

The prayers of David

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DAVID WAS A man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), and as such he must have been a man of prayer. A man who follows Yahweh will both seek from His Word and seek Him in prayer. He was therefore a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, who sought his Father daily in prayer, as David would have done.

The words which David spoke concerning Goliath reveal this: "I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts [Yahweh of armies], the God of the armies of Israel, Whom thou hast defied" (17:45). David saw Goliath as defying, not Saul and his armies, but "the LORD of hosts [Yahweh of armies], the God of the armies of Israel"; he must have sought the Almighty in prayer before he came out against Goliath.

When we look at the life of David we find twelve recorded prayers, three before he became king and nine afterwards, as listed in Table 1. This excludes those recorded in the Psalms (and 2 Samuel 22), which are beyond the scope of this article.

Prayer when pursued by Saul

We first read of David enquiring of Yahweh in 1 Samuel 23. Saul had just smitten Nob, the city of the priests, slaying eighty-five priests; but Abiathar, one of the sons of the high priest Ahimelech, had fled to David, who assured him, "Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard" (22:23).

We read of Abiathar: "he came down with an ephod in his hand" (23:6); and if he had the ephod he would have also have had the breastplate of judgement with the Urim and Thummim. Through this he would have been able to enquire of Yahweh, and it was after Abiathar arrived that we read of David enquiring of Yahweh. Moreover, David also had with him the prophet Gad (22:5).

At this time Israel's great enemy was the Philistines; and men of faith, such as Samson and Jonathan, had earlier fought against them. This is the setting of David's first prayer; but David had not only to contend with the Philistines, but also with Saul and his armies, who were pursuing him.

Table 1 The twelve prayers of David

- 1 Concerning the Philistines and the men of Keilah (1 Sam. 23:1-12)
- 2 Concerning pursuing the Amalekites (30:8)
- 3 Concerning going up to Hebron (2 Sam. 2:1)
- 4 Concerning the first Philistine invasion (5:19)
- 5 Concerning the second Philistine invasion (vv. 23,24)
- 6 Concerning the promises (7:18-29)
- 7 Concerning Bathsheba's child (12:16)
- 8 Concerning Ahithophel (15:31)
- 9 Concerning the famine over Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites (21:1)
- 10 Concerning his sin of numbering Israel (24:10)
- 11 Concerning relief for his people from the pestilence (v. 17)
- 12 Concerning the people's offerings for the temple (1 Chron. 29:10-19)

David's intimacy with the Almighty is shown in that he sought His guidance at every step. He first sought him prior to smiting the Philistines; then, in response to the word of Yahweh, he smote the Philistines with a great slaughter and saved the inhabitants of nearby Keilah (23:1-6). Then he had to contend, not only with Saul, but also with the inhabitants of Keilah: "Then said David, O LORD [Yahweh] God of Israel, Thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as Thy servant hath heard? O LORD [Yahweh] God of Israel, I beseech Thee, tell Thy servant. And the LORD [Yahweh] said, He will come down". He still did not have an answer concerning the men of Keilah, so he asked again: "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD [Yahweh] said, They will deliver thee up" (vv. 10-12).

These answers indicate that there must have been a voice emanating from the Urim and Thummim in answer to David's enquiries.

David and his men therefore had to flee “whithersoever they could go”, and we read: “And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand” (vv. 13,14). Although he sought the Almighty in prayer, David still had to use his ingenuity to flee from Saul, and had to believe that Yahweh was caring for him.

These experiences of David were similar to those of the Apostle Paul:

“. . . in journeyings often . . . in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness . . . in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:26-28).

David was in peril from the heathen (the Philistines), from false brethren (Saul), and from his own countrymen (the men of Keilah); and he was in hunger and thirst, and had the care of his own men and his household, the ecclesia.

Prayers shortly before becoming king

David eventually decided that he would only be safe from Saul if he fled to the Philistines, but when the final crisis for Saul came, and the Philistines prepared for war against Israel, David was forced by the lords of the Philistines to leave the Philistine forces. When he reached his household at Ziklag he found that the Amalekites had invaded, burnt Ziklag and taken the households of David and his men into captivity.

They were all greatly distressed, of course, and David’s men were ready to stone him, but we read in 1 Samuel 30:6 that “David encouraged himself in the LORD [Yahweh] his God”. Then he prayed to the Almighty: “Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And He answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all” (v. 8). Thus he pursued them and smote them “from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day”, and they recovered their households, “and there was nothing lacking” (vv. 17-19).

In a few days David was to become king. His next prayer led up to this: “David enquired of the LORD [Yahweh], saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD [Yahweh] said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron” (2 Sam. 2:1). So David went to Hebron,

“And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah” (v. 4), just as it will be with the Master, who will “save the tents of Judah first” (Zech. 12:7).

Prayers concerning the defeat of the Philistines

When David was anointed king over all Israel, the Philistines came to seek him, spreading themselves in the valley of Rephaim, possibly intending to defeat David as they had defeated Saul. David therefore enquired of Yahweh: “Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt Thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD [Yahweh] said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand” (2 Sam. 5:19).

The battle that followed was very significant: “And David came to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there, and said, The LORD [Yahweh] hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim. And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them” (vv. 20,21). This battle is referred to in Isaiah 28:21 as a type of the sweeping away of the Gogian host by Christ and the saints.

The Philistines then came up again in the same way, and David again enquired of Yahweh, being told: “when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees . . . then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD [Yahweh] go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines” (2 Sam. 5:23,24). Here, the “going in the tops of the mulberry trees” would be the angelic host going forth to fight for David, the host that Elisha’s servant saw (2 Kgs. 6:15-18). David bestirred himself as Yahweh commanded, and smote them “from Geba until thou come to Gazer”.

Prayer after the giving of the promises

The two major campaigns against the Philistines after the defeat of Saul no doubt established David as king. The bringing of the ark to Jerusalem and the giving of the promises followed this. Understandably, the promises were followed by the longest recorded prayer of David, found in 2 Samuel 7:18-29 and 1 Chronicles 17:16-27.

The prayer can be subdivided as shown in [Table 2](#) overleaf. Its focal point was the manner or character of the promised seed. An alternative rendering of the end of 2 Samuel 7:19 is: “And is this the law [*towrah*] of Adam, Adonai Yahweh?”. David saw that his seed was to be the Son of

Table 2 The prayer of 2 Samuel 7

David's humility (v. 18)
The greatness of David's seed (vv. 19-21)
The greatness of the Almighty (v. 22)
Israel's privileged position (vv. 23,24)
Prayer for Yahweh to establish His promise for ever (vv. 25,26)
The building of a house (v. 27)
Prayer for Yahweh to bless David's house (vv. 28,29)

God, and marvelled that such a personage was to descend from his loins. He was to be both the seed of the woman and the Son of God. David was being shown that Messiah was to be God manifest in the flesh.

The references to the house (vv. 25-29) should be understood in two senses, namely the temple and the house or family of David. Through David was to come the promised seed, the seed of Abraham. The importance of his house is shown in Zechariah 12:8: "In that day shall the LORD [Yahweh] defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God [*elohim*, or mighty ones], as the angel of the LORD [Yahweh] before them".

They will be mighty ones because the Messiah has been born in that house and his brethren are related to that house through him. From this point on, David's mind became filled with these promises. They were "all [his] salvation, and all [his] desire" (2 Sam. 23:5), and motivated him in preparation for the building of the temple.

Prayers concerning David's troubles

Following the prayer about the promises, the next five prayers are mainly concerned with David's failures. Is this not true of us? Do not our prayers include a mixture of seeking for the promotion of the Truth and seeking help concerning the troubles which may have come upon us where we have reaped what we have sown? This was the case with David, in whom we see that, where we sow to the flesh, we must reap the consequences, but these very consequences can be the means of our salvation.

David fasted and prayed for Bathsheba's child (12:16), but once he knew it was dead he went into the house of Yahweh and worshipped, and then resumed his normal life (v. 20). His serv-

ants could not understand this (vv. 21-23), but David showed that in the Truth we must not look back, but must always press forward, following the example of the Apostle Paul, who said: "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13,14).

There is a lesson too for us in David's prayer concerning Ahithophel: "O LORD [Yahweh], I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (2 Sam. 15:31). Although David's troubles were the consequence of his sin, he did not just accept them, he dealt with them. David did not just pray, he acted on his prayers. He prayed to the Almighty to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, and then appointed Hushai to do this (vv. 32-37), and his prayer was answered (17:14). In this instance, David prayed directly. There is no reference to him enquiring of Yahweh.

There is also a lesson in the prayer that David uttered when famine came because Saul had slain the Gibeonites (21:1), who were probably serving at the tabernacle when he slew the priests of Nob (Josh. 9:27; 1 Sam. 22:18,19). When troubles occur there may be a reason for them, and we should seek our heavenly Father in prayer so that we might see how to put things right. This is what David did. Putting things right was no easy task for David. To appease the Gibeonites he had to have seven of Saul's sons hanged; and then, to comfort Rizpah, the mother of two of the sons, he removed the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh Gilead and buried them in the sepulchre of Kish, Saul's father. It was not until he had done this that "God was intreated for the land" (2 Sam. 21:14). This shows the care we should take to put matters right in the ecclesia and in our lives.

Prayer and the numbering of Israel

The next two of David's prayers concern his numbering of Israel. This was another failure of David's, but there was an underlying reason for what happened, namely that Yahweh's anger was kindled against Israel (24:1). When David recognised his sin he prayed to the Almighty (v. 10), and then, when he saw the consequences of his actions, he prayed again, blaming himself for the outcome in that 70,000 men died (v. 17). It seems that the reason for their death was Yahweh's anger against them.

This was a profound lesson for David, in that he lost 70,000 of the large army he had numbered, and in which he had trusted; but the mercy of Yahweh is shown in that the sword of the destroying angel stood over the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite, which became the site of the temple (1 Chron. 22:1). God brought good out of evil, and led David to the place of the house which was at the centre of the promise that had become "all [his] salvation, and all [his] desire". It is very fitting, therefore, that his last recorded prayer before he fell asleep should concern this house.

Prayer of thanksgiving for offerings made for the temple

In his trouble David prepared great riches for the house of Yahweh which was to be built

(1 Chron. 22:14). In his prayer recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19 he recognises the greatness of Yahweh and the fact that everything we have, all our riches, comes from the Almighty. He also recognises an important principle: "For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" (v. 15).

We also are strangers and sojourners, "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). As David made preparation for the house of God, may we prepare ourselves now as tried stones that we may be part of God's spiritual house in the Kingdom, seeking to build up the ecclesia, that spiritual house of which we are a part (1 Pet. 2:4,5).

The prayers of Jacob

Russell Ebbs

THE PROMISES TO Abraham are centred upon land and seed, but the wife of his son Isaac, through whom the promises went, was barren, unable to produce a seed. Therefore, "Isaac intreated the LORD [Yahweh] for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD [Yahweh] was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived" (Gen. 25:21). But the tribulation continued, for the unborn children struggled within her, and what should have been a satisfying experience became a traumatic situation, in which Rebekah despaired of life itself (v. 22). Yet faithfully she drew near in prayer to her God, Who revealed to her that the painful struggle represented the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (v. 23).

The conception and birth of Esau and Jacob were therefore closely associated with prayer. However, whilst Esau is never recorded as offering prayer, Jacob and his wives Leah and Rachel are shown to us as people of prayer.¹

The mind of the flesh and the mind of the spirit

There are only two prayers of Jacob which are recorded verbatim,² but, significantly, both of these have to do with situations where Jacob was under intense pressure because of the struggle with Esau, portraying once more the enmity

between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. There is a very important exhortation for us in this point: the lessons of Jacob's prayers will equip us as we wrestle against the flesh.

The first of these two prayers is in the context of Jacob, having received the blessing, fleeing for his life (Gen. 35:1; Hos. 12:12) away from Esau. Esau was a cunning hunter, and Jacob, being a man who dwelt in tents, would have been no match for him in the open country (Gen. 25:27). Jacob's life was very much under threat, and, after racing through the wilderness for perhaps sixty miles, he fell asleep, exhausted and apparently alone, only for Yahweh to reveal to him in a dream that he was not alone, for the angels were always with him to ensure that the Abrahamic covenant would be fulfilled.

1. For example, it is recorded that God hearkened unto Leah and Rachel (Gen. 30:17,22), and therefore we are able to understand that they, like Rebekah, drew near to their God in prayer.
2. When Jacob made supplication to the angel (32:24-26), the present writer does not classify this as 'prayer', as there is open communication with a visible person, just as Stephen's words to the Lord Jesus (Acts 7:60) do not constitute prayer, but verbal communication in a vision.