

# Comments about Old Testament Prayer

(the foundation for New Testament prayer)

Old Testament prayer and New Testament prayer are closely related. The biggest difference is one of emphasis, due to what Jesus Christ accomplished by his death and resurrection.

Here is an assortment of comments, mostly from the Old Testament, related to prayer. Note that "Yahweh" is the Hebrew name of God, found often in the Old Testament (translated as "LORD," in many versions of the English Bible). The name refers to God's nature, which is unchanging, eternal and self-existent.

## 1. Prayer to...

- a. Yahweh, the "God of Israel" and "Lord of nations."
- b. God, not as "a *tribal* god" (one of many, like the nations around them), but as "the *only* God."

## 2. God described (in prayer) as...

- a. A *person* who is spoken to, not a dumb idol (like the gods of the nations around Israel).
  - i. At times, interaction with God is described with "action" concepts, such as "intercession."
- b. The God who is sovereign, majestic, the Creator, etc.
  - i. Addressing God as "Father" was rare in the Old Testament (though it was done - see Isaiah 63:16; 64:8). But now, because of what Jesus Christ accomplished on our behalf, it has become a normal part of prayer.
- c. The God who hears and answers the prayers of his people (Psalm 3:4; 18:6; 65:2; Jeremiah 29:12).
  - i. This is why we can be confident when we come to him (Psalm 17:6+).

## 3. What is the basis (or foundation) for prayer?

- a. Based on God's nature and on his works.
  - i. Appealing to God's nature, honor, glory; Yahweh, the self-existing God.
  - ii. Appealing to what God did in the past.
  - iii. Giving thanks for what God did in the past; then asking for further guidance and deliverance, knowing that he is faithful and acts consistently with his nature.
- b. Based on faith/trust in this God.

- c. Based on being part of a community.
  - i. Israel was able to pray because of their allegiance to Yahweh, who brought them as a *group* out of Egypt. (He did this for them, because of his covenant promise to Abraham, their forefather.)
    - (1) Even when the people prayed as *individuals*, it was made possible because they were part of the *group*.
    - (2) A person could pray, not only because he "believed in Yahweh," but because "Yahweh brought him into the community."
  - ii. About the "community aspect" of prayer, *today*.
    - (1) This concept seems to have become almost 100% lost in societies that focus on the "individual." But it was the normal focus in both the Old and New Testaments.
    - (2) In the New Testament, the *primary* relationship is one of Jesus Christ to the *church*, not Jesus Christ to the individual. The individual's relationship is *based on his relationship to the church*, the "body" of Christ. He can pray because he has become a part of the body.
    - (3) Therefore our *first* focus is to pray as *a member of God's people*, not as an individual (just like the Old Testament concept, as seen in Psalm 35:18; 111:1).
    - (4) We can't pray isolated from each other, ignoring the needs of others! We can't ask in prayer for *ourselves* something we are unwilling to ask in prayer for *others*. (Example: asking for forgiveness.) Beyond that, we are to even pray for the good of our *enemies*, people who are *not* a part of the body of Christ (Matthew 5:44).

#### 4. Types of prayers; topics which are a part of prayer

- a. *Types*: There are many types of prayers, such as: supplication, intercession, praise, thanksgiving, adoration about God (because of who he is, etc.), and more.
- b. *Topics*: We can pray for *all* things that are consistent with God's nature, since the range of God's control is "everything"!
  - i. This is because God is not "a tribal God," but is "the only God," who is over all.
  - ii. Prayer requests in the Old Testament could be related to anything, but they often tended to be physical.
  - iii. Examples: prayers for increased crops and herds, for the destruction of enemies during battle, etc. (Of course, they would be happy if the enemies were willing to repent, instead of them waging war against Israel.)

#### 5. Time and Place

- a. TIME - any time.
- b. PLACE: In the Old Testament, there were some special designated places where God revealed himself, such as at the temple. But prayer was not limited to there, and could be any place. (Example: Jonah in the great fish!)
  - i. It is the same today. There are special designated places, including anywhere that "two or three are gathered together" (Matthew 18:20); but individuals can also pray alone, in any place and at any time.

## 6. Misc. about prayer

- a. Use God's name freely, but don't use it "in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Don't misuse God's name or treat it like something trivial!
- b. Often linked with vows.
- c. Often associated with fasting, which was intended to prove the seriousness of the prayer (and sometimes aided in the prayer).
- d. The followers of God knew that prayer wasn't a "work of piety," an attempt to get God's favor. (Contrast this to the prophets of Baal - 1 Kings 18:25-29.)
- e. True vs. false prayer:
  - i. FALSE - Repetition, no "surrender" to God; formality, no genuine intention of obedience.
  - ii. TRUE - Involves the whole person; humility, yielding to God, etc.
- f. Examples of hindrances: Disobedience (Isaiah 1:15, 17; 59:1; Deuteronomy 1:43,45) / Lovelessness (Isaiah 58:3-10) / Injustice (Micah 3:1-4).
  - i. Old Testament hindrances are basically the same types of things as mentioned in the New Testament.

## 7. Examples

- a. Some examples of Old Testament prayer: Genesis 24:12-15+ (Abraham's servant); Genesis 32:9-12, 22-32 (Jacob's prayer and struggle with God); Exodus 32:9-14 and other places (Moses intercedes for the people); 1 Samuel 1:11 (Hannah's prayer); 2 Samuel 7:18-29 (David); 1 Kings 3:5-9 (Solomon, in a dream); 1 Kings 8:22-53 (Solomon, at the dedication of the temple); Job 42:1-6 (Job, also various other places in the book); many of the Psalms; etc.
- b. Other passages give specific instructions that relate to prayer. Examples: Ecclesiastes 5:2 (about *how* to approach God in prayer) and Isaiah 1:15 (and whole chapter - the need for ones *heart* - attitude and actions - to match one's *words*; in other words, no hypocrisy!).

## 8. A few comments about New Testament prayer

- a. Based on the Old Testament understanding of prayer; modeled after Jesus' prayer example (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4).
- b. Directed to God or Jesus Christ (Lord).
- c. A dialogue (not monologue). The same as in the Old Testament (but now the concept is clearer).
  - i. We talk to God in prayer.
  - ii. God reveals his will to us in Scripture. We understand his answers to our prayers through the circumstances that he brings into our lives, as interpreted by Scripture.