



Part 14: Handbook of Prayers



Opening Quotes -



David Praying



Background Notes -

PURPOSE: To present the Psalms, the prayerbook of the Bible, and the Proverbs.

AUTHOR: King David and King Solomon are attributed to Psalms and Proverbs, respectively, though many authors are likely.

DATE: Collected after the time of the kings, these prayers and sayings range from the time of David all the way down to the Maccabean era.

STYLE: Prayer and wisdom for all aspects of life: hymns of praise, sad laments, wisdom sayings, royal enthronements, liturgical psalms, historical psalms, instructions, and reflections. Psalms are influenced by Babylonian forms of worship revolving around the new year, and Proverbs borrow from Egyptian works such as the *Wisdom of Amenemophis*.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.” Ps 23

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.” Prov 3:5

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.” Prov 8:13

“How long will you lie there, O lazybones?” Prov 6:9

“Keep my teachings as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart.” Prov 7:2

“When he established the heavens, I was there...” Prov 8:27

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One insight.” Prov 9:10

“Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without good sense.” Prov 11:22

the BIG PICTURE		→ : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		→ : key covenants in our Father’s plan	
12 Periods ▼	Plot ▼	Other books related to period ▼		stories in each period ▼	
BC	🌐 THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah’s ark, Tower of Babel	
1850	👤 THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek	
1250	⚠️ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus	
1200	♣️ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua	
1100	👤 THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel	
1030	👤 KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple	
1000	👤 THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile	
721 587	👤 BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, “major” prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)	
538	👤 THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs	Cyrus, 2 nd temple, 2 nd Law, “minor” prophets, new writings	
163 63	👤 THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)	
AD	👤 JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection	
33 70	👤 APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ	



The Story of Part 14: Handbook of Prayers



The Book of Psalms is probably the most popular book of the Old Testament. Also known as the Psalter, it is Israel's hymnbook and includes prayers for every occasion in the nation's life: prayers for the solemn Temple liturgy as well as private, meditative prayer; prayers after victory and defeat, in joy and in sorrow; prayers of thankful praise and prayers of sad pleading. Some are royal prayers, at an enthronement or royal wedding, and show the messianic hopes centered on David's line; others celebrate the kingship of Yahweh.

Although God had repeatedly warned the Israelites not to marry foreign women or worship foreign gods, they disobeyed. One thing that resulted from this was the borrowing of some forms of worship and prayer from the other nations. For instance, some Babylonian forms of worship and myths centered around a new year's festival, and the Jews had their own new year's festival, a feast of thanksgiving for the harvest. The forms of worship themselves were not a bad influence as long as their aim was Yahweh.

The Psalms are the poetry of a vivid and passionate people, using colorful, even wild, images of despair, of God's intervention, of hopes for future prosperity, and even prayers for violent revenge on opponents! The Psalter is arranged into five sections, each separated by a *doxology* (praise and glory to God). The *joyful* psalm like the "Songs of Zion" will open with a blessing, praise Yahweh, recognize his sovereignty (with some reasons to praise him), and close with a blessing. The psalm of *lament*, on the other hand, will call on God's name, describe a present need, plead for help and deliverance, give reasons why God should help, and then vow to praise or sacrifice, trusting that God will answer. Then there are *liturgical* psalms, used for the entrance into the Temple, *wisdom* psalms, giving practical advice, and *historical* psalms, weaning some lessons from reflections on Israel's tumultuous history.

But what set apart the Psalms from their literary influences is the role of Yahweh. The *royal* or *enthronement* psalms, which may include the other types of psalms, describe a symbolic enthronement of Yahweh himself as the true king of the world. God's justice and righteousness are constantly being emphasized. But it is obvious from the Psalms that the Israelites had no clear belief in life after death. After life there was only Sheol, a shadowy existence away from God's presence.

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings, mostly two-line sayings, which also borrowed from other literature, particularly the wisdom sayings of the Egyptians. In fact, most of the proverbs are not even really religious, but instead, teach common sense. Nevertheless, they are succinct, witty, and pungent reflections, morsels of wisdom passed down from those

with experience to those willing to learn (and at the same time blasting those not willing to learn!).

The Proverbs express truth in a striking and memorable way. They seem easy to understand, but actually conceal deep and profound insights. While the format of advice given by teacher or sage to student ("son") has its Egyptian parallels, it is once again the role of God that sets the book apart. Yahweh himself is attributed as the source of all wisdom. According to the Proverbs, wisdom is not some sort of secret knowledge reserved for intellectuals, but a practical knowledge to be sought by everybody. True wisdom is at the service of others. It is humble, recognizes its own limits, and in what can look like a biblical typo, it even contradicts itself (26:4-5)! In light of this duplicitous nature of wisdom (and we already learned from Ecclesiastes that there is a time for opposite things under heaven), the only guarantee of wisdom is the Lord, against whom no wisdom or counsel can stand (21:30).

In some of the more poetic proverbs, wisdom is even described as a woman who is courted. She is a gift from God for all human searching, and mediates between God and the world. She was even present at creation and is the source of all meaning about this world. Proverbs describes the beginning of this wisdom as the "fear of the Lord". It is no wonder that Christian theology has applied the figure of Wisdom to Jesus, who, as the Incarnate Word of God, is the mediator between God and this world (1 Cor 1:24).

Before wrapping up the history of God's people in the Old Testament, we will look at the wisdom of the Israelites during the restoration and beyond, right into the Maccabean era. Until then, the Psalms teach us that prayer is a communication between God and man finding expression in every aspect of our lives. Without prayer, there is no relationship with God. And if there is one key lesson from Proverbs, it is that God himself is the ultimate source of all wisdom, and to fear him means to fear nothing else.

With these two truths in mind, we close with some proven practical prayer advice. Although prayer can take many forms, words, and gestures, we must still make time for quiet prayer, too – time alone with God. To the one who "can't find the time," wisdom teaches that you will never find the time, for prayer is something you have to *make* time for. Without a set time (and place) for prayer, it will be abandoned at the first sign of dryness, a regular part of the prayer process found in the Psalms. But experience has also shown that the more time you give to God, the more time you seem to get in return. This makes sense, since the source of all wisdom is also the source of time itself! 📖



Defending the Faith: The Effectiveness of Prayer

"When we pray we should not ask God for something more than once, which would imply a lack of trust in him (Mk 11:24). Furthermore, to recite repetitious prayers like rosaries and litanies is a superstitious practice that Jesus himself called heathen (Mt 6:7)."

Just as any miracle can be written off as a mere coincidence, so can any answered prayer. Someone who believes that prayers cannot make a difference tends to believe that everything in the universe is the result of strictly natural causes. (See "Do Miracles Happen" and "Atheism and Other Religions" for the refutation of this claim). But given that prayers *can* make a difference, passages like Mark 11:24 may still tempt us to doubt their effectiveness when we don't get what we prayed for. Christ even tells us that anything we ask for with faith will be given, to the point of moving mountains! But as much as we would love to prove to others and to ourselves the power of his name by throwing mountains around, he also tells us there is a deeper meaning to his words (Jn 16:23-25). God is not a genie, there to answer our every wish. But He is our Father, who can and does arrange all things for good for those who love Him (Rom 8:28).

But since we are supposed to accept everything as God's will, does that make it offensive to ask God for something more than once? Of course not. Mark 11:24 never even implies it. In fact, in Luke 18:1-8, Christ teaches us the need for constant prayer and uses the example of a judge who gives in to a widow's request just because she nags him so much!

But doesn't Christ condemn repetitious prayer in Matthew 6:7? Not quite. What He condemns is *useless*, repetitious prayer *in the manner of the heathens*. A complete reading of the Bible reveals that there is also

useful repetitious prayer *in the manner of Christ*. Read Psalm 136 and Matthew 26:44 for examples. The Psalter is obviously not the prayerbook of the heathens, but of the Jews. And just before his Passion, our very Jewish Messiah prays three times, *using the same words*. When asked how we should pray, he even gives his apostles the famous Lord's Prayer – more words! Are we to imagine that they were to say the prayer only once and then strike it from their memory? Or perhaps they could only say it once and then paraphrase it from then on?

Paul does tell us that in our weakness we do not know how to pray, and that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words (Rom 8:26). But this does not mean that words are not useful, but that they are not always necessary. This deeper type of prayer is called *meditative* prayer, and is not to be confused with vocal prayer, or other types of Spirit-filled prayer, like speaking in tongues.

The repetitious prayer that Christ condemns is a heathen idea that a bunch of words by themselves elicit God's response, like some sort of magic spell. This is obviously superstitious. True prayer involves the heart, which God alone can read. But to brand a Rosary or a litany the "prayer of a heathen" because of its repetitious words is like calling the Bible the "book of a heathen" because some people twist its words around to suit their false teachings.

Have you nagged our Father today?



Expressing the Faith: Flood

Reaching out with Jars of Clay, these lyrics contain elements found in the classic laments of the Book of Psalms.

*Rain, rain on my face
Hasn't stopped raining for days
My world is a flood
Slowly I become one with the mud*

*But if I can't swim after forty days
And my mind gets crushed by the crashing waves
Lift me up so high that I cannot fall
Lift me up.*

*Lift me up – when I'm falling
Lift me up – I'm weak and I'm dying
Lift me up – I need you to hold me
Lift me up – to keep me from drowning again.*

*Downpour on my sores
I'm splashing in the ocean, losing control
Dark sky all around
Can't feel my feet touching the ground*

(Chorus)

*Calm the storms that drench my eyes
Dry the streams still flowing
Cast down all the waves of sin
And guilt that overthrow me*

(Chorus)

↗ **Next time: "Hidden Wisdom"** ↖