

Old Testament Prayers

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAYER IN OLD TESTAMENT DISPENSATIONS

- A. Prayer (indepth definition) - prar (deesis, proseuche, enteuxis); “need, indigence, want, privation, penury; a seeking, asking, entreating, entreaty to God or to man; King James Word Usage - Total: 19, prayer 12, supplication 6, request 1 (Thayer's Lexicon, p. 126).
 - 1. The Old Testament places prayer in connection with other religious acts, such as sacrifices, vows, fasts, and mourning ceremonies. "To pray" is expressed in Hebrew by 'athar or he'ethir, a verb which means “to sacrifice.”
 - 2. More frequently hith pallel is used, from a root palal whose original meaning is “to make incisions.”
- B. In the Bible prayer is used in both simpler and more complex manners, wider and narrow usages
 - 1. First, it is supplication for benefits either for one's self (petition) or for others (intercession).
 - 2. Second, it is an act of worship to God.
 - 3. Supplication is at the heart of it, for prayer always springs out of a sense of need and a belief that God will respond
 - 4. Praise, confession, and thanksgiving are necessary elements of prayer
- C. Biblical history and development of prayer
 - 1. In the Patriarchal period, men called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26, 12:8, 21:33)
 - a. Prayer is simple, familiar, and direct, occasionally a two-way conversation (Gen. 15:1-5, 17:1-22, 18:23-33, 24:12-15)
 - b. Occasionally associated with sacrifice (Gen. 12:8, 13:4, 26:25)
 - c. Prayer is not directed or Divinely limited in structure, but appears to be an expression of the daily lives of the Patriarchs
 - d. It was in post Exilic times that prayer was regarded as a meritorious service, as advocated by the Pharisees
 - 2. Israel before the exile: prayer still retains many of the simple features of the Patriarchal type (Ex. 3:4; Num. 11:11-15; Judges 6:13, 11:30; 1Sam. 1:11; 2Sam 15:8; Psalm 66:13).
 - a. However, the free, frank access of the private individual to God gives way to the mediation of the priest (Deut. 21:5, 26:3), the intercession of the prophet (Ex. 32:11-13; 1Sam. 7:5-13), the ordered approach of tabernacle and temple services (Ex. 40; 1Kings 8).
 - b. The Law of Moses says very little about the authorized structure of prayer, differing from post-exile Judaism
 - c. The exile introduced synagogue worship necessitating that Jews move away from temple centric worship overseen by priests to the more individualized synagogue worship instructed by rabbis

- d. Suffering from the exile drove the people to seek God more earnestly than ever before; this continued during the oppression under the Seleucids and Romans in the inter-testamental period
 - e. Prayer began to transition from the nearly exclusive role of the priest (1Sam. 13:8-14) to the individual Jew (Luke 11:1).
 - 3. The prayer Psalms stand apart in an examination of Old Testament prayers, both on account of the large period they cover in Bible history and because they are inspired instruction.
 - a. Speaking generally it may be said that they represent the highest form of prayer in the Dispensation of Moses: the most intense craving for pardon, purity, protection, fellowship with God, and all spiritual blessings (Psalm 51, 130, 42:2, 63:1, 84:2).
- D. Structures of Old Testament prayers
 - 1. The Old Testament prescribes no external ceremonies or postures in prayer as occur among the later Jews.
 - 2. The petitioner stood or prostrated himself as did subjects before kings.
 - 3. The hands were extended to express purity, and were lifted up to heaven or toward the sanctuary in intercession.
 - 4. Prayer was performed in any place, although the sanctuary was considered the most appropriate.
 - 5. In early times prayer accompanied the offer of sacrifice; later it is mentioned expressly as an integral part of daily service.
- E. General observations of Old Testament prayer
 - 1. The method of prayer changed over the millennia of the three dispensations:
 - a. In the early Patriarchal age, men occasionally conversed directly with God
 - b. In the latter part of the Patriarchal age, prayer seems to be associated with sacrifice, implying that it was necessary to offer a sacrifice as an element of prayer
 - c. In the pre-exile period of the Law of Moses, prayers seemed to be limited to the office of priest or prophet
 - d. Among post-exile Jews, prayer becomes part of everyone's life, and is eventually called by the Pharisees one of the three great services of a devout Jew
 - e. In the dispensation of Christ, prayer is the privilege and duty of every Christian
 - 2. It appears that the content of prayer has not changed at all over the dispensations, because the needs of men have not changed
 - 3. God's responses to prayer have not changed: yes, no, and have patience; however, His methods of responding have changed: miracles, Providence, law
- F. While much can be learned from study of Old Testament prayer, Christians should rejoice in the blessing and freedom of prayer in Christ
 - 1. Christians should pray often, at length, and about everything

II. EXAMPLES OF OLD TESTAMENT PRAYERS

(Each prayer manifests characteristics that illuminate how one can pray acceptably. Private prayer is seldom as structured and limited as public prayer. It is important that the petitioner realize this, thus enabling his private prayers to be more comprehensive and efficacious.)

- A. Abraham's Intercession for Sodom - Gen. 18:23-33
 - 1. Asking troubled, tormented questions; manifesting an evolving understanding of God who was in the process of revealing His nature
- B. Daniel's Prayer - Dan. 9:4-19
 - 1. How to pray for forgiveness; prayer becomes an opportunity to learn more about God when He says no
- C. David's Prayer for Protection - Psalm 3
 - 1. Prayer that is random in order and emotionally driven
- D. David's Prayer for Favor - Psalm 4
 - 1. A bedtime prayer; seeking pleasant thoughts before sleep, reserving unpleasant or difficult matters for the day
- E. David's Prayer for Guidance - Psalm 5
 - 1. An imprecatory prayer; man does not know what to pray for; God determines what must be done
- F. David's Prayer for Mercy - Psalm 6
 - 1. A prayer perhaps offered by a depressed person
- G. David's Prayer from Persecution - Psalm 7
 - 1. Open, honest effort to consider all perspectives, including his own responsibility in the matter
- H. David's Prayer for God's Help - Psalm 13
 - 1. An intense appeal from someone who appears to be approaching the limits of his strength
- I. David's Prayer - Psalm 23
 - 1. A prayer of gratitude for a whelming feeling of security
- J. David's Prayer for Trust - Psalm 25
 - 1. He knows God can be trusted, but he is wrestling with fear and doubt
- K. David's Prayer and Fasting - Psalm 35
 - 1. Demonstrates that private prayer may be redundant and lengthy; God does not become weary when His children are repetitive
- L. David's Prayer for Forgiveness - Psalm 51
 - 1. Prayer may be hyperbolic and emotionally driven
- M. Elijah's Prayer for the Widow's Son - 1Kings 17:20-22
 - 1. Begins with grief and ends with reverence
- N. Elijah's Prayer at Mount Carmel - 1Kings 18:36-39
 - 1. A prayer that unselfconsciously instructs collateral hearers
- O. Elisha's Prayer - 2Kings 6:15-18
 - 1. Prayer that is brief and to the point
- P. Esther and the Nation of Israel Prayer and Fasting - Esther 4:16
 - 1. Coordinated prayer by multiple persons apart from an assembly
- Q. Ezra Prayer and Fasting - Ezra 8:21-23

1. A prayer for help precipitated by an error in judgment; a prayer to make good one's profession of faith
- R. Hannah's Prayer for a Child - 1Sam. 1:10-12
 1. Silent prayer (Ken Berdine: "I hope it is scriptural to pray silently, because after praying for an hour my voice gets tired.")
- S. Hannah's Prayer of Thanksgiving - 1Sam. 2:1-10
 1. The prayers of women are no less profound and eloquent than the prayers of men
- T. Hezekiah's Prayer for Health - 2Kings 20:1-6
 1. Bargaining with the Lord by referencing his own good works
- U. Jacob's Deliverance from Esau - Gen. 32:9-12
 1. Pleading the promises of God; reminding God of His promises and asking Him to fulfill them
- V. Jacob at Peniel - Gen. 32:24-30
 1. Prayer as a means of self-examination
- W. Jehoshaphat for Deliverance - 2Chron. 20
 1. God chose to hear and answer the sincere prayer of a flawed man
- X. Jonah for Deliverance - Jonah 2:2-9
 1. There is no place in this world where God cannot hear prayer; God does not judge prayers of desperation as self-serving
- Y. Moses Intercession for His People - Ex. 32:11-13, 30-32
 1. He remonstrates with God, rebukes the people, and then offers himself as a propitiation
- Z. Moses Intercession for Miriam - Num. 12:13
 1. Intercessory prayer for one in spite of her efforts to harm the petitioner
- AA. Moses for Guidance - Exodus 33:12-20
 1. Prayer expressing helplessness and dependency
- BB. Moses and the Promised Land - Deut. 3:24-29
 1. When God says no to an earnest prayer
- CC. Moses and Israel - Deut. 9:26-29
 1. Prayer as a means of reasoning with God at length
- DD. Moses 40 Day Prayer - Deut. 9:18-20
 1. Prayer prolonged over an extended period of time; Luke 18:1-8
- EE. Nehemiah's Prayer and Fasting - Neh. 1:3-11
 1. Prayer that quotes the prayers of others; Ezekiel and Amos
- FF. Nehemiah and Israel Prayer and Fasting - Neh. 9:1
 1. Assembled for formal prayer is not pageantry
- GG. Samson for Strength - Judges 16:28
 1. Self-serving prayer is occasionally answered by God when it serves His ordained purposes
- HH. Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom - 1Kings 3:6-9
 1. An exemplary unselfish prayer
- II. Solomon's Prayer to Dedicate the Temple - 1Kings 8:23-61
 1. A lengthy, comprehensive public prayer