

Sunday, March 24, 2024 am

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (9) Old Testament Examples of Prayer

In the past 2 lessons of our theme we have looked at the “prayer life” of Jesus and Paul. Today, we want to look at some more examples of believers who prayed. In this lesson we are going to look at the Old Testament.

I. Prayer under the Law of Moses

- a. Interestingly, the LOM does not give specific instructions about praying to God. There are instructions about sacrifices (which certainly is about approaching God – cf. Hebrews 13:15 – the sacrifice of praise), a priesthood that approached God on behalf of the people, crying out to God for restoration and deliverance (cf. Exodus 22:23 – when the afflicted poor cry out to the LORD; Leviticus 26:40-42ff – Israel in captivity confesses their iniquity in humility, the LORD would remember His covenant, etc.).
- b. Consider **Moses, their lawgiver** - he spoke with God face to face (Num. 12:7-8). Yet we find him at other times praying.
 - i. Exodus 8:29 finds him entreating the LORD at Pharaoh’s request, and plagues were removed. 3 times we read of this (Exodus 9:28-29, 10:17-18)
 - ii. Exodus 15:22-25 – at the bitter waters of Marah as the people murmured in the wilderness. Moses “cried out to the LORD...” who showed him a tree.
 - iii. Numbers 10:34-36 as Israel traveled in the wilderness, leaving Mt. Sinai, Moses would pray, *So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said: “Rise up, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You.” And when it rested, he said: “Return, O Lord, To the many thousands of Israel.”*
 - iv. Numbers 11:2 – he prayed to the LORD as fire broke out in the camp because of Israel’s rebellion.
 - v. Numbers 12:13 – he cries out to the LORD after his sister Miriam is struck with leprosy, “Please heal her, I pray”. The LORD answered him.
 - vi. Numbers 16:15-16, in the wilderness, a man named Korah stages a rebellion to overthrow Moses as leader. Moses issues a challenge. *Then Moses was very angry, and said to the Lord, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them.”*
 - vii. Numbers 21:7 – later, as fiery serpents were in the camp.
 - viii. One article about prayer in the life of Moses noted 11 prayers of Moses in the book of Numbers. Though some of them were more direct communication with YHWH.
 - ix. Deuteronomy 9:20, 26 – he notes that prayed for Aaron and the people as he recounts the golden calf incident.
 - x. Finally, consider Psalm 90, attributed to Moses. It is titled, “A prayer of Moses the Man of God”. As you read through this psalm, you can see it as a prayer. MORE on this in awhile.
- c. Finally, throughout the Old Testament, we continually find faithful followers of the law praying to God. This shows it was something understood and expected. We will see examples of this.

II. People who prayed

a. **Abraham** –

- i. Like Moses, Abraham had a special relationship with the LORD. He was called the “friend of God” (James 2:23, cf. 2 Chronicles 20:7.)
- ii. He “called on the name of the LORD” (Genesis 12:8, 13:4, 21:33), which at the least would have involved prayer. And he did this frequently.
- iii. Genesis 20:7, 17 – when Abimelech was confronted by God for taking Sarah (though innocent), the LORD demanded that Abraham pray for him to be restored. In his righteousness, he prayed and YHWH listened to him.

b. **Hannah – mother of Samuel.**

- i. Hannah was barren and provoked (severely mocked) by Peninnah, Elkanah’s other wife (another story). She grieved. 1 Samuel 1:10-12 describes one year when she was at the tabernacle of the LORD in bitterness of soul she prayed to God and made a vow. IF He would give her a son, she would dedicate him to YHWH all of his life. She described what she was doing as “poured my soul before the LORD” (vs. 15).
- ii. The LORD granted her request, and Samuel was born. When he is born she keeps her word and after he is weaned, she takes him to the tabernacle to serve.
- iii. 1 Samuel 2:1-8 records a psalm (NOT recorded in the book of psalms) which was accompanied by prayer.
- iv. Lesson: Women need to pray too! ALSO, when you make a promise to God, keep your word (cf. Ecclesiastes 5:4-7 – when you make a vow...)

c. **Solomon at the dedication of the temple**

- i. Solomon, son of David, began his reign right. He asked for wisdom when the LORD offered him anything he wanted. After this Solomon also built the temple as recorded in 1 Kings 5-7.
- ii. 1 Kings 8:22-53, as he dedicates the temple he offers a beautiful prayer, requesting that the temple be a place of blessing to ANYONE who looks toward it. It is worthy of study itself. He begins praising God for His greatness. He asks that his prayer be heard. He requests that when men are facing troubles (even self-inflicted), that if they repent and pray toward the temple that they be heard.

d. **Elijah, the prophet**

- i. Elijah prophecies during one of Israel’s darkest times up to that point. Wicked Ahab is king of Israel with his idolatrous wife, Jezebel, at his side. Elijah is sent to warn him to repent. God is TRYING everything to get His people to return to Him.
- ii. Among the many things Elijah does is pray. We find him praying:
 1. 1 Kings 17:20 – he raises a widow’s son from the dead. He cried out to the LORD.
 2. 1 Kings 18:36-37 at Mount Carmel challenging the 850 prophets of Baal. He prays to God and his sacrifice is consumed.
 3. 1 Kings 17:1-7 records a drought that Elijah proclaimed that would last 3 years until he said something. 1 Kings 18:41-46 – the drought finally ends. Vs. 42 notes that he bowed to the ground and put his face between his knees. While prayer is not specifically mentioned in these verses, we find in **James 5:16-18** that Elijah prayed as the drought began and as it ended.

- iii. Elijah, discouraged because Jezebel wanted to kill him after all he had done. He prays that he doesn't want to live anymore – 1 Kings 19:4. The LORD interacts with him, gives him further instructions. But shortly thereafter, Elijah is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

e. Daniel

- i. Moving forward in time to the Babylonian captivity of Judah. Daniel, along with others, is taken away from Jerusalem to Babylon where he will serve the king. Daniel is very faithful to God and prays often.
- ii. Daniel 2 – Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a statue made of different materials. As Daniel prepares to answer, Daniel 2:17-19 finds him asking his companions along with him to “*seek mercies from God of heaven concerning this secret...*” God answered his prayer and Daniel was able to interpret the dream.
- iii. Daniel 6:10-11 we find that Daniel prayed 3 times a day with his window open toward Jerusalem. When this was outlawed for 30 days, Daniel kept praying (he did not change his pattern). He was cast into the lion's den, but YHWH delivered him.
- iv. Daniel 9 records another prayer of Daniel, in the first year of Darius. Understanding “the books”, namely Jeremiah who had prophesied 70 years of captivity, Daniel knows that time is up. Vs. 3-19 – he set his face toward the Lord God and prayed for the people and himself. A penitent prayer acknowledging his sins and the sins of the people. He also recalls God's promises of deliverance. NOTE Den. 9:18-19. Vs. 20-21 notes that as he prayed, Gabriel appears and he has another vision.
- v. The point continues to be emphasized; Daniel prayed often. It sustained him and gave him influence in the highest of places.

f. Ezra

- i. We have concluded a study of Ezra recently. In this book, Judah is freed from Babylonian captivity by Cyrus, king of Persia (co-regent with Darius – in the book of Daniel). Those who returned to Jerusalem shortly thereafter begin to rebuild the temple. They begin with a dedication ceremony of worship. We read in Ezra 3:11, they sang, praised and gave thanks to the LORD (thanksgiving would include prayers). Because of opposition, the rebuilding is halted for about 12 years (ch. 4). But when they resume, the temple is completed in about 4 years.
- ii. Chapter 7 records the arrival of Ezra (about 55 years later) who helps the people restore worship to God. As he was traveling to Jerusalem, we read in Ezra 8:21-23 that the people fasted and prayed before making their journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. God answered their prayers.
- iii. Ezra 10:1 – Ezra, a godly scholar who leads the people in restoring true worship prays with them as they confess their unscriptural marriages and make hard decisions.

g. Nehemiah

- i. The book of Nehemiah takes place about 20 years after the conclusion of the events of Ezra's arrival and restoration of worship. The book deals with repairing the walls of Jerusalem and (more) restoring of proper worship and service to God.
- ii. Throughout the building process of the walls, the people faced opposition and Nehemiah would pray.
 - 1. Nehemiah 1:4-11, after hearing of Jerusalem's deplorable and disheartened condition, the FIRST thing he does is pray to the LORD. Again, we have a

beautiful prayer of accountability, repentance, and humble requests from God that He restore them because they were returning to Him.

2. Nehemiah 2:4, when he is asked by King Artaxerxes what his request is, we read, “So I prayed to the God of heaven” after which he made his requests, which were granted.
3. Nehemiah 4:4-5, facing resistance from enemies, Nehemiah prays that God defeat their plans and hold them accountable.
4. Nehemiah 5:19, after facing more problems, this time internal. After he helps resolve that issue we read, “*Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.*” He will repeat this declaration 3x more in 13:14, 22 & 31. When offered with true humility, such requests to God are not wrong.
5. Nehemiah 8:6, as Ezra the scribe again teaches the people (along with others), we read that he “*blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands.*”
6. Finally, in Nehemiah 13, again, 3x Nehemiah requests that the LORD remember him for good. He also prays that God remember those who had corrupted the priesthood and His covenant (13:29).

III. **What can we learn from these examples?**

- a. That prayer has ALWAYS been a part of God’s plan. He desires that we pray and always has. Recall Luke 18:1 and so many other passages that encourage us to prayer.
- b. In this we too have a “great cloud of witnesses” (cf. Hebrews 12:1). Great examples of WHEN to pray and how to pray.
- c. IF you desire to learn how to improve your prayers, STUDY the prayers of those of old. In these prayers you learn HOW to praise God, the attitude you need as you approach Him, when and what to pray for, AND that He answers our prayers.

These are a few examples of prayer in the Old Testament. There is one more example that I would like to devote some time to – **David**. That will be our next lesson. Meanwhile, when you look at the examples of godly men and women, do you see a need for improvement in your own prayer life? If so, what are you going to do about it? Think about it!