

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.

Table 1 Jacob's first recorded prayer—Genesis 28:20-22

And Jacob vowed a vow, saying,

- 1 If God will be with me,
- 2 and will keep me in this way that I go,
- 3 and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,
- 4 so that I come again to my father's house in peace;
- 5 then shall the LORD [Yahweh] be my God:
- 6 and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house:
- 7 and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.

Jacob's response was his first recorded prayer, in Genesis 28:20-22 (see Table 1). At first view, this prayer may seem to be simplistic, concerned with material things, a kind of spiritually immature desire on Jacob's part, whereby, if God cares for him, he in return will honour God. Such a view is quite wrong, for whilst Jacob had many lessons to learn in his life (as we all do), yet this prayer reveals a profound spiritual perception on his part.

The sacrifice of thanksgiving

Firstly, we note that this prayer³ is a vow; "Jacob vowed a vow", the first vow in Scripture. In the Law the vow is a loving response to the grace of Yahweh (Lev. 7:16; Num. 6:2), and Jacob's vow is indeed a response to the promise that Yahweh had just made to him concerning the land and seed of the Abrahamic covenant. Here, therefore, is a powerful exhortation to us: our prayers should reflect our very great gratitude in being "made nigh by the blood of Christ", no longer "strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:11-13). Yahweh appreciated Jacob's vow (Gen. 31:13) and will likewise value a loving response from us.

Jacob's opening statement, "If God will be with me" (28:20), is a citation from Yahweh's promise to Isaac: "sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father" (26:3). Jacob had been in a sense driven away from the house of his father and from the land, but Yahweh had confirmed to him that His purpose would nevertheless continue with him. Thus Jacob's opening words are not an immature seeking to come to a conditional agreement with God, but a faithful acknowledgement of what had just been revealed to him.⁴

Bread for the morrow

When he spoke this prayer, Jacob was commencing his period of exile from the land, with his total material possessions consisting of his staff, limited provisions of oil and, one assumes, victuals. He had no wife, no means of supporting a wife and children to fulfil the promises, and he was to be a sojourner in another land; but his precarious future was one which he could face with a measure of confidence because of the revelatory dream.

His brother Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field, but when he had to return home, exhausted and starving, having been deprived by God of game, he was being shown the weakness of flesh (25:27-30). However, Esau failed to take the lesson, that he should learn to turn to Yahweh and His promises.

Jacob, however, had learned that he was dependent on his God, hence he said in his prayer: "If God . . . will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on . . ." (28:20). That is ever a lesson which we must appreciate: "Give us this day our daily bread"; not a surfeit, but sufficiency, so that we can work in our Lord's vineyard (Mt. 6:11; Prov. 30:8,9). Jacob was not seeking prosperous ease, but sufficiency, so that he could be the medium

-
3. That the vow constitutes a prayer is evident from verse 22, where the pronoun 'Thee' addresses the Deity.
 4. Yahweh's promise to Isaac, "I will be with thee", is one of those comforting exhortational themes evident throughout Scripture. God repeats these words to Jacob when telling him to return to the land (31:3), and they also occur in Genesis 48:21 regarding Joseph, Exodus 3:12 regarding Moses, Joshua 1:5 regarding Joshua, Joshua 14:12 regarding Caleb, 1 Chronicles 4:10 regarding Jabez and Psalm 89:24 and 91:15 regarding Jesus.

Table 2 Jacob's second recorded prayer—Genesis 32:9-12

And Jacob said,

- 1 O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD [Yahweh]
- 2 Which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:
- 3 I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant;
- 4 for with my staff I passed over this Jordan;
- 5 and now I am become two bands.
- 6 Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.
- 7 And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

of the promises: "Blessed art thou, O land, when . . . thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!" (Eccl. 10:17).

My father's house

Jacob's desire was to inherit the blessing and the promises, hence he said in his prayer: ". . . so that I come again to my father's house in peace" (Gen. 28:21).⁵ Naturally speaking, in the circumstances of the moment, that would seem an impossibility, but we must note that this was not a case of Jacob being fleshly minded, not caring where he was to live as long as God was providing him with a comfortable existence. The issue of the land and the seed were uppermost in his mind.

His next statement, "then shall the LORD [Yahweh] be my God", is not part of some bargain, but demonstrates that Jacob would not be a stranger to the covenants of promise, for, on returning, it would be evident to all that he, personally,⁶ had been brought nigh in mercy to continue the purpose of Deity.

"And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house" (v. 22). Here again, the depth of Jacob's understanding of God-manifestation is significant. Eventually all nations will be brought into the seed of Abraham and will be the dwelling place of Yahweh. This prayer was uttered at Bethel, which means 'God's house', and the future Kingdom will be centred upon Jerusalem, where God's house will be built. This corresponds to our praying that God's will should be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Acknowledgment of God's open hand

The final and seventh point of the prayer relates to Jacob's thankfulness to Yahweh for the daily

provisions upon which our mortal frames are dependent. A tithe would be a first charge on everything God gave him, demonstrating his awareness that he was dependent on his God for sustenance, as it is written in Psalm 145:15,16: "The eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing". Here Jacob is following the example of his grandfather Abraham, who gave tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20).

Jacob's second recorded prayer

Jacob's second recorded prayer (see Table 2) is likewise in the context of his being under extreme pressure regarding Esau (Gen. 32:7). We can sympathise with the tension between Jacob's fervent faith in the promises and his weakness of the flesh. Despite the latter he did not draw back, but drew near to his God in the obedience of faith, as shown by this prayer.

His first words recall how Yahweh had moved in the lives of his grandfather and Isaac, to whom the promises were made; those same promises which were now vested in Jacob: "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD [Yahweh] . . ." (v. 9). In times of tribulation, or indeed rejoicing, it can be very helpful

5. The words "my Father's house", "come again" and "peace" are used by Jesus in John 14:2,3,27,28.

6. This is the first use in Scripture of the phrase "my God". Interestingly, the second use is Exodus 15:2, where there is a remarkable similarity of context: "The LORD [Yahweh] is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him".

quietly to read about the faithfulness and consistency of our God; the Psalms are especially useful for this purpose, to soothe the mind as with a balm.

The obedience of faith

That same God had given a commandment and promise to Jacob, and he was in the process of obeying that commandment: “. . . Which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee”. Once again, the matter of land and seed was at the forefront of the prayer. As with the psalmist, who said, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (119:11), so for Jacob and ourselves; patient endurance is achieved by keeping the Word at the forefront of our minds.

Hallowed be Thy name

“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands” (Gen. 32:10). Here is a profound understanding of the character of the Father, revealed in the use of the words ‘mercies’ and ‘truth’, which are the foundation of Yahweh’s revelation to Moses of His Name, glory and character in Exodus 34:6,7. Jacob’s humility is an exhortation in itself, as we note his feeling of unworthiness that the Deity should be fulfilling His purpose through him.

Deliver us from evil

“Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother

with the children” (v. 11). Jacob’s fear is that he will not be able to inherit the land, and that his seed will be cut off; he is well aware that Esau is quite capable of such merciless action in order to protect his own inheritance.

Further, in laying his innermost fears before Yahweh, Jacob’s openness with his God is notable. The Apostle John records: “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world” (1 Jno. 4:17). Here the word “boldness” is the Greek word *parrhēsia*, meaning ‘openness of speech’. The lesson is that, if we are like Jacob and are completely open and frank now with our God, then on the day of judgement we can approach knowing that we have not deliberately sought to hide anything from Him, as for example did Cain (Gen. 4:9) and Gehazi (2 Kgs. 5:25).

Thy Kingdom come

The seventh and final part of the prayer is a faithful recalling of the Divine promises: “And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude” (Gen. 32:12). Yahweh is pleased when men and women align themselves with His purpose expressed in His promises (Ex. 32:13; Jer. 14:22).

For this reason, our prayers likewise must have a similar emphasis: “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD [Yahweh], keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isa. 62:6,7).

The case of Jacob is perhaps one of the most striking in the whole range of scripture history, in the combination of human fear and divine guardianship. There are many cases of God preserving and delivering, but only in a few other cases—notably Job, David, and Jeremiah—have we such a complete exhibition of the mental distresses of those delivered, and the human details of the process by which deliverance was wrought out. All cases of scripture illustration are really alike in principle, but in only a few cases is the picture drawn completely. Jacob’s is one of them. His experience is thoroughly, though so briefly, portrayed. The result is, we can look at him closely, and are enabled to realise how human he is, while at the same time so devout and so direct and continual in his recognition of the divine hand in all his ways. In this his case is all the more helpful to us, who, by our position in the times of the Gentiles, are so far removed (in the past at all events) from those interpositions of divine power which necessarily characterised the initiation of the divine plan, and which enabled those who stood related to them so much more easily to realise the guidance of God, and to be in His fear all the day long.

Robert Roberts, *The Ways of Providence*