

Prayers of the Prophets

Introduction:

We often think of the Old Testament prophets as those men who spoke to people on behalf of God. Their prophetic messages were primarily two-fold: to foretell future world events, including the coming and mission of the Messiah, and to “forth-tell” the sinful condition of their audiences, calling them to repentance or pronouncing judgment. These prophecies they accomplished through writings, vocal pronouncements, and symbolic actions. Sometimes God spoke to them directly—perhaps even in an audible voice, and at other times God gave them dreams or visions and their interpretations—many of which are recorded in detail.

The more subtle ministry of these prophets was when they spoke to God on behalf of themselves and the people. We don't know how much time these men actually spent in prayer, but pray they did! If we look closely, the Bible text will reveal that these men rarely acted independently of God in their words and actions of prophecy. They didn't work by their own fleshly whim, but were divinely directed. The prayer habits of a few are recorded, especially the faithful Daniel, who prayed three times a day, even when there was a ban on prayer. Then we're shown the likes of Jonah, who tried to run away from God rather than carry out his prophetic ministry to the Assyrian city of Nineveh. Mighty miracles and awesome foretelling's often clashed with the weak humanity of these individuals. It was undoubtedly their weakness and needs that kept them humble and reliant upon the Lord.

In their prayers, you'll find much emotion and sincerity, confusion and trepidation, thanksgiving and worship, and a contrast of faith and unbelief. Jeremiah called for pain and destruction upon his enemies, Habakkuk questioned God, and Elijah pleaded for God to take his life. Yes, with a little imagination, we can relate to the prayers of the prophets, and perhaps there is something valuable we can learn from them.

May you be blessed of the Lord as you study His Word through this lesson guide. Most of all, may you be encouraged to engage in faith-filled and sincere praying as a result!

In God's Precious Love,
Mike Ahlborn

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Lesson 1 - Prayers Not Heard

He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. - Lamentations 3:6-8

Scripture Reading: Hosea 3:1-5

Introduction

The only thing worse than desperate circumstances to believers is to feel that God no longer hears our prayers. We know the power and ability of God to bless us and keep us through fire and flood, through sickness and despair, but what happens when the Master of all Ages stops hearing us? What happens when the heavens have become brass, and it seems our cries for mercy are only bouncing back at us?

How do we get to a place where our prayers are not heard? Oh, how we'd like to blame God-many do, in fact. We question His love, His faithfulness, even His power. Doesn't He know how badly we need help? Where is He? Some have even made the assumption that there is no God!

All the while, God is just waiting until we become so desperate for deliverance that we surrender under His mighty sovereignty and accept the fact that if He isn't hearing us, we must be in the wrong. We must examine ourselves. If we discover sins, we must be repentant, and one thing God will always hear is a broken and contrite heart! (Psalm 51:17; 34:18).

The main prophet for this study is Hosea, although it isn't Hosea's prayer we're studying, but the lessons in prayer given in this book. Interestingly, Hosea is a monument to God's love and care for Israel. God tells them through Hosea why He isn't hearing their prayers. Unable to hear and answer their prayers, Yahweh nevertheless reaches out to his rebellious people in love and mercy, hoping they will change.

Lesson Questions

1. Will prayers and sacrifices to idols have any real success? Hosea 4:6,12-13; Jer. 2:26-28; Isaiah 46:5-7.
2. What is God's judgment against those who pray to idols? Jer. 2:29-32; Isaiah 45:18-25; Exodus 20:4-6.
3. How long will some people wait to seek God? Hos. 5:14-15; Heb. 12:11. **Note:** Unfortunately, even by many Christians, prayer is considered "a last resort." When all else fails, we try prayer. Why are we so rebellious that God must force us into impossible situations to get us to pray and believe Him? Saints, God is powerful-talk to Him first!
4. How effective is prayer without repentance from sin? Hos. 6:1-3; Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:2.
5. How effective is prayer that is insincere? Hos. 7:14; 10:12-13; Jeremiah 7:8-10.
6. Does God hear the prayers of the unmerciful? Hos. 6:4-6; Prov. 21:13; Psalms 18:25.
7. How effective are the prayers of the unstable? Hos. 5:4-6; 10:3; James 1:6-7; Mark 11:24.
8. Does God answer self-indulgent prayers? Hos. 4:7-9; 10:1-2; James 4:3. Psalm 66:18.

Life Application

Do you feel that your prayers are going unheard? Examine your life in relation to questions 4-8 above. Does any of these stand out to you as a deficiency in your approach to God?

The best thing to do is kneel and confess your sins and improper motives to God. Ask Him to forgive you and help you to change so that nothing comes between God and you. God will help you restore your life, and help you fix that broken "prayer-line."

Lesson 2 - Complaint & Vindication

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. –Habakkuk 2:1

Scripture Reading: Habakkuk 1:1-17

Introduction

The book of Habakkuk, however short, is nevertheless beautifully descriptive of the prophet's journey from doubt and anxiety to faith and worship. Habakkuk begins with a desperate agonized cry for the dire circumstances in Jerusalem, questioning God's mercy and wondering if He remembers His people.

After God answers his first cry, Habakkuk begins to question God's methods of answering his prayer. The prophet struggles to understand why God would use a wicked foreign power to chasten Judah.

Habakkuk starts his transition from doubt to faith by saying he will stop talking and wait to hear from God. He wants to understand why God works in such mysterious ways. Most importantly, the prophet shows that he desires God to correct him.

One of the greatest statements in the entire Bible is Habakkuk 2:4: "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith. " (NKJV)

Here we see the lives of those who are unstable, who attempt to find life in themselves, contrasted to the dependable and reliable nature of the man who finds his life and meaning in God. A comment made on this verse in the Spirit-Filled Life Bible, says ... The Jewish Talmud states: "Moses gave Israel 613 commandments. David reduced them to 10, Isaiah to 2, but Habakkuk to one: 'The just shall live by his faith. '*"

Habakkuk closes out his book with a song of faith and worship, having moved from anxiety to God's perfect and abiding peace.

Lesson Questions

1. Why did Habakkuk feel his prayers were not being heard? Hab. 1:1-2.
2. From what desperate situation did the prophet cry out? Hab. 1:3-4.
3. How did God say He would answer Habakkuk's plea? Hab. 1:5-6; Deut. 28:47-53; II Kings 24:1-4. **Note:** "Chaldeans" is another name for the Babylonians. Scripture Reading: Isaiah 26:1-12
4. How treacherous did God say the Babylonians would be in their conquests? Hab. 1:7-11.
5. Why was Habakkuk deeply concerned with the way his prayer would be answered? Hab. 1:12-17.
6. What humble and teachable spirit was shown by Habakkuk? Why is this wise? Hab. 2:1; Isaiah 55:8-9.
7. What did God tell the prophet about the delay in answering his prayer? Hab.2:2-4.
8. How could Judah have been delivered from invasion and captivity?

Life Application

Habakkuk wasn't very happy with the way God answered his prayer. How do you feel when God answers your prayers in ways you don't like? Are you still able to rejoice in the Lord, knowing He is sovereign, and that He knows what is best? Remember that God is not your servant – He doesn't have to answer your prayers just the way you want them to be. Accept the fact that God knows best. Have faith!

One of the secrets of living we should learn from Habakkuk is to remain teachable. God can use the events in our lives to teach us about Himself, and the ways of righteousness. If we will wait and listen patiently, God can teach us many important things.

* Spirit-Filled Life Bible (NKJV), [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., copyright 1991].

Lesson 3 - Pain & Oppression

For the Lord will not cast off forever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. –Lamentations 3:31-33

Scripture Reading: Lamentations 1:1-12

Introduction

When King Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonians, to whom Judah was subject, Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem. While the Babylonians sieged the city, the people inside began starving and dying. When the city finally fell, Judah's king escaped from the city with his soldiers, abandoning the population to their enemies. The Babylonian official in charge of the siege destroyed most of Jerusalem, burned the temple, and carried all but the poorest people into exile.

The book of Lamentations is a collection of five lamentations (songs) of Jeremiah over the suffering and destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent exile of many of its people. Contained within three of these lamentations are prayers that the prophet cried in anguish to the Lord. The last lamentation is itself a prayer from start to finish, that recorded Jerusalem's suffering and final plea. The book of Lamentations has much to teach us today concerning suffering. Consider the following:

- 1) The best way to survive grief is to express it. It is helpful to talk through each aspect of our sorrow.
- 2) Defeats as well as victories need to be remembered. If we'd commemorate some of our failures, the failure probably wouldn't be repeated.
- 3) Privileges do not protect us from responsibility or from discipline. Actually, privileges increase our responsibility and need for discipline.
- 4) God often allows suffering in our lives to discipline us, and sometimes to restore us to fellowship with Him.
- 5) Satan can also bring suffering on us, but that type of suffering is destructive rather than restorative.
- 6) Suffering should bring us into earnest prayer. With God as our focus, we should look for some hope to help us endure. Lamentations offers this in 3:21-24, where God's great mercy and love are remembered.

Lesson Questions

1. How deeply tormented was Jeremiah in his first lamentation? Lam. 1:20.
2. What did the prophet pray concerning the enemies that were destroying Jerusalem? Lam. 1:21-22.
3. How were the people of Jerusalem instructed to pray in the second lamentation? Lam. 2:18-19; Psalm 42:3-5.
4. For what fatal tragedy were the people to intercede? Lam. 2:20-22; Jer. 16:1-4.
5. In the third lamentation, why did Jeremiah plead for God to hear him? Lam. 3:40-57.
6. As he continued his prayer, what did the prophet pray concerning the invading Babylonians? Lam. 3:58-66.
7. Describe the heavy oppression that Jeremiah's prayer revealed in the fifth lamentation? Lam. 5:1-18.
8. What does the prophet's prayer reveal as the only hope for Judah? Lam. 5:19-22; Psalm 80:1-7; Jer. 17:13-14.

Life Application

How do you know that God really loves and accepts you as His child? In Hebrews 12:6-7, it says, *“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”* Could we say God really cared about us if He never corrected or disciplined us? It is cruelty or love that makes a good father chasten his children? God chastens us so that we *“... might be partakers of His holiness”* (Heb. 12:10). Have you ever thanked God for His correction and discipline – clear signs of His infinite Love?

Lesson 4 -Backsliding

O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. – Hosea 14:1,4

Scripture Reading: Exodus 32:1-10

Introduction

God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt. Reading the Exodus account clearly shows that this was no easy task, for to prove His power and might to Egypt, God had "hardened" Pharaoh's heart against letting the Israelites go. After the tenth devastating plague had fallen on Egypt, wiping out the firstborn from every Egyptian household, he finally conceded and freed God's people. But Pharaoh soon had a change of heart and pursued them to the Red Sea, where the waters of the sea were brought down to destroy his mighty army. Israel was free! ... or were they?

Moses soon discovered that getting the people out of Egypt was much easier than getting "Egypt" out of the people! Complaining, disobedient, stubborn, and even idolatrous all described the Israelite brood. Too rebellious to allow God to write His laws upon their hearts, they were taken to Mt. Sinai where God wrote His holy code in softer material-stone tablets! And coming down from the mountain with the 10 Commandments, Moses found them bowing down to a golden calf (an idol of Egypt!). The Lord was furious, ready to slay them all, and then start afresh with just Moses. But Moses interceded in prayer. Faithful Moses! - confronted Pharaoh and Israel on behalf of God, and now willing to approach God on behalf of Israel. Moses the mediator-the intercessor-the deliverer. And where would Israel be without his prayers?

How long has it been since you wept for lost souls? Have you been praying for those that you know are backslidden? The prayers of an intercessor are powerful!

Lesson Questions

1. What did God want to do to the Israelites for making the golden calf to worship? Ex. 32:7-10.
2. How was Moses' first plea of intercession protective of God's honor? Ex. 32:11-12; Num. 14:13-19.
3. What did Moses use as the legal defense of Israel to ask for God's mercy? Ex. 32:13-14; Gen. 22:15-18; Heb. 6:13-18.
4. In his second intercession before Yahweh, what did Moses offer as an atonement for Israel's sin? Ex. 32:30-32; (see also Paul's intense desire in Rom. 9:1-5).
5. What was God's response to Moses' atonement offering? Ex. 32:33-35.
6. Why did Moses pray for God's presence to go with Israel? Exodus 33:12-17.
7. What did Moses request for himself? Ex. 33:18-23.
8. How was Moses affected by exposure to God's glory? Ex. 34:29-35.

Note: Apostle Paul shared in II Cor. 3:13-14 that Moses wore the veil so that the Israelites wouldn't see the temporary nature (fading glory) of the Old Covenant-standing in stark contrast to the eternal nature of Christ's glory and the New Covenant. When reading the Old Testament, the Israelite's eyes were blinded to the clear revelation of Christ, the true glory of God, even as many are blinded today.

Life Application

We all have family members or acquaintances who need to be saved. Keep praying for their deliverance and salvation every day. At the same time, pray for wisdom in reaching them with your witness for Christ. Ask God to help you be a soul-winner. Other lives depend on it!

Lesson 5 -Confession

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. -

1 John 1:9

Scripture Reading: Daniel 9:1-19

Introduction

While the book of Jeremiah's "lamentations" focused upon the pain and oppression that fell upon Judah during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, Daniel's prayer in chapter 9 focuses upon Judah's need for inner change. Daniel cries out for God's forgiveness, and pleads for the Almighty's help in restoring obedience and holiness to Judah.

This prayer of confession shows this prophet's true heart toward Judah's sin. He openly admits that Judah is in exile in Babylon because of their rebellion toward God. Daniel also recognizes the integrity of God in bringing the judgment upon His people. From Daniel's confession we should learn that the LORD is a merciful God, but He means what He says!

Concerning the mystery of God's nature, Paul taught the Roman Church: "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." (Romans 11:22-23) Yes, God is a good and merciful God, but He is also a holy God, and can't compromise His own perfect nature with sin. Sin and disobedience carry the consequences of separation and death. We are likewise warned today, "For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation ...? (Heb. 2:2-3a). To be saved, we must confess and forsake sin! This we can only do with God's help--but isn't this His promise?

Lesson Questions

1. What significance does Daniel's opening statement have to his prayer of confession? Dan. 9:3-4; 2:20; Matt. 6:9-10.
2. Describe the specific parts of Daniel's confession of sin. Daniel 9:5-6,10-11a.
3. What did Daniel say that Judah's unfaithfulness has earned them? Daniel 9:7-8. **Note:** It is an embarrassing and shameful experience to have our sins uncovered. Many people are only sorry that their sins have been revealed, but not sorry for their sins. To repent of sin also means to forsake those sins and turn to righteousness with the help of God.
4. What did the prophet sorrowfully admit was the result of Judah's rebellion? Dan. 9:11-12; Lam. 2:13; Deut. 28:15, 36-37, 45-46. **Note:** In any sincere confession, it is necessary to accept responsibility for the consequences of sin that have come upon us. We must not blame God or get angry with Him when our rebellion produces calamity.
5. What was the resulting attitude of them who received severe judgment? Dan. 9:13-14; Isaiah 9:13.
6. After confessing his sin and the sins of Judah, what things did Daniel plead for? Dan. 9:15-19.
7. How is our relationship with God affected by our sin? Isaiah 59:1-2,12-15; 64:7.
8. What happens to those who fail to confess their sins? Provo 28:13; Psalm 32:8-10; I John 1:8-10; Rom 6:16,23.

Life Application

Illnesses can often be linked to sin. Apostle James points this out in James 5:13-16. Here we are instructed to "confess our faults" (better translated trespasses or sins) to each other, in order for us to be healed. In Jesus' time the idea that sickness was always a judgment for the sin in someone's life was taken to an extreme – every sick person was criticized as a sinner. This was erroneous. However, the Bible also teaches that some healing can be done only after we have confessed and repented of our sins. When seeking healing, this is important to consider.

Lesson 6 - Spiritual Insight

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to seek out a matter. Proverbs 25:2

Scripture Readings: II Kings 6:15-18 and Daniel 2:1-13

Introduction

Isn't it amazing how much the young and inexperienced often think they know? Actually, the more we learn, the more we come to realize how much more there is that we don't know! The wisest men of all understand how much they lack-and how desperate they are for the only Wise and True God! The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

It is impossible to learn and understand the things of God with the natural mind. Our natural limitations and the very nature of God limits our reception of divine truth to the spiritual renewal and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. No man can perceive truth unless the Spirit of God leads him. This is why Apostle John wrote that the Holy Spirit would be given to lead us into all truth (John 14:26). Therefore, if we are seeking truth, we must do more than study the Bible-we must pray! Seeking spiritual insight through prayer is critical to receiving revelation.

Anyone can study the Bible and get "surface" information about God (if they're willing to accept what they read). But the Bible was written so that man could know God. There is a vast difference between information and relationship! And the better we get to know God, the more our minds will be divinely transformed. The more we are spiritually renewed, the easier it will be to understand the Word of God.

Elisha had to pray for his servant's eyes to be opened to an awesome angelic presence. The prophet, Daniel, knew that truth and understanding come from God alone. At the time that he was compelled to pray for divine revelation, many lives were on the line, including his own. If no one could be found to correctly remember and interpret Nebuchadnezzar's strange dream, all the wise men of the land would be put to death.

Lesson Questions

1. What are the contrasting reactions of Elisha and Elisha's servant to the Syrian army surrounding the city of Dothan? II Kings 6:15-16.
2. What prayer did Elisha pray for his servant? II Kings 6:17.
3. For what did Elisha pray concerning the Syrian army? II Kings 6:18.
4. Why did Daniel and his friends pray for spiritual insight? Dan. 2:1-5,11-17.
5. What things did Daniel do when he received the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream from God? Dan. 2:19-24.
6. What declaration did Daniel make revealing the source of his revelations? Dan. 2:27-29; Gen. 40:8; 41:16; Deut. 29:29.
7. What humble statement did Daniel make about himself to the king? Dan. 2:30; Rom. 12:3; Gal. 6:3.
8. Why was Moses attributed with spiritual insight? Heb. 11 :24-27.

Life Application

A change in perspective can have a dramatic affect on our attitude. God has a much greater perspective on life than men. Can you imagine seeing everything through God's eyes? The Lord must have had this partly in mind when He "...raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). If Christ is seated in the supreme place of victory over all His foes, and we are seated there in Him, then we have access to incredible spiritual insight!

The devil would like to keep our understanding darkened to who we are in Christ- to keep us defeated! But why should God's people walk in despair and defeat? Through "...exceeding great and precious promises..." that allow us to be "...partakers of the divine nature..."we will walk in power and victory! Lord, give us a new perspective!

Lesson 7 - Faith

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like the hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. -Habakkuk 3:18-19

Scripture Reading: Habakkuk 3

Introduction

In lesson #2, we studied how Habakkuk was in turmoil over the rebellious condition of his people and how it seemed to him that God was doing nothing about it. When God revealed His plans to chastise Judah, Habakkuk was even more perplexed. How could God use a grossly wicked people like the Chaldeans (Babylon) to bring judgment on sinful Judah? When the prophet had prayed for God's help, this wasn't at all what he had had in mind. Habakkuk was dismayed at those prospects.

Somehow, in the end, the prophet moved from despair and doubt, to faith and peace. But he also was moved from the fear of man to the fear of God. The third chapter of Habakkuk is a song-prayer extolling the awesome and fearful workings of Almighty God (Hab.3:3-16) and ending with a tremendous acclamation of faith and security in Yahweh's goodness and mercy (Hab. 3:17-19). We should note that as the fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom, so it is also the basis for belief and trust in God. If we recognize with Habakkuk the awesome and holy nature of the Lord, then how can we do anything else but praise Him?

Shelved between Habakkuk's doubt in chapter one, and Habakkuk's song of faith in chapter three, are God's pronouncements of woe upon those who live in greed and covetousness. These words not only applied to Judah and the Chaldeans who were both living in rebellion to God but may be applied indirectly to the self-centered wickedness of today. Before any significant salvation work can begin, men must be shown they are lost and in need of a savior. The Bible clearly states that the way of salvation is by way of faith! We who are trapped in our lost state can certainly not of ourselves begin to live righteously! We must trust in Jesus the Savior. Through Him we can be saved from spiritual calamity.

Lesson Questions

1. What was Habakkuk's initial prayer request? Hab. 3:1-2.
2. Describe the awesome activity of God that Habakkuk sings of in this prayer. Hab. 3:3-12.
3. Why was God going forth to destroy? Hab. 3:13-15.
4. What effect does witnessing God's awesome judgments have upon the prophet? Hab. 3:16.
5. In contrast to his first prayer in Hab. 1:1-4, what is Habakkuk's final response of faith to the calamity that would come to Judah? Hab.3:17-18; Isaiah 41:14-17.
6. What great personal declaration of faith ends Habakkuk's prayer? Hab.3:19; Psalm 18:1-3.
7. What did Isaiah reveal would be the thankful prayer of those delivered from their rebellion and sin? Isaiah 12:1-3.
8. What will the backsliders tell the world when they are delivered? Isaiah 12:4-6; Psalm 45:1-9.

Life Application

In his book, Purpose in Prayer, E.M. Bounds* makes this astute observation: "Holy men have, in the past, changed the whole force of affairs, revolutionized character and country by prayer. And such achievements are still possible to us. The power is only wanting to be used. Prayer is but the expression of faith... Prayer honors God; it dishonors self. It is man's plea of weakness, ignorance, want. A plea which heaven cannot disregard. God delights to have us pray."

Unless we would squander our faith, we must become people who pray. As faith is expressed through prayer, even greater faith will be the result. But faith in God that remains silent is a faith likely to be choked.

*Purpose in Prayer, E.M. Bounds, [Westwood, NJ: The Christian Library edition, copyright 1984], pg. 41

Lesson 8 - Divine Power

Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

– I Kings 18:37

Scripture Reading: I Kings. 18:1-20

Introduction

Not all great prayers recorded in the Bible were long-many of the greatest were quite short. Such is the case with Elijah's prayer for divine power to be demonstrated before Israel on Mt. Carmel. With just twenty-six words, Elijah prayed and the fire fell!

Of course, it is well understood that Elijah was a man of prayer. Undoubtedly, he spent much time before the Lord God in holy conversation. The fire that fell on the altar that critical day didn't fall because of the length or shortness of Elijah's praying, but because Elijah's heart was right with God and the prophet moved in the divine will.

There are many misconceptions about praying that need to be corrected. Perhaps the worst is that prayer is a chore, not a privilege. The way we view prayer will depend greatly upon the relationship we have with God. If our fellowship with God is strained or broken, then prayer will be dull and undesirable. A strained marriage is not much different. If a husband has allowed his love for his spouse to wane, he probably won't get much joy from communicating with her. The limited time she'll receive his attention is when he wants something in return.

How do you view prayer? If our relationship with God is vibrant and alive, then we will be looking forward to spending time talking with Him. But if we've allowed other things to take His place in our lives, then prayer will be difficult. This must be changed.

Take it from Elijah-prayer works! So, if your praying has lost its potency and excitement, it's time to put God back on the throne of your heart. Ask Him to send heavenly fire down to consume the sacrifice of your life!

Lesson Questions

1. Who did Ahab gather together for the showdown on Mt. Carmel? I Kings 18:19-20.
2. What was Elijah's challenge to Israel? I Kings 18:21-24; Jos. 24:14-15.
3. What did the prophets of Baal do to get Baal to answer them? I Kings 18:25-29.
4. How did Elijah prepare the altar and sacrifice for the LORD? I Kings 18:30-35.
5. Does Elijah's prayer reveal that he was under divine guidance in the meeting on Mt. Carmel? I Kings 18:36.
6. Why did Elijah want God to answer his prayer? I Kings 18:37.
7. What was the ensuing result of Elijah's prayer? I Kings 18:38-40.
8. Describe how Elijah then prays for an end of the drought. I Kings 18:41-45.

Life Application

When believing God for a miracle, it is good to enlist the help of others. Praying together, and for each other, holds many powerful benefits. Remember that Jesus sent His disciples out by twos. The early church likewise sent teams to do missionary work. There is power in working together in unity.

Jesus said, "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:19-20)

The Greek word for "agree" is the word from which we get "symphony." A harmonious blend of prayer is desirable and effective.

Lesson 9 - Spiritual Cleansing

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. –Isaiah 55:7

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 6:1-13

Introduction

In the fifth chapter of Isaiah, the prophet pronounced woe upon six different sins of Judah: (1) covetousness and self-indulgence; (2) drunken revelry; (3) defiant vanity; (4) moral subversion; (5) inordinate pride; and (6) perverted justice. God identified these specific areas of their rebellion for them, as he prepared to send Isaiah to proclaim God's coming judgment and Israel's hope of a Messiah.

In Isaiah 6, the prophet had a vision of God in the temple. That vision was so vivid and real that Isaiah was deeply shaken. During this vision, the prophet's original calling was expanded, and he found himself immersed in a mission for which God offered little hope for success. And yet, due to the vision he received and the spiritual cleansing brought into his own life, Isaiah seemed ready, even eager, to be used of God.

When God brings a move of spiritual revival, it is often His own people that need to experience it first. How easily our Christian lives can grow stale and lifeless! We must hunger for Almighty God to breathe His life-essence into us once again. Our neighbors, our churches, and our communities desperately need the Lord, but if there is any hope of them finding Him as their savior, then they must see our lives renewed.

If we're no different from the world, why should they want to be like us? If we read the same books, go to the same movies, and engage in the same sinful or questionable activities as unbelievers, then what impact could our testimony possibly have? Like Isaiah, if we have any hope of introducing bringing souls to the spiritual cleansing of the Holy Spirit, then we must ourselves be cleansed by "coals from the altar."

Lesson Questions

1. What vision did Isaiah have that caused him to see his own spiritual impurity? Isaiah 6:1-4.
2. What was the prophet's anguished prayer response to this vision? Isaiah 6:5.
3. How was Isaiah's sin and impurity cleansed? Isaiah 6:6-7.
4. How did Isaiah respond without hesitation to God's call for a messenger? Isaiah 6:8.
5. What mission was given to Isaiah that God foretold was nearly hopeless? Isaiah 6:9-10. **Note:** Having received spiritual cleansing himself, Isaiah is now sent to Judah to proclaim their need for cleansing from sin. In this message, many prophecies concerning the coming Messiah emerged. Take note that the poor reception of God's message in Jesus' time was similar to Isaiah's difficult calling. Read Mark 4:10-12.
6. How long was Isaiah to undertake this difficult mission? Isaiah 6:11-12.
7. What promise was given to Isaiah lest he would think all his work in vain? Isaiah 6:13.
8. How did God speak to Israel about their religious hypocrisy? Isaiah 29:11-19.

Life Application

Jesus contrasted humble and prideful prayers in His parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). As the Pharisee prayed, he lifted himself up in pride, thanking God that he himself was superior to "other men." The tax collector, much humbled in God's presence, beat upon his own breast, crying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" The attitude of the heart makes a tremendous difference in prayer. God knows all that is written on the inside before He ever hears our words.

Lesson 10 - Divine Retribution

Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire. –Jeremiah 38:6

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-18

Introduction

What must a man endure for God? Without argument, the prophet Jeremiah suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually-and he reached a boiling point where he desired for his persecutors (seemingly all of Jerusalem) to be wiped out! Elijah, on the other hand, asked for God to wipe him out! Don't think for a moment that standing for God comes cheaply. Hebrews 11:35b states: "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. "

The early church suffered gut-wrenching horrors under the Roman emperor, Nero. One writer accounts, "Huge griddles were made on which they would fry Christians alive. Nero's entourage also developed the skill of taking knives and filleting the skin off believers in the same way one would skin a pig. With muscles and ... blood vessels ... exposed, these Christians were thrown in heaps of manure ... [further shocking description]. Christians were forced to fight gladiators as 'sport' in the Coliseum ... At times, they were wrapped in the skins of dead animals and thrown to lions ... [or] made to fight to their death with [other] wild beasts."*

I will write no more-for even worse sickening atrocities were demonically forced upon the church! Yet, by God's grace, they endured faithfully.

Will God send retribution on persecutors of the righteous? Paul wrote to the Roman church: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:19-21)

Lesson Questions

1. What initial encouragement did God give to Jeremiah for his difficult calling? Jer. 1:8-10, 17-19.
2. How did the people respond to Jeremiah's prophecies? Jer. 18:18; 11:18-23; 26:10-16.
3. What was the prophet's cry of injustice against Jerusalem? Jer. 18:19-20.
4. What was Jeremiah's plea for judgment? Jer. 18:21-22.
5. Contrast Jeremiah's merciless prayer with the life of Jesus. Jer. 18:23; 11:20; Titus 3:1-7; Luke 9:51-56; John 8:2-11; Luke 23:33-34.
6. How negatively did Jeremiah come to feel about his life? Jer. 15:10; 20:14-18.
7. What reassurance did God give to His prophet? Jer. 15:19-21.
8. What perspective are we to have toward our enemies? Matthew 5:9-12, 43-45.

Life Application

Peter wanted to know how many times he was expected to forgive someone. "Up to seven times?", he asked the Lord. Jesus replies, "...I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22). Of course, Jesus was not dispensing forgiveness by legalistic or mathematical formulas. Certainly, Peter was not to "keep score" of the times he'd forgiven up to 490 (70x7)!

Jesus teaches up to practice unlimited forgiveness, using the parable of the servant who was forgiven of his debt, but would not forgive another who owed him much less. Jesus clearly taught that if we would not forgive others their trespasses, that God would not forgive us.

*Living in the Combat Zone, Rick Renner, [Tulsa: Albury Publishing, copyright 1989], pgs. 14,15.

Lesson 11 - Deliverance

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. –Psalms 34:6-7

Scripture Reading: Psalm 34:15-22

Introduction

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were three Hebrew men who experienced an awesome deliverance by God. You probably know them as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego-the three friends of Daniel. They refused to worship the false god of Nebuchadnezzar. They were willing to burn rather than bow!

Yet we find their curious reply to the Babylonian king was one of bold confidence, a declaration of faith in the deliverance of the Almighty. They didn't know if they would be delivered, or would be burned alive in the furnace. But they knew with all certainty that if God desired to deliver them, He could and would! They knew for a fact that it was not God's will for them to worship an idol.

They could have burned that day. But God proved His awesome power by burning off their bonds and setting the captives free. And when Nebuchadnezzar looked, he saw a fourth man walking in the fire! There must have been something very special about the fourth man-as the king stated he was "like the son of God." That fourth man is still there for those being sorely tried. For some, He brings deliverance. For others, He brings a supernatural grace to endure their hardship even unto death.

King Darius wondered if Daniel's God would spare him from the lions. Honoring Daniel's integrity, Darius declared, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." (Dan. 6:16) But we find Darius struggled with his faith, as he returned to his chamber and was unable to sleep, and then rose very early and went to see if Daniel was alive. In fact, Daniel probably got more sleep than Darius that night!

Will God even deliver the rebellious and disobedient? Consider God's patience and love in the life of the prophet, Jonah. With the Lord, you can run, but you can't hide!

Lesson Questions

1. What circumstances lead up to Jonah's cry for deliverance? Jonah 1:1-13.
2. What prayer beseeching God for His mercy and understanding did the sailors' pray? Jonah 1:14; (see also Ps.115:3)
3. Where did Jonah end up then? Jonah 1:15-17.
4. How do we know from the opening of Jonah's prayer that he was in agony in the fish's belly? Jonah 2:1-2; Psalm 88:1-5.
5. Does Jonah acknowledge that it wasn't actually the sailors who got him into his predicament? Jonah 2:3-4; Psalm 88:6-7.
6. How deep in despair did Jonah feel? Jonah 2:5-6; Psalm 88:8; Luke 22:44; Matthew 27:45-46.
7. How did Jonah exalt God's mercy and salvation in his prayer? Jonah 2:7-9.
8. What was the result of Jonah's plea? Jonah 2:10-3:2.

Life Application

Perhaps you or someone close to you is in need of God's deliverance. Jonah lacked in obedience, and it led him into dire trouble. Yet, Jonah had faith in God to hear his prayer and bring deliverance to him. Jesus told his disciples that faith moves mountains. Have you put your faith and prayers to work? God will hear those of a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 34:18; 51:16-17). Seek God from the depths of your broken and repentant heart – God will deliver!

If you are interceding in prayer for someone else's deliverance, be faithful! Stand in the gap, keep believing – your prayers do make a difference. God hears those pleas for help. Prayer and faith combined is an awesome spiritual catalyst. Don't faint, the answer is soon to come.

Lesson 12 - Peace

And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. – Isaiah 25:9

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 26:1-12

Introduction

What does "perfect peace" mean to us? It would seem that those who live in peace may soon take it for granted. During times of war and conflict, we pray ever so hard for victory and divine protection upon our troops (and usually our enemies are praying the same thing). Peace becomes most valuable when it's something we don't possess.

We can pray for "world peace," but biblically we can see that there will be no lasting peace until the Prince of Peace rules. Clashes over race, religion, philosophy, politics, land, natural resources, etc., will continue until the return of Christ. Violence is the way and nature of mankind.

The Middle East is on fire with bombings. Long gone are the peace talks in Israel, peace talks in Jordan, peace discussions with Iran, or the peace negotiations with Egypt. And there will never be true peace because men are not turning to the One True God, the source of Peace! Pray, people of God, pray!

We are in turmoil in our states, in conflict in our cities, and many neighborhoods are bloody combat zones. Some public schools in the large inner cities are dealing with student bodies laden with weapons, drugs, illicit sex, and demonism. Teachers' and students' lives are at high risk. Pray!

How about wars on the "home front?" We see strife between parents and kids, discord in marriages, battles between brothers, and millions of unborn children destroyed for convenience sake. Our Christian homes and churches are not immune to this satanic assault! Pray church, pray!

And what of the wars raging inside of people? Satan wants control of our thinking and emotions. All the weapons and schemes in his arsenal are aimed at dominating and destroying us! *Cry out for God's peace!*

Lesson Questions

1. What did Isaiah say will one day be the strong defense of the righteous who remain faithful? Isaiah 26:1-2.
2. What great promise of "perfect peace" was revealed in this prayer, and what condition was placed upon it? Isaiah 26:3-4; Phil. 4:6-9 **Note:** The double expression of peace, "shalom, shalom," is a Hebrew way of heavily emphasizing an important word. In this case, "perfect peace" includes safety, happiness, well-being, health, peace of mind, contentment, and fulfillment. The term used in the same verse for "mind," is unusual. It literally means, "the creative imagination." One who keeps his thoughts upon God and His righteousness, will enjoy all the benefits implied by "shalom, shalom." (Paraphrase of thoughts taken from the Spirit-Filled Life Bible marginal notes on Is. 26:3-4*).
3. How does God deal with the haughty enemies of His people? Isaiah 26:5-6; Rev. 18:1-9,21.
4. How are God's judgments applied to instructing the unredeemed? Isaiah 26:7-9; Psalm 51:10-13.
5. Will all who receive favor and mercy from God turn from their wickedness? Isaiah 26:10-11.
6. What contrasts between God and Judah's captors did Isaiah make? Isaiah 26:12-15.
7. What confession of failure does Isaiah make on behalf of Judah? Isaiah 26:16-18.
8. What promises of final victory for God's people did Isaiah pray prophetically? Isaiah 26:19-21.

Life Application

The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, comes from the root verb, shalam, which means "to be complete, perfect, and full." So shalom is much more than the absence of war and conflict; it is the wholeness that the entire human race seeks. It is God's delight for us to walk in wholeness and total well-being. In Isaiah 53:5, Jesus was chastised for our shalom. Through the Messiah, we can have the perfect peace of God in our hearts. In prayer, claim the shalom that is yours in Christ.

* Spirit-Filled Life Bible (NKJV), [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., copyright 1991].

Lesson 13 - Understanding

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. - Psalm 32:8

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 32:1-15

Introduction

What if the country you lived in was overrun by enemy troops, and the main body of their army was about to seize the capital city? Would purchasing a parcel of land near the capital enter your mind? Probably not. Most of us would probably think of running for our lives!

Buying real estate wouldn't have crossed Jeremiah's mind either unless God had told him to do it. And that He did. God told Jeremiah to buy a field near Jerusalem, while Jerusalem was being sieged by the Babylonian army! Jeremiah obeyed-oh, and by the way, Jeremiah was under arrest and sitting in jail when he made this acquisition. What must have gone through Jeremiah's mind? Of all the things God had told him to do, perhaps this made the least sense.

Do you feel like God doesn't always make sense? It is hard for us to understand the mysterious workings of the Lord. But we know that God doesn't make mistakes.

Paul stated well our inability to understand: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (I Cor. 13:12). Ancient mirrors actually manufactured at Corinth were made from metal and gave only dim reflections. This illustrates the lack of knowledge we possess at this time.

When Jeremiah prays about his real estate purchase, he doesn't question God's integrity or sanity. Rightfully, he questions his ability to understand why God would have him do this. Those great prophets from the Bible didn't know and see everything! Daniel prayed earnestly for insight-God granted it. And now Jeremiah prays, and God opens his understanding.

Lesson Questions

1. How was God's command to buy a field near Jerusalem to have been a sign of hope to Judah? Jer. 32:1-2,13-15.
2. What confidence in God's power did Jeremiah show in his prayer? Jer. 32:16-17.
3. What confidence in God's mercy and judgment did Jeremiah have? Jer. 32:18-19.
4. What works of God did the prophet remember in his prayer? Jer. 32:20-22.
5. Why was Jerusalem being sieged by the Chaldeans? Jer. 32:23-24.
6. During the time of Jeremiah's prayer, he is imprisoned in the court of a royal prison, in a city that is under siege and will be destroyed. Discuss how purchasing real estate at this time might not make sense to the prophet? Jer. 32:25.
7. Why was it at this specific time that God wanted Jeremiah to buy the field? Jer. 32:26-28, 31, 36-39.
8. How does God plan to establish His righteous people? Jer. 32:40-42; 31:31-34; Ezek. 37:24-28; Psalm 40:6-8.

Life Application

Although we may trust God, and rely upon His great power, we may not always understand Him. But we must remember that God's perspective is much higher than ours. When all His work is revealed, it makes perfect sense why He does things His own special way. During a trial of life, it seems much harder to understand. But don't stop seeking God's fact! In His own perfect time, He will answer. *"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength..." (Is 40:31a)*