

Appendix 10. The Greek Words for Prayer

Pray, a prayer.

The Greek verb *euchomai* (#2172 εὐχομαι) and the noun *euche* (#2171 εὐχή) are prayer in the general sense. The verb *euchomai* is used 7 times, and the noun *euche* 3 times. The semantic range of these words includes *to pray to God, and prayer in the general sense*; and it can include the idea of wishing, i.e., *to wish*. The noun *euche* can also mean *a vow*, and of its three uses, twice it is used to mean *vow* (Acts 18:18; 21:23) and once to mean *prayer* (James 5:15).

Our Translation:

(1) “To pray” (Five uses of *euchomai*: Acts 27:29; 2 Cor. 13:7; 13:9; James 5:16; 3 John 1:2)

(2) “To wish” (Two uses of *euchomai*: Acts 26:29; Rom. 9:3). The usage in Acts 26:29 employs the optative mood of the verb, which signifies wishing or possibility (Dana and Mantey, §164); Rom. 9:3, on the other hand, is the “potential imperfect” indicating “I could wish,” (Robertson; *Grammar*, p. 886).

(3) “A vow” (Two uses of *euche*: Acts 18:18; 21:23).

(4) “A prayer” (One use of *euche*: James 5:15).

Pray, a prayer.

The Greek verb *proseuchomai* (#4336 προσεύχομαι) and its noun form *proseuche* (#4335 προσευχή), like *euchomai* and *euche*, denote prayer in the more general sense. This means the content of the prayer may include various specific requests (*aitema*), supplications (*deēsis*), intercessions (*enteuxis*), etc. However *proseuchomai* and *proseuche* are only used as prayer to God (the prefix *pros* means towards)—whereas *euchomai* and *deēsis* are not restricted in this way (Trench, *Synonyms*). It generally “seems to indicate not so much the contents of the prayer as its end and aim” (Thayer).

Our Translation:

(1) “To pray” (85 verb uses).

(2) “Prayer” (36 noun uses).

Ask; question.

Erōtaō (#2065 ἐρωτάω) is a Greek word for *ask*, and can mean (1) to ask a question or (2) to ask a request, i.e., entreat, beg, beseech. We have chosen the English *ask* to represent both meanings. One must examine the context to see if the asking is done to seek information or to acquire action of some kind. According to Thayer, *erōtaō* puts the emphasis on the “request [of] a person to do (rarely to give) something; referring more directly to the person, it is naturally used in exhortation.” Whereas *aiteō* “signifies to ask for something to be given not done, giving prominence to the thing asked for rather than the person and hence is rarely used in exhortation” (under *aiteō* entry). However, not all lexicons agree on this distinction; see *aiteō* below.

Our Translation:

(1) “Ask” (58 verb uses).

(2) “Question” (1 verb use: John 16:30). *Erōtaō* was translated “question” in John 16:30 for sake of clarity: “We know that you know all things, and do not need that any man should question you.” The context shows that Christ has no need for anyone to ask him questions, because he is speaking plainly, i.e., not in parables.

Ask, request.

The Greek verb *aiteō* (#154 αἰτέω), like *erōtaō*, means *to ask*. Its noun form *aitēma* (#155 αἴτημα) means “that which is being asked for,” i.e., *requests*. “In distinction from *deēsis*, *aitēma* points to the content of the request” while *deēsis* points to the urgency or need of the request (TDNT).

Lexicographers differ regarding the distinction between *aiteō* and *erōtaō*. Some think the two words were interchangeable. But others, such as Trench, Bullinger, and Vine hold that *aiteō* is more submissive, being used by an inferior to a superior, while *erōtaō* implies a more equal footing between the two parties. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* agrees: “*aiteō* seems to presuppose a lesser degree of intimacy than *erōtaō*.” The entire Greco-Roman world was built on a patronage system, with sharp distinctions between classes, ranks, and the “haves” and “have nots,” so it makes sense that there would be different words for asking an equal for something and asking a superior for something. However, since that distinction does not clearly exist in our culture or the English language, it is difficult to bring into modern English.

Thayer and some other scholars, on the other hand, reject this understanding. Thayer claims the difference between the words lies not in the “relative dignity of the person asking and the person asked” but rather, in emphasizing the thing being given (*aiteō*) verse placing the emphasis on the person being asked to do something (*erōtaō*). But even if he is right, it remains difficult to see what English words would bring this distinction over from the Greek. Thus we have chosen *ask* to represent both *erōtaō* and *aiteō*.

Our Translation:

(1) “Ask” (70 verb uses).

(2) “A request” (3 noun uses: Luke 23:24; Phil. 4:6; 1 John 5:15).

Implore, supplication.

The Greek verb *deomai* (#1189 δέομαι) and the noun *deēsis* (#1162 δέησις) also means to ask, but connotes urgency and necessity. “To make known one’s need, urgently request, supplicate, beseech” (Bullinger, *Lexicon*). The noun form *deēsis* is specifically petitionary as opposed to the more general *proseuche*. The former usually emphasizes the “particular benefits” of the thing being asked for (Trench, *Synonyms*). Further, *deēsis* can be used in relation to man, while *proseuche* is used only to God. Commenting on the differences, Thayer writes, “In 1 Tim. 2:1 to these two words is added *enteuxis*, which expresses confiding access to God; thus, in combination, *deēsis* gives prominence to the expression of personal need, *proseuche* to the element of devotion, *enteuxis* to that of childlike confidence, by representing prayer as the heart’s converse with God.” The English term “implore” captures the sense of urgency implied in the Greek, while “supplication” denotes the earnest, humble sense of the noun.

Our Translation:

- (1) “Implore” (22 verb uses).
- (2) “Supplication” (18 noun uses).

Entreat, call on, beg, urge.

The Greek verb *parakaleō* (#3870 παρακαλέω) and its noun form *paraklēsis* (#3874 παράκλησις) have a very wide range of meaning. Further, they appear quite often in scripture (109 verb uses; 29 noun uses). The words’ basic meaning is *to call to one’s side*. “To call some one hither, that he may do something...to use persuasion with him” (Bullinger). The calling along can be meant to appeal or plead; encourage or urge; to comfort; summon or invite; only once is it applied to God and that by the Lord Jesus (Matt 26:53).

Our Translation:

Verb Forms: (106 uses).

- (1) “Entreat.” (Matt. 8:5; Mark 6:56; 7:32; 8:22; Luke 7:4; 8:32; 8:41; 15:28; Acts 8:31; 9:38; 13:42; 16:9; 16:15; 16:39; 24:4; 28:14; 28:20; 1Cor. 4:13; 2Cor. 10:1).
- (2) “Call on.” (Matt. 26:53).
- (3) “Begged.” (Matt. 8:31; 14:36; 18:29; 18:32; Mark 1:40; 5:10; 5:12; 5:18; 5:23; Luke 8:31; 8:32).
- (4) “Exhort.” (Luke 3:18; Acts 2:40; 11:23; 14:22; 1 Cor. 16:12; 2 Cor. 6:1; Phil. 4:2; 1 Thess. 2:11; 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:12; 1 Tim. 6:2; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit. 2:15; Heb. 3:13; 10:25; 13:22; 1 Pet. 5:1; 5:12).
- (5) “Urge.” (Acts. 19:31; 25:2; 27:33; 27:34; Rom. 12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; 2 Cor. 2:8; 8:6; 9:5; 12:18; Eph. 4:1; 1 Thess. 4:10; 5:14; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2:1; Heb. 13:19; 1 Pet. 2:11; Jude 1:3).
- (6) “Plead.” (Acts. 21:12; Matt. 8:34; Mark 5:17; 2 Cor. 12:8).
- (7) “Encouraged.” (Acts 15:32; 16:40; 20:1; 20:2; Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 6:22; Col. 2:2; 4:8; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:1; Tit. 1:9; 2:6).
- (8) “Appeal.” (2 Cor. 5:20; Philem. 1:9; 1:10).
- (9) “Comfort.” (Matt. 2:18; 5:4; Luke 16:25; Acts. 20:12; 2 Cor. 1:4; 1:6; 2:7; 7:6; 7:7; 7:13; 1 Thess. 3:2; 3:7; 4:18; 2 Thess. 2:17).

Noun Forms: (29 uses).

- (1) “Consolation” (Luke 2:25 Consolation emphasizes the alleviating of grief or the mitigating of the sense of loss,” whereas comfort “implies imparting cheer, strength, or encouragement as well as lessening pain.” (*Webster’s dict. of syn.*) In the context of waiting for Israel’s redemption from Roman rule, consolation seems to be emphasized);
- (2) “Comfort” (Luke 6:24; 2 Cor. 1:3; 1:4; 1:5; 1:6; 1:7; 7:4; 7:7; 7:13; 2 Thess. 2:16).
- (3) “Encouragement” (Acts. 4:36; 9:31; 15:31; Rom. 12:8; 15:4; 15:5; 1 Cor. 14:3; Phil. 2:1; Philem. 1:7; Heb. 6:18; 12:5).
- (4) “Exhortation” (Acts. 13:15; 1 Tim. 4:13; Heb. 13:22).

- (5) “Pleading” (2 Cor. 8:4).
 (6) “Appeal” (2 Cor. 8:17; 1 Thess. 2:3 (following appeal in Rom. 5:20)).

Intercession, petition.

The Greek verb *entynchanō* (#1793 ἐντυγχάνω) has a basic meaning of “to fall in or happen with.” This falling in occurs when one party meets with another especially for the purpose of supplication or making intercession or petition on behalf of another. Thus the noun *enteuxis* (#1783 ἔντευξις) is a falling in with, a coming together esp. for the purpose of making petition on behalf of someone or something. The interceding may also be for negative purposes (Acts 25:24; Romans 11:2), which we have represented with the word *petition*. When applied to God, *enteuxis* implies free familiarity in the prayer (Trench).

In his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Marvin Vincent takes the position that the meaning is deeper than just intercession of one party for another, and that included with it is the idea of personal involvement. Vincent says, “The verb signifies to fall in with a person; to draw near so as to converse familiarly hence, ἔντευξις is not intercession in the properly accepted sense of that term, but rather approach to God in free and familiar prayer. ἐντυγχάνειν is not “to make intercession” but to “intervene, interfere” thus in Romans 8:26 it is not that the Spirit pleads on our behalf, but that he throws himself into our case; takes part in it. So Hebrews 7:25: not that Jesus is ever interceding for us, but that he is eternally meeting us at every point, and intervening in all our affairs for our benefit. In ἔντευξις here the idea of interposition is prominent: making prayers a factor in relations with secular rulers.” (Vincent’s *Word Studies*, Vol. IV, p. 216; not on 1 Tim. 2:1).

Our Translation:

- (1) “Petition:” (2 verb uses: Acts 25:24; Romans 11:2)
 (2) “Intercession:” (3 verb uses: Rom 8:27; 8:34; Heb. 7:25).
 (3) “Intercession” (2 noun uses: 1Tim. 2:1; 4:5).

Intercede.

The Greek verb *huperentynchanō* (#5241 ὑπερεντυγχάνω) is simply the verb *entynchanō* with the prefix *huper*. It means *to intercede on behalf of another*; the *huper* emphasizes that the intercession is on behalf of another and that it is above and beyond. Interestingly, its only occurrence is found in Romans 8:26 where “the spirit itself intercedes for us.”

Our Translation:

- (1) “Intercedes” (1 verb use: Rom. 8:26).