

PRAY ALWAYS

A Catholic Study of Prayer for Inmates

Part 1: Prayer in the Old Testament

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*“Then he told them
a parable about the
necessity for them to
pray always without
becoming weary.”*

Luke 18:1

Nihil Obstat: Reverend Thomas Knoebel
Censor
April 13, 2010

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Part 1: Prayer in the Old Testament

Study Instructions

This Study contains:

- 1) *Introduction to Prayer*
- 2) *Study Sections on Prayer*
- 3) *Review Test* pages

Begin the Study:

- 1) Read *Introduction to Prayer*.
Do the *Review Test* page at the end of the study booklet.

- 2) Read all *sections* of the study.
Do the *Review Test* pages at the end of the study booklet.

Instructions:

- Tear out carefully only the pages called *Review Test* at the end of the study booklet after you have completed them.
- Send these *Review Test* pages to Dismas Ministry, Be sure to add your name and address on each sheet. If the name/address box isn't big enough, put your name/address on the back of each sheet.
- Your *Review Tests* will be reviewed by Dismas Ministry.
- You will receive a *Certificate* after completing this study.

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Introduction

We Are Called to Pray

“Call to me, and I will answer you” (Jeremiah 33:3).

“I Want to Pray”

When someone says *“I want to pray”* these words usually come from a very deep, personal place inside them—*from the heart*. Why they want to pray may be hard to put into words. Maybe life has become sad or painful. When things are going well unfortunately we do not think about praying, even though we should be grateful for the blessings we have received. But when life hands us a tragedy or crisis, it shakes us to the core and we turn to God for help.



Sometimes people who say they *want to pray* are really saying that God expects them to pray. They are afraid that bad things will happen if they do not pray. Some people feel guilty because they are not honoring God. For others, life feels *out of balance* if they are not praying every day. Their time is filled with work and taking care of what others need. The busier they are, the more they feel something is missing. Those who see the suffering of others, especially family and friends, turn to God for comfort and strength. Some people feel hopeless and lost. Like Moses and the psalms they complain and ask God *“why”* or *“where are you?”* In every case, however, God exists and welcomes their prayers.

The Bible and learning how to pray

Although Jesus told us to *“pray always”* learning to pray can feel as hard as starting to climb a mountain. We need help to find our way. Although the need to pray comes from deep inside us, we need help to get in touch with the inner place where we stand before God and speak to Him. As followers of Christ we can turn to fellow believers for guidance on how to pray. But above all, we can turn to God’s *Word*. In the Bible we will find many wonderful examples of how God’s people prayed. Besides the patriarchs and Moses, or kings and prophets, we also find examples in the first disciples who knew and followed Jesus, including Mary his mother. They *“...devoted themselves with one accord to prayer..”* (Acts 1:14). But above all, we see in Jesus the best example of what true prayer is. The gospels often describe how Jesus prayed (Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 22:41, John 17:1).

Forms of Prayer

In the Catholic tradition there are five forms of prayer revealed in the Bible: *adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise*.

Adoration

Adoring the Creator who made us is our most basic attitude before God. We did not create ourselves, only God has the power to share his life with us. We humbly recognize that God is far greater and more powerful than we are. Psalm 95: 6 expresses this prayer of adoration: *“Enter, let us bow down in worship;/let us kneel before the LORD who made us.”*

Petition

God’s greatness is also his goodness. That is why as his creatures we turn to God for help in all our needs. As in the Bible, we ask God for help, sometimes pleading and crying out for help: *“Hear the sound of my pleading when I cry to you...”* (Psalm 7: 2). Life can be hard and we are not in charge of all that happens to us. So we look to God for help, guidance, strength and deliverance. At times we may suffer the consequences of our own mistakes, so we come to God humbly to ask for his forgiveness, trusting in his love and goodness. Jesus teaches us to: *“Ask and it will be given to you”* (Matthew 7:7) but always in accord with God’s plan: *“...your will be done!”* (Matthew 26:42).



Intercession

Because we believe in God’s love and trust in his mercy we ask him to help others, especially with their spiritual needs, as Paul does: *“May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless...pray for us [too]”* (1 Thessalonians 5: 23-25). In the same way we pray for others, even for our enemies, as Jesus taught: *“...pray for those who persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44).

Thanksgiving

God’s goodness in creating us and watching over us is the greatest reason to give him thanks: *“With my whole being I sing/ endless praise to you./ O LORD, my God,/ forever will I give you thanks”* (Psalm 30:13). The greatest prayer of the Church is the Eucharist which means *thanksgiving*. Together with Christ our head we offer thanks to God for his goodness, especially for setting us free through the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Praise

Although we are grateful to God for what he has done for us, we also find joy simply in who he is—the Creator who is our beginning and our end. Psalm 150 is a wonderful example of giving joyful praise to God: *“Let everything that has breath/give praise to the LORD!”* (v.6). In heaven we will join all those who have gone before us in giving praise and glory to God.

We are body and soul

Prayer is as necessary to the soul as food and water are to our bodies. In a way, living *without* prayer is like being starving our spirits. In order to be fully alive, to learn and grow in the spirit,

we must pray. One time after Jesus had gone without food, his apostles invited him to eat something. He replied: *“I have food to eat of which you do not know”* (John 4:32). For Jesus, feeding his soul was as necessary as feeding his body. We also need to quench our thirst for God, as Jesus said to the woman at the well: *“If you knew the gift of God...he would have given you living water”* (John 4:10).

The truth is, we *pray* because we are *called to pray*. It is our nature to pray. We are made of body and soul but too often we only take care of our bodies, and forget to feed our souls. That is why we grow tired and sad. Our soul is starving for the spiritual food that God provides.

Prayer is loving

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 tells how God appealed to the hearts of his people with a special command of love as part of their covenant with him:

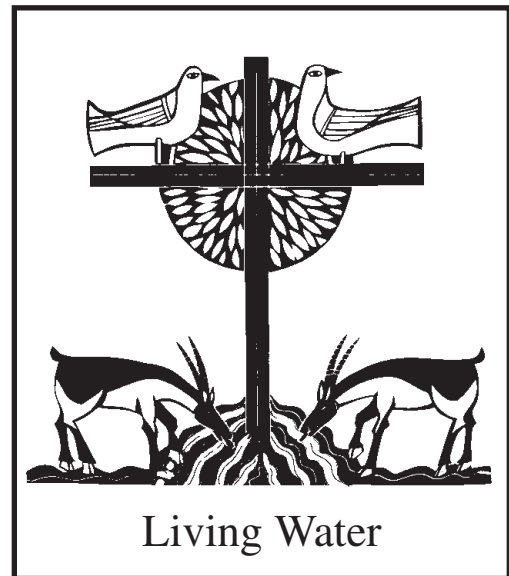
“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.”

This commandment revealed the great love of God’s heart for his people. It called them to remain close to him and speak with him often. Like people in love, they put signs of their love on their wrists or foreheads, and marked their doors and gates to remember the One they loved and who loved them. This shows how prayer also can include symbols and actions as a way to express love.

Prayer is humble

A wise and holy person once said: *“Prayer is raising one’s mind and heart to God, or requesting good things from God.”* (St. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* - The True Faith). But as we lift our minds and hearts to God, what should our attitude be? The truth is, we are speaking to the creator of all things who made us from nothing. We are speaking to One who *searches our hearts* (Jeremiah 17:10) for nothing is hidden from God. It is said that *humility is truth*, so the only real attitude to have is the truth that we are God’s creation—made in his image and likeness. Everything we have and are we owe to God’s goodness.

Jesus reminded us of God’s goodness when he said: *“There is only One who is good”* (Matthew 19:17). He told the rich young man who asked how to gain eternal life that we must approach God with humble hearts. St. Augustine said that every human being *“is a beggar before God”* (Sermon 56). We must empty ourselves of any false values we hold, letting go of selfishness as well as self-hatred and despair. A basket full of stones, can’t be filled with bread. Some saints used the Greek word *kenosis* for this emptying process. Even Christ emptied himself and became poor



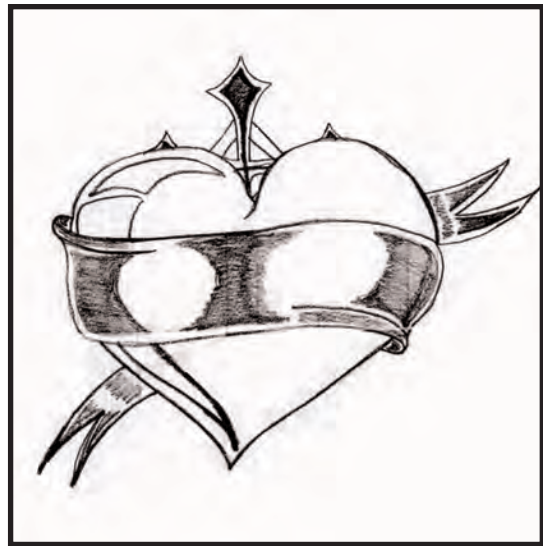
for our sake. He died on the cross so that we could be filled with God's gift of salvation (Philippians 2:5-11).

The heart of prayer

Whether we pray silently or with words and actions, we must strive to pray with our *whole heart*. As the Bible teaches:

"...love and serve the LORD, your God, with all your heart and all your soul" (Deuteronomy 10: 12).

No matter where we live or where we are, our heart is our center. It is unseen by anyone else except God who made us, knows us and loves us. In our hearts we decide what is right and wrong, what leads to life or death. We stand before God as we are and agree to accept his love. It is where we *"...hear the word of God and act on it"* (Luke 8:21). We surrender our hearts, loving as God loves and giving generous service to God and his people.



" 'Come' says my heart, 'seek God's face' "
(Psalm 27:8).

Prayer is a gift

Prayer is a relationship with God who is *"our Father"* (Matthew 6:9). He loves us as his children and knows how to give exactly what we need. As Jesus taught in *Matthew 7:11*: *"If you then...know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him."* Prayer puts us in touch with God who is not only the Father, but also the Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, prayer introduces us to a new way of living with the Trinity. This is possible because we are members of Christ's body through baptism. Prayer is like breathing or eating. When Jesus said *"pray always"* he meant that it becomes a habit of being in God's presence. Not only do we need God to keep us alive, but we need his love to make us happy. Without prayer we are not really living. A life of prayer is a gift: *"...this is not from you; it is the gift of God"* (Ephesians 2:8). With total trust as God's children, let us ask for this wonderful gift from God. He is our *Abba (papa)* who gives *"good things to those who ask him"* (Matthew 7:11). Above all, he will give us the Spirit who *"...comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought,..."* (Romans 8:26). As we learned earlier, *"...prayer is requesting good things from God."*

We are never alone

We are never alone when we pray. We are joined to Christ who is the head of all his members, both the living and the dead. When we feel alone, we can find comfort by recalling that God is everywhere and we belong to the family of God. Even when we feel separated from others, we are one in the Spirit who comforts us as we pray. *"...it is I who comfort you"* (Isaiah 51:12).

Postures of Prayer: Praying with Body and Soul

God has created us to worship him all that we have—our minds, our souls and *our bodies*. Therefore the Bible shows us at least 6 ways that people use their bodies to pray.

1. *Kneeling*: There are many examples in the Bible of people praying to God on their knees. In Daniel 6:10 we read that he prayed on his knees three times a day. In Acts 7: 60 Stephen fell on his knees and prayed before he was stoned to death. In Acts 9:40 Peter knelt before the body of Tabitha and prayed for her return to life. Other examples can be found in Acts 20: 36 and Ephesians. 3:14. Kneeling was a way to express reverence and surrender to God.

2. *Standing*: Standing before God in prayer was also very common in the Bible, maybe even more than kneeling. In 2 Chronicles 20:13 Jehoshaphat and the people stood up in the house of the Lord and prayed for liberation. Other examples are found in 1 Samuel 1:26, Job 30:20 and Esther 5:2. In the New Testament Jesus condemned the Pharisee's pride during prayer but not the practice of standing (Matthew 6:5). Jesus also said to the disciples, "*When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance*" (Mark 11:25). Standing in prayer expresses the freedom we have to approach God We recognize that he is the creator of all things and as his children we come before him to ask for guidance, blessings, and favors.

3. *Extending Hands*: Along with standing in prayer holding up or extending both hands was a common way of praying in the Bible. This found in this and many other psalms: "*I will lift up my hands, calling on your name*" (Psalm 63:5), and in other places like Lamentations 2:19: "*Life up your hands to him.*" Extending their hands also was used by the early Christians as shown in an ancient painting in the catacombs of Rome.

4. *Sitting*: Sitting down while praying was not as common in the Bible, but there is a good example when David "*went in and sat before the LORD and said 'Who am I, Lord God...?' "* (2 Samuel 7:18). Sitting was also the posture of those who were seeking instructions from God or prophets like Elisha as in 2 Kings 4:38 when "*the prophets were seated before him.*" In Ezekiel 33:31 "*they sit down before you and hear your words...*"

5. *Lying Down*: When lying down, or *prostrating*, people placed their bodies flat on the ground, with their faces down and with arms stretched forward or out to the side (like a cross). There are many examples of *prostration* in the Bible: (1 Kings 1:47; Mark 14:35). It expresses honor or surrender to someone who is greater (1 Samuel. 28:14; 2 Samuel 14:4). It also is used to worship God (2 Chronicles 20:18). It means that God is the Creator of human life and the One who preserves it (Numbers 16:45; Joshua 7:6). In Revelation 4 we read about the vision of heavenly worship in which "*the twenty-four elders fall down before the one who sits on the throne and worship him, who lives forever and ever*" (v. 10). The Bible also describes how people prayed while lying down on their beds. In the stillness of the night they turned their minds and hearts to God: "*When I think of you upon my bed,/ through the night watches, I will recall/ That you indeed are my help...*" (Psalm 63:7).

6. *Bowing*: There also is plenty of evidence that bowing was commonly used in prayer. The psalmist invites those who worship to reverence God's temple:"*I bow low toward your holy temple...*" (Psalm 138: 2). Bowing also is joined with kneeling:"*Enter, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel...*" (Psalm 95:6).

Postures are important only if they express true reverence for God, and the devotion that is in our hearts. One posture is not enough to include everything we wish to express. That is why the Bible reveals many possibilities. Worshipping God with our bodies is also a worthy thing to do because Christ suffered with his body on the cross and his body rose from the grave to redeem us. Therefore we pray to God—not only in soul but also with our bodies that suffer and one day will rise victorious with Christ. It is important to note that all of these biblical gestures of prayer are used in the Catholic Mass or elsewhere in the Church's seven sacraments.

Prayer in Genesis

Praying in the Garden (Genesis 3: 8-13)

“When they heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. The LORD God then called... ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself’” (Genesis 3:8-10).

Genesis opens with the words “in the beginning.” This first book tells the story of the “fall” of our first parents. But it also describes how talking with God was a regular part of their life in the garden. Since *prayer means communicating with God and God with us*, this story also shows us how Adam and Eve spoke with their Creator. We can imagine Adam and Eve praising God in the midst of creation, as Psalm 104: 24 does:

*“How varied are your works, LORD!
In wisdom you have wrought them all;
the earth is full of your creatures”*



As they lived in the midst of all the wonders that God made, their hearts and minds went from the beauty of creation to the beauty of God:

*“Bless the LORD, my soul!
LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
You are clothed in majesty and glory...” (Psalm 104:1)*

Meeting together in the garden seemed to be something God did too: *“For the LORD takes delight in his people...”* (Psalm 149: 4). God came in the cool of the day to talk with them. It is wonderful to realize that even though they were his creatures, God wanted to be with them and talk with them. So from this we learn that speaking with us is joyful for God too! We also learn that prayer begins with God who looks for us and calls to us. It is up to us to answer him!

There is even more to learn from this passage. It was not God, but Adam and Eve who changed. They tried to hide themselves because they began to see themselves differently; they no longer valued themselves and went from innocence to guilt. But when God created all things, including human beings, he looked on them as “good.” So the question is: why do we hide from God? In a real way, we stop hiding from God when we turn to Him in prayer.

When we pray we begin to see our value once more in the eyes of God. Our “work” in prayer is to believe that God loves us and forgives us. Daily prayer is like going to school everyday where we learn how good God is, and how valuable we are in the eyes of God who created us.

Abraham and the Test of Faith (Genesis 15: 1-18)

As we have learned, prayer is communicating with God and God with us. In this next passage of the Bible God and Abram (later changed to Abraham by God) communicate through words and actions. God visited Abram to renew the promise (covenant) he had made earlier, that he would give him children:

*“...this word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:
‘Fear not, Abram!
I am your shield;
I will make your reward very great’ ”*
(Genesis 15: 1).



Exactly how God spoke to Abram is not clear, but his message came in a vision. Abram was first told not to be afraid. This is what God and his messengers usually said when approaching a human being. It must have been a shock to hear this strange voice so God calms Abram by saying that he is a shield that protects him. Abram recovered quickly and asked God:

“... ‘O LORD God, what good will your gifts be, if I keep on being childless...?’ ” (Genesis 15: 2).

A lot of time had gone by since God promised Abram he would make him a great nation (Genesis 12). In the meantime Abram had grown old and still had no children. It was no wonder that Abram came up with the idea that one of his servants might become his heir. He suggested to God that his steward Eliezer might get his inheritance.

“ ‘See, you have given me no offspring, and so one of my servants will be my heir’ ” (Genesis 15: 3).

By this time Abram thought it was impossible to have a son of his own. That is why he thought that one of his servants would get his inheritance.

“Then the word of the LORD came to him: ‘No, that one shall not be your heir; your own issue shall be your heir’ ” (Genesis 15: 4).

God continued to make it clear that he was going to keep his promise. This must have been hard for Abram to imagine because of his age. But God went on to explain:

“He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so,’ he added, ‘shall your descendants be’ ” (Genesis 15: 5).

As Abram looked at all the stars spread across the night sky, God’s promise must have seemed awesome. In other words, his descendants would be too many to count. Most likely, Abram had no idea that God’s promise included not only the coming nation of Israel but also

the followers of Christ who also would inherit the promise God made that night.

“Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness” (Genesis 15: 6).

It is important to realize that this is the first time the word *“faith”* is mentioned in the Bible. The apostle Paul pointed to this same passage when he wrote about faith in his letter to the *Romans* (Chapter 4). The word means that Abram simply took God at His word. Perhaps that is a good definition of faith—*taking God at his word*. Abram trusted and believed in what God promised. He was a powerful example of what it means to have faith in God.

“He then said to him, ‘I am the LORD who brought you up from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession’ ” (Genesis 15 : 7).

God reminded Abram of what he had done for him in the past, bringing him and his family from Ur to a place he could call his own. God assured Abram that he was the One who had called him back then and was reminding him now of the promise he made.

“ ‘O Lord GOD,’ he asked, ‘how am I to know that I shall possess it?’ ” (Genesis 15: 8).

It seems fair that Abram asked God how this was going to happen. His question reminds us of how the mother of Jesus asked the angel: *“How can this be,...?”* (Luke 1:34). God did not explain it right away. Instead he asked Abram to prepare to offer him a sacrifice:

“He answered him, ‘Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.’ He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up” (Genesis 15: 9-10).

Except for the small birds, all the animals were divided in two. Each half was placed on the ground opposite the other. This was an ancient way that two people made a covenant. Both persons would walk between and around the parts as a way of sealing their agreement.

“Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram stayed with them” (Genesis 15: 11).

While God seemed absent for awhile, Abram did his best to protect the meat from the birds trying to eat it. All he could do was drive them away while he waited for God to show up. Where was God? Abram’s faith was tested severely as time dragged on and he grew tired.

“As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him” (Genesis 15: 12).

As the setting sun signaled the end of the day, doubts may have entered Abram’s mind.



Maybe he began to fear that he was a fool—an old, childless fool! Sometimes faith can be very close to doubt. Finally, Abram was surrounded by the darkness. Maybe the night reflected what was going on in his soul. No doubt he felt alone and powerless, a feeling those who have been placed in the hole may understand. Abraham’s experience also reminds us of the darkness expressed in Psalm 88:7: *“You have plunged me into the bottom of the pit,/ into the dark abyss.”* Finally God arrived and spoke to Abram:

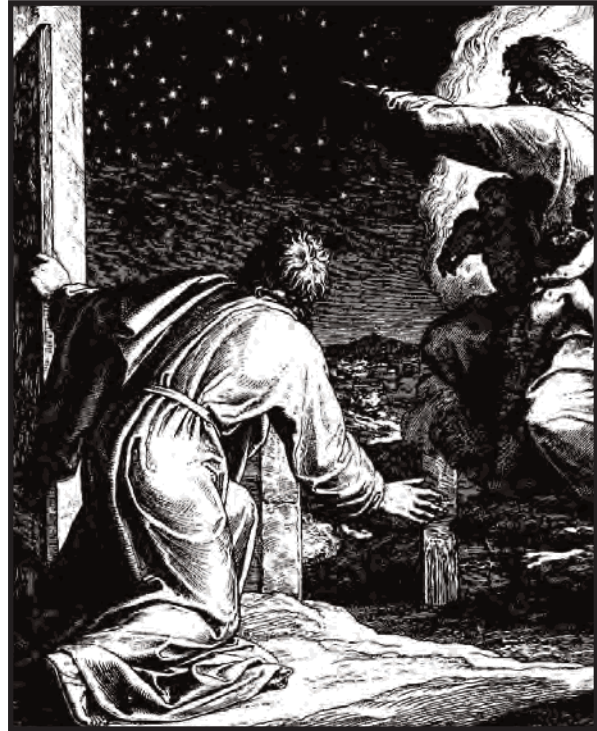
“ Know for certain that your descendants shall be aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years’ ” (Genesis 15: 13).

As if waiting in the darkness was not enough, God said something that must have tested Abram’s faith even more. God told him that his descendants would become slaves, but in the end they would be free. Then God assured Abram his friend:

“ You, however, shall join your forefathers in peace; you shall be buried at a contented old age’ ” (Genesis 15: 15).

Sometimes we find it hard to understand why God seems to act so slowly. But this story reminds us that God is infinitely wise and loving. He knows the right time to fulfill his promises.

“When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking brazier and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces” (Genesis 15: 17).



At last God sealed the covenant with Abram.

Smoke and fire passed between the carcasses Abram had faithfully protected. In the Bible fire is often a powerful sign of God’s presence. It seems to be alive yet without a body, giving light and warmth, but also burning things up. With this sign of his presence, God passed between the offerings and sealed their covenant. Abram’s faith had been tested and he remained faithful.

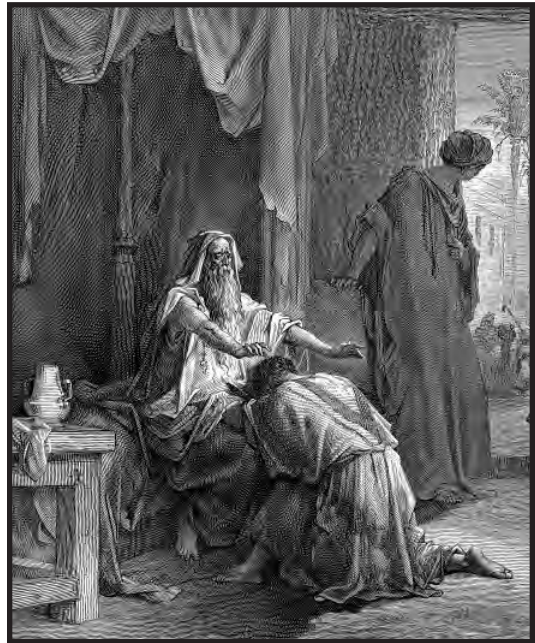
“It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I give this land,...’ ” (Genesis 15: 18).

God kept his promise: *“The LORD took note of Sarah as he had said he would; he did for her as he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time that God had stated. Abraham gave the name of Isaac to this son of his whom Sarah bore him”* (Genesis 21: 1-2). Abram and Sarah received a greater gift than their own son. From their descendants came the messiah, *Jesus Christ*. Sometimes God answers our prayer in a way we could not even imagine. We see our time but God sees all time and eternity. Sarah’s joy is also ours as she said: *“God has given me cause to laugh, and all who hear of it will laugh with me”* (v. 6). She teaches us that even laughter can be a joyful prayer when we are blessed by God’s goodness!

Jacob's Prayer: Wrestling with God (Genesis 32:9-32)

When Jacob was getting ready to meet his older brother Esau, he should have looked forward to the reunion. Instead, he was afraid because he thought he was walking into danger. Esau had good reason to be angry with Jacob because of how he tricked their father Isaac. Before he died Isaac gave Esau's special blessing to Jacob (*Genesis 27*). As a result, "*Esau bore Jacob a grudge because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, 'When the time of mourning for my father comes, I will kill my brother Jacob'*" (*Genesis 27:41*).

When their mother heard about it she told Jacob to run away and live with his uncle Laban, "*...[until your brother's anger against you subsides] and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send for you and bring you back. Must I lose both of you in a single day?'*" (*Genesis 27:45*).



Now it was years later, and Jacob was still afraid of what Esau might do when they met again. He had no idea if he was still angry with him or not. As the time for meeting Esau got closer he turned to God in prayer: "*O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac! You told me, O LORD, 'Go back to the land of your birth, and I will be good to you'*" (*Genesis 32:9*).

Jacob did not begin by focusing on himself or his problems. Instead he focused on God first. This showed his progress in how he approached God in prayer. Twenty years earlier his prayer was more self-centered. Back then he only bargained with God: "*If God remains with me, to protect me on this journey I am making and to give me enough bread to eat and clothing to wear, and I come back safe to my father's house, the LORD shall be my God'*" (*Genesis 28:20-21*).

That kind of prayer showed he still thought only of himself. Now Jacob began with God and how kind God had been even though he did not deserve it: "*I am unworthy of all the acts of kindness that you have loyally performed for your servant:...*" (*Genesis 32:11*).

Jacob humbly admitted that he did not deserve God's kindness. When he first ran away from home he had nothing but a staff. Now he had a large family and owned many animals. Only after humbling himself did Jacob make his request to God: "*Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau! Otherwise I fear that when he comes he will strike me down and slay the mothers and children'*" (*Genesis 32:12*).

Not only did Jacob pray for himself but he included his loved ones as well. We never pray alone. Whenever we pray we are united with the rest of God's people. There also is a saying that we should "*pray as if everything depended on God, and act as if everything depended on us.*" And that is what Jacob did. He started to prepare for the meeting with his brother—or at least

soften his brother's anger with all the gifts he would give him. He picked hundreds of cows and camels, goats and sheep from his herds and flocks.

“For Jacob reasoned, ‘If I first appease him with gifts that precede me, then later, when I face him, perhaps he will forgive me’ ” (Genesis 32: 21).

Then, after he sent his servants on ahead with all these gifts and settled his family in a camp for the night, *“...Jacob was left there alone”* (Genesis 32:25). Most likely Jacob wanted to be alone so he could think and pray. But instead of spending the night alone, a mysterious stranger appeared and Jacob wrestled with him all night until dawn started to break. Then, in order to end this struggle, the stranger *“...struck Jacob's hip at the socket, so that the hip socket was wrenched as they wrestled”* (Genesis 32: 26). But Jacob would not let go until this strange man agreed to bless him. What happened next was very interesting:



“ ‘What is your name?’ the man asked. He answered, ‘Jacob.’ Then the man said, ‘You shall no longer be spoken of as Jacob, but as Israel, because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed.’ Jacob then asked him, ‘Do tell me your name, please.’ He answered, ‘Why should you want to know my name?’ With that, he bade him farewell. Jacob named the place Peniel, ‘Because I have seen God face to face’ he said, ‘yet my life has been spared’ ” (Genesis 32:28-31).

Who was this strange wrestler and what does this story mean? It seems clear that it was a messenger from God in a human form. Also for Jacob, it was a moment of real truth. In some ways, like any wrestling match, he was struggling as much with himself as with his opponent. Jacob was afraid he would be killed by his own brother. He also was afraid his loved ones might die. He had wronged Esau and now his past was catching up with him. It was Jacob's hour of decision—should he run away or face up to what he had done in the past? He also had to face the sad truth that had put his own family in danger. Jacob wrestled with some very tough questions: *who am I? what have I done to myself and to those I love?*

But Jacob was a fighter, and after hours of wrestling he did not quit until his spiritual visitor put him out of joint. Nobody could keep on wrestling in that condition, so all Jacob could do was hang on to his opponent while he pinned him down. Jacob must have guessed that this was no ordinary visitor and that he had the answers to his questions. At last Jacob said to him, *“I will not let you go until you bless me”* (Genesis 32: 27). It is interesting that God's messenger responded with another question, *“What is your name?”* (Genesis 32:28)

This also is no ordinary question. It is like a search-light shining in the soul of Jacob as if to

say, *“Never mind who I am. The real question is: who are you?”* It is a question that God asks us when we pray too. God knew Jacob's name but Jacob needed to remember his past. He needed to take a good look at himself. Then the new self could take the place of the old one. This only happened after Jacob humbly asked for a blessing. His new name stood for restored relationships and a new beginning for himself and his people.

When it was morning, Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with four hundred men. His first thought was to place himself in front of Leah, Rachel and all his family and servants. If they were going to be in danger, he would take the first blow himself. But he truly wanted to settle things peacefully so he was not afraid to humble himself:

“He himself went on ahead of them, bowing to the ground seven times, until he reached his brother. Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, and flinging himself on his neck, kissed him as he wept” (Genesis 33: 3-4).

When Esau asked Jacob what all the flocks of animals were for, Jacob told him they were a gift. But Esau replied that he had plenty of his own and that Jacob he should keep what was his. What Jacob said next is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible:

“If you will please do me the favor, please accept this gift from me, since to come into your presence is for me like coming into the presence of God, now that you have received me so kindly” (Genesis 33: 10).

Esau accepted his gift and then said: *“Let us break camp and be on our way; I will travel alongside you”* (Genesis 33: 12).

The story of Jacob and his forgiving brother is a story about all those who reconcile with the people they have harmed. It is a story about *restorative justice*—about bringing victim and offender together in truth and healing.

This story teaches that God is a God of surprises. He answers prayers in ways we do not expect, just as He did for Jacob. God restored Jacob's identity, his relationship with his brother and his future.



Jacob and Esau embrace and reconcile.

Prayer in Exodus and Numbers

Praying on Holy Ground (Exodus 3: 1-14)

The familiar story of how God spoke to Moses from the burning bush is told in Chapter 3 of Exodus. As Moses watched the flocks in the desert country near Mt. Horeb he came across something that changed his life forever:

“There an angel of the LORD appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, ‘I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned.’ When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ He answered, ‘Here I am.’ God said, ‘Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground...’ ” (Exodus 3:1-5).

We can learn a lot about prayer from this passage. First of all, it was God who called Moses by his name. God chose him just as he was, a shepherd and run-away from the law. We also learn that God can reveal himself anywhere. It can be in nature, a prayer group, a church or in a cell. Wherever we meet God it is holy ground.

We also can learn from the attitude of Moses. He answered God with a willing spirit – *here I am*. The heart of Moses was open to God But before God revealed his mysterious name to Moses, he revealed his compassionate heart. He wanted his beloved people to be free. He said to Moses:



“I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them...” (Exodus 3:7-8).

Moses did not doubt God’s powerful love, but was not so sure he would make a good leader: *“Who am I that I should go...?”* (Exodus 3: 11). He also was afraid the people would not believe him and would ask the name of the God who sent him. So God said: *“I will be with you...”* (Exodus 3:12). Then God revealed his mysterious name: *“ ‘I am who am...This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you’ ”* (Exodus 3: 14). In that moment, the life of Moses changed forever. Before this he was a shepherd, hiding from the law. Now he was God’s instrument who would bring dignity and freedom to his people.

Pleading for the People (Exodus 32: 32)

After Moses met God in the burning bush his prayers no longer focused on himself. They were patterned after God's heart and concern for his people. Moses left his secure life behind and returned to Egypt to free them from slavery. He led them through the sea into the desert where he taught them to be a nation. The only time he was not with them was when they marched into the promised land after he had died. This teaches us that our prayers should not only be for ourselves. We should also care about and plead for the needs of others. That is how our prayer becomes *intercessory* prayer.

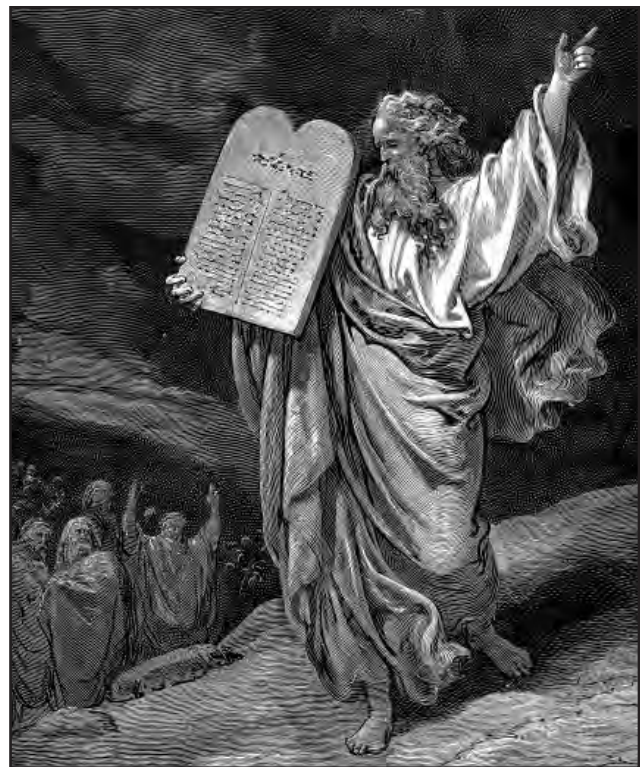
One of the most touching prayers of Moses was his *intercession* for his people when they turned from God and worshiped the golden calf. He loved them so deeply that he did not want to be saved without them. Moses begged God to forgive them: *"If you would only forgive their sin! If you will not, then strike me out of the book you have written"* (Exodus 32:32). This great prayer was more than his plea on behalf of his people. It showed how much he was willing to sacrifice for them, even so far as taking their guilt on himself.

This prayer took place while Moses was on Mount Sinai. On the one hand, Moses was getting instructions from God about the clothing and other things needed for Aaron's priestly duties: *"You shall make a lampstand of pure beaten gold..."* (Exodus 25:31). On the other hand, Aaron was below the mountain, acting in a way that was unworthy of his priesthood. He gave in to the people who wanted to build a gold calf to worship. He told them: *"Have your wives and sons and daughters take off the golden earrings they are wearing, and bring them to me"* (32:2). After he collected their gold, he made the idol and *"...built an altar before the calf..."* (Exodus 32:5).

Later, when he faced an angry Moses, he tried to blame the people: *"You know well enough how prone the people are to evil"* (32:22). Unlike Moses he tried to separate himself from the people's sin. He even claimed that when the Israelites gave him their gold, *"...I threw it into the fire, and this calf came out!"* (32:24).

Actually, Aaron did not love his people enough to stand up to them. His attitude was the opposite of Moses who was willing to take on the guilt of his people, even though he had no share in their idolatry.

This prayer of Moses teaches us about the prayer of *intercession*. The person who intercedes for others does not stand apart from them. Moses deeply loved his people and would do almost anything to save them.



Complaining to God (Numbers 11:4-34)

This next prayer of Moses shows the human side of Moses. It took place while the Israelites were still living in the desert. To keep them from starving, God sent *manna* from the sky to earth every night. In the morning the people gathered it, ground it and baked loaves to eat. But after a while the people grew tired of eating it. They remembered all the food they ate in Egypt:

“We remember the fish we used to eat...and the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now we are famished; we eat nothing before us but this manna” (Numbers 11:4-6).

Moses heard family after family complaining in front of their tents. He became upset, not only because they were ungrateful, but also because God had given him the difficult job of leading them. In this prayer Moses let God know how he felt:

“Why do you treat your servant so badly?...Why are you so displeased with me that you burden me with all this people? Was it I who conceived all this people? Or was it I who gave them birth, that you tell me to carry them at my bosom, like a foster father carrying an infant, to the land you have promised under oath to their fathers? Where can I get meat to give to all this people? For they are crying to me, ‘Give us meat for our food.’ I cannot carry all this people by myself, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you will deal with me, then please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face this distress” (Numbers 11:10-15).

Moses usually offered many wonderful prayers that showed his faith in God’s greatness and power. But this was a prayer of *complaint*. We do not usually see Moses like this. We think of him as “above” us in the way he related to God. After all, Moses spoke with God in the burning bush and later on Mt. Sinai face to face. He held out his rod to turn back the waters of the sea. He struck the rock in the desert and water flowed to satisfy the people’s thirst. His prayers brought victory against the enemy.



But in this prayer we see another side of Moses. Instead of a great hero we see a human being who felt like we do sometimes. This unusual prayer of Moses and others in the Bible teaches us how to be “at home” with God, and freely complain to him like a friend or member of the family. God’s wisdom is infinite, his love is unconditional. As a Father he listens even if we complain or ask: *How can I do what you are asking? How will I survive what lies ahead? Why did you bring me here? Why ask me to help? Can’t someone else do it?* When we feel weak and unfit for what lies ahead, we can recall this prayer of Moses. God knows our needs, just as He knew what Moses needed that day. He gave him 70 helpers to share his spirit and his duties:

“I will also take some of the spirit that is on you and will bestow it on them, that they may share the burden of the people with you. You will then not have to bear it by yourself” (Numbers 11: 17).

Miriam - A Prayer of Song and Dance

Exodus 2: 1-15

It seems likely that Miriam who was the older sister of Moses, was responsible for saving his life when he was a baby. When the Israelites were ordered to work as slaves in Egypt, yet still grew in number, the pharaoh ordered all the baby boys to be killed at birth or thrown into the river if found alive.

After Moses was born his mother kept it a secret for three months. Finally, she placed him in a basket and set him to drift in the river. It was a desperate attempt to save his life. The sister of Moses kept watch along the riverbank while the basket drifted in the reeds.

Eventually, Moses was rescued by pharaoh's daughter, who was bathing in the river. In a smart move, the sister of Moses quickly came forward, offered to find a woman to nurse the baby, and then took Moses to his mother.



As a little child Moses became the adopted son of pharaoh's daughter, and remained in her household. Several years later, as a young man, he witnessed firsthand the mistreatment of his people. One day he saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite. Overcome with anger, he murdered the overseer and hid the body in the sand. Not long after, his deed became known so Moses fled for his life into the desert.

Exodus 15: 20-21

Years later, while Moses was still in hiding as a shepherd, God spoke to him from the burning bush, commanding him to return to his people and rescue them from slavery. (The entire story is found in Exodus 3 to 12). After Moses led them out of Egypt, they passed safely through the Red Sea as the waters parted. Since their slave masters could no longer harm them they were filled with relief and joy at what God had done for them. They burst into singing:

“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

*I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.*

*My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior..*

*In your mercy you led the people you redeemed;
in your strength you guided them to your holy dwelling“*

(Exodus 15: 1-2; 13).

The great excitement continued as Miriam, called to serve her people as a prophetess, also led the people in a prayer that was both a song and a dance:

“The prophetess Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, while all the women went out after her with tambourines, dancing: and she led them in the refrain:

Sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;

Horse and chariot he has cast into the sea” (Exodus 15: 20-21).

Numbers 20: 1

Later, after the whole Israelite community arrived in the desert and settled at Kadesh, Miriam died and was buried there. Like her brother Moses she did not live to see the promised land. Nevertheless, during her journey with them she used the gifts God gave her for their well-being.

With strength of spirit, she had the gift of expressing joyfully her people’s blessings, and the faithfulness of God who saved them. As a person of her time and culture, she expressed her prayerfulness with her whole being, in word, song as well as dance.



PASSOVER

One of the great prayers that Moses taught his people was actually a *meal*– the *seder*. *Seder* is a Hebrew word for *order*, because this meal is also a ritual that follows a certain order. This prayerful meal took place for the first time in Egypt, on the eve of the Passover, while the Israelites were still slaves. Since then the Passover has been celebrated each year as a reminder of how they were freed from slavery by the hand of God: *“This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all generations shall celebrate...as a perpetual institution”* (Exodus 12:14).

God instructed Moses: *“This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the LORD.”* (Exodus 12:11).

The name *passover* (Hebrew *pesach*) refers to the way God protected the Jews as the angel of death *passed over* their homes, and later how they *passed through* the Red Sea to safety: *“But the Israelites had marched on dry land through the midst of the sea, with the water like a wall to their right and to their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel on that day from the power of the Egyptians”* (Exodus 14:29-30).

The Passover seder, along with blessing prayers, includes special foods such as *lamb*, *bitter herbs*, *unleavened bread* and *wine*. The unleavened bread recalls how the Jews had no time to wait for bread made with yeast to rise. The bitter herbs remind them of the harsh life of slavery, and the wine celebrates the blessings of God’s goodness.

At the beginning of the Passover meal the youngest person at the table asks: *“Why is this night different from all other nights?”* The entire meal, with the story of Exodus retold, and with the blessings of bread and wine, is the answer to the child’s question:

“It was because the LORD loved you and because of his fidelity to the oath he had sworn to your fathers, that he brought you out with his strong hand from the place of slavery...” (Deuteronomy 7:8).

Every generation struggles to be free from one form of slavery or another. If not for God’s help we would still be slaves to our attitudes, addictions, prejudices and unhealthy habits. We might dream of changing, but we need God’s help to regain the freedom of our souls.

Like those about to be executed, the Passover was also the last meal that Jesus ate before he died (Mark 14: 12-16). During this meal, he gave us his body and blood in the Eucharist as he blessed the bread and wine. Later on Calvary, his blood smeared on the wood of the cross delivered us from slavery.



Prayer in Joshua and Judges

(Joshua 7: 1-13)

Joshua, whose name in Hebrew means *God saves*, was the leader Moses gave to the people before he died. He was faithful to the ideals of Moses and the welfare of the people, and led them courageously across the Jordan river into the promised land. Although they would face many trials, they placed their trust in Joshua and God. He helped the twelve tribes gain the land and settle it. But God reminded them that their friendship and covenant with him was even more important. He taught them not to take on the habits and practices of the pagans around them. They were set aside to be a holy people. Their future depended on remaining faithful to God's plan for them. Before he died, Joshua prepared the people for his departure. He told them they must decide whether to remain faithful to God or not. With words that are seen in many homes today, he stated that he and his family would be faithful to God who saved them: *"As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:15).

The story of the Battle of Jericho is well known. Instead of attacking the city directly with his army, Joshua ordered the Israelites to circle the fortified city for seven days, with seven priests carrying the sacred ark. *"As the horns blew, the people began to shout. When they heard the signal horn, they raised a tremendous shout. The wall collapsed, and the people stormed the city...and took it"* (Joshua 6: 20). This amazing event gave Joshua and his people a great victory. As the walls of their enemy came down, their confidence went up.

Later however, in a battle against the city of Ai, things did not go as well. Like life in every age, there were victories and defeats. Joshua had been told not to send his entire army against this particular city for it appeared to be weak. His advisors told him: *"The enemy there are few; you need not call for an effort from all the people"* (Joshua 7: 3). When the news came back that the Israelites had been pressed back and broke ranks and fled, *"...the confidence of the people melted away like water"* (Joshua 7: 5). Joshua and his people turned to prayer—a very special form of prayer that was typical of ancient people:

"Joshua, together with the elders of Israel, rent his garments and lay prostrate before the ark of the LORD until evening, and they threw dust on their heads. 'Alas, O Lord GOD,' Joshua prayed, 'why did you ever allow this people to pass over the Jordan, delivering us into the power of the Amorites, that they might destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell on the other side of the Jordan. Pray, Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has turned its back to its enemies?...What will you do for your great name?'" (Joshua 7: 6-9).

God's response to this prayer was clear and direct: *"Stand up. Why are you lying prostrate?" Israel has sinned: they have violated the covenant which I enjoined on them...Rise, sanctify the people. Tell them to sanctify themselves before tomorrow"* (Joshua 7: 10-11,13).

Despite all that God had done for them before, the faith of Joshua and the people had weakened. They forgot that God was leading them and even Joshua felt like going back across the Jordan to their old home where things felt safe, even though it meant giving up their future. This experience is not strange to us today. We can forget what God has done for us and lack faith in what God will do. Our tendency is to pull back from growing and reaching out, to play it safe. But prayer helps us recall what God has done and to focus on God's power rather than our weakness and failures. Admitting our faults is important, but God does not want us to stay down forever, but *"stand up"* and find strength in his power,

Deborah: (Judges 4 and 5)

The book of *Judges* is about a special group of people who led Israel after Joshua died until the first kings led them. These leaders were called *judges* because they made important decisions and settled disputes. It was a time in Israel's history that provides many examples of what happens when people ignore God and choose to go their own way. When the people lived by God's commands and treated one another well, they enjoyed peace. When they disobeyed God's laws, things did not go well. There was fighting even among themselves. During such times God sent spiritual leaders to guide them. Some well-known judges are: *Gideon, Samson and Samuel*.

But there also were other judges like Deborah (whose name means "honey bee"). Besides being a judge, she also was a prophetess. Deborah's story focuses on a battle that took place on the flatlands along the Kishon River. A century before, Joshua had conquered Hazor, a Canaanite stronghold. But in Deborah's time Hazor had grown powerful again and was making life difficult for Israel. Hazor's military leader Sisera had hundreds of iron chariots, something the Israelites did not have. However, Deborah called Barak to gather his soldiers and lead them against Sisera's army. Barak accepted on one condition: "*If you come with me, I will go; if you do not come with me, I will not go*" (Judges 4: 8). He needed Deborah's spiritual leadership to win this fight. Although she preferred not to, Deborah agreed to go. However, she wanted no credit for the victory. She advised Barak to meet the enemy along a dry riverbed that would fill up when it rained: "*Be off, for this is the day on which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your power. The LORD marches before you*" (Judges 4: 14). What happened was one of those amazing events in the Bible: "*And the LORD put Sisera and all his chariots and all his forces to rout before Barak. Sisera himself dismounted from his chariot and fled on foot*" (Judges 4: 15). With the odds against them Barak's underdogs won the battle. Apparently, as Deborah's prayerful song indicates, it suddenly rained, causing the heavy iron chariots to get stuck in the mud. In her prayerful song Deborah rejoiced in her gifts, but she also gave God the glory:

*"...I to the LORD will sing my song,
My hymn to the LORD, the God of Israel.
The earth quaked and the heavens were shaken,
While the clouds sent down showers.
Gone was freedom beyond the walls
Gone indeed from Israel.
When I, Deborah, rose,
When I rose, a mother in Israel,
My heart is with the leaders of Israel,
Nobles of the people who bless the LORD;
Awake, awake, Deborah!
Awake, awake, strike up a song.
From the heavens the stars, too, fought;
From their courses they fought against Sisera.
The Wadi Kishon swept them away;...
May all your enemies perish thus, O LORD!
But your friends be as the sun shining in its might!"*
(Judges 5: 3, 4, 7, 9, 12, 20-21, 31).



Prayer in 1 and 2 Samuel

Hannah Pours Out Her Heart

(1 Samuel 1: 1-28 and 2: 1-11)

Although Hannah and her husband loved one another very much, she had no children. Because of this she also was ridiculed by other women who had children. This caused her so much grief that *“Hannah would weep and refuse to eat. Her husband Elkanah used to ask her: ‘Hannah, why do you weep, why do you refuse to eat? Why do you grieve? Am I not more to you than ten sons?’ ”* (1 Samuel 1: 7-8). In his own gentle way he was trying to comfort Hannah and reassure her of his love.

Hannah and her husband regularly made pilgrimages from their own city to worship God and offer sacrifices at the shrine of Shiloh. One time, while Hannah and her husband were at the shrine, Hannah went off by herself to pray alone before God:

“In her bitterness she prayed to the LORD, weeping copiously, and she made a vow, promising: ‘O LORD of hosts, if you look with pity on the misery of your handmaid, if you remember me and do not forget me, if you give your handmaid a male child, I will give him to the LORD for as long as he lives...’ ” (1 Samuel 1: 10-11).

When Hannah entered the shrine to pray she walked past Eli the priest who was stationed at the door. He noticed something unusual about the way she prayed.

“As she remained long at prayer before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth, for Hannah has praying silently; though her lips were moving her voice could not be heard. Eli, thinking her drunk, said to her, ‘How long will you make a drunken show of yourself? Sober up from your wine!’ ” (1 Samuel 1:12-14).



It wasn't enough that Hannah had come to pray in her grief. Now she had to face the accusations of the priest. It must have seemed like there was no place to go for comfort and hope. Nevertheless, she respectfully explained to the priest:

“It isn't that, my lord...I am an unhappy woman. I have had neither wine nor liquor; I was only pouring out my troubles to the LORD. Do not think your handmaid a ne'er-do-well; my prayer has been prompted by my deep sorrow and misery.” (1 Samuel 1: 15-16).

Eli realized that he had misjudged this good woman and changed his attitude toward her. Instead, the priest prayed a blessing for her *“Go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you what*

you have asked of him.’ She replied, ‘Think kindly of your maidservant,’ and left” (1 Samuel 1: 17). She left after totally surrendering everything to God. It was now in his hands and she was at peace: “She went to her quarters, ate, and drank with her husband, and no longer appeared downcast” (1 Samuel 1: 18).

Some time later God answered her prayer. She became pregnant, and gave birth to a son. She called him Samuel, *“because she had asked the LORD for him” (1 Samuel 1: 19-20).* In Hebrew Samuel means “name of God.” She nursed her baby until he was weaned, and then she brought him to the temple. When she saw Eli the priest she said to him: *“I am the woman who stood near you here, praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the LORD” (1 Samuel 26-28).*

Hannah joyfully kept her promise to God, as she handed little Samuel to the priest. Afterward she offered this strong and beautiful prayer:

*“My heart exults in the LORD,
my horn is exalted in my God.
I have swallowed up my enemies;
I rejoice in my victory.
There is no holy One like the LORD;
there is no Rock like our God...
The LORD makes poor and makes rich,
he humbles, he also exalts.
He raises the needy from the dust;
from the ash heap he lifts up the poor;
To seat them with nobles
and makes a glorious throne their heritage”
(1 Samuel 2: 1-2, 7-8).*

After Samuel was born Hannah also had other children, but when she and her husband went to the temple each year she brought a robe for Samuel that she herself had made. Her mother’s heart would never forget her firstborn.

As Samuel grew up in the service of the temple, it became clear to all that he was blessed by God with the gift of prophecy. In his old age, even though Saul was still the king, Samuel anointed the shepherd boy David. He knew that he was destined to become one of the greatest kings of Israel. The gift of a son that Hannah had prayed for many years ago, brought even greater blessings on her people, because through David’s line the Messiah was born.

In this way we see how God answers prayers in ways that are beyond anything we could imagine.

David's Promise (2 Samuel 7:18-29)

After David became the king and was living in a palace, he wanted to build a temple for God: *"Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!"* (2 Samuel 7:2), but God told the prophet Nathan that David's son would be chosen to build his temple. Even so, God made a wonderful promise to David: *"Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever"* (2 Samuel 7:16).

When David heard this promise he offered a beautiful prayer to God. His prayer teaches us some valuable things that should be part of our own prayer to God.

As a great warrior and a wealthy king David certainly was somebody who was respected and obeyed. Because he wanted to humble himself before God's greatness: *"...King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, 'Who am I, Lord GOD, and who are the members of my house that you have brought me to this point?'"* (2 Samuel 7:18). God had just promised David that his throne would remain forever and this was wonderful news for a king like David. He could have announced it to his people, *"Look, I am the greatest king of Israel! My throne is going to last forever!"* But David did not brag about it. Instead, he spoke quietly and humbly to God, *"Who am I, Lord GOD?"*



Some people promote their own egos instead of giving God the glory. They see their gifts and talents as a way to gain power and influence, instead of serving others. But David's attitude toward God teaches us to be humble. Even if we think God has chosen us to do something for him, we should remember that God has his reasons for choosing us. Therefore, when we come before God in prayer, we should come to him with humility like David.

David's prayer focused on God's greatness: *"Great are you, Lord GOD! There is none like you and there is no God but you,..."* (2 Samuel 7: 22) and 27 -29. Even though God did not give David what he asked for, by not allowing him to build his temple, this did not fill David with disappointment. David still praised God for the wonderful things he had done for him and his people: *"You have established for yourself your people Israel as yours forever, and you, LORD, have become their God"* (2 Samuel 7:24). David is a powerful example for us because his love and devotion to God did not change even when his request was not granted. When God does not answer our own prayer in the way we asked, we can trust like David in the goodness of God—giving thanks for what God *has done* already, and also for what he *will do*, even if it is in his own time and way.

It would be a mistake if our devotion to God depended on always getting what we think we need. True prayer is not trying to force God to do what we want. Prayer is surrendering our lives to God's plan, allowing God to shape and guide our lives according to his will. After God denied his request, David immediately changed his prayer:

"And now, LORD God, confirm for all time the prophecy you have made concerning your servant and his house, and do as you have promised" (2 Samuel 7:25).

Discovering God's Will

In this example, God's will was clear to David. However, it is not always so easy to know what God wants. As God told Isaiah:

*"...my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways"* (Isaiah 55:8).

We may have to ask for God's help: *"Make known to me your ways, LORD"* (Psalm 25:4). We can discover God's will with the help of several sources: *asking the Holy Spirit to guide us, listening to the Word of God, studying what the Church teaches, and seeking the advice of trustworthy people.*

In the end, if there seems to be no answer, we must accept what we cannot change and trust that God will reveal his will to us in due time.

Even when we discover God's will, it might not be easy for us to accept it as quickly as David did. We still might have to deal with our feelings of fear and anxiety. Even so, David was able to surrender his will because he had the help of God's Spirit.

That is why David also prayed:

"Therefore your servant now finds the courage to make this prayer to you" (2 Samuel 7:27).



God's Spirit can guide and strengthen us too, so that we can do more than we ever thought was possible.

Prayer in 1 and 2 Chronicles

Solomon's Temple - A Place of Prayer (2 Chronicles: 5:1-7:11)

As we learned in 2 Samuel, David wanted to build a temple to honor God: *"It was my purpose to build a house of repose myself for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the footstool for the feet of our God; and I was preparing to build it."* (1 Chronicles 28: 2).

However, in his own words David explained that God had other plans: *"But God said to me, 'You may not build a house in my honor..' For he said to me: 'It is your son Solomon who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him for my son, and I will be a father to him' "* (1 Chronicles 28: 3, 6).

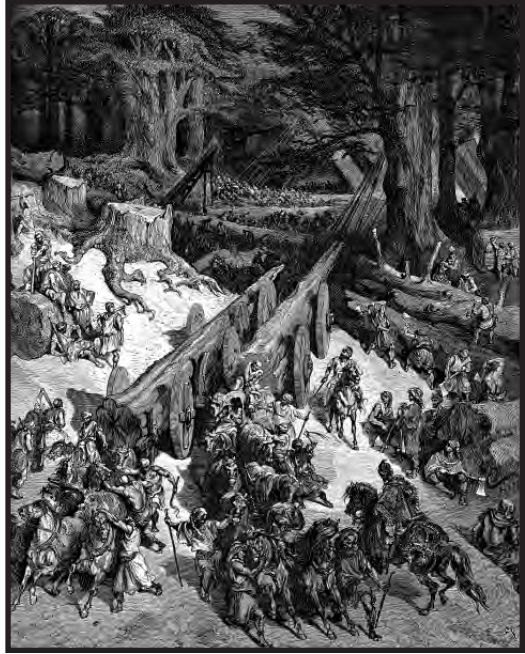
The project so dear to David's heart would pass to his son Solomon when he was king: *"See then! The LORD has chosen you to build a house as his sanctuary. Take courage and set to work"* (1 Chronicles 28: 10).

With unselfish devotion, David began collecting what Solomon would need to build the temple. He gathered gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, precious stones and a large supply of marble. Although he would never see it, he hoped the temple would be a wonderful place: *"...for this castle is not intended for man, but for the LORD God"* (1 Chronicles 29:1). It would be made of smooth, cut stone, cedar wood, precious stones, silver and gold. Wood was cut from the cedars of Lebanon. Huge stones were cut and set aside. Those who had precious metal and stones were invited to donate them. And David led them in generosity: *"But now, because of the delight I take in the house of my God, in addition to all that I stored up for the holy house, I give to the house of my God my personal fortune in gold and silver"* (1 Chronicles 29: 3)..

After David died, Solomon was anointed king. He immediately set to work where David left off. He hired thousands of stone cutters, craftsmen and wood cutters. He said: *"The house I intend to build must be lofty and wonderful"* (2 Chronicles 1: 8). When the entire temple was completed, a great day of dedication was held. A huge crowd gathered while the priests brought the ark of the covenant and placed it inside the holy of holies. When they came out to join the crowd, amidst singing and trumpets blowing, *"The building of the LORD's temple was filled with a cloud...the LORD's glory filled the house of God"* (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).

Then Solomon knelt down in front of the altar. In the presence of everyone he stretched out his hands toward heaven and offered a prayer:

"LORD, God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven or on earth; you keep your covenant and show kindness to your servants who are wholeheartedly faithful to you" (2 Chronicles 6:14).



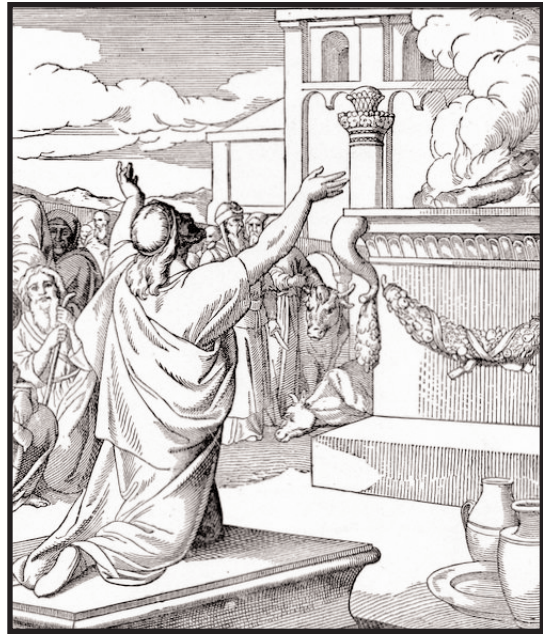
Cutting the cedars of Lebanon for the temple.

Solomon's prayer was focused on God while he and the people offered first and foremost their hearts to God. He continued to pray, making eight requests.

First Request - Dwell with us

“Can it indeed be that God dwells with mankind on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple which I have built?...May your eyes watch day and night over this temple, the place where you have decreed you shall be honored;...” (2 Chronicles 6:18-20).

Even though the temple is called "the house of God" Solomon realized it could not contain God who is the creator of the entire universe. His prayer reminds us that because God's kingdom is within us, we also are the dwelling place of God—our souls are holy ground. Therefore, we can take comfort that we are never alone because God is with us night and day.



Second Request - Judge us

“When any man sins against his neighbor and is required to take an oath...before your altar in this temple, listen from heaven: take action and pass judgment on your servants, requiting the wicked man and holding him responsible for his conduct, but absolving the innocent and rewarding him according to his virtue” (2 Chronicles 6:22-23).

In their day the ancient Israelites went to the temple and made an oath on the altar, that what they said was true. Solomon's prayer reminded the people to honor God's dwelling place by living according to the *Truth*. Since we also are temples of God, our souls should be a place where the Spirit of God is honored. The Spirit of God helps us understand who we are and challenges us to accept the truth and live by it. Our own actions judge our truthfulness.

Third Request - Pardon us

“When your people Israel have sinned against you and are defeated by the enemy, but afterward they return and praise your name, and they pray to you and entreat you in this temple, listen from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which you gave them and their fathers” (2 Chronicles 6:24-25).

Sincere prayer is based on a humble heart. It takes real humility and courage to face hardship in life, especially if it is caused by our failure to follow God's way. But the Bible assures us that if we admit our mistakes, and do not blame others, God is faithful and will forgive us—no matter what we have done. We believe that God always always hears us and brings us back home to his pardon and peace.

Fourth Request - Restore our lives

“When the sky is closed so that there is no rain, because they have sinned against you, but then they pray toward this place and praise your name, and they withdraw from sin because you afflict them, listen in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants and of your people

Israel. But teach them the right way to live, and send rain upon your land which you gave your people as their heritage” (2 Chronicles 6:26-27).

Ancient people thought that drought was a punishment for their sins. Jesus changed this way of thinking when he taught that God: “...causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). However, we often act as if we are in control and do not need God. When things happen beyond our control we realize how powerless we are. Even in the spiritual life, our souls can go through times of “dryness.” At such times, even spiritual things do not appeal to us and God seems absent. We realize that we are totally dependent on God to restore us. All we can do is wait for this dry season of the spirit to pass.

Fifth Request - Search our hearts

“When there is famine in the land...when their enemies besiege them at any of their gates; whenever there is a plague or sickness of any kind; when any Israelite of all your people offers a prayer or petition of any kind, and in awareness of his affliction and pain, stretches out his hands toward this temple, listen from your heavenly dwelling place, and forgive. Knowing his heart, render to everyone according to his conduct, for you alone know the hearts of men. So may they fear you and walk in your ways as long as they live on the land you gave our fathers” (2 Chronicles 6:28-31).

Often it takes a crisis to make us turn our attention to God and ask for help. We may feel like blaming others for what has happened but God is ready to help us learn from our problems. Sometimes an enemy hurts us where we are the weakest. Often our faults are too close for us to see them. Others see them clearly, but we have a “blind spot”. Sometimes God uses failure to get our attention. Then we are faced with the problem we have caused. God knows the human heart. Gradually his Spirit opens our eyes to see why we have problems. With God’s help in prayer we see ourselves more clearly, make needed changes and live more fully.



Sixth Request - May all know you

“For the foreigner, too, who is not of your people Israel, when he comes from a distant land to honor your great name, your mighty power, and your outstretched arm, when they come in prayer to this temple, listen from your heavenly dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner entreats you, that all the peoples of the earth may know your name, fearing you as do your people Israel, and knowing that this house which I have built is dedicated to your honor” (2 Chronicles 6:32-33).

Some people have found God. Others are looking for him without even knowing it. But in their search for love and happiness they sometimes lose their way and follow false promises. Because we all have fallen short of God’s glory, we can help others draw near to God even though we are not perfect. If anything, we can serve as examples of God’s forgiveness.

God's heart is very wide and his grace is for everyone. Prayer gives us a wider view and a compassionate heart. We see that there is room for everyone in God's house.

Seventh Request - Defend us

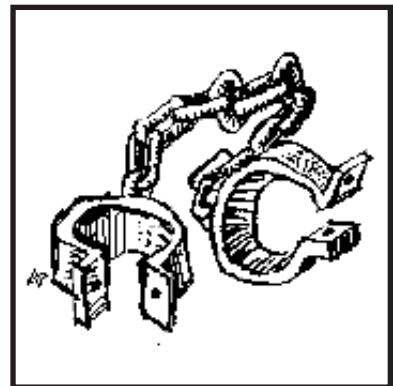
"When your people go forth to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and pray to you in the direction of this city and of the house I have built to your honor, listen from heaven to their prayer and petition, and defend their cause" (2 Chronicles 6:34-35).

This request focuses on our need for strength as we face the evil that threatens us. As spiritual warriors we encounter enemies we must struggle with what is *inside* and *outside* of ourselves. In all our struggles we have God's Spirit to guide us as we fight to do what is right. Greed, envy, pride, lust, anger, revenge, various kinds of addictions—these are the things we struggle with and need God's help to overcome. While our enemies rage, God is our defender. He remains at our side always, even if we fall and calls us to get up again.

Eighth Request - Uphold us

"When they sin against you (for there is no man who does not sin), and in your anger against them you deliver them to the enemy, so that their captors deport them to another land, far or near, when they repent in the land where they are captive and are converted, when they entreat you in the land of their captivity and say, 'We have sinned and done wrong; we have been wicked,' and with their whole heart and with their whole soul they turn back to you in the land of those who hold them captive, when they pray in the direction of their land which you gave their fathers, and of the city you have chosen, and of the house which I have built to your honor, listen from your heavenly dwelling place, hear their prayer and petitions, and uphold their cause. Forgive your people who have sinned against you. My God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayer of this place" (2 Chronicles 6:36-40).

Sometimes people or their loved ones lose their way and end up in a "strange land." It might be through drugs or alcohol addiction that consumes them, or by anger that turns violent, or the misuse of sex that destroys relationships. Such evils can be very strong and quickly overcome us, despite all our prayers and good intentions. They rob us of our freedom. We no longer control ourselves or our actions. Solomon's prayer reminds us, that no matter what we face, to cling to God in prayer *anyway*. We still can go to him each day and ask him to uphold us. No matter how many times we fail, we can expect his help because God wants us to be free. Even if we find ourselves in the gutter God is there, holding us and reminding us of our worth.



When Solomon ended his prayer, *"...fire came down from heaven and consumed the holocaust and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the house" (2 Chronicles 7:1).*

Solomon's prayer ends with a *holocaust*. There were many kinds of sacrifices in the temple, but a holocaust was an offering that was *totally consumed*. This means that none of it was kept to eat or drink later. We also have many types of prayer. Sometimes we ask God for something we would like. But at other times we simply give our hearts to God, asking him to fill us with the fire of his love. We can offer God many things: our prayers, our works our sufferings and joys. But most of all God wants our hearts, so he can give us his unconditional love. As we read in Bible, *"For the LORD takes delight in his people" (Psalm 149: 4).*

The Prayer of King Asa (2 Chronicles: 14:2-16:12)

In this story we learn about praying when we feel out-numbered and things are overwhelming. Asa was Solomon's grandson and the third king of Judah. When he became king the first thing he did was remove all the places of idol worship in his kingdom:

“Asa did what was good and pleasing to the LORD, his God, removing the heathen altars and the high places, breaking to pieces the sacred pillars, and cutting down the sacred poles. He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to observe the law and its commands” (2 Chronicles 14:1-3).

As their king, Asa challenged his people to give up their false gods. No doubt some of the people did not like this, but Asa believed he did the right thing because idols only degraded and deceived his people.

He took nothing for granted. After that, he fortified the nation even though it seemed to be at peace. He told his people: *“Let us build these cities and surround them with walls, towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, for we have sought the LORD, our God; we sought him, and he has given us rest on every side”* (2 Chronicles 14:6).

As it turned out, a violent ruler named Zerah was gathering a huge army of men and chariots in the nearby country. He was planning to conquer all the nations around him. Eventually Zerah marched across the Sinai desert and camped in a valley not far from Jerusalem. Asa and his army moved out to this place and both sides formed their battle lines. When Asa saw the tents of the enemy soldiers as far as he could see, he knew he was outnumbered. And in that fearful moment he prayed:

“O LORD, there is none like you to help the powerless against the strong. Help us, O LORD, our God, for we rely on you, and in our name we have come against this multitude. You are the LORD, our God; let no man prevail against you” (2 Chronicles 14:10).



In this prayer Asa recognized that there is no one like God to help him, because God knew more about him than anyone else, even himself. Maybe Asa remembered all the ways that God delivered his people in the past. He knew that there were many ways that God could help his people, at that moment and in the future as he did for Asa's son Jehoshaphat who became king after him, *“You will not have to fight in this encounter. Take your places, stand firm, and see how the LORD will be with you to deliver you...Do not fear or lose heart. Tomorrow go out to meet them, and the LORD will be with you”* (2 Chronicles 20: 17). Like his son after him, Asa learned that God can help us in ways we know nothing about.

The history of God's people is filled with examples of those who faced great problems but trusted in God. In our day, Mother Teresa of Calcutta left the security of the convent for the city streets to pick up the homeless who were dying, and give them respect and love. She loved each one as if they were the only one and started a whole movement. It does not make any difference whether we have a lot of talent and riches or nothing at all. God can work in us and through us if we give him our trust. God can work with many people or just one. He can use the strong or the weak. It makes no difference to God.

So Asa stood there with the odds against him, he trusted in God's help: "*O LORD, there is none like you to help the powerless against the strong. Help us, O LORD, our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. You are the LORD, our God; let no man prevail against you*" (2 Chronicles 14: 10).

Sometimes we make the mistake of telling God what to do. We have our prayer all figured out—exactly what we want to say: *God, I want you to do this for me*. So when we think God does not listen to us, we get frustrated and even angry. But Asa relied on God's wisdom and power even though his legs may have been shaking. And what was the result of Asa's prayer? "*And so the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and they fled*" (2 Chronicles 14:11).

What a sight it must have been as Asa and his people watched the great army panic and flee from them. They celebrated an amazing victory that day. It may seem like the end of the story, but one more thing happened right after this victory. Asa was met by some of God's prophets who gave him an important message. One of them named Azariah said to Asa:

"Hear me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin! The LORD is with you when you are with him, and if you seek him he will be present to you; but if you abandon him, he will abandon you." (2 Chronicles 15:1-2). Azariah ended his message with encouraging words: "*But as for you, be strong and do not relax, for your work shall be rewarded*" (2 Chronicles 15:7).

The prophet reminded Asa about an important truth: *God will always be there for us* when we go to him for help. The prophet did not mean that God abandons us. He may allow us to face the consequences of our actions so that it feels like we are alone. As God said in Psalm 81: 13, "*So I gave them up to the hardness of their hearts;/ they walked according to their own counsel.*" Then we do not feel God is with us or hears us. Even then, God is still with us. For example, if one night suddenly the lights go out, it does not mean the room is empty. The people we were with are still there. In the same way, it may get dark at times but God is always there. Even our loneliness is God's call to return to him in daily prayer.

We must hold firmly to the belief that God's Spirit is at work in us. Although we have been created by God, it is up to us to walk in faith with God or not. As Paul wrote "*...we walk by faith, not by sight*" (2 Corinthians 5:7). We can choose to believe in God and his promises or go our own way. We might feel abandoned but even then God has not forgotten us. It just feels that way. Hanging on in prayer takes quiet, heroic courage. It means seeking God again and again, humbly admitting our weakness, facing our guilt, asking him to forgive and guide us.

The prophet's words, "*If you seek him*" are actually about prayer. Prayer is the way we come

to know God. Our hearts and minds are touched by his Spirit who renews our life. We grow in understanding of God's Word and gain spiritual strength. This in turn creates changes in the way we behave. We begin to see ourselves and others in the light of God. God's will becomes our will so that we want only what God wants. This is what Asa did after he heard the words of Azariah: "...he was encouraged to remove the detestable idols from the whole land...and to restore the altar of the LORD which was before the vestibule of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 15:8).

Asa and his people made an oath to cleanse and renew themselves. Once again they made sure there were no idols in their midst. We too must take a deeper look at ourselves and make sure we have no false gods in our life. We must ask ourselves: *what is preventing us from doing good or doing the right thing?* This lead us directly to the idols we have set up-whoever or whatever *is taking the place of God in our hearts or in our lives?* Once we remove these things we are ready to restore the altar of our hearts. Then, like Asa and his people we will experience the joy of praising God:

"They swore to the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting and with trumpets and horns. All Judah rejoiced over the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and sought him with complete desire, so that he was present to them. And the LORD gave them rest on every side" (2 Chronicles 15: 14-15).



Although we are not rulers facing great armies, this story reminds us of experiences that we must face at times. We also will face challenges of our own, both from within ourselves and from outside influences. We may be feeling secure, have plenty of money, enjoy good health and have a future that looks promising. Then suddenly we are faced with a possible disaster. We suddenly realize that we are outnumbered or up against something or someone that is too big for us to handle. We all face this at one time or another in our lives. Asa's prayer was only a few short lines and may not be everything he said that day, but it helps us understand what he was going through in that moment. They are recorded "*for our instruction*" so that when we are up against our own problems that seem too great for us, we can pray as Asa did or as the psalmist in the following:

*"Though an army encamp against me,
my heart does not fear;
Though war be waged against me,
even then do I trust" (Psalm 27:3).*

Prayer in the Psalms

The History of the Psalms

The Book of Psalms (or *Psalter*) has been called a “*school of prayer*” because it gives us models of prayer to follow. It also inspires us to express our own experiences as God’s friends. The collection of songs and poems that make up the 150 psalms express the heart and soul of God’s people as they worshiped, not only in the temple during ceremonies and throughout the day and night, but in their personal prayer too. Many musical instruments were used with the psalms: *trumpets* (Numbers 10:10), *tambourines, lyres, harps* (Psalm 81:103) and *cymbals* (1 Chronicles 25: 1-2). Nehemiah 12:27-43 describes how the entire community celebrated and worshiped with songs and instruments as they dedicated the walls of the city: “...*the rejoicing at Jerusalem could be heard from afar off.*” Psalm 150: 1-5 also describes such joyful worship:

*“Praise God in his holy sanctuary...
Give praise with blasts upon the horn,
praise him with harp and lyre,
Give praise with tambourines and dance,
praise him with flutes and strings.
Give praise with crashing cymbals,
praise him with sounding cymbals.”*



The psalms include songs of hate and love, suffering and joy, abandonment and hope. Some of the psalms describe injury and call for justice. Others tell how the people were defeated and mourned their loss. Yet other psalms describe how a person escaped death and gave thanks. Some recall how the whole nation was rescued from bondage by God’s power. Some meditate on God’s law and the need to repent: “*Then I declared my sin to you;/my guilt I did not hide*” (Psalm 32:5). Others celebrate God’s power to bring down the strong and raise up the weak. Several psalms complain to God and ask *how* or *why* things did not go well: “*Before God I pour out my complaint*” (Psalm 142:3) and “*How long, LORD? Will you utterly forget me?*” (Psalm 13:1).

How and when did the psalms begin? Who wrote them? From the Bible itself we know that David who “*sang the words of this song to the LORD*” (2 Samuel 22:1) wrote several of them. In fact, David may have composed over seventy of the psalms. After the second collection of psalms, Psalm 72: 20 ends by stating: “*The prayers of David, the son of Jesse are ended.*” Otherwise, it was other persons or groups who created them. It is not possible to provide a date or composer for each psalm. The people of Israel preserved the psalms because they expressed their covenant with God and helped them recall how God revealed himself in the events of their lives. They also remind us today of God’s everlasting covenant with us.

The psalms have been gathered into five “books” or groups as follows:

Psalms 1 to 41 (First Book)

Psalms 42 to 72 (Second Book)

Psalms 73 to 89 (Third Book)

Psalms 90 to 106 (Fourth Book)

Psalms 107 to 150 (Fifth Book)

Each group ends in a prayer of praise to God or *doxology*, such as *Psalms 41:14*,

*“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from all eternity and forever.
Amen. Amen.”*

The first collection of psalms began after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon. The collection was completed about three hundred years before Christ. Many psalms belong to the time after the exile, but others were composed before then because they describe the time of the kings. The psalms are so popular because they are about the struggles and joys of people as they live with God. They deal with every human experience and speak to the human heart. They are not about doctrine or creeds even though they do teach us about God’s relationship with his people,



Many of the psalms can be placed into groups. The *Lament* psalms are the most numerous. They are a cry to God from pain or sorrow of one person (Psalms 13, 22) or of the community (Psalm 74). Often they begin with the question "Why?" but end with faith in God in spite of the pain.

Thanksgiving psalms express thanks and praise to God in response to God's faithfulness and love (Psalms 18, 138, 107). Others offer *praise* to God simply for who he is, as creator of the universe and Lord of history (Psalms 8, 66, 113).

Other types of psalms are: *salvation history* psalms that celebrate God's saving actions on behalf of his people (Psalms 105 and 106), songs of *trust* that give testimony to God's faithfulness (Psalms 23 and 131), *wisdom* psalms that praise the value of a wise life (Psalms 36 and 73), and *liturgical* (formal worship) psalms used in ceremonies or rituals when the community gathered to worship (Psalms 2, 50 and 122). Several are called *penitential* psalms because they deal with repentance (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).

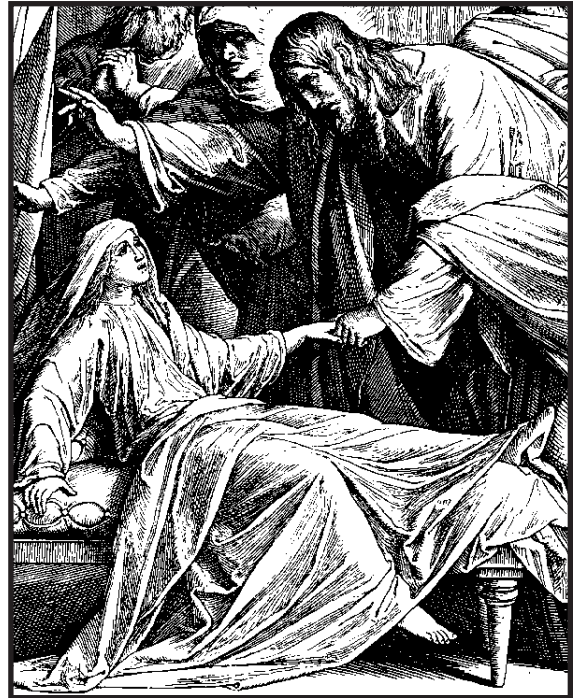
The psalms helped the Israelites express their praise and thanks, as well as their pain and grief. They did this because they believed and trusted in God. They preserved the psalms as a people of faith, and have given a treasury of prayer to both Christian and Jewish communities for thousands of years.

Images of God in the Psalms

The psalms are a treasure of mercy, joy, comfort, strength and peace inspired by God who loves us. We find in them wonderful images of God's care for us. He is our *shield, rock, king, shepherd, judge, refuge, creator, provider, deliverer, healer, protector, and redeemer*. And these are just a few ways that God is described. Psalm 23 it is used most often because it is so encouraging in times of trouble and heartache:

*“Even when I walk through a dark valley,
I fear no harm for you are at my side;
your rod and staff give me courage”* (v. 4).

The psalms help us see the greatness of God who, as creator and redeemer, deserves our praise now and forever. The following are only a few of the many images of God to be found in the psalms:



God is our provider. Psalm 72:6,

*“He shall be like rain coming down on the meadow,
like showers watering the earth.”*

Besides describing the blessings of the Creator, this psalm may have been used as a blessing during the crowning of Israel's king. It also points to the future kingdom of the messiah.

God is our rock. Psalm 18:2-3 *“I love you, LORD, my strength,
LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer...”*

This is one of David's songs of gratitude. The Lord also can be a rock in our lives, giving us strength in hard times.

God is our comforter and helper. Psalm 5:2 *“Hear my words, O LORD;
listen to my sighing.
Hear my cry for help,
my king, my God!”*

We have help not just from a human power, but from the creator of the universe.

God is our shepherd. Psalm 80:1 *“Shepherd of Israel, listen,
guide of the flock of Joseph!”*

As a faithful shepherd God carefully guides us to what is best for us.

God is our deliverer. Psalm 142:8

The psalms sometimes speak of our helplessness and our need to be rescued: *“I am imprisoned and I cannot escape”* (Psalm 88: 9). Nevertheless we are valuable in his eyes, as this cry from prison reminds us:

*“Lead me out of my prison,
that I may give thanks to your name.
Then the just shall gather around me
because you have been good to me”* .

The same God who freed his people from bondage in Egypt also wants us to be free of whatever enslaves us. Many people are imprisoned by forces that keep them from being spiritually and emotionally healthy. They might be struggling with a destructive *force from within* like an addiction or self-hatred, or a *force from without* like rejection or unjust treatment by others. All of these forces seek to keep us from becoming what God meant us to be. We realize that we need to be rescued from the powers that hold us down. As Psalm 129: 4 says: *“But the just LORD cut me free/ from the ropes of the yoke of the wicked.”*

Prayer for Victory Over Our Enemies

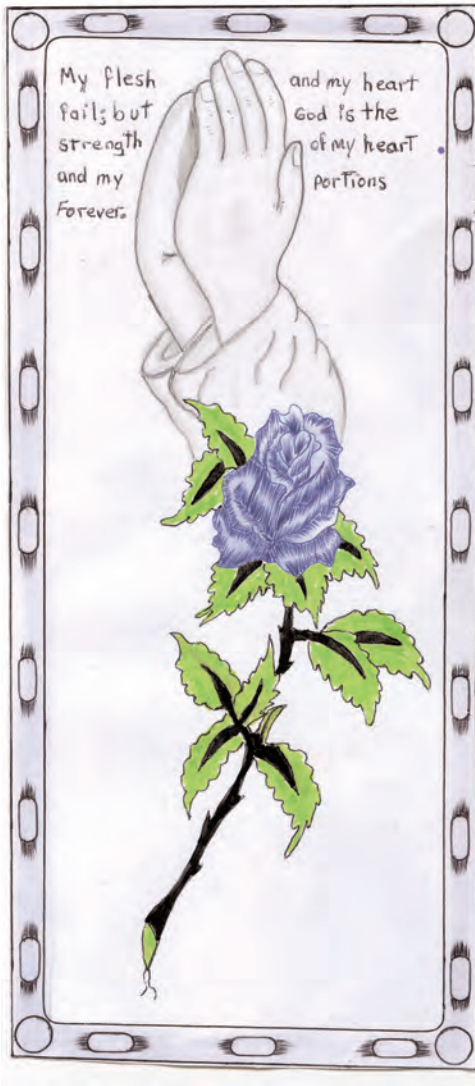
The psalms also help us pray for victory in our struggle to overcome our own enemies—the *negative spiritual forces* that can drag us down or prey on our weakness. Many psalms speak of Israel’s struggle against its enemies. Such psalms stand for our own struggle to be better, stronger persons. They show us how to call on God’s power to save us: *“O my God, make them like leaves in a whirlwind,/ like chaff before the wind/ Let them be ashamed and put to rout forever;/let them be confounded and perish,/ Knowing that you alone are the LORD,/ the Most High over all the earth”* (Psalm 83: 14, 18-19). Psalm 79 could also be regarded as such a prayer.

These and the other psalms remind us that *God is with us* no matter what happens— whether we must face difficult problems, have failed in some way or when we wish celebrate with others or are content to rejoice alone in the stillness of God’s presence.



*“Justice shall flower in his days, and
profound peace, till the moon be no more”*
(Psalm 72: 7).

Praying with the Psalms



Prayer at Dawn	Psalm 5
Prayer at Night	Psalm 4
Prayer in Distress-1	Psalm 6
Prayer in Distress-2	Psalm 13
Prayer for Safety	Psalm 16
Prayer of Rescue	Psalm 18
Prayer of Abandonment	Psalm 22
Prayer to the Shepherd	Psalm 23
Prayer for Guidance	Psalm 25
Prayer of Deliverance	Psalm 30
Prayer of Forgiveness	Psalm 32
Prayer for Repentance	Psalm 51
Prayer for Protection	Psalm 57
Prayer of Trust	Psalm 62
Prayer of Longing	Psalm 63
Prayer for Blessing	Psalm 67
Prayer in Anguish	Psalm 69
Prayer for Victory Over Enemies-1	Psalm 79
Prayer for Victory Over Enemies-2	Psalm 83
Prayer of Joy in God	Psalm 84
Prayer of Prisoners-1	Psalm 88
Prayer of Refuge	Psalm 91
Prayer of Joyful Worship	Psalm 95
Prayer of God's Glory	Psalm 96
Prayer of Victory	Psalm 98
Prayer of Thanksgiving	Psalm 100
Prayer of Prisoners-2	Psalm 102
Prayer of God's Kindness	Psalm 103
Prayer to God the Savior	Psalm 107
Prayer of the Poor & Needy	Psalm 113
Prayer to a Gracious God	Psalm 116
Prayer of Enduring Love	Psalm 118
Prayer to God Our Guard	Psalm 121
Prayer for Pardon	Psalm 130
Prayer in the Midst of Enemies	Psalm 138
Prayer in the Midst of Violence	Psalm 140
Prayer for Deliverance from Evil	Psalm 141
Prayer in Need of Protection	Psalm 142
Prayer of God's Compassion	Psalm 145
Prayer of All Creation	Psalm 148
Prayer of Final Praise	Psalm 150

The Canticles

Like people today, the ancient Jews also expressed their spiritual sorrows and joys in prayerful songs or *canticles*. There are many examples in the Bible of God's people breaking into song as a way of expressing themselves before others and God.

For example, after they were delivered from Egypt's army by passing through the parted sea they burst into joyful song with Moses:

"I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant:..." (Exodus 15: 1).

This was followed by Miriam and all the women who:

"...went out with her with tambourines, dancing; and she led them in the refrain..." (Exodus 18: 20-21).

Hannah the mother of Samuel sang as she offered her son in the temple:

"There is no Holy One like the LORD:..." (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

Not all the songs were happy ones. David composed a song of grief for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1: 19-27:

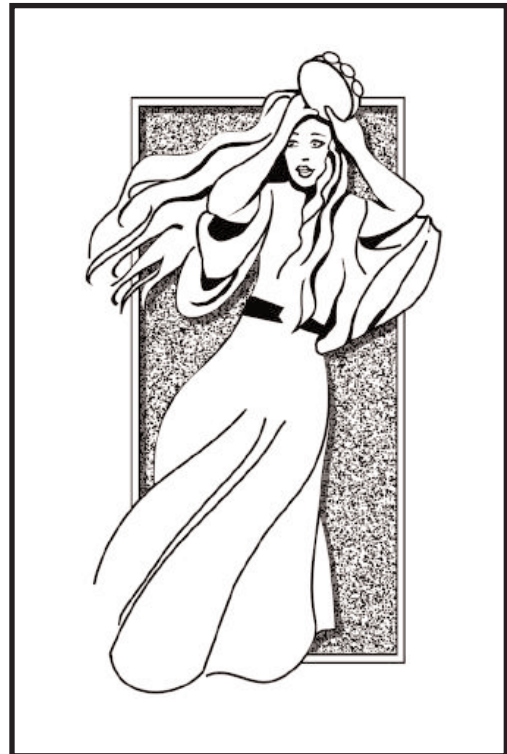
"How can the warriors have fallen—" (v. 25).

There are many beautiful *songs or canticles* in the Old Testament as the following list reveals:

Exodus 15: 1-18
Deuteronomy 32: 1-43
1 Samuel 2: 1-10
Tobit 13: 1-18
Judith 16: 1-17
Wisdom 9, 1-18
Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8
Isaiah 12: 1-6; 26: 1-19; 38: 9-20
Daniel 3: 26-90
Habakuk 3: 1-19

The Bible tells us that even God sings about us because he loves us so joyfully:

*"The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,
He will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals"*
(Zephaniah 3: 17-18).



Prayer in the Prophets

Jonah's Prayer

(Jonah 2:1-11)

The story of Jonah and a large fish (the Bible does not call it a *whale*) describes a prophet who is running away from God. But it also includes a great prayer of the Bible. In Chapter 2 Jonah prayed in total darkness inside the fish where he finally stopped resisting and surrendered to God's plan. It shows just how far someone might go in order to run away from God and his plan.



During Jonah's time, the Israelites were being threatened by their enemies, the Assyrians. In words that seemed very strange to Jonah, God told him to go to Nineveh and preach to the Assyrians so that they would repent of their sinfulness.

Because Jonah did not want his enemies to receive God's mercy, he boarded a ship and headed out to sea. He thought he would get as far away as possible from God's request.

After Jonah was far out to sea, a huge storm put the ship in danger of sinking. The ship's crew cast lots to find out who was the cause and when the lot pointed to Jonah, he admitted it. He told the crew to throw him overboard. At first the frightened crew tried rowing to safety, but finally they gave up: "*Then they took Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea's raging abated*" (Jonah 1:15). Although it was strange that Jonah suggested being throw overboard, he realized that they were in danger because of his own rebellion against God.

After Jonah was thrown into the sea, the Bible says: "*Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*" (1:17.) In a way, allowing the fish to swallow Jonah was merciful on God's part. God wanted Jonah to live so that he would bring his message of repentance and forgiveness even to his enemies.

Here is Jonah's prayer while he was in the belly of the great fish:

"Out of my distress I called to the LORD, /and he answered me; /From the midst of the nether world I cried for help, /and you heard my voice. /For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the sea, /and the flood enveloped me; /All your breakers and your billows passed over me. /Then I said: 'I am banished from your sight! /yet would I again look upon your holy temple.' /The waters swirled about me, threatening my life; /the abyss enveloped me; /seaweed clung about my head. /Down I went to the roots of the mountains; /the bars of the nether world /were closing behind me forever. /But you brought up my life from the pit, /O LORD, my God. /When

my soul fainted within me, /I remembered the LORD; /My prayer reached you /in your holy temple. /Those who worship vain idols /forsake their source of mercy. /But I, with resounding praise, /will sacrifice to you; /What I have vowed I will pay: /deliverance is from the LORD” (Jonah 2: 3-10).

As Jonah was praying to God he was sinking to the bottom of the sea. When the sailors threw Jonah overboard he probably was afraid he was going to die. Yet he was still clinging to hope because he prayed; “*yet would I again look upon your holy temple.*” Something within him still called out to God even though he had tried to get away from him.

Jonah felt close to death when he said: “*...the bars of the nether world /were closing behind me forever.*” In this life-and-death struggle he felt the strong arm of God bring him back from the pit. Although he felt his soul sinking within him, he remembered God. In this dark moment he surrendered to God, realizing he had nowhere else to turn. He could no longer fight against God. He was ready to cooperate: “*But I, with resounding praise, /will sacrifice to you; /What I have vowed I will pay:...*” After three days in darkness and near death the stubborn will of Jonah was broken and he agreed to do whatever God wanted. That was the moment God was waiting for: “*Then the LORD commanded the fish to spew Jonah upon the shore*” (Jonah 2:11). Once again, God told Jonah to preach his message to the people of Nineveh.

What seemed like harsh reality to Jonah at first, was really God turning his life upside down in order to save him. In the beginning Jonah had no interest in helping his enemies repent. However, God’s mercy was *greater* than Jonah’s. It included both Jonah and his enemies. Jonah went to Nineveh and convinced them to no longer *forsake their source of mercy*. This story reveals how God’s love embraces everyone—even our enemies—as he asks for our help in turning their lives around.

Although this story begins with Jonah’s proud resistance, it ends in humble surrender. God never gave up on Jonah. He patiently pursued him until he had a change of heart. This is *good news* for us when we have run away from God. Even though our lives are a “mess” because of the choices we have made, God continues to love us. Because of our mistakes we might feel that we can no longer expect God’s help.

If God rescued Jonah he will rescue us too. We have the key to real peace and joy if we surrender to God’s wise and loving plan for us and for everyone – *even our enemies!*



Jonah preaching to the people of Nineveh.

Habakkuk's Protest Prayer

(Habakkuk 1:1-3,19)

This story teaches a very special lesson. In it the prophet Habakkuk prayed for the kingdom of Judah because it was in serious trouble. There was wide-spread idolatry and injustice among the people, even among its leaders. Habakkuk felt frustrated that God did not seem to be helping:

*“How long, O Lord? I cry for help
but you do not listen!
I cry out to you, ‘Violence!’
but you do not intervene.
Why do you let me see ruin;
why must I look at misery?”*
(Habakkuk 1: 2-3).

Habakkuk prayed in protest because God did not seem to care that others were getting away with evil. When God answered him, it was not in a way that Habakkuk expected. God replied:

*“For see, I am raising up Chaldea,
that bitter and unruly people,
That marches the breadth of the land
to take dwellings not his own”*
(Habakkuk 1: 6).



Maybe Habakkuk thought that his people would have a sudden change of heart. He had his own ideas of how God would change things. But when God told Habakkuk what was going to happen, he could hardly believe it. God revealed that the lawless Chaldeans were on their way to attack:

*“Terrible and dreadful is he,
from himself derive his law and his majesty,
Swifter than leopards are his horses,
and keener than wolves at evening...”* (Habakkuk1: 7-8).

This was hard for Habakkuk to understand. These enemies were more worse than his people were:

*“Why, then, do you gaze on the faithless in silence
while the wicked man devours
one more just than himself?”* (Habakkuk 1:13).

Although we live in a different time and place than Habakkuk, his problem is one that we face too. We pray for things to get better but things happen in a way we would never choose. Like Habakkuk we are faced with the hard fact that we can't control the choices that others make. We feel frustrated and tell ourselves: *“I never thought it would turn out like this.”* We struggle to realize that God knows more than we do. What we think is a mistake, may be God's way of solving things. Like Habakkuk all we can do ask God to help us understand:

*“I will stand at my guard post,
and station myself upon the rampart,
And keep watch to see what he will say to me,
and what answer he will give to my complaint” (Habakkuk 2:1).*

When we are facing a problem and do not understand what God is doing, we might be tempted to say: *“I’ve tried God’s way and tried praying but it doesn’t work.”* What we are really saying is that we don’t believe we can rely on God. But the problem is not God, although we would like to blame him. The problem is that we are not seeing as God sees. We only see a small part of life. Sometimes God grants our prayers right away; sometimes he does not. If we watch and pray, God usually will answer us in one several ways: *through his Word, in our spirit, or through our circumstances.*

Sometimes as we read or listen to God’s Word a passage suddenly helps us understand what God is doing. An answer comes when we least expect it. This is how God’s Word helps us.

At other times God answers us in our spirit. We feel a *push* in a certain direction; it keeps growing stronger until we cannot ignore it. We must be careful because Satan can pretend to be God’s voice. But God’s Spirit speaks quietly and peacefully to us.

God also speaks to us through our circumstances. When one road is closed it maybe God is trying to show us another way to go. One of these circumstances can be the decisions of *authority*, whether from the community or the church as the wisdom of others guides and protects us.

Sometimes God’s answers might not seem like good ones at that moment. Gradually we learn that God’s vision is better than ours:

*“For the vision still has its time,
presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint;
If it delays, wait for it,
it will surely come, it will not be late” (Habakkuk 2:3).*

Waiting can be hard especially when we want an answer *right away!* But God does things in his own time and way. We think we know what is good for ourselves and others, but we do not see the whole picture. We only see *here and now*—and not even that so clearly! God’s delay does not always mean “no”. While we wait God teaches us to stop and look at ourselves and our motives; God purifies and trains us to have *faith* in him. God told Habakkuk:

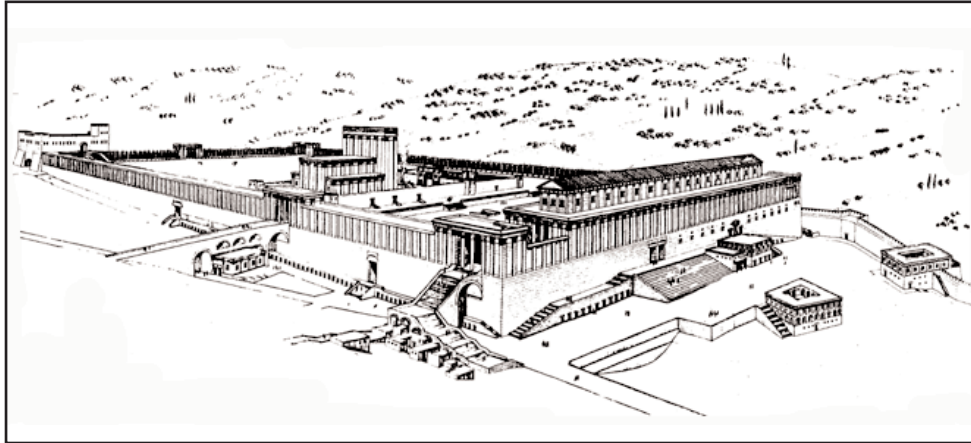
“The rash man has no integrity; /but the just man, because of his faith, shall live” (Habakkuk 2:4).

Finally Habakkuk stopped protesting. He trusted that no matter what happened, God would do what was best. Like him we can trust in God’s help even when we feel helpless while others face the consequences of their actions. All we can do is hope and pray that something good will come of it with God’s help:

*“For though the fig tree blossom not
nor fruit be on the vines...
Yet will I rejoice in the LORD
and exult in my saving God.
GOD, my Lord, is my strength...” (Habakkuk 3: 17-19).*

Prayer in Temple Worship

“They shall make a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell in their midst. This dwelling and all its furnishings you shall make exactly according to the pattern that I will now show you” (Exodus 25:8-9).



The temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish worship. This sacred building was patterned after the tent God instructed Moses to set up in the desert as his dwelling place or *tabernacle*. The same sacrifices and other religious rituals that were offered in the tent took place in the temple. Solomon's *first temple* was partially destroyed at the time of the Babylonian Exile and then rebuilt after the Jews returned. This *second temple* was rebuilt by Zerubbabel and later expanded by Herod the Great. There was a temple in Jerusalem for over a thousand years, from the time of Solomon's temple until the second one was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. All that remains today of the temple is the famous *Western Wall* which is now a place of prayer. When the temple was standing it was located above and behind this wall.

The First Temple - Solomon's Temple

The *first temple* was built by Solomon around 957 BC, to replace the tabernacle tent. Until then a special tent had been used for worship because Moses and the people had lived in the desert. Solomon's magnificent temple of stone and wood took thousands of workers 7 years to complete. It was done with great care and reverence: *“The temple was built of stone dressed at the quarry, so that no hammer, axe or iron tool was to be heard in the temple during its construction”* (1 Kings 6:7).

A detailed description of the temple can be found in *1 Kings* 6:1-38. Its roof beams and ceilings were made of wood from the cedar trees of Lebanon. The rooms of the temple also were lined with cedar wood: *“...all was of cedar, and no stone was to be seen”* (1 Kings 6:18). The temple included an entrance, a room containing the *menorah* (lampstand with 7 branches), the incense altar and table of twelve loaves of bread, and the inner room called the *Holy of Holies*: *“In the innermost part of the temple was located the sanctuary to house the ark of the LORD's covenant...Solomon overlaid the interior of the temple with pure gold”* (1 Kings 6:19).

Once it was finished, the temple was under the care of the high priest who was a descendant of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Other priests descended from the tribe of Levi also had special duties there each day. The priests offered the sacrifices commanded by Moses and also saw to the upkeep of the temple area. These sacrifices were part of the covenant that Israel had made with God at Mount Sinai.

The Menorah or Lampstand

The menorah was a seven branched lampstand. Some people think that this lampstand represented the burning bush that Moses saw when God spoke to him in the desert. It was lit by the priests in the sanctuary every evening. In the morning they cleaned it and replaced the wicks and put fresh olive oil in the cups. Detailed instructions on how it was made are found in *Exodus 25*:

“You shall make a lampstand of pure beaten gold—its shaft and branches—with its cups and knobs and petals springing directly from it. Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand, three branches on one side, and three on the other” (Exodus 25:31-32).



This carving on the Arch of Titus, still standing in Rome today, is the best known image of the menorah .

The Ark

The ark kept in the holy of holies is referred to in many places in the Bible. A description of how it was made is found in *Exodus 25:10-22*. *Exodus 37:1-9* also mentions Bezalel the artist who made it. The ark also is mentioned in:

Deuteronomy 10:5; Joshua 3:6; 1 Samuel 3:3; 4:11; 7:2 and 2 Samuel 6:17. Other passages are: *1 Kings 8:9; 1 Chronicles 13:9 and 2 Chronicles 35:3*.

The Bible describes the Ark as made of wood from the acacia tree, known to the Egyptians as the “tree of life” because it provided a certain medicine. It measured 4.27 x 2.56 x 2.56 feet and was covered inside and outside with gold. On each of the sides were two gold rings, where two wooden poles covered in gold were placed. This allowed the ark to be carried (*Numbers 7:9; 10:21; 4:5,19, 20 and 1 Kings 8:3, 6*). Over the ark, at both ends, were two cherubim (winged figures) with their faces turned toward one another (*Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 7:89*). Their wings spread over the top of the ark and formed the throne of God, while the ark itself was called God’s footstool (*Exodus 25:10-22; 37:1-9*). The ark contained the stone tablets of the Law given to Moses:

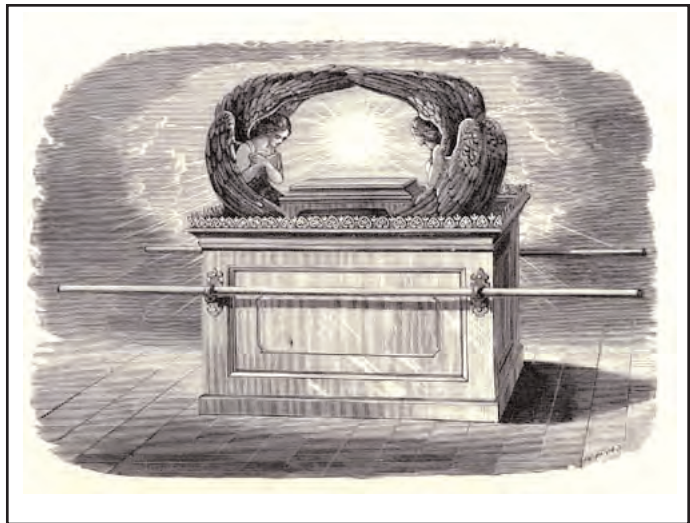
“In the ark itself you are to put the commandments which I will give you. There I will meet you...I will tell you all the commands that I wish you to give the Israelites” (Exodus 25:21-22).

At one time the ark also may have contained Aaron’s staff and manna, but at the time of the

building of Solomon's temple *I Kings 8:9* states that there was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone.

Offering Sacrifice

Jewish worship included the offering of sacrifices. *Sacrifice* usually means to give up of something. In baseball we refer to a *sacrifice hit*. The word comes from the Latin *sacrificere*, to make sacred. The Hebrew word also means “to draw near.” This points to the basic purpose of an offering: to bring people nearer to God. Three things are basic to understanding sacrifice: *giving*, *substituting* and *coming closer*.



Giving: A sacrifice meant giving up something that belonged to the person who made the offering. That is why sacrifices used animals from their own herds and flocks, not wild animals. Wild animals could not be “given up.” For the same reason, offerings of food were usually in the form of flour or meal, because this took a lot of work to prepare.

Substituting: This meant that what was offered was a substitute or stand-in for the person who was making it. Whatever was done to the offering was something that would have been done to the person making the offering. The offering in some way took the place of the person.

Coming Closer. The most important aspect of making an offering was that it was meant to bring the person closer to God. Sometimes a portion of the meat or bread offered was eaten by the person offering it. This was because it was like sharing a meal with God.

Purposes of Sacrifice

Seeking forgiveness for sins, cleansing a person of an impurity or atoning for sins were not the only reasons for offering a sacrifice. The other reasons were: to bring an offering to praise God and grow closer to Him, to give God love and gratitude, to celebrate holy days and festivals.

Types of Old Testament Sacrifices and Offerings

There were many different types of sacrifices in the Old Testament. Leviticus describes each of them in detail. The things offered were sometimes brought by the common people or their leaders, but only Israel’s priests could perform the actual sacrifices. Sometimes the offering was totally burned on the altar. At other times only a part of the offering was burnt, and a portion was given to the priests, and the rest was eaten by the offerer and family. Here is a brief introduction to some of the major types as found in *Leviticus*:

Whole Burnt Offering

The best-known type of offering was the *holocaust*. It was completely burnt on the altar and no part of it was eaten by anyone. The offering represented total submission to God's will because

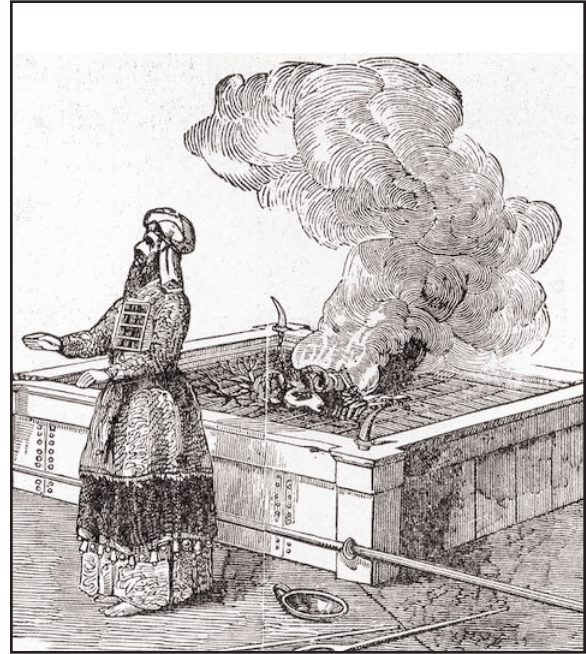
the entire offering was given to God. Animals *without blemish* (cattle, sheep, goats, or birds) could be used for this offering, depending on what each person could afford to buy or bring (*Leviticus* 1: 1-17; 6: 8-13; 8: 18-21; 16: 23-24)..

Peace Offering

A peace offering was meant to express thanks or worship to God for his goodness and mercy. The fat and some of the inner organs of an animal without blemish, or bread without yeast, were offered. Everyone shared a part of this offering with God (*Leviticus* 3: 1-17; 7: 11-36).

Sin Offering

A sin offering was an offering to atone for and purge a sin. It expressed sorrow for the error and a desire to be reconciled with God. It was offered for *unintentional* sins that were done through carelessness, not for bad reasons. The size of the offering depended on how serious the sin was and what the person could afford to give (*Leviticus* 4: 1-5, 13; 6: 24-30; 8: 14-17; 16: 3-22).



Guilt Offering

A guilt offering was offered to make up for taking or destroying something that belonged to God or another person, if it was not clear if wrong had been done or not. This offering required a ram without blemish, or the cost of the ram, in addition to paying back what was taken or destroyed (*Leviticus* 5: 14-6: 7; 7: 1-6).

Food and Drink Offerings

The offering of bread made with honey, olive oil and no yeast, represented the gift of thanks to God who gives the blessings of all good things. Part of the offering was burnt on the altar, but the rest was eaten by the priests. There also were offerings of wine (*Leviticus* 2: 1-16; 6: 14-23).

The Destruction of Solomon's Temple and the Exile in Babylon

In 586 B.C. the Babylonians attacked the kingdom of Judah, destroying Jerusalem and leaving the temple built by Solomon in ruins. Psalm 74: 4-7 describes what this was like: "*Your foes roar triumphantly in your shrine.../with chisel and hammer they hack at all its paneling./ They set your sanctuary on fire...*" Thousands were killed but many survivors, especially the priests, nobles, and upper classes, were taken to Babylon. Only the farmers, shepherds, and village dwellers were left who would not fight without their leaders. This exile lasted for about 50 years, until Babylon itself was conquered by the Persians who allowed the Jews to return home and rebuild the temple.

But during the years before their return, the exiled Jews faced a crisis. They were not able to offer sacrifices to God, since these could only be offered in the temple of Jerusalem. As a result they wondered if their covenant with God still remained. The prophet Ezekiel (who went

into exile with them) assured them that God's covenant was forever. He also told them that some day God would bring them back home. He told them about the great vision he had of *dry bones* (see Ezekiel 37). In this vision God promised that he would restore their lives. One day God's people would return from exile to live in their own land.

The Second Temple - Zerubbabel's Temple

The *second temple* was built by Zerubbabel after Cyrus allowed the Jews to return from their captivity in Babylon around 537 BC. After a few delays, this temple was completed and then dedicated in 515 BC. However, those who remembered Solomon's temple felt that it was nothing like that first beautiful temple.

*“Who is left among you
that saw this house in its former glory?
And how do you see it now?
Does it not seem like nothing in your eyes?”* (Haggai 2: 3-9).

Nevertheless, the prophet Haggai predicted:

*“Greater will be the future glory of this house
than the former, says the LORD of hosts,
And in this place I will give peace,
says the LORD of hosts”* (Haggai 2: 9).

The high priesthood of this second temple remained in the family of Zadok for almost 350 years. This family had provided the chief priests in Solomon's temple from its dedication onwards. Over the years Zerubbabel's temple was repaired and enlarged from time to time, but none of this rebuilding or expanding of Zerubbabel's second temple compared, however, with the work of King Herod the Great.



Herod's Temple

Herod complained that Zerubbabel's temple looked like a fortress. It was shorter than Solomon's temple by about 90 feet because of a decree by Darius the Persian king. Although Herod's project actually amounted to rebuilding the temple entirely, it was never called the *third temple*. Herod himself said that he only wanted to make Zerubbabel's temple larger and more beautiful.

The work of rebuilding the temple began in 19 BC during the 18th year of King Herod's rule. According to the historian Josephus the effort used thousands of workers. Many Levites also were trained as builders, because only they could enter the sacred areas. The work was carried out so carefully that the sacrifices and other rituals never stopped. Construction began with the most sacred part of the temple—the Holy Place—which contained the *Holy of Holies*. Closest to the Holy Place was the *priests area* and the *altar of burnt offering*. Next to it was the *court of the Israelites* who gathered to worship. Next to that was the *court of the women*, and behind this was the *court of the Gentiles* with the porticos of Solomon. These were the beautiful marble porches built around the temple mount. Herod's temple was taller so that the white stone gleaming in the sun was seen from miles away.

When Jesus visited the temple during the Passover at the beginning of his ministry, the place had been under construction for 46 years. The work was not completed until 63 AD, only 7 years before the temple was entirely destroyed. Herod began renovating the temple around 19 BC to create a larger and grander version. But just a few years after this work was finished, the temple was totally destroyed down to the foundations. This was done by the Roman army under General Titus in 70 AD. This fulfilled the prediction of Jesus:

“Jesus left the temple area and was going away, when his disciples approached him to point out the temple buildings. He said to them in reply: ‘You see all these things, do you not? Amen, I say to you, there will not be left here a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down’ ” (Matthew 24: 2).

To this very day, the memorial of the temple’s destruction remains carved in marble on the *Arch of Titus* in Rome. It shows the Roman soldiers returning home as they carry the treasures of the temple in a victory parade. One of these treasures was the *menorah* (see p. 46).

The Synagogue

Even after King Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Israel, a number of them remained in Babylon. By then, many had been born in Babylon, had built homes and set up businesses. They believed that sacrifices could be offered only on the altar in Jerusalem, but prayers could be offered anywhere. We know from Daniel's prayer (Daniel 6:11) that he faced Jerusalem when praying to God. As a result, synagogues were created as places of prayer and study.

Even in Israel, where going to the temple was not always a daily event, synagogues served as the central places of Jewish life where study, worship and community meetings took place. Outside of Israel, and besides Babylon, there were synagogues in Alexandria, Egypt and the Roman empire wherever numbers of Jews lived. Jewish tradition holds that at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, there were hundreds of synagogues in Israel.

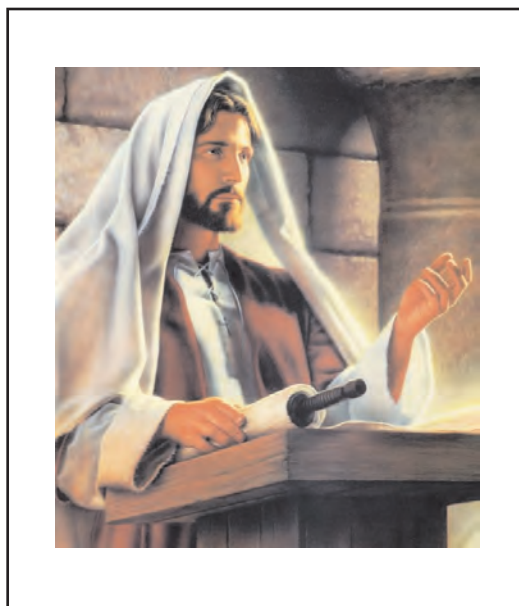


For faithful Jews, the study of scripture is a life-long task, therefore, the synagogue has a library of sacred books for study. It is also the place where children receive their basic religious education. The synagogue often functions as a hall where important matters of the community can be discussed. In addition, the synagogue serves as a social welfare center where money and other items are collected and given to the poor and needy in the community.

The part of the synagogue where prayer services were performed is called the *sanctuary*. Synagogues are generally designed so that the front of the sanctuary is on the side towards Jerusalem, which is the direction that Jews face when offering certain prayers. The most important feature of the sanctuary is the *ark*. This is a cabinet or opening in the wall that

holds the *Torah scrolls*. The ark is a word for a chest and does not refer to Noah's ark. That is a different word in Hebrew. The ark is located in the front, that is, on the side facing Jerusalem. The ark has doors as well as an inner curtain. This imitates the curtain in the sanctuary of the temple. During certain prayers, the doors or curtain of the ark are opened and closed. This is done by a member of the synagogue and is considered an honor. All stand when the ark is open.

In front of the ark and above it is the *eternal lamp*. This symbolizes the command to keep a light burning in the temple outside of the curtain that surrounded the ark of the covenant (Exodus 27:20-21). There also is a *candlestick* that represents the menorah that stood in the temple. This candlestick has 6 or 8 branches instead of the 7 branches of temple menorah. Front and center is a *pedestal* where the Torah scrolls are placed when they are read.



We know that Nazareth and Capernaum had synagogues because they are mentioned by Josephus the historian and in the gospels (Luke 4:16-30; Luke 13:10-17; Mark 1:21-28; Mark 3:1-6). The following describes his visit to the synagogue of his home town:

“He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...’ ” (Luke 4:16-18).

Daily Prayer

During the exile in Babylon, the people were not able to sacrifice in the temple, so they simply offered their prayers instead. It was the offering of their *lips instead of bulls* as the prophet Hosea taught. They gathered to pray three times a day, in the *morning, afternoon and evening*, in memory of the three daily sacrifices in the temple. There was another prayer service on the *Sabbath* and also on certain holidays. These were like the additional temple sacrifices of those days, or this might have been done even before the exile. The oldest daily prayer is the *Shema* as recorded in *Deuteronomy* 6:4-9; 11:13-21, and *Numbers* 15:37-4. This ancient command is fulfilled to this day by reciting the *Shema* in the morning and evening. Each word is spoken carefully and many Jews cover their eyes with their right hand while praying it. The words of this prayer are:

In Hebrew: *“Shema Yisrel, Adonai eloheinu, Adonai echad”*

In English: *“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.”*

In Hebrew it is written like this: **שמע ישראל יהוה יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד**



REVIEW TEST
Pray Always: Part 1
Introduction and Genesis

*After completing all the test pages carefully
remove and send them to Dismas Ministry.
Add your name, ID# & address on this page.*

Name _____

1. We can turn to fellow believers for guidance on how to pray, but *above all* where can we turn to find wonderful examples? _____

2. What are the *five forms of prayer* revealed in the Bible? Please list them:

3. The greatest prayer of the Church is the _____

4. What is Psalm 150 an example of? _____

5. Why can prayer also include symbols and actions? _____

6. According to St. John of Damascus, what is prayer? _____

7. In the emptying process called *kenosis* by some saints what must we empty ourselves of?

8. What *six postures of prayer* are found in the Bible and in the Catholic sacraments?

9. Prayer means communicating with _____ and _____. *Complete this sentence.*

10. Speaking with us is joyful for God. ___ True ___ False

11. Why did Adam and Even try to hide from God? _____

12. In what passage is the word "*faith*" first mentioned in the Bible? _____

13. Which psalm does Abram's experience of darkness remind us of? _____ Why, what does it say?

14. In Genesis 21 what does Sarah teach us about prayer? _____

15. In Genesis 33 what did Jacob say coming into the presence of Esau was like and why?



REVIEW TEST
Pray Always: Part 1
Exodus and Numbers

*After completing all the test pages carefully
remove and send them to Dismas Ministry.*

Add your name, ID# & address on this page.

Name _____

1. In Exodus 3 God chose Moses just as he was. What was he? _____
2. When prayer is not just for ourselves but cares about and pleads for others, what kind of prayer is it? _____
3. How did Aaron act in a way that was unworthy of his priesthood?

4. The person who intercedes for others always stands apart from them. __True __ False
5. In the prayer of Moses in Numbers 11: 10-15 Moses hid his feelings from God. __True __ False
6. What kind of prayer did Moses offer in Numbers 11: 10-15? _____
7. What does the prayer of complaint teach us? _____

8. When God answered Moses' prayer of complaint what did he do for Moses?

9. Who seems most likely for saving Moses when he was a baby? _____
10. As a young man, why did Moses murder the Egyptian overseer? _____

11. After Moses and the people passed safely through the Red Sea what did they do?

12. Miriam was called to serve her people as a prophetess. __ True __ False
13. What did Miriam and the other women do after Moses and the Israelites sang a triumphant song?

14. One of the great prayers Moses taught was a *meal* that recalled the Passover. What was it called?

15. Why was unleavened bread used for the seder meal at *Passover*? _____



REVIEW TEST
Pray Always: Part 1
Joshua and Judges

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Name _____

1. What does the name Joshua mean in Hebrew? _____
2. What famous words did Joshua use to state the he and his family would remain faithful to God?

3. When news came back that the Israelites lost the battle of Ai, what happened to the people?

4. What special form of prayer did Joshua and the elders perform? _____
5. When the people forgot that God was leading them what did even Joshua feel like doing? _____
6. What does prayer help us recall? _____
7. Admitting our faults is important, but what does God want? _____
8. Why were the special leaders of Israel called *judges*? _____
9. Who are some well-known judges? _____
10. What was Deborah besides a judge? _____
11. Barak told Deborah he would fight Sisera on one condition. What was it? _____
12. Deborah wanted to take credit for the victory at the Kishon River. __True __ False
13. Who did Deborah say marched before Barak? _____
14. In her prayerful song, what two things did Deborah do? _____
15. In her song, when Deborah “rose” in Israel what did she call herself? _____



REVIEW TEST
Pray Always: Part 1
1 and 2 Samuel

*After completing all the test pages carefully
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Name _____

1. Hannah and her husband did not love one another. __True __False
2. During one of their pilgrimages why did Hannah go off by herself? _____
3. As she prayed and wept, what was the vow she made to the Lord? _____

4. As the priest Eli watched Hannah, how was she praying? _____

5. In 1 Samuel 1: 15 what did Hannah *pour out*? _____
6. According to 1 Samuel 1: 16 what prompted Hannah's prayer? _____
7. Write Eli's blessing of Hannah: _____

8. Why did Hannah call her son *Samuel*? _____
9. What does the name *Samuel* mean in Hebrew? _____
10. According to Hannah's prayer what does the Lord do for the *needy* and the *poor*?

11. Why did Samuel's anointing of David bring greater blessings on Hannah's people?

12. God answers prayers in ways that are beyond anything we could imagine. __ True __False
13. After David heard God's promise why did he go in and sit before the Lord? _____

14. We can discover God's will with help of what four sources? _____

15. David was able to surrender his will because he had the help of whose spirit? _____



REVIEW TEST
Pray Always: Part 1
1 and 2 Chronicles

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Name _____

1. God chose David instead of Solomon to build his temple. True False
2. In addition to all he stored up, what did David give to God's house?

3. After the priests placed the ark in the holy of holies and joined the crowd, what filled the temple?

4. What *postures* did Solomon use for the dedication prayer of the temple? _____

5. How many requests did Solomon make during his dedication prayer? _____
6. The people honor God's dwelling place by living according to what? _____
7. Even in the spiritual life our souls go through times of dryness. At such times what happens?

8. As spiritual warriors where do we encounter the enemies that we must struggle with?

9. We can offer many things to God. But most of all what does he want? _____
10. What was the first thing Asa did when he became king? _____
11. Why did Asa challenge his people to give up their false gods? _____

12. Complete Asa's words: "*O LORD, there is none like you* _____"
13. What are Azariah's words "*If you seek him*" actually about? _____
14. What prevents us from doing good or doing the right thing? _____

15. When *all Judah rejoiced over the oath*, how had they sworn? _____



REVIEW TEST
Pray Always: Part 1
Psalms

*After completing all the test pages carefully
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Name _____

1. What has the Book of Psalms been called? _____
2. Why is the Book of Psalms called a “*school of prayer*”? _____
3. According to the Psalms we should never complain to God or ask *why* or *how*? __True __ False
4. Why did the people of Israel preserve the psalms? _____

5. What do the psalms remind us of today? _____
6. What do the *lament* psalms express? _____
7. Name at least four groups of psalms: _____

8. The psalms have been a *treasury of prayer* only for the Jewish communities. __True __ False
9. Which blessing psalm in this chapter *points to the future kingdom of the Messiah*? _____
10. List several images of God’s care for us in the Psalms? _____

11. What is your favorite *image* of God in the psalms? _____
Which Psalm is it in? _____
12. What *enemies* do the psalms help us pray for victory to overcome? _____

13. What two psalms might be applied to prisoners? _____
14. What is one of your favorite Old Testament *canticles*? _____
15. The psalms and *canticles* sing about God, but where in the Bible does it say that God sings about us?



REVIEW TEST
Pray Always: Part 1
Prophets

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Name _____

1. Besides a runaway prophet what else does the story of Jonah include? _____
2. God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh to condemn the Assyrians for their sinfulness. __True __ False
3. Why did Jonah get on a ship and head out to sea? _____
4. Where did Jonah’s prayer take place? _____
5. Who brought Jonah’s life up from the pit? _____
6. In Jonah’s prayer, when his *soul fainted within* him who did he remember? _____
7. What do they forsake who worship vain idols? _____
8. God’s mercy was wider than Jonah’s. Who was included in God’s mercy? _____
9. God patiently pursued Jonah until what happened? _____
10. In Habakkuk’s day what was wide-spread? _____
11. Why did Habakkuk pray in protest? _____
12. Like Habakkuk what hard fact do we face at times? _____

13. God often answers us in one of several ways. Give three of these ways _____

14. How does God teach us while we wait? _____

15. Like Habakkuk we can trust in God even when we feel helpless while others face what? _____



REVIEW TEST
Pray Always: Part 1
Temple Worship

*After completing all the test pages carefully
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Name _____

1. What did Moses construct in the desert? _____
2. What remains of the Jewish temple today? _____
3. Describe the *menorah*: _____
4. The *ark* was called God's *footstool*. __ True __ False
5. At the time of Solomon's temple (I Kings 8: 9) what was in the ark? _____
6. What does the Hebrew word for sacrifice mean? _____
7. What three things are basic to understanding sacrifice?

8. Sometimes a portion of the meat or bread offered was eaten. Why? _____

9. What is the best-known offering called? _____
10. Describe the holocaust offering: _____
11. List the major types of offerings found in *Leviticus*: _____

12. Who built the first Jewish temple? _____ Who built the second? _____
13. What did the synagogue serve as? _____

14. During their exile in Babylon the Jews still offered sacrifices. __ True __ False
15. What is the oldest daily Jewish prayer called and what are the words in English?



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