versus contextual effects obtained.²⁸

It seems that the word ἐπιούσιος would have very little relevance to the original audience, especially if one takes into account this cost-benefit relation in RT. Indeed, if it were expected of the ordinary first-century peasants to investigate the meaning of ἐπιούσιος in the same manner of scholarly conjectures by modern etymologists, the author of Matthew, for example, would have had a hard time communicating. Origen was the first to point out a wide assumption that among early Greek-speaking Jews, readers of translated Hebrew Scripture were accustomed to idea of words or expressions that are strangely coined in a manner which did not conform to the prescribed norm of Greek literary writing. To illustrate this, he uses the example of περιούσιος, an "un-Greek" word which occurs twice in the Exodus of the Septuagint text with reference to God speaking to Moses, calling

²⁷ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 260.

²⁸ Ernst-August Gutt, *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation* (Dallas, TX; New York: Summer Institute of Linguistics; United Bible Societies, 1992), 24.

the Israelites μοι λαὸς περιούσιος ("my peculiar people"²⁹ Ex. 19:5; 23:22).³⁰ Therefore instead of puzzling his audience, Matthew used this newly coined word to *support* that popular assumption, creating large contextual effects. This is consistent with the principle of RT.

It is likely, as Origen suggests, that ἐπιούσιος was formed out of ἐπί and οὐσίος, with οὐσίος being the adjective of ἡ οὐσία. The objection to this choice of etymology is that the preference over ἐπι-ουσίαν or prepositional phrase ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν needs to be explained. To this end we return to the poetic features already observed above. ἐπιούσιος is prominently positioned right at the middle of Section B (v. 11) as well as of the entire prayer. Further analysis of the parallelism between modifying phrases ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (v. 9b) and τὸν ἐπι-οῦσιον (v. 11) displays the extent of further agreement. As a characteristic in parallel structure pointed out earlier, they agree in the number of syllables: both have six syllables.³¹ In the light of RT, the first century readers of Matthew's Gospel would notice these communicative clues as ways in which the communicator wished to have created large contextual effects at minimum cost for his audience.

Hence I argue that it is in this light of poetic structure in the Lord's Prayer that one can approach the meaning of ἐπιούσιος with confidence. In accordance with RT, poetic effects are regarded as an interpretive use of language in order to achieve economic-efficient communication. By *interpretive* use of language Sperber and Wilson mean that an utterance is "intended to represent what someone said

²⁹ Translated by Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English, Companion Texts for Old Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1980). תְּבַרְכֶנּוּ in the MT.

³⁰ First suggested by Origen in his treatise on prayer, *De Oratione* 27.7.11. Other occurrences of περιούσιος are found in Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18 in the LXX, all of which refer to the "chosen" (people of God). The only occurrence in the NT also make this same reference (Titus 2:14).

³¹ ὁ-ἐν-τοῖς-οὐ-ρα-νοῖς (6) and τὸν-ἐ-πι-οῦ-σι-ον (6).

or thought," as opposed to *descriptive* use which is "intended to be taken as true of a state of affairs in some possible world."³² The poetic device, using the language interpretively, is therefore an effective strategy to reduce the processing effort and yet increase the contextual effects. Poetic effects as exemplified by parallelism can therefore explain the Evangelists' preference for ἐπιούσιος over ἐπι-ουσίαν or the prepositional phrase ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν. Likewise it can account for an alternative etymological option, ἐπιούσα (participle of ἐπιέναι), meaning "the following"³³ which would make very little sense to the original audience. It would only make sense to them if they had equal access to the sophisticated reasoning of modern etymologists but they did not. Also, if ἐπιούσα were the correct etymology of ἐπιούσιος, Section C must be understood as "Give us our bread for tomorrow today" or "Give us our bread for the day today," depending on the perspective of the person who prays, that is, what part of the day the prayer is said. This understanding will find itself at odds with the prevalent poetic structure of the prayer. The reader of Matthew's Gospel will notice the parallel structure between ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανῶις and τὸν ἐπι-ούσιον, and conclude that ἐπι-ούσιον is used decisively to contrast the ideas that our Father who *is in heaven* (i.e. He exists in heaven) as opposed to the bread *for our bodily need or existence*.

³² Ernst-August Gutt, "Pragmatics Aspects of Translation: Some Relevance-Theory Observations," in *The Pragmatics of Translation*, ed. Leo Hickey, *Topics in Translation; 12* (Clevedon, England; Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1998), 44. Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 224ff.

³³ A summary of discussions concerning scholarly conjectures on the origins of ἐπιούσιος is numerous. See for example, A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), 159-60. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Exeter: Paternoster, 1985), 590-99.

To have relevance to the first century Palestinians many of whom spoke Greek as a second language, the communicator, in our example, Matthew, must use words that were highly understandable by the general population. More importantly, these chosen words are structured in a particular way to compose the prayer expected to be memorized and recited by all believers and thus relevant to all. It is thus fair to say that the original audience could easily recognize the obvious connection between τὸν ἐπι-ούσιον and the prepositional phrase that could have been used, ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν. Οὐσία is a highly accessible word common to the everyday usage. It derived from participle of εἶμι and generally means "substance" or "that which exists and therefore has substance."³⁴ It may also mean "property," as in Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:12, 13).³⁵ Therefore ὁ ἐπι-ούσιος, having derived from the prepositional phrase ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν, may mean something like "which is of the substance" or "into the substance" as suggested by Origen commentator Eric Jay.³⁶ Accordingly, the bread petition in Section B, τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον, is to be understood as "Give us our bread of the substance today." Hence, it supports the translation "that bread that we need" or "our necessary bread" found in many the footnotes of English versions.³⁷ Interestingly, Eugene Peterson's rendering of "keep us alive with three square meals" in *The Message* essentially conveys

³⁴ Definitions are taken from entry in Danker and Bauer, *BDAG*, 740.

³⁵ Our only examples of οὐσία in the New Testament.

³⁶ See Jay's comments on Origen's *De Oratone* 27.7.12, Jay and Origen, *On Prayer*, 171.

³⁷ For example, *The Contemporary English Version: God's Promise for People of Today*, ed. Barclay M. Newman (New York: American Bible Society, 1995), *Good News for Modern Man: The New Testament in Today's English Version*, ed. Robert G. Bratcher, 3d ed. (New York: American Bible Society, 1971), *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1999), Daniel B. Wallace, "Net Bible," (Biblical Studies Press, 2003). Kittel has noted that the interpretation of ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν gives us the sense of "necessary," like the manna in the OT, and Proverbs 30:8-"give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food I need..." The phrase τὰ δεόντα καὶ τὰ ἀνάγκη expresses the confidence that God will give us as we have need. See Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *TDNT*, 599.

the same meaning of ἐπιούσιος.³⁸ Since the poetic analysis of this study supports ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν as the correct etymology of ἐπιούσιος, it should provide us the basis for the interpretation of "substance" of the bread and its Christological significance.

VI. Conclusion

The investigation of the parallel structures in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9b-13), specifically the two modifying prepositional phrases ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (v. 9b) and τὸν ἐπιούσιον (v. 11), has yielded convincing evidence that supports the etymological explanation that ἐπιούσιος is a derivative of the phrase ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν. The combined effort of poetic analysis and etymology, therefore, has significantly addressed the insufficiencies of the existing scholarly conjectures in search of the meaning and origin of the word ἐπιούσιος. One crucial step is taken from a different starting point: a top-down approach, giving priority to a detailed literary analysis of the entire Lord's Prayer rather than to an etymological investigation of the word. The cognitive framework of relevance theory has provided us satisfactory explanations to the profound significance of the word. Today many are still waiting for the unearthing of new textual evidence for actual occurrence of ἐπιούσιος, which they believe to be the only convincing proof that would put to rest this *crux interpretum*.³⁹ In Jesus' day, prayers, especially the Lord's Prayer, were vital to the believers' life

³⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994).

³⁹ For example, Bruce M. Metzger, "How Many Times Does Ἐπιούσιος Occur Outside the Lord's Prayer," *Expository Times* 69 (1957): 52-54. David F. Wright has noted that "perhaps only new textual discoveries will resolve this *crux interpretum* in Lord's Prayer" in David F. Wright, "What Kind of 'Bread'? The Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer from the Fathers to the Reformers," in *Oratio* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 161.

of faith, and were taught to be memorized and recited by all ages. As the RT suggests, perhaps early Christians, without the advantages of scholarly conjectures on the basis of etymology, never had trouble understanding the meaning of ἐπιούσιος. They understood because of the poetic structure of the Lord's Prayer, which even a child's ear could easily identify, and appreciate its beauty, and pray.

Diagram I. Matt. 6:9-13

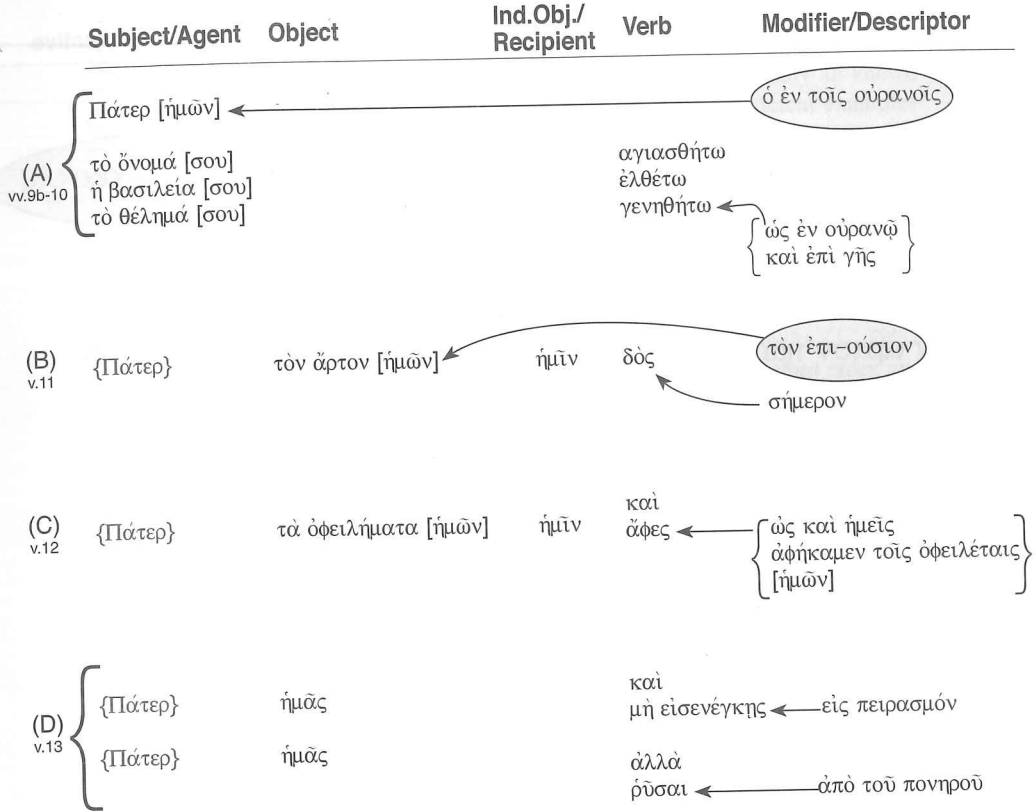
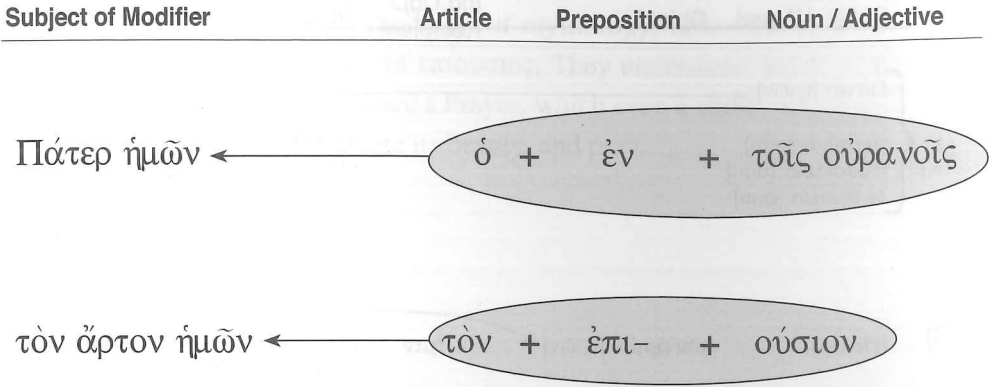


Diagram II. Matt. 6:9b, 11



ABSTRACT

It is still unknown to us, despite numerous attempts for solution over the centuries, regarding the meaning (and origin) of ἐπιούσιος in the bread petition of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:11; Luke 11:3). Probably coined by the Evangelists, ἐπιούσιος is used exclusively within the context of the Prayer in virtually all known Greek literature. The problem persists not on the ground of insufficient examples of the word available outside the Prayer context, but rather on the methodological ground. Scholarly conjectures have overlooked the literary structure of the Prayer, seeking solutions solely on the basis of etymology. This paper seeks to address this inadequacy by means of implementing a detailed analysis of the poetic characteristics of the Prayer. The analysis identifies four literary sections in Matthew 6:9b-13, each of which contains poetic features including parallelism expressed at several levels, forms, and modes. The discovery of parallelism yields a crucial identification of parallel structure between ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (v. 9) and τὸν ἐπι-ούσιον (v.11). These two phrases display remarkable agreement in their function, position, word order, and number of syllables. Finally, compelling evidence of this study leads to a conclusion which supports the theory that ἐπιούσιος is a derivative of ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν.

撮 要

歷世紀以來，儘管學者多番努力研究，試圖探尋答案，然而，我們還沒能明白主禱文中求賜飲食（太六11；路十一3）裏，ἐπιούσιος這希臘文的意思（及來源）。在差不多已知的希臘文學作品中，ἐπιούσιος純粹只見諸主禱文裏，這大抵是布道者所發明的詞彙罷。問題不在於在主禱文以外欠缺該詞語的充分例子，而卻在於研究方法上。學者因着臆測，竟忽略了主禱文的文學結構，而只着眼根據字源學的基礎來尋覓答案。本文作者致力透過仔細分析主禱文的詩體特色，來改善有關不足。本文指出馬太福音六章9節下至13節中四個文學部分，每一部分蘊含涉及多個層面、格式、模態所表達的平行對仗。經此發現，我們得見第9節的ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς和第11節的τὸν ἐπι-ούσιον之間出現的關鍵平行對仗，這對仗在作用、位置、詞彙次序、音節數量上，尤其工整。而這些強而有力的證據，驅使作者達致如此結論——ἐπιούσιος衍生自ἐπὶ τὴν οὐσίαν。