



The Doctrine of Prayer

Notable Old Testament Prayers and Their Lessons

I. GENESIS 24:12-14 – THE FIRST RECORDED PRAYER

A. The setting

1. Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac.
2. Abraham was living in Canaan with his family and did not want Isaac to have a wife of the Canaanites (Genesis 24:3).
3. The servant swore an oath to Abraham that he would go unto Abraham's native country and there find a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:3-4, 9).
4. Being a faithful servant, he took camels and riches and departed and came unto the city of Nahor (Genesis 24:10).
5. There he made his camels to kneel down before the water at the time when women came out in the evening to draw water (Genesis 24:11).
6. It is at this point that the servant prayed to God.

B. The prayer – Genesis 24:12-14

1. The scripture starts out with "And he said" which could indicate that this prayer was spoken out loud versus in his heart.
2. The servant calls God's attention with "O".
 - a. The use of the word "O" was very common in the Old Testament when praying unto the Lord (Genesis 32:9, Exodus 15:11, Numbers 12:13, Deuteronomy 3:24, Deuteronomy 9:26).
 - b. This word was also used when addressing the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:1, Deuteronomy 6:3-4, Deuteronomy 27:9).
 - c. Furthermore, it was used when addressing an earthly king (1 Samuel 26:17, 2 Samuel 14:9, 2 Samuel 19:26).
 - d. It would seem that this word "O" is utilized to call the attention of another when there is something of importance to be said. At times, it also seems to indicate one's reverence for the individual being spoken to.
3. The servant addresses God as "LORD God of my master Abraham".
 - a. He is showing his reverence for God by addressing him as LORD God.



- b. The servant is addressing God on behalf “of my master Abraham”. He is acknowledging that the LORD God is the God of Abraham and that he is coming to God on behalf of Abraham.
 4. The servant’s general request in the prayer.
 - a. He says to God “I pray thee”. This is not the servant telling God that he is currently praying unto him. Our modern English has changed but scripturally speaking this word “pray” was mostly used like we would say “ask” or “request” (Genesis 12:13, Genesis 13:8, Genesis 16:2). In other words, the servant was saying to God “I request of thee”.
 - b. His general request of God was that God would send him “good speed this day” and that he would “shew kindness unto my master Abraham”. This further shows that the servant was requesting of God on behalf of Abraham.
 5. The servant’s specific request in the prayer.
 - a. He tells the Lord where he is standing at that very moment. He is “by the well of water” when the women come out to draw water (Genesis 24:13).
 - b. Then the servant becomes very specific in his prayer. He had determined what he was going to say to a damsel “Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink”.
 - c. He then gave God the very specific answer that he will be looking for from the damsel that was appointed for Isaac by requesting that she shall say “Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also”.
 - d. The servant tells God that if the damsel says this to him that he will know that she is appointed for Isaac and that God shewed kindness to Abraham.
- C. The answer to the prayer.
 1. While the servant was still speaking in prayer to God, and before he finished his prayer, Rebekah came out unto the well and filled her pitcher (Genesis 24:15-16).
 2. He then runs to meet her and speaks to her the phrase he just spoke to God. At this point, he is awaiting her response to see whether she is the right woman or not (Genesis 24:17).
 3. Rebekah then responded “Drink, my lord” (Genesis 24:18) and when he drank she then said “I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking” (Genesis 24:19). This is exactly what he requested God to have the damsel say so that he would know she was the right woman.
 4. He then inquired of her and learns that she is of Abraham’s brethren (Genesis 24:23-25).



5. It is at this point that the servant bows “down his head, and worshipped the LORD”.
 6. The servant then praised God in the presence of Rebekah, saying “Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham” (Genesis 24:27).
- D. The lessons in this prayer.
1. The servant was doing what he was supposed to be doing, being obedient to Abraham, then he asks God to give him “good speed”. Do not expect God to bless your way and be attentive to your request if you are doing that which you are not supposed to be doing (Proverbs 15:29).
 2. The servant had reverence toward God and addressed him appropriately (Psalm 111:9).
 3. This prayer was spoken to God out in the open where others were going about their business. Prayer does not have to be something secret.
 4. Just because God knows all things does not mean that we should therefore not bother to tell him things that are going on. God knew where the servant was standing and what time it was but yet the servant still told God this information. If we took the attitude of “I do not need to tell God this because he already knows” then there would be no need to talk to him at all because he knows all things.
 5. The servant was very specific with what he needed God to do for him. He was so specific that he asked God to have the damsel say something specific. We need to understand that being specific in our prayers shows confidence and trust in the Almighty and that being specific is biblical. God answered the servant and provided what he specifically requested.
 6. Possibly one of the most important lessons from this prayer is what the servant did after he prayed and after God provided. The servant worshipped the LORD! We are quick to pray to God asking for help but when God provides, we simply receive it and go on with our day. This is wicked and robs God of his praise and glory. The servant did not wait till later but right there, in front of Rebekah, he bowed down and worshipped God. We should be just as quick to praise God and worship him when he answers our prayer!



II. JOSHUA 7:7-9 – JOSHUA IS CORRECTED THROUGH HIS PRAYER (PRAYER IS BRINGING US ON THE SAME PAGE WITH GOD)

A. The setting – Joshua 6:1-27 and 7:1-6

1. God led the children of Israel to Jericho and gave them specific instructions on how they were to conquer Jericho (Joshua 6:1-17).
2. Joshua instructed Israel that they were not to take anything from the spoils of Jericho but that all the silver, gold, and vessels of brass and iron were consecrated to God (Joshua 6:18-19).
3. The children of Israel conquered, destroyed, and burned Jericho. They also saved Rahab (Joshua 6:22-27).
4. On the heels of the victory of Jericho, Joshua sent men to view the country of Ai. The men went and return telling Joshua that not all the men need to go to battle Ai but only two or three thousand. So, Israel went to Ai and Ai smites thirty-six men of Israel and Israel fled (Joshua 7:1-5).
5. Upon this defeat, Joshua rent his clothes, fell upon his face, and put dust on his head and Joshua cried out unto God.

B. The prayer – Joshua 7:7-9

1. Joshua called God's attention with "Alas, O".
2. He addressed God as "LORD God".
3. Joshua posed a question to God possibly as a way of expressing his dissatisfaction. He questioned God's motive and purpose in bringing Israel over the Jordan asked God if he did so just "to destroy us?".
4. Then Joshua complained and regrets that Israel did not remain content over on the other side Jordan!
5. In verse 8, he again called God's attention and based on the wording he is questioning God again but the punctuation tells us that Joshua was not truly asking a question but rather making a statement to God "what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!".
6. Joshua closed his prayer by telling God his prediction of what will happen because of their defeat. Joshua believes that the Canaanites will hear of this and "environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth".
7. Joshua finished with a second question to God, "and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?".

C. The answer to the prayer – Joshua 7:10-15



1. The Lord responded to Joshua by telling him to get up and asked Joshua a rhetorical question “wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?” (Joshua 7:10).
2. God proceeded to correct Joshua and enlighten him to the reason that Israel was smitten of Ai. God told Joshua that Israel hath sinned and taken from Jericho the accursed thing. This is why Israel “could not stand before their enemies” (Joshua 7:11-12).
3. Then God told Joshua to sanctify the people and to bring the people out according to their tribes to identify the individual who took of the accursed thing (Joshua 7:13-15).

D. The lessons in this prayer

1. It would seem that Joshua was upset with God, or at the least, frustrated with God. Joshua did not hide his heart from God. He came before God in all his anguish and frustration with the situation and was simply honest with God. He questioned God and told God the problems he had with God about what just transpired. We need to learn that we can express our emotions and feelings to God, in a reverential way. We do not need to hide our feelings from God. If we are upset with God, we can tell him and explain our thoughts to him.
2. Joshua went to God when he was in anguish and upset. We can talk to God in the midst of our struggles, sufferings, trials, pain, grief, anger.
3. Joshua did not possess the knowledge that God possessed and spoke to God out of that lack of knowledge. But because Joshua spoke to God, God was able to respond to Joshua and explain to him the knowledge that he lacked. God corrected Joshua because he prayed. There will be times when we pray that through our prayers, God will correct us and bring us in line with him. This is part of prayer, talking to God and allowing him to work in our hearts and teach us.

III. 1 SAMUEL 1:10-11 – HANNAH TOOK THE “BITTERNESS OF HER SOUL” TO THE LORD IN PRAYER.

A. The setting – 1 Samuel 1:1-10

1. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:2).
2. He went yearly to worship and sacrifice unto the Lord in Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:3).
3. His wife Peninnah had sons and daughters (1 Samuel 1:4) but God had shut up Hannah’s womb so that she was barren (1 Samuel 1:5-6).
4. Each year as the family went to Shiloh, Peninnah provoked Hannah because she was barren causing her to weep and not eat (1 Samuel 1:7).



5. Hannah rises up and goes to the temple to pray unto the Lord and weep sore (1 Samuel 1:9-10).
- B. The prayer – 1 Samuel 1:11
1. The part of Hannah’s prayer that is recorded is her vow unto the Lord. It is important to note that this is not all that she prayed. Verse 12 says that she “continued praying before the LORD”.
 2. Hannah calls God’s attention with “O”.
 3. She addressed God as “LORD of hosts”. God is above all the hosts of heaven and earth (Isaiah 6:5, Ephesians 4:6, Colossians 2:16-17) and Hannah is exalting God by addressing him as such.
 4. Hannah has four specific requests of God:
 - a. She wanted God to “look on the affliction of thine handmaid”.
 - b. She wanted God to “remember me”.
 - c. She wanted God to “not forget thine handmaid”.
 - d. She requested God to “give unto thine handmaid a man child”.
 5. If God would do those things for Hannah, then she would do the following for God:
 - a. She would give the man child “unto the LORD all the days of his life”.
 - b. She promised that “there shall no razor come upon his head”.
- C. The answer to the prayer – 1 Samuel 1:19-20
1. Elkanah and his family returned to their house.
 2. Elkanah knew his wife, Hannah.
 3. Then “the LORD remembered her”.
 4. Hannah then conceived and “bare a son”.
 5. She called his name Samuel “Because I have asked him of the LORD”.
- D. The lessons in the prayer
1. In the deepest of sorrow in Hannah’s life she went to the Lord. The scripture says Hannah’s heart was “grieved” (verse 8), that she “was in bitterness of soul” (verse 10), that she was in “affliction” (verse 11), that she was “a woman of a sorrowful spirit” (verse 15), and that she prayed “out of the abundance of my complaint and grief” (verse 17).



- a. The only thing that Hannah could do in response to her great bitterness of soul, affliction, and sorrow was come before God and “poured out my soul before the LORD” (verse 15).
 - b. There are times in life where other people may be able to comfort us in our pain but ultimately the Lord is the only one who can know our deepest griefs and help us.
 - c. Hannah did not hide her pain and sorrow from Elkanah but God was the only one to whom she was able to turn to pour out her soul before.
 - d. This prayer reminds us that God is our ultimate source of comfort and who we should turn to with our heartache (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
2. Hannah brought her bitterness to the Lord rather than letting it fester.
- a. Peninnah would continually provoke Hannah because she was barren whereas the Lord had allowed Peninnah to have sons and daughters.
 - b. Hannah had every reason to be bitter and she did have bitterness in her heart.
 - c. What makes this an example for us is that Hannah did not harbor this bitterness but when it welled up in her she poured it out to God.
 - d. There is no indication in the scripture that Hannah ever retaliated to Peninnah’s provoking, she simply took it to God and left it there.
3. She vowed a vow unto the Lord if he would grant her request. We should only make promises to God that we truly intend to keep. We should also not make foolish promises without considering the ramifications such as Jephthah did (Judges 11:30). Scripture says if we make a vow unto the Lord that we should not defer to keep the vow (Ecclesiastes 5:4).
4. Hannah continued in prayer. The scripture only records a portion of her prayer. Sometimes when we are in bitterness of soul, it will take much time in communion with the Lord.
5. Hannah prayed in her heart. Prayer can be audible or it can be something internal in our hearts. The Lord God does not need us to speak audibly in order to hear our prayers. He “searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts (1 Chronicles 28:9).
6. After the Lord answered her prayer and she brought Samuel to the temple, she prays and praises God for answering her prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10). We are quick to ask of God but when he provides, we often fail to then thank and praise him. He is worthy of our praise.



- a. Furthermore, 1 Samuel 2:1-10 is referred to as a prayer in verse 1 but the whole prayer is praise to God and there is no request made at all.
- b. Prayer is not simply asking something of God.

IV. NEHEMIAH 9:5-38 – THE PUBLIC PRAYER OF PRAISE TO GOD FOR HISTORICAL EVENTS

A. The setting – Nehemiah 8:1-18, Nehemiah 9:1-4

1. This was a great time of revival in Israel's history.
2. Upon the first day of the month, all the people gathered themselves together in Jerusalem and asked Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses to be read unto them (Nehemiah 8:1).
3. They read in the book of the law of Moses from morning until midday and the people were attentive and worshipped the Lord (Nehemiah 8:2-6).
4. They went away that day in mirth because they had understood the words that were declared unto them (Nehemiah 8:12).
5. On the second day of that month, they gathered again and found written in the law of Moses that they were to dwell in booths and keep that feast (Nehemiah 8:13-15).
6. So, the people went and prepared and kept the feast of booths (Nehemiah 8:16-18).
7. In the 24th day of this same month they were all assembled again with fasting, with sackclothes and earth upon them (Nehemiah 9:1) and having separated all the strangers from them and confessed their sins and iniquities of their fathers (Nehemiah 9:2).
8. They read in the book of the law of Moses for a fourth part of the day, and another fourth part they confessed and worshipped the Lord (Nehemiah 9:3).

B. The prayer – Nehemiah 9:5-38

1. This prayer begins mid-sentence. The Levites addressed the people commanding them to "Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever:" and almost in response to their own command they turned from talking to the people to talking to God.
2. They then turned their attention to God and said "and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise."
3. The prayer begins with praise unto God in verses five and six.



4. Then the Levites proceed to recount to God the history of Israel in verses seven through thirty-two, beginning with the promise that God made to Abraham (Nehemiah 9:7-8).
5. This section of the prayer recounts to God the failures, sins, rebellions, and chastisement of the children of Israel.
6. It is also rife with describing God's marvelous might and all his wonderful works that he did for the children of Israel.
7. In verse thirty-two we see a change in the prayer to the present situation of the people. The Levites make one request of God to "let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day."
8. They end the prayer by explaining to God their present situation and that they "are in great distress" (Nehemiah 9:37) and that they are making a sure covenant.

C. The lessons in the prayer

1. The first lesson we see is how simple and easy it is to enter into prayer with the Almighty God. At one moment they were talking to the people and before even finishing that sentence they are talking to God. Prayer is just as easy and simple as speaking to a person that is before us.
2. In this prayer, the Levites largely consider the past versus something future that they need God's help with. They looked back and readily acknowledged the sins, wickedness, and shortcomings of Israel and all the while acknowledged God's faithfulness, mercy, and forgiveness. How often do we look back and consider our shortcomings and wickedness and contrast it with God's faithfulness and mercy?
3. They called attention to all that God had done for Israel over the many years which is glorifying to God and acknowledges all that he did for them. They had not forgotten how good God was to them.
4. There are twenty-four sentences in this prayer and there seems to be only one that has a request in it which can be found in verse thirty-two. There are 1,213 words in this prayer and only 48 of those words are a request of God. This equates to 4% of this prayer is asking something of God. Are we too focused on making requests of God?
5. Just like these Levites, we need to look back in our own lives and continually praise the Lord for all that he has done for us. We should not praise God one time for something he has done for us and then never praise him again for it.



Scripture teaches us that we should be continually glorifying God for the things he has done.

6. Seven times in six verses do the Levites praise God for his mercy. 25% of the sentences in this prayer give God glory for his mercy. This prayer is full of direct praise and reverence for God. Praise for his mercy, his dealings with Israel, praise for his character, and praise for his attributes. How much of our prayers are praise unto God? Too much of our focus in prayer is what God can do for us rather than praising God for who he is and what he has done.
7. Our praise of God should not be restricted to a one-time praise of a recently answered prayer. We should regularly look back over our lives and praise God for all that we see he has done and all that he has provided. Part of our praise to God is acknowledging all that he has done and this does not have to be limited to just our own lifetime. We can praise God for any number of things throughout history.

V. PSALM 109 – DAVID’S PRAYER FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF HIS ENEMIES

A. The prayer

1. David immediately opened this prayer with a direct request of God, “Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise;” (Psalm 109:1).
2. The justification given for his request (Psalm 109:2-5)
 - a. The mouth of the wicked and deceitful were against David with a lying tongue (Psalm 109:2).
 - b. These enemies compassed David about with words of hatred and fought against him without cause (Psalm 109:3).
 - c. David showed them love and they rewarded him by being his adversary (Psalm 109:4).
 - d. The enemy rewarded David evil for good (Psalm 109:5).
 - e. The enemy would not shew mercy but persecuted and sought to slay David in the brokenness of his heart (Psalm 109:16).
3. David’s focus on and requests for his enemies in his prayer.
 - a. Set a wicked man over him and let Satan stand at his right hand (Psalm 109:6).
 - b. Let him be condemned and let his prayer become sin (Psalm 109:7).
 - c. Let his days be few and let another take his office (Psalm 109:8).



- d. Let his children be fatherless and let his wife be a widow (Psalm 109:9).
 - e. Let his children continually be vagabonds and let his children seek bread out of desolate places (Psalm 109:10).
 - f. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath and let strangers spoil his labour (Psalm 109:11).
 - g. Let none extend mercy to him and let there not be any to favour his fatherless children (Psalm 109:12).
 - h. Let his posterity be cut off and let the name of his following generation be cut off (Psalm 109:13).
 - i. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out (Psalm 109:14).
 - j. Let them (his father's and mother's iniquity and sin) be before the Lord continually that their memory may be cut off (Psalm 109:15).
 - k. Let cursing come unto him and blessing be far from him (Psalm 109:17).
 - l. Let cursing clothe him and come into his inward parts (Psalm 109:18).
 - m. Let cursing be unto him as a garment which covereth him continually (Psalm 109:19).
 - n. Let them be clothed with shame and let them cover themselves with their own confusion (Psalm 109:29).
4. David's focus on and requests for himself in his prayer.
- a. Do for me for thy name's sake and deliver thou me (Psalm 109:21).
 - b. I am poor and needy and my heart is wounded (Psalm 109:22).
 - c. I am weak from fasting and my flesh faileth of fatness (Psalm 109:24).
 - d. Help me and save me according to thy mercy (Psalm 109:26).
 - e. Bless me and let me rejoice (Psalm 109:28).
5. The conclusion of David's prayer.
- a. I will praise the Lord and praise him among the multitude (Psalm 109:30).
 - b. God will stand for me and save me (Psalm 109:31).
- B. The lessons in the prayer
1. We have previously studied how our initial purpose in prayer is to pray for the good of our enemies (Psalm 35:13-14).



2. Yet, there comes a point where our enemies are unrelenting and our prayer needs to change from their good to their destruction.
 - a. Psalm 109 and Psalm 35 both wonderfully exemplify this truth for us. It is not ungodly for us to pray that the Lord would destroy those that oppose us as we serve the Lord.
 - b. David's requests for his enemies are extreme but that does not make them ungodly. Remember that "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11).
 - c. God also had the Israelites destroy men, women, and children of the ungodly peoples inhabiting Canaan because they were wicked. This is hard for us to accept and we often find ourselves making excuse for God when pressed about such issues.
 - d. God gives all men opportunity to seek him but there comes a point when they have rejected him for the last time and then they are rewarded with his wrath. God is merciful but he is also righteous and "a man of war" (Exodus 15:3).
 - e. We must accept the God of the Bible as he states he is and not as we want him to be and sadly much of Christianity would rather make God after their own desires. We can be grateful that God is as he is because this makes him just and trustworthy and perfect in all his ways. The righteous will be rewarded and the evil punished.
3. David's desire in all this was that the name of the Lord would be upheld and not slandered (Psalm 109:21). The Lord is glorified and his name magnified when his enemies are destroyed (Psalm 109:27). We want our enemies removed from our lives but even more we should be angry and want them removed for the sake of the name of the Lord.
4. Finally, we see how that David had full faith in the Lord for what he was requesting (Psalm 109:31). When the Lord destroyed his enemies then David said he would praise the Lord and praise him among the multitude (Psalm 109:30). We must come to the Lord in faith (Hebrews 11:6) and never fail to give him his due praise, and publicly!