

and sent them to be crucified, so tying up all the loose ends, as they thought. The writer willingly acknowledges, as stated above, that the foregoing is at best interesting speculation. What is important is for us to note that, as our Lord hung dying on the cross, God had provided in His mercy and love that one should be next to His Son who would confirm a belief in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Was this an answer to a prayer of Jesus?

The God of comfort

The Apostle Paul describes God as “the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation”, and as “God, That comforteth those that are cast down” (2 Cor. 1:3,4; 7:6). The purpose of receiving comfort is explained by Paul as being “that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (1:4). The word translated ‘comfort’ (*paraklēsis*) is related to *paraklētos*, literally ‘one who comes alongside’. In Christ’s greatest hour of agony and need, God

had provided one next to him who confirmed the purpose of his life and death.

The prayer of the malefactor, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom”, would have been a comfort to Christ, and the reply of Christ a comfort to the malefactor. Christ could not remove for that man the consequence of his sin, which was death. He was, though, able to direct him past the present suffering to the promise of the Kingdom.

We too can be of comfort to Christ as we fellowship his suffering and look forward to the Kingdom. As we pray, “Thy kingdom come”, and as we ask, “forgive us our sins”, we acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Lord. In prayer to God through Christ we can recall the joy that is set before us which will enable us to endure the crucifying of the flesh. In true repentance we must recognise our sins and the provision God has made for our forgiveness, and be comforted by those words of Jesus: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32).

The prayer of Solomon

1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 6

Edward Carr

PRAYER IS a deeply personal matter. Communication with our Maker leads, almost inevitably, to a feeling of inadequacy and insufficiency. Consequently, a problem arises as to how to translate this very personal communication into prayer on behalf of others, particularly those made in a public setting. Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple gives us some indications as to how this transition can be achieved, as well as giving more general lessons in regard to our own individual attitudes to our prayers.

Content

Solomon’s prayer of dedication is an exhortation. He expounds the Scriptures, and in doing so draws out strong lessons, both of encouragement and warning, for his original hearers, and us along with them. It is not by any means argued that every prayer should take this exact form, but perhaps this mix of encouragement and warning is one which is appropriate to ex-

amine in relation to our own prayers, particularly our communal and public prayers.

The occasion of the dedication of the new temple afforded Solomon the opportunity to reaffirm the truth of the blessed position of “the . . . congregation [LXX, ecclesia] of Israel” (2 Chron. 6:3). The parallels between our own situation and those of the “congregation of Israel” are striking. They, like us, had been called out by God. They, like us, were to have the presence of God embodied in their midst—they with the temple, us with the Lord Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of the living temple. They, like us, were to be a part of the worship of God in that temple, the place where God had chosen to place His Name.

The way Solomon reaffirms these truths is by reminding the hearers of their place in a covenant relationship. Solomon expounds the blessings and curses enumerated in Deuteronomy 28, and more particularly Leviticus 26 (see [table](#) for brief comparisons). The people were to remem-

| Solomon's prayer and Leviticus 26 | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| Leviticus | | 1 Kings |
| 26:11 | tabernacle / dwell among you | 8:27 |
| 26:17 | enemies | 8:33 |
| 26:19 | no rain | 8:35 |
| 26:26 | famine | 8:37 |
| 26:25 | pestilence | 8:37 |
| 26:21 | plague | 8:37,38 |
| 26:38 | land of the enemy (captivity) | 8:46 |
| 26:40 | confess iniquity | 8:47 |
| 26:13,45 | brought out of Egypt | 8:51 |

ber that they were in a covenant relationship with God Himself. God had promised them that, however they treated Him, *He* would remember the covenant: “. . . and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised My judgments . . . But I will . . . remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen” (Lev. 26:43-45).

They needed the reminder of the position they held and the responsibility it brought—a responsibility to show to the nations round about their connection with the covenant of God, as Solomon said: “that all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God” (1 Kings 8:60). With the privilege of prayer comes the responsibility to act in a way that is consistent with that privilege. Over and again in this prayer the plea is made, ‘if they . . . then hear Thou’. This is a responsibility that in turn comes to us, to shape our lives in response to the knowledge we have that we too are now a covenant people. Solomon’s prayer indicates that we need reminding of the great promises God has made in order that we might realise that collectively we are as Israel were: “an holy nation, a peculiar people; that [we] should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called [us] out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Intent in prayer

Although Solomon’s prayer is long, prayer is not, nor ever should be, defined by the length of

time it takes to express the things that require expressing. Many Biblical prayers are of quite some length, and to modern readers this can become a stumbling block to appreciating them fully. Christadelphians themselves, it has been noted, sometimes ‘suffer’ from and because of long prayers.

Words of Solomon himself are used in support of short prayers: “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Eccl. 5:2). So, it is asserted, ‘This is a lesson many Christadelphians would do well to learn’. Undoubtedly this *is* sometimes, perhaps even often, true. Solomon here, however, is less concerned with the length of prayer than with the spirit in which it is given (as

the context of this verse well illustrates). He is far more concerned about *thoughtless* utterances (which can by nature be short *or* long) than the *length* of prayers.

Solomon’s prayer of dedication, although long, was far from thoughtless. However, not only is the spirit in and with which the prayer is given paramount, Solomon’s address to the people after the prayer indicates how important the attitude of those who listen is. Hearers are to be attentive and willing to be taught—in short, there was to be an effect on those who heard: “Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God” (1 Kgs. 8:61). This is where our focus should lie in assessing any prayer, whether offered by us or not. Communal prayer should be able to inspire in us all a desire to see the fulfilment of the purpose of God. At the same time it should provide a sense of our own responsibility to the faithfulness of the heavenly Father.

Our use of Scripture

Often our response to God’s faithfulness in prayer is hindered because “we know not what we should pray for [RV, how to pray] as we ought” (Rom. 8:26). If we are unable to find the correct words or ideas, our first reference should be to the Scriptures. Apt words, ideas and phrases for expression of prayer are often supplied for us in the Word of God, the Psalms being the most obvious source. The use of previous scriptures, as demonstrated by Solomon, highlights that we can and should make use of Scriptural expression

(as opposed to Christadelphianisms) to convey our meaning in prayer. This presupposes that the Scriptures are familiar enough to us for us to frame our thoughts by them.

However, we should never fall into the trap of simply stringing quotations together just for effect; again, “He That searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit” (v. 27), that is, whether we are true or not. The inclusion of true Scriptural phrases can be extremely beneficial in prayer, and what better way to express ourselves than in the words already supplied to us by God Himself?

Posture

Much could be made of the posture of Solomon. There is the construction of the platform (RSV), his standing, then kneeling before the people, as well as the spreading forth of his hands toward heaven (2 Chron. 6:13). The inconclusive nature of the argument as to the ‘how’ in relation to posture is also apparent elsewhere in Scripture. To give too much weight to any of these matters of posture would be to miss the point, interesting though they undoubtedly are. Again, it is the *content* of the prayer and the *intent* of the one who prays which should command our attention, along with our own attitude to what we hear (or, in this case, read).

A new beginning

This dedicatory prayer was to be a new beginning for the congregation in the worship of God. Now was the time to rededicate themselves in the service of their God. Essentially this is what prayer is about. Prayer was and is an opportunity to begin again, to reaffirm, as Solomon was doing, commitment to a God Who hears. It has already been commented that Solomon’s prayer is an exhortation. This is not the end of the parallels with the spirit of the breaking of bread meeting, a meeting at which the living temple of God is (re-)dedicated. Each one present at the dedication of the temple had to examine him- or herself and determine “to walk in [God’s] statutes, and to keep His commandments, as at this day” (1 Kgs. 8:61).

Such was true for the congregation of Israel. Inherent in Solomon’s prayer is the idea that at all times and in every place the children of Israel could look to the house that represented God’s place among them, and they could be assured that they were heard. Solomon repeats, some eight times in various ways, an appeal to God:

“hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place”—a repeated acknowledgement of his earlier statement of the greatness of God, that “the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (v. 27).

In the same way, our weekly remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of God in him should be carried with us beyond one individual meeting. We too can look, at all times and in every place, to the embodiment of the presence of God among us, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We can understand that we have assurance that in the Lord Jesus Christ our prayers are heard, and through him we may begin again in our struggle to walk in newness of life.

Perhaps this analogy with the breaking of bread makes us realise that each prayer we give or participate in should be a reflection on the life-giving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we accept this to be the case, our prayers will not only be more focused on the work of God’s salvation, but they will be less centred on our own needs—an attitude promoted by Jesus: “your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him” (Mt. 6:8).

Mutual benefit

Whether the practice of our own prayers corresponds to our understanding of the glories of the purpose of God is a personal question. Each of us must ask ourselves, Is there a gap between the appreciation of the Truth in an intellectual way and the practice of prayer that is an expression of this understanding?

The more we understand and appreciate the greatness of the purpose of God, as centred in His Son, the better equipped we are to pray in the right way—a principle certainly indicated by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:26. (Whether we use this to its full advantage is again a personal matter.) In turn, this understanding that we take to ourselves of the mind of the Spirit (of Christ) can allow us to put our lives into perspective. We are enabled to see our own lives in relation to God’s purpose; however hard our lives may be, it is that we might be children of God, and our prayers can be tempered and shaped by this understanding of our own need to be chastened.

Our prayers together as brethren and sisters in Christ can be an expression of the fact that the struggle to walk in the narrow way is one shared by all. We can be mutually comforted in our prayers together that the work of the Lord Jesus

Christ, the mediator of a better covenant, is sufficient to remove our iniquity even when we despise God's judgements. In praying together we can be comforted together that we are not alone. In praying alone with our understanding

we can be comforted that we are accompanied by many others and that we are all led in the worship of the Father by one greater than Solomon, who "ever liveth to make intercession for [us]" (Heb. 7:25).

The prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah

Michael Jenner and Nigel Bernard

WE COULD describe the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah as prayers for God's servants and people. Both were offered for very specific purposes, on behalf of Israel. Both prayers quote extensively from other parts of Scripture and draw attention to the transgressions of Israel. In this article we will look at just a few aspects of the prayers in order to provide us with help and guidance for when we ourselves pray to God.

Preparation

Nehemiah 1:2,3 tells how Nehemiah asked after Judah and Jerusalem. The reply from the men of Judah was that the people were afflicted and that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down. Verse 4 gives us the curious reaction of Nehemiah. It seems he may not have prayed immediately after hearing this, but instead he sat down, wept, mourned certain days, fasted, and only then prayed to God. There was clearly a lot of emotion involved here; these were not everyday prayers (if there is such a thing) that were going to be offered. Perhaps Nehemiah, as later, "consulted" with himself (5:7), so that he would be properly prepared to pray for this special purpose before God. This considered approach would also provide preparation for the prayer he offered in the presence of the king (2:4).

Ezra goes through a similar period of meditation before offering his prayer. Ezra 9:2 records the message given to Ezra that Israel, and in particular the Levites, were intermarrying with, and acting like, the surrounding nations. We then read in verse 3 that Ezra rent his garment, plucked off the hair of his head and beard and sat down astonished. Ezra was awestruck until evening, and only then did he get up and proceed to fall upon his knees, spreading out his hands unto God. Neither Nehemiah nor Ezra approached God while just full of emotion, but they prepared for some time, and chose their words very

carefully. Ezra had sat down and readied himself in the eyes of all the people before he gave his public prayer.

Fasting and prayer

When speaking about having faith which could move mountains, the Lord Jesus said: "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Mt. 17:21). The link between fasting and prayer is seen in the case of both Ezra and Nehemiah. In Ezra 8 we read: "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance . . . So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was intreated of us" (vv. 21,23). Nehemiah, as we have seen, fasted before he prayed (1:4).

The significance of fasting is shown by the words of David in Psalm 35: "I humbled my soul with fasting" (v. 13). The word translated "humbled" is usually translated 'afflicted', and is first used of the way the Israelites would be afflicted in Egypt (Gen. 15:13). The affliction which fasting represents is the opposite of the pleasures of this life. In the days of Isaiah the people were fasting, but, although denying themselves food, they were seeking other pleasures, thus making a mockery of the fast: "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and Thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and Thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours" (Isa. 58:3). Yet in the case of Ezra and Nehemiah their fasting was indicative of a life devoted to following the things of God and of denying themselves (Lk. 9:23).

There is no specific fasting mentioned in association with the prayer in Ezra 9. However, there is an interesting link between his posture of prayer and fasting. Ezra says: "I fell upon my knees" (v. 5). When we kneel our legs collapse. It