

# PRAYERS OF THE ANCIENTS

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Prayers usually have two forms: 1) to offer God heartfelt thanksgiving, worship, and honor; and 2) to ask, entreat, petition, supplicate, implore, or otherwise seek God on behalf of ourselves or others. Prayers can occur at regular times of the day or they can be inspired by the urgency of a crisis that arises. For each of us, our prayers are unique because they are the result of our individuality and our experiences. When we first began to pray our thoughts were simple; usually focusing on asking for forgiveness and Godly wisdom and strength. Although they were sincere, over time our prayers change. As time passes and we experience more of this physical life and we grow in understanding of God's word, our prayers are principally changed by one thing that has the greatest impact in our lives—suffering. Trials change us and, as we grow in the Holy Spirit, our prayers become wholehearted.

*Wholehearted* simply means with complete sincerity and faith. Sadly enough, it is most often through hardships and sufferings that human beings can become wholehearted. People that have been given everything and are never denied anything are shallow and uncaring, thinking only of themselves. They are incapable of loyalty and compassion. The world around them exists only to gratify their lusts. Think about it. People that have experienced dire privation are debtors because they receive more than they can give. Although some resort to violence under these circumstances, many experience something life changing through suffering. Sometimes this is from the charity of strangers. They were given food, clothes, or money when they needed it most. Some even owe their lives because of the sacrifice of others. Those who are indebted to others know humility. Humility binds us to others, even strangers. This is what God has done for us. We owe God and Jesus Christ debt that we can never repay and trials are a test of our humility and love whether they fall upon us or others.

God desires prayers from humble hearts and the only way to please Him is through sacrifice. Not the sacrifice of animals but something of ourselves. *Sacrifice* means to surrender or give up, permit personal injury, or accept a disadvantage for the sake of something or someone else. Prayers are a sacrifice **to** God. Notice these from Psalms:

PSALMS 51:15-17 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. 16 For **thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.** 17 **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.**

PASLM 141:2 **Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.**

The Bible is full of sacrificial prayers. Reading them lets us actually know something about the giver. Key to understanding why prayers are so important to God is our heart. It is through prayer that God knows our inner thoughts and emotions: “The spirit of man *is* the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.” (Proverbs 20:27).

God searches the deepest parts of our heart. He sees through the walls we put up for other, He hears beyond our words, and He touches us in places we cannot reach. One of the most heartfelt is a prayer of Daniel, who was “greatly beloved” of God:

DANIEL 9:3-4, 7, 9, 13, 16-19 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: 4 And **I prayed unto the LORD my God**, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; ... 7 O Lord, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, *that are near*, and *that are far off*, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. ... 9 To the Lord our God *belong* mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; ... 13 As *it is* written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. ... 16 O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people *are become* a reproach to all *that are* about us. 17 **Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications**, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake. 18 O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for **we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.** 19 **O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do;** defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

Daniel is obviously mourning for his people. They were captives in Babylon because of their disobedience. Knowing their punishment was from God and seeing the suffering, Daniel calls upon “the LORD my God” to be merciful. His desire is for God to put and end to the pain and agony of the people. He knows that God is the source of all righteousness, mercies, and forgiveness. His request is powerful and direct, yet with the humility of one who has suffered. He considers himself God’s servant. In his humility, he is small before the “great and dreadful God”, so much so that God even has to bend down (“incline thine ear”) to hear his small voice. Imagine the tears when he says, “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God.” Daniel wholeheartedly appeals to God for the Jews’ salvation.

Another magnificent prayer was spoken by a master of all manner of prayers—David:

2 SAMUEL 7:18-22, 24, 27-29 Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, **Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? 19 And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD;** but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And *is* this the manner of man, O Lord GOD? 20 And **what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant. 21 For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them.** 22 Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for *there is* none like thee, neither *is there any* God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. ... 24 For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel *to be* a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God. ... 27 For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: **therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.** 28 And now, O Lord GOD, thou *art* that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: 29 Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord GOD, hast spoken *it*: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.

Like Daniel, David considers himself a servant to God. However, their use of this word was as worshippers of God. Both men called God by the name He revealed to the Israelites while in Egypt—Jehovah—a name that describes His eternity. David absolutely believes God's promises and was moved to thanksgiving when he said that he "found in his heart" a need to pray. The word *found* literally means "to come forth" so his prayer came forth from his heart.

David was constantly praying and put many of them to music. He trained his son Solomon to be devoted to his God as well and the sense of heartfelt humility is evident in this prayer:

1 KINGS 3:7-9 And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and **I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.** 8 And thy servant *is* in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. 9 **Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?**

The king who reigned over a vast land filled with wealth and peace, saw himself as a little child before Jehovah, his God. His desire wasn't for riches or power but to serve the people in righteousness and wisdom. This came from seeing the horrors of wars, murders, and traitors during the reign of his father David. It came from seeing the lust and greed of a few that produced suffering and death for many. It came from seeing injustice as in the case of the woman whose child died and then tried to deprive another woman of her own infant child.

Prayer is true communications with God. Not just in words, but in the innermost thoughts of our hearts. They cannot be concealed from God when we pray because the Holy Spirit “groans” (sighs, murmurs, speaks inaudibly) unspoken words to God (Romans 8:26). God in turn encourages, teaches, and uplifts us through His Holy Spirit.

Read the prayers of the ancients including Nehemiah 1, Psalm 4, Psalm 61 and others. Read the prayers of Jesus. Pray **always**. Pray in *faith*. Pray for yourself. Pray for your brethren. Pray for this world. Most of all, pray for the Kingdom to come! Open your heart to God for He is faithful to His promises.