

Misunderstanding The Lord's Prayer

Part Four

It Was Rewritten in 382 AD.

Overview

The Lord's Prayer contains a word no Greek writer ever used. This article walks through Matthew 6:11 in the original Greek, word by word, focusing on three words that reconstruct the line. One word, ἐπιούσιος (epiousios), translated as "daily," appears nowhere else in ancient Greek literature. It is a word the Evangelists seem to have invented. Jerome translated it in two contradictory ways in the same Bible in 382 AD. The second word is ἄρτος (artos), translated as "bread," the same word Jesus uses for himself in John 6:35. The third word is ἐπεῖμι (epeimi), the root verb that most likely formed epiousios. It appears five times in Acts, and each time it means "what comes next." After this, the line stops sounding like a request for groceries and starts sounding like something the English never carried.

A Summary

Epiousios appears only twice in the entire Greek language: Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3. Thayer's states directly that it appears nowhere else. Origen, writing around 233 CE in his treatise *On Prayer*, observed that the word is not employed by any Greek writers or philosophers, nor in common usage, and appears to have been invented by the Evangelists themselves. Jerome, in 382 CE, rendered it *supersubstantialem* (above substance) in Matthew and *quotidianum* (daily) in Luke, two contradictory Latin translations of the same Greek word in the same Bible. Artos is the standard word for bread. Jesus claims this exact word for himself in John 6:35 and connects it directly to the manna of Exodus 16:4, the bread that could not be stored for tomorrow and required daily trust. Two competing roots have been proposed for epiousios. The first is *epeimi*, to come upon, whose participle *epiousa* appears in Acts 7:26, 16:11, 20:15, 21:18, and 23:11, each occurrence pointing to the next day or what comes next. Jerome himself noted that the lost Aramaic Gospel of the Hebrews used מָהָר (mahar, meaning "to hasten" or "to hurry"), which he translated as "tomorrow," for this word. The second root is *epi plus ousia*, being or substance, yielding *above substance*, the path Jerome reached for in Matthew. Both paths bypass the English word "daily" entirely. Matthew uses δὸς (dos), an aorist imperative, a single urgent command. Luke uses δίδου (didou), a present imperative, continuous giving. In this reading, the line asks for what is above material substance, aimed forward at what is approaching, echoing the bread Jesus claimed as himself.

An Examination of the Text

Every time you say the Lord's Prayer, you speak a word that does not appear anywhere else in the ancient world. Not in philosophy. Not in literature. Not in a single surviving Greek text outside this prayer. That word appears in Matthew 6:11. Just seven words in the original Greek. One of them is a word that no translator in two thousand years has agreed on how to render. The English reading is not wrong, but it is incomplete. The Greek beneath this line carries something the translation cannot preserve. In 382 AD, one man was tasked with translating it into Latin, and he gave it two contradictory definitions from the same Bible. And before him, a scholar said something about this word that most Christians have never been told.

The English Bible reads, "Give us this day our daily bread." The word translated as "daily" is ἐπιούσιος (epiousios). It appears nowhere else in the entire Greek language. Not in Plato, not in Aristotle, nor in a single letter, document, or receipt from the ancient world. Thayer's Greek Lexicon explicitly states that it is found only in Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3. That is not a difficult translation problem; it is a word with no comparison point, no other context to check it against, nor a second verse to confirm its meaning. The most famous prayer on the planet contains a word that the men who wrote the Gospels appear to have made up. And no one in the twenty centuries since has been able to fully agree on what they meant by it.

The Greek text, the Latin manuscript, the date it was changed, and the three competing meanings that were collapsed into one English word—all of it sits in this single line of the prayer you have been saying since you were a child. By the end of this article, you will have the original word, know what it was built from, and have a way to pray this line that English has never given you access to.

That story begins with a man named Jerome sitting at a desk in Rome, coming upon a word that stopped him cold. In the year 382, Pope Damasus I gave a single man a task: produce one authoritative Latin Bible for the entire church. The man he chose was Jerome, arguably the most skilled translator alive at the time. Jerome had the Greek manuscripts in front of him, the Hebrew texts, and decades of training in both languages. He sat down in Rome to begin what would become the Latin Vulgate, the Bible that would shape Western Christianity for the next thousand years.

When he reached the Lord's Prayer in Matthew chapter 6:11, "Give us this day our daily bread," the Greek word behind "daily" was epiousios. Jerome then did something no translator is supposed to do: he gave the word *two different translations*. In Matthew, he wrote the Latin word "supersubstantialem." That was a word he invented, meaning "above substance." Super means above, and substantia means substance. It was a Latin word coined to carry a Greek word for which there was no Latin equivalent. Then he reached Luke chapter 11:3. The exact same prayer with the exact same Greek word. "Give us day by day our daily bread," using the same word, epiousios. But this time Jerome wrote quotidianum, a common Latin word that just means "daily, routine, and ordinary," something that is done every day. One prayer, one Greek word, with two

contradictory Latin translations from the same Bible and the same translator. The man who was supposed to settle this question was unable to settle it himself.

Although you might think epiousios was simply a difficult, rare word with a tricky shade of meaning, it was not rare; it was something far stranger than that. One hundred and fifty years before Jerome, Origen was writing a treatise on prayer. Around 233 A.D., in Caesarea, he came to the same word, epiousios, and stopped. He wrote that this word is not employed by any of the Greek writers, nor by philosophers, nor in common usage. He also said it appears to have been invented by the Evangelists themselves. Matthew and Luke did not choose an existing word; instead, they created one. Your Bible says "daily." But that is only a guess. The word the prayer actually uses was so far beyond ordinary Greek that the men who wrote the Gospels had to build it from scratch. And the man tasked with translating it tried two answers and still could not close the gap. You have been praying a word that has no parallel in the language in which it was written. Every English Bible contains the least interesting option. The next time you pray this line, you will feel the weight of epiousios sitting where "daily" used to be. Not because someone corrected you, but because the text itself showed you what was there. And now that you have seen it, the old rendering no longer holds. Jerome knew epiousios was not "daily." That is why he reached for "above substance" in Matthew. He was grasping for something Origen had pointed to a century and a half earlier, and even that was not enough.

Secondly, the bread this word modifies is not what you were told either, and that changes the weight of the entire line. When the English say "bread," most people picture a loaf, food on a table, and something you eat to get through the day. The Greek word is ἄρτος (artos). Thayer's defines it as "food composed of flour mixed with water and baked." That is the primary meaning, and it functions that way in dozens of New Testament passages. But artos does not stay on the table in this prayer. In John chapter 6:35, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." The word He uses for bread is artos. The exact noun in Matthew 6:11 is modified by the impossible word epiousios. The Church's reading of "bread" in the Lord's Prayer has served millions of people well. That is not the issue. The real issue is what artos becomes when you trace it through the text, because Jesus does not compare himself to a loaf. He claims the word; He says, "I am this. This noun is me."

And the trail goes even further back. In John chapter 6:32, Jesus says, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." He points to Exodus chapter 16:4, where God says, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day." That bread had one rule: it could not be stored for tomorrow. Exodus chapter 16:20 says those who tried to keep it found it bred worms and stank. Every day, you had to trust that more would come. The provision was real, but it required you to face forward. You could not hoard yesterday's bread to avoid depending on what was coming. The bread of the original exodus was not a commodity. It was a daily act of trust aimed at what lay ahead. And in John 6, Jesus deliberately positions himself as the fulfillment of that bread. Not the bread Moses gave, but the true bread from the Father.

Therefore, when Matthew 6:11 says "give us this day our epiousios artos," both words are loaded. The bread is the same word Jesus uses for himself, and the modifier is a word no one in the ancient world had ever seen. Together, they form a request that English cannot fully carry. You have likely kept the Lord's Prayer bread and the John 6 bread in separate rooms your whole life. But they were never separate, because the same Greek word appears in both passages. Now that you see that the word "artos" bridges the prayer and the bread-of-life discourse, the request no longer sounds like you are simply asking for groceries. It sounds like a request for the thing Jesus said he was. From this point forward, every time you say "daily bread," you will hear "artos" underneath it. Not as a loaf, but as a word with a lineage that reaches into the heart of what Jesus claimed to be.

But if the bread is not just food and the word modifying it is not "daily," what exactly is the prayer asking for? The answer lies in the root of epiousios itself. The root appears five times in the book of Acts, and every time it means the same thing. The word epiousios was built from something. The strongest evidence points to the Greek verb epeimi, which means "to come upon." Its form when describing time is ἐπιούσα (epiousa, meaning "following" or "next"). Epiousa appears five times in the book of Acts, in chapters 7, 16, 20, 21, and 23, and every time it points to what comes next. Not one of them means "daily" or "routine." Five instances, all pointing in the same direction.

As mentioned above, Jerome himself found the same trail. In his commentary on Matthew, he noted that the lost Aramaic Gospel of the Hebrews used the word מָהָר (mahar) for this line. All lexicons agree that Mahar means "for tomorrow." The standard lexicon definition reads "for the coming day, for subsistence." The root, the Aramaic, and the lexicon all converge on one point: this word never points to *today's routine*; it always points to *what comes next*. Since epiousios is the adjective form of epiousa, the word means "for the coming day," not "daily." That's not repetition; it's forward-looking. There is also a second layer in the grammar that no English translation preserves. In Matthew, the verb is δός (dos), indicating a one-time command, a single urgent request aimed at one moment. Give. Now. Today. In Luke 11:3, the verb is δίδου (didou), which denotes a continuous action: keep giving, day after day.

Two different verbs in two different Gospels for the same prayer. Matthew's version is not a formula to repeat. It is a single forward-looking demand: give us today what we need for what is coming. You have prayed this line as a request for maintenance. Bread for survival. Enough to get through. But the root, epeimi, says something different. It is aimed forward.

And the grammar in Matthew says something different—it is urgent, not routine. The next time you say this line, you will hear the direction of epiousa in it. Not backward toward yesterday's needs, but forward toward what approaches. That shifts the posture of the entire prayer from survival to readiness. You now know this, not because someone explained it to you, but because the root showed you where the word was pointing. And now that you have that root, you cannot unhear it. The word does not exist anywhere else. The bread it modifies is the word Jesus uses for himself. The root it was built from means "the coming day." Jerome tried two translations, and neither captured it. Origen said it was invented. So, what is the prayer actually

asking for? That answer is what was *rewritten* in 382 AD. And epiousios completely changes the line. A word no Greek writer had ever used. Placed by the Evangelists themselves into the most intimate prayer in the text. Modifying artos, the bread Jesus claimed as His own in John 6. Built from a root that five witnesses in Acts confirm means "the coming day." Three threads. One word. And every thread points past the English.

Now the two competing paths converge. Jerome reached for *supersubstantialem* because the *epi* in *epiousios* can also sit atop *ousia*. *Ousia* means "being, substance, or essence." *Epi* on top of *ousia* gives "above substance," that is, beyond what is material. Jerome knew the word pointed beyond the physical, which is why he *coined* a Latin term to try to capture it. Origen, 150 years before Jerome, had already gone there. He wrote that this bread "most closely corresponds to the rational nature" and "brings health and well-being and strength to the soul." He argued that it was beneath the teaching of Jesus to ask the Father for something as worldly as physical food in a prayer that moves from heaven to forgiveness to deliverance from the evil one. Both paths land on the same ground. Whether you follow the root to *epiousa* and land on "for the coming day," or you follow the root to *ousia* and land on "above substance," you arrive at the same conclusion. The English word "daily" is the weakest possible rendering of what this prayer contains. Both paths bypass it completely. Both paths point past the material. The line reads differently, not "give us this day our daily bread." But something closer to "Give us today the above-substance bread for what is coming. Bread that is not material."

This request is not routine. A prayer aimed forward. Bread, Jesus claimed, was Himself. A bread that echoes the manna you could not store and had to trust would arrive again. Bread, modified by a word the Evangelists invented because no existing Greek word could hold what they needed to say. Three threads. One line. And all of them, every single one, point beyond the English word you were given. That is what Jerome rewrote in 382 AD. He could not hold the word, so he split it in two. And English inherited the lesser half. Nobody caught it. Every Greek word from this article: *Epiousios*, *Artos*, and *Epiousa*. The full definitions are provided. Every verse is referenced.

Generations have prayed this line without access to the word the Evangelists built for it. The most intimate prayer in the tradition, spoken billions of times, contains the single most unusual word inside it, which was flattened before it reached anyone in English. That loss is quiet rather than dramatic. It is simply the distance between what was written and what was delivered. But you have it now:

- You have the word.
- You have the date it was changed.
- You have the name of the man who changed it.
- You have the root, the five witnesses in Acts, and the cross-reference to John 6.

The prayer is returned to you in a form the English never carried. Say the Lord's Prayer out loud. When you reach "daily bread," stop. Replace "daily" with "for what is coming." Let the bread become whatever you need to be inwardly prepared for what approaches today. Not food, not survival, but the thing that would make you steady enough for what is next. Then finish the

prayer from that position. Or sit with the second path. Ask yourself what inner nourishment you are actually lacking today. Not groceries. The thing beneath that. The bread of life that John 6 names. The thing above substance. Let whatever answer rises be what you are requesting when you open your mouth to pray. You cannot pray this line the old way anymore. Not because the prayer changed. Because you now possess the original word. And that word was never "daily." It was something the Evangelists had to invent because Greek lacked a term for it.

The word did not come from the language. It came from the teaching. And now the teaching is back in your hands. The Evangelists coined a word for this line. They could have used any Greek word already in use for "daily." They had *hemera* for day and *kathemerinon* for daily in the ordinary sense. They used neither. They built something new. For two thousand years, translators have tried to fit it into languages that lack a container for it. Every major manuscript preserves it unchanged, including Codex Sinaiticus from the fourth century and Codex Vaticanus from the same era. Every scribe who copied this prayer for sixteen centuries faithfully reproduced a word they could not fully define. The only place it did not survive was the translation. *Now you have it back!*