

Pray for the Nation !



Church and Government

Bible Studies on Prayer, including Praying for Cities and Nations

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PRAY FOR THE NATION !

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INTRODUCTION

In September 1971, the first Festival of Light was held in Britain. The purpose of this Festival was to call Christians together to make a public stand for righteousness, in the face of declining moral and spiritual standards in Britain, and also to call people together to pray for their nation.

The concept behind the Festival of Light came from a custom, a few centuries ago, when the land was alerted to the approach of an enemy by lighting fires as beacons on the tops of key hills throughout the land. The watchman who spotted an approaching enemy would light a fire on the top of his hill. Seeing his fire, watchmen on other hills would light fires on the tops of their hills too, and so, in a short period of time, the whole nation could be alerted to the approach of an enemy. The spiritual parallel should be obvious!

In 1971, I was the Director of Youth With A Mission (YWAM) in New Zealand, and my wife, daughter and I were in England for a few weeks in August 1971. We had contact with a few of the leaders of the Festival of Light and were very interested in the concept. Unfortunately we could not stay in England for the Festival itself, but we heard the wonderful results and answers to prayer as tens of thousands of Christians gathered throughout Britain to stand for righteousness and to intercede for their land.

In September 1971 we were in Switzerland, at the YWAM base in Lausanne, attending a YWAM leaders mini-School of Evangelism. Part of the School involved teaching by Joy Dawson on prayer and intercession, and each day we would spend an hour in small groups, seeking the Lord and praying for evangelism worldwide.

On returning to New Zealand early in November 1971, about a week later I awoke very early one morning and felt God call me to call the Christians of New Zealand to pray for the nation – specifically, for revival and evangelism in New Zealand. In a few minutes God gave me the aims and method by which this should be done.

The original name God gave me for this ministry was *Pray for the Nation* – a title which we have still retained.

Denis Clark, in January 1969, commenced the ministry of Intercessors for Britain. I was aware of the existence of this organisation, and of the Revival Prayer Fellowship (also based in Britain) whose aim was to intercede for a worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit in revival.

When I started *Pray for the Nation* in January 1972 I thought it would be great if we could get 200 Christians to commit themselves to praying for New Zealand on a regular basis. I distributed some leaflets to people I had contact with through YWAM and other groups with which I was associated. I was a little disappointed when we started in January 1972 with only about 80 people. (Incidentally, in those days the total cost of printing the monthly magazines was about \$2 and the postage also cost \$2. Today it costs about \$1500 to print the magazines and another \$1500 to post them! Haven't times changed!)

In spite of only 80 committed people at the start, I still thought that if we could eventually get 100 people committed to intercede for New Zealand, that would be great. Today, 22 years later, we are printing 11,000 magazines each month! (We have printed almost one and a half million magazines over the 22 years!)

1972 was a key year, in many ways, in New Zealand. It saw the commencement of the first Jesus Gathering in Wellington in March, and subsequent Jesus Marches throughout the country in the following months and years. Those were the days of the Jesus Movement and quite a spiritual awakening within the land, and, indeed, in many other nations as well.

By May 1974 a number of Intercessors For ... groups had started in other countries too, and so we added the name *Intercessors For New Zealand*, in order to identify with them. Today there are similar groups in about 45 countries throughout the world.

The ministry here in New Zealand has primarily centred around our monthly prayer letter, which has always contained challenging articles and items for prayer, a Bible study, and prayer suggestions.

From time to time the Bible studies have been collated into books. We have now published 11 different books, and a total of about 67,000 copies of these books have been printed.

Right from the start we have had overseas people on our mailing list, praying for New Zealand. Some of these are New Zealanders who have moved overseas or who are missionaries; others are people who are concerned for our nation and are willing to pray for us. Currently we have about 220 people, in about 50 different countries, who receive our magazines. Through the generosity of those who have supported our work we have been able to make many of our books available free of charge to people in poorer countries. About 6700 of our books have been sent overseas, and some have been translated into other languages, some with the financial help of IFNZ.

Denis Clark came to New Zealand several times and led Prayer and Bible Weeks, and weekends with us. Since he went to be with the Lord, we have continued an annual Prayer and Bible Week as an opportunity for Christians around the nation to gather together for fellowship and prayer. These are held every January at Waikanae.

We are also in contact with about 150 prayer groups around the country. Most of these are small groups of committed Christians who meet weekly, fortnightly or monthly to intercede for New Zealand.

As we look back over 22 years we marvel at what God has done: "To GOD be the glory, great things He has done!" For every provision – inspiration, anointing, provision (materially, financially and spiritually) – we give Him thanks and praise!

Today, 22 years since we began, the need for revival and evangelism in our country is as urgent, if not more urgent, than ever before. But when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard against him.

During these 22 years at least 40 Christian organisations have been raised up in New Zealand to share the Gospel or to take a stand for righteousness and for Godly laws.

The past 22 years have seen a real pruning and purging in the Church. Many nominal Christians have either been converted or no longer go to Church, and in many churches the numbers have declined. But at the same time God is saving many. Hundreds of new churches have sprung up and, in many cases, nominalism is a thing of the past. Jesus said that before the Great Harvest there would be a weeding out of the weeds so that the true wheat can be seen, untainted by the weeds, ready to be gathered into the Lord's granaries.

Five passages of Scripture that have particularly motivated this ministry are:

"If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves, pray, seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, I will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14)

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34)

"If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up, break down and destroy it, and if that nation concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil I intended to do to it. If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in My sight, not listening to My voice, then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do to it" (Jeremiah 18:7-10)

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7)

"First of all then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men; for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, Godly and respectful in every way. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

May we continue to earnestly *Pray for the Nation*, interceding and waging spiritual war against the principalities and powers of darkness and seeing God's victory in our land as He once again pours out His Holy Spirit in revival power, turning many people back to Himself and extending His saving grace to our nation. Even so, COME LORD JESUS!

May the Lord bless, strengthen and inspire you as you read this book and commit yourself to Pray for the Nation!

Brian Caughley
January 1994

NEW ZEALAND'S NATIONAL ANTHEM

God of nations, at Thy feet
In the bonds of love we meet
Hear our voices we entreat
God defend our free land!
Guard Pacific's triple star
From the shafts of strife and war
Make her praises heard afar
God defend New Zealand!

Men of every creed and race
Gather here before Thy face
Asking Thee to bless this place
God defend our free land!
From dissension, envy, hate
And corruption guard our state
Make our country good and great
God defend New Zealand!

Peace, not war, shall be our boast
But should foes assail our coast
Make us then a mighty host
God defend our free land!
Lord of battles in Thy might
Put our enemies to flight
Let our cause be just and right
God defend New Zealand!

Let our love for Thee increase
May Thy blessings never cease
Give us plenty, give us peace
God defend our free land!
From dishonour and from shame
Guard our country's spotless name
Crown her with immortal fame
God defend New Zealand!

May our mountains ever be
Freedom's ramparts on the sea
Make us faithful unto Thee
God defend our free land!
Guide her in the nation's van
Preaching love and truth to man
Working out Thy glorious plan
GOD DEFEND NEW ZEALAND!

Chapter 1

PRAYER AND INCENSE

It may seem unusual, in this day and age, for us to talk about incense in a Christian context. Incense was used in Old Testament times by the Israelites; its importance to us today lies in the fact that incense is a type or illustration of prayer, and there are a number of parallels between incense and prayer that illustrate some important points about prayer.

Incense and prayer

Back in Psalm 141:2, David said "Let my prayer be counted as incense before You, and the lifting up of my hands be as an evening sacrifice."

Just before the birth of Jesus, a priest named Zechariah went into the Temple to burn incense, and we read that all the people were praying outside, at the hour of incense. So the hour of incense was a time for corporate prayer (Luke 1:10).

In Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4 we read of "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints", and incense was mingled with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar before the throne of God. So the parallel between incense and prayer is found in the New Testament, as well as in the Old.

The ingredients of incense

What was incense made of? Exodus 30:34-38 tells us that it was made from the resins or gums of stacte, galbanum and frankincense, together with onycha (which was made from mollusc shells). When these were burned together they produced a fragrant smell.

Parallels between incense and prayer

We find the following parallels between incense and prayer:

1. Balance

Incense was to be blended from four components and "of each there shall be an equal part". The four main components of prayer are:

- (a) Adoration (worship and praise)
- (b) Confession
- (c) Thanksgiving
- (d) Supplication (which means asking for something, and includes intercession and spiritual warfare)

The ingredients of incense were compounded in a balanced way, with none in excess; just the right amount of each. As Christians we often tend to go to extremes and to major on one thing at the expense of others. Our prayers are to be balanced (without getting too legalistic, of course!) – a balance of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication – conveniently remembered by their initial letters: A-C-T-S

2. Pure and holy

Incense was to be seasoned with salt. Salt, in Biblical times, was used as a preservative, to stop things from going bad. Our prayers, like our worship, are to be pure and holy, "in Spirit and in Truth" (John 4:23-24). They are to be genuine, honest, from right motives, without hypocrisy, sincere. (The word "sincere" comes from the Latin which means "without wax".

Wax was used to fill the cracks and flaws in marble sculptures that were imperfect. A "sincere" sculpture was one that had no flaws – it was without wax, genuine and true.

3. Beaten very small

Before the incense was offered to the Lord it was ground very finely and then burned slowly with fire. The ministry of prayer is far more than "saying a few prayers". The true intercessor, for example, will find that it is not always easy to pray; it requires discipline and commitment. The hand of God will be upon them, and the ways of God will often require them to be "beaten very small", and to be "tested by fire" over a long period of time (1 Peter 1:6-8; 4:12-14). To be beaten very small requires humbling and affliction, which the Bible relates also to fasting – Psalm 35:13; 69:10; Ezra 8:21. We should not fear this or seek to turn from it, for the final result is a sweet-smelling aroma that is pleasing to the Lord. The fire brings out the fragrance!

4. Offered only by priests to the Lord

Incense was only offered by priests and was only offered to the Lord – it was not for personal use and certainly not for other gods (that would be idolatry). All true Christians are priests to the Lord (1 Peter 2:9-10). Since Jesus' death on the Cross, the veil in the Temple (which separated people from the presence of God in the Holy of Holies), has been torn in two from the top (Heaven) to the bottom (earth) and we have been able to approach the Lord through the Blood of the Lamb of God. As true believers therefore, we can come as priests directly to God and offer our prayers as incense to the Lord (Hebrews 4:14-16).

5. Costly

Incense was a costly offering. Stacte was obtained from the middle of hardened drops of myrrh; it was rare and very valuable. Onycha was made from shellfish shells. Galbanum came from the roots of a flowering plant that grew in Syria and Persia. Frankincense came from the bark of a tree that grew in southern Arabia.

True prayer is also costly. Sometimes the time we spend in prayer is more like spending our "spare change" than making a costly investment! David said, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the

Lord which cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24; Psalm 116:7). How much does our prayer-life cost us? Is it worth offering to the Lord?

6. Inspired

The concept, ingredients and directions for making incense were inspired by God; they were not just someone's good idea! We need divinely-inspired prayers (Romans 8:26-27). We need to pray at all times in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20).

7. Specific

God gave some very specific directions as to how incense was to be made. He did not allow Moses or the perfumer to do what they liked. Our prayers, too, need to be specific. To blind Bartimaeus, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" "Let me receive my sight", Bartimaeus replied; and Jesus did exactly what he asked! (Mark 10:46-52).

8. Continual

Incense was continually burned on the altar of incense, day and night (Exodus 30:7-8). The Scriptures also encourage us to be persistent in prayer. In fact God says to the watchmen (intercessors), "take no rest, and give Him no rest!" (Isaiah 62:6-7). See also Luke 2:37; 18:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:5; 2 Timothy 1:3.

In spiritual warfare, the Church is to use a "battering ram" of continuous prayer so that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). That calls for persistence!

9. Grace, and grace alone

For the atonement, we read that the cloud of incense covered the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:12-14). While we may see prayer as something we do, this reminds us that every answer to prayer (and, indeed, the privilege of being able to approach God in prayer) is all by God's grace – grace, and grace alone! Praise the Name of the Lord!

QUESTIONS

1. What was "the hour of incense"? (Luke 1:10)
 2. What important things about prayer does incense illustrate?
 3. How important is it that our prayers are "balanced"?
 4. How do we worship "in Spirit and in Truth"?
 5. What are some of the costs or "sacrifices" of prayer?
 6. In what sense are Christians "priests"?
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Chapter 2

WHY PRAY?

If it is true (and it is) that God knows what we need even before we ask Him; if it is true (and it is) that God knows even better than we do what we need and when; then why pray? Why not just leave it all to God? Why not adopt the fatalistic attitude: "The will of God shall be done, and there is nothing I can do to change it!"?

The Bible shows us seven very important reasons why we should still pray!

1. Because God has told us to pray

"Pray constantly; give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:17). If you want to know part of the will of God for you, it is that you should pray constantly!

"Jesus told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1-8)

Jesus expected His followers to pray. He said "When (not "if") you pray ..." (Matt. 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-13). In the parable which Jesus told in this latter Scripture, we see portrayed the beautiful fact that an intercessor links a friend with a need to a Friend who can supply that need!

An intercessor stands in the gap on behalf of those who cannot, or will not, pray for themselves (Ezek. 22:30)

In fact, even if we do not understand why we should pray, we should still pray out of obedience – because God has told us to pray!

It is similar to a parent with a young child who keeps on asking why it should do something. Often the exasperated parent finally says, "Just do as you're told!" or "Because I said so!" Why pray? Because God said so!

2. "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2)

In nine simple words James tells us that there are some things we do not receive, not because God does not want to give them to us, but because we will not come to Him in prayer and ask for them. There are some things we will not receive if we do not ask.

If we, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him? (Matt. 7:11)

How often have we lost something, or sought in vain for a parking space for our car, or have had a very trying day, and we forget to ask God for His help? We get really angry, while all along God is wanting us to turn to Him in prayer and ask for His help. We don't ask, so He may not help.

3. Because there is a war on!

Whether we realize it or not (and whether we like it or not), there is a battle on. Satan and the powers of darkness constantly oppose the Lord, His people and all that they try to do.

One aspect of prayer is spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness (see Eph. 6:10-18; 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21-22)

For example, "The Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached and everyone enters it violently" (Luke 16:16). Salvation, deliverance, etc., involve spiritual warfare for people's lives.

As we wage war in the heavenly places against the powers of darkness, so we will see the victory won on earth. Battles are won by spiritual warfare in the heavenly places; they are often lost by default.

4. Because prayer is fellowship with God

Prayer is one of the principal ways in which we commune and fellowship with God.

God has told us to seek Him and He will reveal Himself to us (Jer. 29:11-14). "Ask, and keep on asking, and you will receive. Seek, and keep on seeking, and you will find. Knock, and keep on knocking, and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11:9-10)

Waiting on God, meditation and praying in the Spirit are all aspects of fellowshiping with God through prayer.

For example, People who love each other always want to spend time in one another's presence: it brings them great joy and pleasure just being together, spending time with each other, getting to know each other.

5. Because prayer brings about God-consciousness and dependence

Without prayer it would be very easy to do (or think that we are doing) things for God in our own strength and ability.

"It is not by (human) might, nor by (human) power, but by My Spirit" says the Lord (Zech. 4:6)

Prayer (beseeching God, or pleading with Him) is humbling! It puts us in our place, and it puts God in His rightful place!

It shows us the futility of works without faith!

6. Because we may be part of the answer

Jesus warned His followers to beware of those who, for pretence, pray long prayers and yet do nothing to help those in need (Mark 12:38-40)

If we are to pray, without becoming hypocrites in our praying, then God may well require us to be part of the answer to our prayers! See James 2:14-26. Always be available to be used by God to be a part (even a small part) of the answer to your prayers.

Faith without works is dead, just as works without faith become "dead works"!

7. Because the Lord wants us to be co-workers with Christ

God could do everything by Himself. Or, He could get His angels to do everything. But He has chosen us to be "labourers together with God" – fellow-workers with Him in the ministry of intercession, in the ministry of reconciliation, and so on (1 Cor. 3:6-9)

For example, Parents with a young child: it is often easier for the parents to do things by themselves but they choose to allow the child to do it with them.

Is it important to pray?

It is if we want to be obedient; if we want all the good things God has for us; if we want to be victorious in battle; if we want to fellowship with God and be conscious of His presence, inspiration and power; if we are willing to be part of the answer, and if we want to be co-workers with Christ in what the Lord is doing in the world!

If we look at the four main types of prayer, we can also see why it is important to pray:

A – Adoration: because He is worthy.

C – Confession: because we need forgiveness.

T – Thanksgiving: because of His goodness.

S – Supplication: because of the 7 things mentioned above.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important for Christians to pray?
2. In what way are Christians involved in a battle or war?
3. How do we "fellowship" with God?
4. Why is prayer humbling?
5. How does the concept of "faith AND works" apply to prayer?
6. How much time each day should we spend in prayer? Is the length of time important?

Chapter 3

"LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY"

Two of the simplest possible statements on prayer are: "You do not have because you do not ask"; "Ask and you will receive so that your joy may be full" (James 4:2; John 16:24). Surely these verses mean that there are some things we do not receive, and therefore we do not have full joy, simply because we do not come to the Father and ask for them in prayer!

What could be simpler? Yet so often real prayer is a last resort rather than a daily reality! Sometimes people jokingly say: "If all else fails, read the instructions". To many people it is a case of: "If all else fails, try praying". But this is certainly not what the Bible teaches, nor is it the example Christ shows us. Indeed, "He always lives to make intercession for us" (Hebrews 7:25). As our Great High Priest this is His paramount ministry, but prayer and intercession are ministries given to every believer.

Many people find it difficult to pray by themselves – they find that their thoughts start to wander onto other things, and they run out of things to pray.

Taking every thought captive

In the context of spiritual warfare, the Bible talks about the need to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-6). Obviously, one of the reasons our minds tend to wander is because there are many other things on our minds (often things we are unconsciously worried about and, therefore, perhaps need to pray about!), but no doubt much is due to a deliberate distraction from the enemy to cause us to stop praying effectively. We need to learn, through prayer, to take every thought and make it captive to obey Christ – that is, to discipline our thinking so that we concentrate on the way the Holy Spirit wants to lead us in prayer. This may take some time and some effort, but we must not allow the enemy to win the victory in this battle if we are really going to pray effective prayers.

Prayer diary

Another help is having a prayer diary in which, on the left-hand page you write the date that you began to pray over a topic, and a summary of what you are praying for; and on the right-hand page, the date and answers to those prayers. In this way you build up a list of prayer topics, continuing to pray for those things that are still not answered and rejoicing in, and giving thanks for, those that have been answered – a personal "prayer and thanksgiving" diary!

Prayer partners

It can be a help to find one or two prayer partners with whom to pray. (Remember Matthew 18:19-

20). In this way you can encourage each other to pray; you can together pray at greater depth and in more detail about a topic, and one person's prayers supplement another's prayers. Praying aloud together in this way also helps you to concentrate on what you are praying and avoid wandering thoughts that may come when you are praying silently by yourself.

Alternatively, if you are by yourself, pray in a whisper so that you articulate your prayers and you can hear your prayers, rather than praying in absolute silence.

Quality or quantity?

People often feel that they are not "great pray-ers" because they cannot pray for great lengths of time. While it is true that there are times when God may lead you to pray for an hour, or take part in a half- night of prayer, or even an all-night prayer meeting, it is also important to realise that the length of time you pray is not the most important thing. It is far more important that we pray in faith, with complete honesty and openness, with perseverance, with right motives, fervently, and so on. While not all repetition is necessarily "vain", Jesus does warn us about "vain repetition" in prayer (Matthew 6:7-8)

Praying for nations

God says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Note the words "a nation" and "any people" – this applies to any nation and people, not just to Israel; this is an eternal, universal truth. If we are concerned for our nation – we need to pray against sin in the nation and pray that righteousness will prevail.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 the Lord said: "If my people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray, seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven and I will forgive their sin and heal their land." (One aspect of "humbling ourselves" is to fast and pray). So God is calling Christians to fast and pray, seek His face, repent and turn from evil so that our sin will be forgiven and healing will come to our land.

Similarly, we read in Jeremiah 18:7-10, "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation ... turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil I intended to do to it. [Remember Nineveh!] And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in My sight, not listening to My voice, then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do to it." [Remember Israel!] Note again, that God is not just talking about Israel: He says, "If at any time... a nation or a kingdom..." This is a general principle to all nations at all times! This is also an extension of the principle God gave to the nation of Israel in Leviticus 26 which states, in essence, "If you obey the Lord, He will bless you. If you disobey, He will punish you (because He loves you). If you confess your sins, He will forgive you". How simple are God's ways! Even a little child can understand His principles!

Paul, in Galatians 6:7-8, echoes the same thought, although applying it to an individual. (But a nation is, of course, a large collection of individuals and so this has national application as well): "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man [or nation] sows, that he will also

reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will, from the Spirit, reap eternal life." We reap what we sow – if we live evil lives we will suffer the consequences of evil fruit; if we live Godly lives we will enjoy the fruit of a blessed, eternal life.

Praying for leaders

Some Christians may feel that it is all right to pray for other Christians, for the salvation of the lost, for the Church, and so on, but what about "secular" things, like governments? Lest we think that secular things are unimportant, or that God is not interested in them, Paul writes: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men; for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, Godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour... " (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

God is concerned about leadership; after all, it is by His authority that they are in those positions, and He has the Sovereign power and absolute authority to raise people up and put people down (Daniel 2:20-21; 4:17). Therefore we are exhorted to pray for our leaders, and to submit to their authority (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17) except when they command things which are contrary to God's laws and they are therefore acting outside of their God-given authority (Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29).

Watchmen

As intercessors, we also need to be watchmen – people who both watch and pray, discerning the times in which we live, discerning what is happening in the spiritual realm and in the heavenly places so that we are aware of what is happening behind the scenes and can warn people to pray accordingly. When we see the enemy coming and discern his tactics we can sound the trumpet, warn the people, intercede and engage in spiritual warfare. Watchmen watch, warn, and as warriors, engage in spiritual warfare. (Ezekiel 33:1-11)

The hour of prayer

The following major prayer topics are offered as a suggestion of how you can spend an hour in prayer. Obviously each day will be different, as the Lord leads, and you do not have to pray over each topic every day! Seek to listen to the Lord for His direction as you pray.

WAITING ON GOD. Spend a few minutes in silence, waiting on God and stilling your heart and mind before Him. Meditate on the Lord.

WORSHIP. Begin by worshipping and praising the Lord for Who He is. Read or sing a Scripture chorus, or hymn, or Psalm of praise.

THANKSGIVING. Thank God for all His goodness to you, and thank Him specifically for prayers He has answered.

CONFESSION. Ask God to search your heart and life, revealing those things that are displeasing to Him. Confess these sins and ask His forgiveness.

SUPPLICATION. Commit yourself, your day and your family to the Lord. Pray concerning your own needs and those of your family.

INTERCESSION. Pray for any of the following, as the Lord leads:

- * those in leadership in the Church and nation (Government).
- * evangelistic outreaches in the nation.
- * Christian use of the media to broadcast the Gospel.
- * your own local church and its needs.
- * revival in the nation.
- * national needs: for peace, unity, Godliness, wise and righteous laws.
- * other nations God lays on your heart, and mission work in those lands.
- * the home and family; youth and Christian youth organisations.
- * the education system.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE. Pray against immorality, the occult, false religions and cults, the use of drugs, lawlessness, violence, abortion, racial division, and principalities and powers of darkness.

Pray that God will help you to walk in the Spirit – today!

QUESTIONS

1. How can we overcome the problem of "wandering thoughts" when we pray? Should all Christians spend an hour in prayer each day?
 2. Why do many Christians find it such a struggle to pray? Why are prayer meetings usually poorly attended, compared with most other church meetings?
 3. What are some of the benefits of keeping a prayer diary? What are some of the benefits of praying with one or two prayer partners?
 4. What did Jesus mean by "vain repetition" in prayer (Matt. 6:7-8) and how can we avoid it?
 5. Is God concerned with nations and governments today, or is He only concerned with the Church, with individuals and the unsaved?
 6. What does it mean to be a spiritual watchman?
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Chapter 4

THE LORD'S PRAYER

When Jesus' disciples saw Jesus praying by Himself, one of them said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John the Baptist taught his followers to pray", and Jesus gave His disciples "The Lord's Prayer" as a model on which to base their praying. See Luke 11:1-4.

It has been suggested by some people that this prayer, commonly called "The Lord's Prayer", should actually be called "The Disciples' Prayer" because it is the prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples. In fact Jesus probably never intended for it to be recited word for word, although there is nothing wrong with doing so, as long as our heart is really in what we are saying! There is no record in the Bible of anyone actually praying this as a prayer. It is really a model prayer or prayer outline, covering the areas of praise, confession, supplication and intercession.

Jesus said, "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to be seen by men. Instead, go into your room, shut the door and pray to your Father in secret. When you pray, don't repeat empty phrases – your prayers are not heard just because of their many words. Instead, pray like this: "Our Father, Who is in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever. Amen." (See Matthew 6:5-15).

OUR FATHER

While it is right and important that we spend times in prayer alone with God, there are also times when we pray together corporately. The word "our" not only implies a group (or at least two or three people) praying together, it also implies unity and agreement in their praying. God has promised special blessing and power in united, corporate prayer (Matt. 18:18-20; Psalm 133). The agreement the Lord is referring to here is not merely mental assent to agree, but a genuine heart-felt agreement that is born of the Holy Spirit – united prayer because it is inspired by the same Spirit.

The word "Father", in the Lord's prayer, emphasises the fact that when we pray we are talking to our Heavenly Father – not a remote God, great though He is, but a Father – personal, loving, caring, providing; one Who loves His children to come to Him and one Who loves to bless by answering their prayers (Mark 10:13-16).

WHO IS IN HEAVEN

God is the Lord of Glory; King of kings and Lord of lords; the Almighty, the Everlasting One, the all-powerful, all-wise God; He is also "our Father"!

The Sovereignty of God and His supremacy over all things – in Heaven, and on earth, and even under the earth – are emphasised by the words "Who is in Heaven". Nothing is outside His control. He rules and reigns! Therefore, when we come to Him, we know that nothing is beyond His power to fulfil, if that is His perfect will for us.

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

This means: "May Your name be revered, respected, honoured, regarded as holy". How sad that the name of our Lord is so blasphemed by the world today. But Christians should hold His name in highest honour. There is power in His name: "Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name", said Jesus, "He will give you" (John 16:23-24).

His name is above all names. "At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that JESUS IS LORD, to the glory of the Father." (Phil. 2:9-11).

While the world may slander His name, let us respect, honour, cherish and love the name above all names.

YOUR KINGDOM COME

The longing of every true believer, everyone who has been born again by the Holy Spirit and who loves their Lord, must surely be the longing for God's Kingdom to come in all its fulness. At the moment we have a glimpse of its glory and perfection, its infinitely desirable nature, but we do not yet experience it in all its fulness.

The Kingdom where Christ is King; the Kingdom where the perfect will of God is done; the Kingdom where all people freely and gladly honour and worship the King; the Kingdom that has triumphed over all evil – "Lord, may Your Kingdom come – quickly!" "Even so, come Lord Jesus", was John's fervent prayer (Rev. 22:20).

There is a deep desire for such a Kingdom in the hearts of all those who read God's Word and have glimpsed, as a foretaste, something of the coming Kingdom in all its glory!

To a certain degree the Kingdom has already come, in the lives and hearts of Christians and in the Christian community as a whole, yet until our lives in practice become transformed to be like that of Christ, we are still some way from experiencing what it is really like. O! for a holy, loving, Christlike people who live in the "Kingdom of God on earth"!

The Kingdom has come; it is yet to come in all its fulness and glory!

YOUR WILL BE DONE

This has both a positive and a negative aspect. Positively, we are praying that those things that

are pleasing to God will be done – not just God's permissive will but His perfect will. How often we fall short of that!

Negatively, it is praying against all those things which are displeasing to God and contrary to His will. It involves binding the powers of darkness and loosing those people who are bound by them (Matt. 18:18). It involves waging warfare against demonic principalities and powers (2 Cor. 10:3-4; Eph. 6:10-13).

While the Lord is Sovereign over all things, it is interesting to notice that He has still asked us to pray that His will be done. Of course, that should start in our lives: "May Your will be done in my life, here and now!"

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

God's will is done perfectly in Heaven; may His will also be done on earth in like manner – starting in my life, in the Church as a whole, then in the world at large.

There is so much in the world that must grieve the Lord. His Word and His ways are largely ignored, His name is blasphemed, people worship false gods, there is greed, violence, injustice, immorality, and so on.

Only as individual lives are reconciled with God through the preaching of the Gospel and as there is repentance, cleansing and the life-transforming power of Christ in people's lives, will God's will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. This should be our earnest desire and prayer.

[Continued in the next chapter]

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think there is no record in the Bible of the Lord's Prayer ever being recited as a prayer?
2. What are the main themes of the Lord's Prayer?
3. What two things do the words "Our Father" remind us of, when we are praying?
4. How can we maintain the balance, in our prayer lives, between the holiness, power, awesomeness of our great God, and His personal intimacy, love and care as our Heavenly Father?
5. Has God's Kingdom come? How will His "will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven"?
6. Where does obedience to God's will begin?

Chapter 5

THE LORD'S PRAYER (*continued*)

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

Even though God knows our every need, He has told us to ask. Asking shows our dependence upon Him and the recognition that all we have is a gift from our loving, providing Heavenly Father – Jehovah Jireh (the Lord Who Provides).

We are told to ask for God's provision for all we need (not necessarily all that we want!) – see Philippians 4:19. We are told, too, to ask for this day's needs – the needs for tomorrow will be taken care of in due course so there is no need to worry or be anxious about tomorrow! (Matt. 6:33-34).

In the wilderness God provided manna each day for the Israelites' needs; He gave them, each day, their daily bread. Only on the day before the sabbath did He give them a double portion, for the next day as well, so that they did not have to gather it on the sabbath (Exodus 16).

God knows our needs. God cares. God provides, each day, for that day's needs.

FORGIVE US OUR SINS

Here is the prayer for forgiveness for all we have done wrong – everything we have thought or said or done that is displeasing to the Lord and contrary to His will. Having looked at our Heavenly Father's sovereignty, His majesty, His loving provision, we now see our need for cleansing. The only way to "ascend the hill of the Lord" and to come into His presence is with clean hands and a pure heart, washed in the precious blood of the Lamb of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is no other way! (Ps. 24: 3-5; Is. 6:1-7).

God is always willing to forgive when we come to Him in true repentance and confess our sins, asking His forgiveness (1 John 1:7-9). But we cannot expect Him to hear and answer our prayers if we refuse to forsake and confess our sins; in fact He has said He will not (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:9,13; Is. 59:1-2)

AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US

When we ask forgiveness, we are asking for it in the same way and to the same extent that we are willing to forgive others! Are we certain of our own forgiveness? If not, perhaps it is because we have not forgiven those who have wronged us? If we do not forgive others, neither will we be forgiven (Matt. 6:14-15; 18:23-35). Interestingly enough, this is the only part of the Lord's prayer that Jesus amplified – obviously showing its importance!

May God grant us forgiving hearts, to forgive even as we have been forgiven!

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

Here is a prayer for both victory in the time of trial, and protection from the attacks of the enemy.

God does not tempt us to sin (James 1:2-4, 12-15) but He does allow our faith to be tested (John 6:6). The devil certainly tempts us! May we, in these times of testing, draw on God's strength, receive the gift of faith, and be victorious (1 Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12-13).

Temptations to sin come from the flesh and from the devil. As Christians we are told to die to the flesh – to be "crucified with Christ" (Rom. 6:1-13). We are also told to submit ourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7).

There is victory, if we will call on the Name of the Lord in prayer, and receive His help and strength (Matt. 26:41).

DELIVER US FROM EVIL (or FROM THE EVIL ONE)

The enemy sometimes comes as a roaring lion – very obvious (1 Pet. 5:8), sometimes as a wolf in sheep's clothing – cleverly disguised (Matt. 7:15), and sometimes as an angel of light – totally deceiving (2 Cor. 11:14). But God knows his ways; He also gives the gift of discernment so that we will not be deceived but will discern the enemy's cunning ways (1 Cor. 12:10). Again, if we will pray and call on the Lord, He will keep us from evil, bring deliverance from demonic attacks and demon possession, and protect us from the evil one.

FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER AND THE GLORY

The Lord's prayer begins with worship and it also ends with worship. Yes, there is a time for confession; yes, there is the need for deliverance and help; yes, there is a place for asking for our daily needs to be supplied, but first and last there is the need to praise our Lord! Indeed, about a third of the Lord's prayer is praise and worship.

How important it is, whenever we pray, that we recognise Who we are praying to. Prayer is not a religious exercise, a passive meditation, a superstitious ritual – it is fellowshiping with our Heavenly Father, the Lord of Glory, the King and Creator of all! It is a divine audience; a royal privilege; a precious time of intimacy with the Lord. Good and right though it is to intercede, prayer is more than just intercession, more than just asking for things – it is coming into the presence of God Himself – His is the one true Kingdom, His is the almighty power, His is the supreme glory, now and forever!

O! worship the King and bow down before Him!

FOR EVER AND EVER

When the Lord revealed to Moses Who He was, He said that His Name was I AM (Exod. 3:13-14). Jesus frequently called Himself by the same title: "I AM ..." For example, in John 8:24, 28 He said, "You will die in your sins unless you believe that I AM ... When you have lifted up the Son of Man [on the Cross], then you will know that I AM" (the word "He" does not occur in the original Greek).

The Lord was, He is, and He always will be – forever. He had no beginning; He has no end – He is eternal. To God, everything is in the present. To know the future is no problem to God, for HE IS. His reign, His Kingdom, His glory, and His power are for ever and ever – unchanging! Hallelujah!

AMEN!

The word "Amen" is a confirmation or seal of our sincerity, our agreement with, and faith in, the prayer just prayed: **May it be so!** Yes, Lord, this is my heart's sincere desire and prayer – so be it!

Here, then, in less than 70 words, is the model prayer or outline which the Lord gave His disciples to pray. A prayer that has been prayed for 2000 years, a prayer that is prayed every day, all around the world. A prayer that is both amazing in its simplicity and yet profound in its depth.

We stand in awe before our Heavenly Father and say, with the disciples of old: "**LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY!**"

[You might have noticed that there is no mention of giving **Thanks** to the Lord in this prayer. It is well worthwhile looking through this whole prayer again and seeing how many things in it should lead us to giving thanks to God! Thanks should be spontaneous, from grateful hearts, for all that God has done, is doing and will do in the future! "**Thank You, Lord, for ...**"]

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the Lord's prayer only ask for God's provision for *this day's* needs? Can we not also pray about future needs?
2. If we are to be forgiven, what must we do?
3. Does God lead us into temptation? If not, how are we tempted?
4. What is meant by "deliverance" from the evil one?
5. Why did God tell Moses His Name was "I AM"? What is the significance of Jesus frequently saying, "I AM ..."?
6. What does "Amen" mean?

Chapter 6

JESUS PRAYER

By reading the Gospels it is clear that Jesus spent much time in prayer – that is, in communion with His Father – and yet very little is said concerning how Jesus prayed or what He said, except in John 17 where we have by far the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. What did Jesus pray?

v.1 He prayed that the Father and the Son would be glorified.

As Christians, everything we do and every prayer we pray should ultimately glorify God. One good test of our prayers and intercessions is this: will the answer to our prayers glorify God? If not, then we are not praying correctly!

v.2-3 He prayed for the salvation of the lost.

One of the reasons we witness and pray for the salvation of the lost is not only so that they might be saved but also that God will be glorified by their salvation and transformed lives. And what is eternal life? Eternal life is a life-transforming knowledge of the Father and the Son; it is not merely an intellectual theology or the ability to sign a creed or doctrinal statement – it is knowing God.

Jesus' desire was to glorify the Father and finish the work He had given Him to do (v.4-5. See also John 9:4).

v.6-10 He prayed for His followers.

Jesus had manifested God's Name, He preached God's Word, people had received God's words, believed, responded and had kept God's Word. Now He prayed for those followers (Christians – followers of Christ), that God would keep them – not that God would take them out of the world, but that He would keep them safe in the world: in the world but not of the world; in the world but not worldly; in the world but that the world would not be in them! (v.11)

v.11 He prayed for the unity of believers.

He did not pray that they would be one in theory, but in reality and truth – as united as the Father and Son are one – in perfect harmony and love; of one mind, heart and Spirit.

v.12-16 He prayed that they would have joy in spite of persecution.

Jesus keeps those who the Father has given Him, and none is lost (except Judas who, as the Scripture foretold, fell away). Now He prays that His disciples will know Jesus' true inner joy in themselves, in spite of the world's hatred of them because they are not worldly, and in spite of all that the evil one might seek to do. "While in the world, Father, keep them from the evil one".

v.17-19 He prayed for their sanctification.

Jesus prayed that God's Word would be such a part of His followers' lives that they would be sanctified (set apart, made holy) by His Word which is Truth. Even though they would be sent out into the world, they would be kept by His Word.

v.20 He prayed for all who will believe.

Jesus' prayer was not just for His immediate disciples, or even for the hundreds of other believers in His day – He also prayed for us and those following us, who will also believe and be saved. "I do not pray for these alone, but for all those who [through the centuries] will believe in Me through their word".

v.21-23 He prayed that the world would believe.

Jesus' desire was that the world might believe. How? Through the amazing unity that His followers, diverse though they might be, would demonstrate. Every act of disunity and conflict within the Body of Christ is to our shame and dishonours His precious Name. Worse, it gives unbelievers an excuse to remain in their unbelief and cynicism. God's desire is that we will be one in the same manner and to the same degree that He and the Father are one.

Impossible? No! not with God's help and our obedience! If Jesus' life was truly manifest in our lives, day by day and moment by moment, we would demonstrate to the world such a remarkable unity that the world would know that the Father had sent Jesus. Moreover, if God's glory was upon us as it was upon Jesus, so that we were perfectly one, then the world would see the manifest love of God in us.

For example, in the early Church, the Christians were of one accord, they prayed with one voice and they were of one heart and soul (Acts 4:24, 32). Consequently, things happened when they prayed, and they saw the glory of God (Acts 4:31; 7:55-56).

v.24 He prayed that we would always be with Him.

There are many things Jesus desires to do in the world today. Often we lag behind, either because we do not seek His will or because we are disobedient when He reveals it to us. He wants us to be with Him wherever He goes and whatever He does. Jesus only did those things He saw the Father doing (John 5:19); likewise we need to be part of what the Lord is doing, just as the Israelites of old followed the cloud of God's glory wherever He went (Exod. 40:34-38).

v.24 He prayed that we would see His glory.

When we are sanctified, when we live in His Word and He lives in us, when we are one both with Him and with other believers, we will begin to see His glory, and O! there is nothing like being in the presence of His glory, seeing a little of Him as He really is! "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then – face to face!" (1 Cor. 13:12).

v.24-26 **He prayed that God's love would be in us.**

Jesus prayed that the same love, to the same degree, with which the Father loved the Son, would also be in us! Hallelujah! Perfect love! Infinite love! Sacrificial love! What more could we ask? When such love is in us, how can we help but do what Jesus did: declare God's Name to the world and manifest that love to the world!

v.26 **He prayed that His life would be in us.**

"I in them". "Christ in you – the hope of glory!" (Col. 1:27). O! to be in Christ and for Christ to be in us – that is glory, and it glorifies God! (John 15:1-8).

This, then, is Jesus' prayer – something dear to the heart of God. If we want a model prayer on which to base our prayers, then here is that model, for in praying this prayer we know that we are praying according to God's will and therefore He will hear and answer! (1 John 5:14-15).

QUESTIONS

1. From this prayer we learn those things which are dear to the heart of God. What are some of them?
2. Is the unity Jesus prayed for, really possible? How?
3. What will convince the world that Jesus really is the Son of God?
4. "In the world but not of the world". What does this mean for us? How is it possible?
5. In what ways can the glory of God be seen in the Church?
6. Which major themes are common to both the Lord's prayer and this prayer of Jesus? Which theme in the Lord's prayer does not occur in John 17?

Chapter 7

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN EVANGELISM

The heart of true evangelism is the life-transforming experience which occurs when a person places their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and they are born again of the Holy Spirit (John 1:12-13; 3:3-7)

This is, profoundly, a spiritual experience, although it should affect every area of the person's life. Prayer therefore has a very important place in effective evangelism and if we neglect it we cannot

expect to see much fruit for our witness.

The Scriptures show us a number of areas in which we need to pray, even before we begin to actively witness for the Lord.

1. Jesus told His disciples that the "fields are ready for harvesting" and this is as true today as it was then. "Pray, therefore, that the Lord of the Harvest will send out labourers into His harvestfields" (Matt. 9:35-38). Remember, too, that as you pray for OTHERS to be sent out to evangelise, the Lord is also calling YOU to be an effective witness wherever He has placed you.

2. Many Christians fail to witness effectively either because their lives do not match up to their testimony, or because of the fear of man. If the former is the case, then that is a sad testimony to our walk with the Lord and the sooner we do something about it the better, both for ourselves and for those to whom we should be witnessing. In a sense the lives of all Christians are a witness – for good or for bad!

If we are ineffective in our witness because of fear, then we really need to seek God for deliverance from the spirit of fear, which is not of God (read and pray through 2 Timothy 1:7). Pray for boldness, and note what happened when the early Church did this, even in the face of persecution (Acts 4:29-31)!

3. We also need to pray for open doors to witness (Col. 4:2-4). It is one thing to be willing to witness, ready to witness and free from fear, but people need to become receptive to what God is wanting to say. In some cases there is simply a lack of hunger for spiritual reality. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). God also says, "Seek Me and you will find Me, when you seek for Me with all your heart I will be found by you" (Jer. 29:13-14). So we need to pray that people will begin to hunger and thirst for the things that really matter – things of the spirit; things of eternal importance. We need to pray that people will seek God until they find Him, and that they will not be side-tracked into demonic, counterfeit or false religions or cults.

In other cases it is more than merely a lack of interest or hunger for spiritual truths that stops people being receptive to the Gospel: the Bible also tells us that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:3-4). There is therefore a spiritual battle going on for people's souls and lives. Through intercession and spiritual warfare, we need to bind the strongman at work in the lives of unbelievers and ask God to set them free so that they can see and believe. Until these spiritual strongholds are broken people may be unable to receive the Lord. The enemy does not easily let people go! He is totally opposed to God and His Kingdom, and will do all that he can to prevent people's salvation. In some cases there is a long and fierce battle (especially, but not only, in the spiritual realm) before a person is saved. Many a person has prayed for years before they have seen the salvation of someone close to them.

May God give us the ability to discern the spirits and wage effective spiritual warfare against every hindrance to people's salvation!

Paul sums this up in his passage on spiritual warfare and the weapons of our warfare when he concludes with the words: "Pray for me that utterance may be given to me to open my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel and that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:19-20)

4. Apathy amongst Christians is another major barrier to them witnessing. It is one thing to be free from fear but we also need such a compassion for the lost, to see them as Christ sees them, to really sense the hopelessness of their eternal salvation apart from Christ, that we break out of our apathy and are ready to witness "in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2)

Then, too, we need to be ready at all times to share our faith with others. So often the opportunity arises when we least expect it, and often we are caught on the hop and miss ideal situations to speak for the Lord. Unless we are prayerfully prepared, ready, expectant, waiting for that opportunity, we will often miss it. Watch and pray that God will both give the opportunity and that you will be ready when it comes. Pray for a spirit of wisdom and grace to effectively speak to the person's heart. Pray, too, for clarity and wisdom as you speak (James 1:5-8)

5. Witnessing should be the spontaneous overflow of a Spirit-filled life. It certainly was in the early Church! But are we really walking in the Spirit moment by moment? Many of us have been filled with the Spirit in the past, but are we NOW walking in the Spirit? A God-given opportunity, coupled with an anointed witness, is a thrilling thing to experience!

The fulness of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are not primarily for the enjoyment of the saints: they are given in order that we might be more effective witnesses. Jesus told His disciples to wait until they were clothed with power from on High (Luke 24:49); that they would receive that power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and that they would be witnesses to Him as a result (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit, together with accompanying signs, wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit came upon them on the Day of Pentecost, and subsequently, and they were mightily anointed in their witness. Consequently multitudes came to the Lord. May the same also be true today! May God again "confirm His Word with signs following" (Mark 16:15-20)

6. In speaking to a person about their salvation, we also need to pray that the Holy Spirit will convict them of "sin, righteousness and judgement" (John 16:7-11). While we may share what the Bible says concerning sin and God's attitude towards it, it is primarily the Holy Spirit's work to bring conviction, Godly sorrow and repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10). It may be easy for us to condemn, but condemnation will not, in itself, lead to repentance and salvation! Pray that the Holy Spirit will bring divine conviction and will draw people to Jesus Christ in order that they might know His cleansing and forgiveness.

7. When the person or people have responded to the Gospel, that is not the end to our prayers! We need to pray, in terms of the parable of the Sower and the Seed, that the enemy will not take away the seed that has been sown; that the cares of this world will not choke the new life which has sprung up; and that the seed will root deep into the good soil so that it can withstand everything that comes against it (Matt. 13:19-23)

Also, let us never forget to give thanks to God for all His answers to prayer. It is one thing to spend

much time in prayer, intercession, spiritual warfare and witnessing, but often we almost forget to give God thanks and praise for all He has done in answer to our prayers. Were it not for God, all our efforts would have been in vain!

Much prayer needs to accompany the follow-up of new Christians. New Christians are described in the Bible as "babies in Christ", needing constant care, encouragement, feeding, teaching and so on. All this needs to be accompanied by prayer. It is interesting to note that in the first chapter of most of Paul's epistles he mentions how he is praying for those to whom he is writing. He obviously took the matter of fervent prayer, as well as effective follow-up, very seriously. Probably the lack of these two things are responsible for many, if not most, of the "back-sliding" we see amongst new converts. Our labour is almost in vain if we pray, witness and see people come to Christ, only to then neglect them so that they go back into the world. We have no right to have (spiritual) children if we are not also prepared to nurture them until they are mature enough to go on in the Lord without our constant help.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so important to depend on the Holy Spirit when we witness?
 2. How can we overcome any "fear of man" when we witness?
 3. What makes people "hunger after God"?
 4. Apathy about witnessing (in Christians), and apathy about spiritual matters (in non-Christians), are two great problems we must overcome. How can we overcome them?
 5. What is "spiritual warfare" for the lost, and why is it necessary?
 6. Explain how each of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8-11) can be used to make our witness more effective.
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Chapter 8

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH CITIES

In recent years, evangelical Christians have placed great emphasis on the salvation of individuals. Generally there has not been a great emphasis on seeing whole families come to the Lord, as long as individuals are being saved.

We have tended to think of God's dealings as only being concerned with the individual, not families, and certainly not cities or nations.

But God is concerned with cities (or towns) and nations too. After all, a city is a large collection of people for whom Christ died. And while God is concerned over one person's sin, He is also concerned at sinful cities and the sins of nations. After all, the sinfulness of cities and nations are powerfully bad examples and influences on the individuals who live in them!

As far back as Genesis 18, God was grieved over the sins of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He was so grieved that He shared with Abraham the judgement He was about to bring on those cities because of their sins. Abraham pleaded with God to spare the cities, and God said that He would if He could find even ten righteous people in the city – but He could not. So God removed Lot, his wife and two daughters, and destroyed the rest of the cities.

God spoke to both Moses and Joshua about setting aside certain cities as cities of refuge (Joshua 20): these were cities to which people could come and find protection if they had accidentally killed someone. Larger cities, in Biblical times, were protected by high walls and gates. The elders and judges of the city exercised their authority and judgement at the gates of the city. The city was thus to be a place of protection and justice for the people.

When Nehemiah saw the state of the city of Jerusalem, with its walls broken down, lying in waste, the haunt of jackals and wild beasts, open to the enemy, undefended and unprotected, he wept, he fasted and he prayed (Nehemiah 1)

The Temple, the House of God, had been restored by Zerubbabel about 100 years earlier, but the city and the Temple still lay unprotected.

Why had the city of Jerusalem been destroyed? Because the people of Israel had rebelled against the Lord; they had refused to listen to His prophets, refused to obey His Word and His laws, and had gone into idolatry. Therefore God said, "I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good" (Jer. 21:10).

Even when the people of Israel were in captivity in Babylon, God said "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29:7).

A city will know the goodness of God, or His judgement, depending on how the people in that city live.

A city's protection

A city is protected by:

1. Its walls and gates. "You shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise" (Is. 60:18; cf. Ps. 100:4).
2. Its watchmen. "I have set watchmen upon your walls; all day and all night they shall never be silent" (Is. 62:6-7). "I have made you a watchman ..." (Ezek. 33:7-9)

3. Its soldiers. When the watchmen perceived the enemy coming, they sounded the alarm (blew the trumpet) and warned the people; it was the soldiers' task to protect the city and its inhabitants (2 Kings 11:4-8)

4. Its elders. The elders sat at the gates of the city and exercised judicial authority over those who lived within – they maintained law and order within the city, while the walls, gates, watchmen and soldiers protected the city from dangers outside. (Ruth 4:1-12)

Our cities need protection! They need watchmen to sound the alarm; they need spiritual elders; they need people who can engage in spiritual warfare and intercession! They need the walls and gates of salvation, praise and thanksgiving! Too many of our walls have been broken down by neglect or by the enemy. Sound the alarm! Warn the people! (Joel 1:14; 2:1, 15-16)

How we need God's help! How we need to cry to Him! "Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Ps. 127:1). We cannot protect the city in our own strength or wisdom. We are utterly dependent upon God for His help!

"When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness. By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 11:10-11)

There is hope! Even if things look bad, there is hope. Nineveh was an exceedingly great, but wicked, city. Nevertheless God had pity on the city (Jonah 4:11) and sent Jonah with a message of impending judgement. When the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, mourned over their sin and cried to God, God spared that heathen city. "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it" (Jonah 3:10)

New Testament examples

God's concern for cities did not stop at the end of the Old Testament. Lest anyone should feel that today God is only concerned for individuals, not cities, let us look at some New Testament examples.

When Jesus sent His disciples out into the towns and villages He said that if a town did not receive their message they were to shake the dust off their feet as a sign against it, and pronounce judgement, not over individuals, but over the town as a whole (Luke 10:8-12)

Jesus Himself did this when He pronounced judgement over Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because of their refusal to repent, in spite of the mighty works done in them (Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 10:13-15). More than this, Jesus compared city with city, and the response of one city with the response of another. He compared Chorazin and Bethsaida with the cities of Tyre and Sidon; He compared Capernaum with Sodom. Thus Jesus dealt not only with individuals and their judgement or salvation, but also with cities as a whole.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not!" (Matt. 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44)

What does Jesus think of our city? Does He weep over it? Does He rejoice over it? Does He pronounce judgement, warning or blessing?

Acts 8:14 says that "Samaria" received the Word of God. No doubt not everyone in Samaria became a true believer in Jesus Christ, but as a city it received God's Word, so Peter and John went there and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit – and they did!

The seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 were written to the churches in seven cities.

The city of Babylon (a type of the city of Rome, built on seven hills) is described in Revelation 17:1-9 as "the great harlot", and "the mother of harlots". In marked contrast, the city of Jerusalem (in spite of all her faults and failings) is described in Revelation 21:1-2 as "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband".

Characteristics of a city

In the Bible we see cities described by many different characteristics, some good and some bad.

Bad cities

Rebellious and wicked city (Ezra 4:12)
City of confusion or chaos (Is. 24:10)
City full of injustice (Ezek. 9:9)
Rebellious, defiled, and oppressive city (Zeph. 3:1)
Waste or ruined city (Is. 61:4; Ezek. 36:35)
Bloody city (Ezek. 22:2)
Undefended city (Is. 25:2)
Divided city (Matt. 12:25) – leads to ruin
Desolate city (Jer. 9:11)
Idolatrous city (Acts 17:16)

Good cities

Righteous, faithful city (Is. 1:26)
City of praise and joy (Jer. 49:25)
City of perfection, beauty and joy (Lam. 2:15)
Faithful city (Zech. 8:3)
City of refuge (Num. 35:14-15)
Beloved city (Rev. 20:9)
Fortified city (Jer. 1:18)
Cities of our God (2 Sam. 10:12)
Great city (Josh. 10:2)

Holy cities (Is. 64:10)

City of the Lord (Is. 60:14)

Great and good cities (Deut. 6:10)

City called JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH = "the Lord is there" (Ezek. 48:35)

How would you describe your city? We need to discern how God sees our city – and pray for it accordingly!

Cities can change!

There is hope: ruined cities can be repaired (Is. 61:4; Ezek. 36:35). Conversely, once-fortified cities can have their defences broken down and they can be destroyed (Is. 1:21; 25:2; 37:26; 64:10). We must continually maintain our defences!

How does God see our city?

QUESTIONS

1. We know that God is concerned about individuals. What Scriptures show us that God is concerned about cities and nations too?
2. Why is it important that we pray for, and seek the welfare of, the city in which we live (Jer. 29:7)?
3. How are cities protected – physically and spiritually?
4. What does the book of Jonah teach us about how God deals with cities?
5. Does God still deal with cities in this way today, or was it just for Old Testament times?
6. How would God describe the city you live in today?

Chapter 9

GOD OF NATIONS

Does God deal with nations, or is He only concerned with individuals? In the Old Testament we read of many examples of God dealing with nations: Egypt, Israel, Arabia, Chaldea (Babylonia), Assyria, Media, Persia (Iran), Greece, Syria, Lebanon, etc. But what about in New Testament times – did the God of nations then become merely the God of individuals? The answer to this question is "No!", as we shall see.

God's dealings with nations

In Jeremiah 18:7-10 we read some very important words, because they are addressed to "A NATION" at "ANY TIME" – they are thus permanently relevant – today, not just 2500 years ago! God said "If at any time I declare, concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare, concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in My sight, not listening to My voice, then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do to it."

This is, in fact, a shorter and more generalised form of what God told Israel centuries earlier, which says, in essence: "If you are obedient as a nation, you will be blessed; if you are disobedient you will be punished; but if you repent, I will forgive you" (Lev. 26:3-13, 14-39, 40-45). That is, "repent of evil or face judgement!"

Proverbs 14:34, again written about "A NATION" and "ANY PEOPLE" (not just Israel), says "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach (disgrace) to any people."

The judgement and punishment of sin are inherent in the sin itself. All sin brings its own guilt, defilement and punishment because all sin is contrary to God's perfect will and therefore hinders His blessing, spoils His plans and separates us from Him.

Galatians 6:7-8 puts it quite clearly, and although written about "a man", it applies also to a nation: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

A nation's attitude towards Israel

Psalms 33:12 reminds us that "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." While this no doubt refers primarily to Israel, it is also true that our nation will be blessed to the extent to which we make God the Lord over our nation, following His laws, and worshipping and serving Him as Lord.

Part of this involves blessing Israel as a nation. God said to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you. Through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:2-4; Gal. 3:8). A nation's attitude towards the nation of Israel is thus very important! See also Jeremiah 12:14-17 and Joel 3.

God's Sovereign rulership over nations

Daniel (2:21; 4:17,25,32; 5:21) clearly shows that God has absolute and supreme authority in the raising up and putting down of kings and those in authority in nations – nothing is outside His control. Psalms 46:10; 47:1-9; 75:6-7 and Proverbs 16:33 confirm this.

Paul also affirms this in Acts 17:26-27 when he says that God "made from one (Adam) every nation of men, to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation". In other words, God controls the borders (boundaries) of nations and the times allotted for each regime!

David prophetically declared that blessing comes to a nation when its rulers rule justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, but godless men are to be rejected for they will inflict pain on a nation (2 Sam. 23:2-7)

Hence, in broad terms, God commands us to honour, respect and obey those in authority over us (Rom. 13:1-5; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), except when they clearly order us to disobey God Himself (something which is outside their God-given authority to do!) See, for example, Acts 4:18-20; 5:28-29). Hence, also, Paul's injunction to pray for good and Godly leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-4)

Biblical descriptions of nations

The Bible describes nations in various ways. Which do you think are most appropriate for your nation?

Neutral descriptions: strange, ancient.

Good descriptions: righteous, holy, great, strong, mighty, wealthy.

Bad descriptions: nation of fierce countenance, void of counsel, ungodly, sinful, hypocritical, rebellious, bitter and hasty, crooked and perverse, foolish, defiled, divided uncircumcised (heathen).

Jesus spoke of the dangers of a kingdom being divided against itself (Matt. 12:25-26; Mark 3:24; Luke 11:17-18). United, we stand; divided, we fall!

The writer to the Hebrews says that through faith we can subdue kingdoms (Heb. 11:32-33). In other words, no matter how oppressive a regime, our faith can enable us to still be victorious! China and Romania are good examples of this.

Finally, Revelation 11:15 reminds us that one day "the kingdom of the world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." "At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11)

How should we respond?

Just before Jesus ascended into Heaven He said to His disciples, "Go ... and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). It is God's desire that people from every nation should hear the Gospel and be saved. Indeed some shall, for Revelation 5:9 talks of people who have been ransomed "from every nation".

Psalm 22:27 says that one day "All the families of the nations shall worship before Him". This is echoed in the book of Revelation where we read again and again of people from every nation worshipping around the throne (7:9-12; 14:6-7; 15:3-4)

Thus the Gospel is to be preached as a testimony to all nations (Matt. 24:14) and God's great Name will be feared among the nations (Mal. 1:11,14).

Is God concerned about nations? Yes, because nations are people, and God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9)

Is the Lord, the God of nations? Yes, because He is Sovereign, and because the redeemed live in every nation, worshipping and serving Him. Hallelujah!

Our task is to pray and to witness so that His great and holy Name is feared amongst our people! Our task is to exalt the Lord our God, as King over all the nations of the earth; to let Him reign over every area of our lives – personally, in the Church, and in the nation.

"Reign King Jesus reign, over all the nations of the earth!"

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is God interested in nations today?
2. Why is a nation's attitude towards Israel important?
3. How does the principle of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7-8) apply to a nation?
4. Leviticus 26 has three main sections. In summary, what do each of them say? Do they apply to nations today?
5. How do you think God sees *your* nation today?
6. Who sets the boundaries of nations, and who puts people in authority in nations? Which Scriptures support your answers?

Chapter 10

THE HIGH PLACES

"Thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose Name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the

humble and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones'." (Isaiah 57:15)

The Almighty God dwells in the high places, for by His very nature He is the only one worthy of such a place – worthy to be worshipped, loved and adored. He also dwells with those who will worship Him with a humble and contrite heart.

This has always been God's eternal purpose, but it has been spoiled by the enemy. While we were created to love and worship and serve the Lord, Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was to try to elevate man to "become like God" – to sit in a place of equality with God rather than humbly serve the Almighty (Gen. 3:1-5).

The tower of Babel was a humanist attempt at equality with God – "Let us build ... a tower whose top is in the heavens [in the high places]; let us make a name for ourselves". God showed His displeasure by confusing their languages and scattering them over all the earth (Gen. 11:1-9).

Good and bad uses of the high places

In the Bible we read of "high places" being used in both the good and bad sense. The high places were where the people worshipped the Lord in both the tabernacle and temple, and where altars were built to the Lord, but when the people fell into idolatry they were also the places where heathen altars were built and idols were worshipped.

In 1 Chronicles 16:37-40 and 2 Chronicles 1:3, 13 we read that David "left Asaph and his brothers before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord to minister before the Ark regularly as every day's work required ... and Zadok the priest and his brethren the priests, before the tabernacle of the Lord at the high place that was at Gibeon, to offer burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of burnt offering, ... to do according to all that is written in the Law of the Lord which He commanded to Israel". "Then Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon, for the tabernacle of meeting with God was there, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness ... Solomon came to Jerusalem from the high place that was at Gibeon, from before the tabernacle of meeting, and reigned over Israel".

Earlier, in 1 Samuel 9:12-14, we read of Samuel coming up to the high place because a sacrifice for the people was to be made there and Samuel must bless it. The following chapter (1 Sam. 10:5-13) talks of the prophets coming down from the high place, prophesying, and there Saul would receive his divine commission and anointing, and he too would prophesy and be turned into a new man.

Not only was the tabernacle placed on a high place, but the temple was also built on the top of Mt Zion – a local high place where worship, sacrifice and meeting with God took place.

The high places belong to the Lord. They are places of worship, sacrifice and meeting with the Lord.

However, the high places also became places of idolatrous worship when Israel disobeyed God and fell into apostasy. False gods, idols and heathen altars on high places were used during

Israel's rebellion against God.

God warned of this in Leviticus 26:27-30. He warned of idolatry in the high places, and He warned them of His anger if they prostituted their worship to idols.

In Numbers 22:41 to 23:5 we read of Balak and Balaam going up to the high places of Baal, but building there seven altars of sacrifice to the Lord, and then seeking a word from God.

In Deuteronomy 12:1-14 God told Israel that when they entered the promised land they were to tear down the heathen altars and burn their idols for He would show them where to worship (namely, on Mount Zion).

The battle of the high places

In the books of Kings and Chronicles we read much of the "battle of the high places". During the reigns of evil kings, idolatrous high places multiplied; during the reigns of better kings this idolatry was lessened but in some cases the high places were not removed and consequently the people went back into idolatry. Some kings, however, had the evil high places destroyed as God had commanded.

For example, in 2 Kings 21:1-3 and 2 Chronicles 33:1-3 we read of Manasseh: "he did evil in the sight of the Lord ... for he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals and made wooden images."

Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, Amaziah and Jotham all allowed high places to remain even though they were basically good kings (1 Kings 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 15:4,14,35). Hezekiah and Josiah, on the other hand, tore down the evil high places (2 Kings 18:4,22; 2 Kings 23:5-20).

In fact, during the reigns of the kings of Israel there was a constant battle between good and evil, worshipping God and worshipping idols, building demonic high places and tearing them down. Thus Elijah challenged king Ahab and the prophets of Baal on a high place (Mt Carmel) to see who was the one true God: the God of Israel or Baal? Who is worthy to be worshipped? And we all know the results of that challenge! (1 Kings 18:17-40).

Some of the worst of these high places involved the sacrifice of children to the god Molech (Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35). Evil high places were both places of spiritual and physical prostitution (Prov. 9:14; Jer. 3:2,21; 17:3). A prostitute is a false, evil "wife" who leads men into unfaithfulness, and God regarded Israel's false, evil worship of idols as prostitution.

While much of the Old Testament deals with Israel's sins and idolatries, there is hope!

The minor prophets

Towards the end of the Old Testament in the minor prophets we read of the Lord "walking in the high places" (Amos 4:13; Micah 1:3,5) and a prophecy that the Lord will cause us to walk in the high places too: "The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet and He will

make me walk upon high places" (Hab. 3:19). See also 2 Samuel 22:32-34; Psalm 18:31-33.

How will God do this? How will the evil high places be torn down and how will God be exalted on the high places, which are rightfully His? Through Christ!

The coming of Christ

When Jesus was born, the angels of God declared: "Glory to God in the Highest" (Luke 2:14). When Jesus was transfigured, it was "up a high mountain" (Matt. 17:1). When Jesus entered Jerusalem just prior to His crucifixion, the people declared "Hosanna to the Son of David ... Hosanna in the Highest!" (Matt. 21:9)

Now that Jesus has risen from the dead and ascended into Heaven, "God has highly exalted Him and given Him the Name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9).

Jesus ascended into the high places – into the heavenlies, where He sits in glory. Satan has been stripped of his usurped authority; the high places belong to our God!

"Seated with Him"

God has "raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).

With Christ, and by the power of His Holy Spirit, we need to take the "high places" on earth back for God, and make them part of God's Kingdom, declaring His glory. Many "high places" in our world today have been prostituted to false gods, idols, demon spirits and so on.

As Christians, we need to intercede, wage spiritual warfare, witness and work to see the Lord restored to His rightful place in the land. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 24:1). The high places belong to the Lord but we have allowed them to be usurped by the enemy. We need to intercede and see demonic high places cleansed, and see God glorified in the high places in our land.

[Continued in the next chapter]

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant, in the Bible, by the term "the high places"?
2. What is the right way in which the high places should be used? What are some wrong ways?
3. In what sense is it true that "The earth is the Lord's"? Why, then, does the Bible talk of "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2)?
4. In what ways are Christians "sitting with Christ in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6)?

5. What is meant by the term "spiritual warfare in the heavenlies (high places)"?
 6. What are some physical "high places" in the area in which you live? What are some of the spiritual "high places"?
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Chapter 11

THE HIGH PLACES *(continued)*

The "high places" have both a physical and a spiritual aspect.

Physical high places

First, the physical aspect: the high places were literally elevated places (hills and mountains) overlooking the surrounding towns and cities. One of the things God has been leading Christians to do, in different parts of the world, is to go to the high places in their towns and cities and to declare the Sovereignty of the Lord over them – to worship, pray, give thanks, confess sin, intercede, engage in spiritual warfare, declare the victory and glory of God, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all things. This has already happened in parts of New Zealand, as well as in other countries.

The enemy is a liar and a usurper; he can only take what we allow him. We need to declare the victory of Calvary. We need to declare the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We need to confess the glory, power and authority of our God. We need to tear down the strongholds of the enemy, to bind evil principalities and powers, and set the captive people free in Jesus' Name!

Spiritual high places

Second, the spiritual aspect: the "high places" referred to in Scripture were not just physical high spots, like hilltops; they were also high places spiritually – places where people either worshipped the Lord or where, in times of apostasy, idols were worshipped. Such pagan worship and idolatry was often accompanied by gross immorality and inevitably led to God's wrath being poured out on the people.

Occult worship, witchcraft, false gods, etc., are an abomination to God. All of these, as well as false ideologies (atheism, humanism, New Age, etc) are regaining a hold in the world today, especially in the Western world.

High places are places of authority and control – either for good or evil. In this sense we may also see a government as a high place of power, authority and influence, and again it may be good or

evil, depending on the extent to which it acknowledges the Lord and is subject to His laws and will. "Righteousness (judged by God's standards!) exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). Again, the Lord is calling Christians to intercede for all who are in authority, and prayer times are being held in and around the centres of political power.

So ... there is much to pray for!

What are some other high places?

The evil high places were where other gods (idols) were worshipped. Some of these false gods today include:

1. **The god of mammon** (Matt. 6:24). Stock markets, interest rates, exchange rates, futures markets, an ever-increasing amount of gambling and constant emphasis on money, wealth and prosperity are all indicators of the way the gods of mammon and materialism are being worshipped. People still worship the god of the golden calf!

2. **Hedonism** (pleasure-seeking and self-gratification). We live in a very self-centred, pleasure-seeking generation where many people are pre-occupied with excitement. While millions of people in our world today face starvation and disease, others squander their money on luxuries and pleasures with little or no thought of the desperate needs of others. Perhaps they give a token gesture towards their plight, but only in order to ease their consciences; they really wish the problems would go away so that they could enjoy themselves and not be bothered by cries for help from the poor and needy.

While communism has its evils of totalitarianism, lack of freedom, Godlessness, fear and suspicion, etc., the extremes of capitalism are just as evil, with its greed, selfishness, exploitation of the weak and vulnerable, and so on.

3. **Sexual immorality**. Closely related to the god of hedonism is sexual licence and immorality – so called "freedom". In the desire for sexual gratification ("freedom without responsibility") all sorts of lusts, immorality, and perversions abound. The increasing rates of abortion, divorce, exnuptial births, family breakdown, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are all evidence of the marked moral decline in our nation.

In the Old Testament, the worship of false gods, Baals and idols was almost invariably accompanied by sexual permissiveness and perversions; it is no different today.

4. **Godless humanism**. Where sin abounds, people prefer and choose to deny the existence of God because it eases their conscience. Humanism, devoid of God and devoid of responsibility, is appealing to the natural, unregenerate, lower human nature. It denies absolutes of right and wrong; it lets man become his own god ("you are god"), doing what is right or pleasurable in his own eyes.

5. **"Modern" Baal worship**. Godless humanism ultimately does not satisfy. Having denied the Creator and His creation, the human spirit still seeks for something or someone to worship. Some

seek it in the mind of intellectualism, others in witchcraft (which is at least as ancient as Gen. 41:8), others in the so-called "New" Age philosophy (which is at least as old as ancient Hinduism – about 5000 years old!) and other occult, para-normal experiences. The gods of this world are as numerous as the pagan gods of the Canaanites, which Israel was told to wipe out but didn't! Their failure to destroy the gods of pagan nations constantly led Israel back into idolatry and God's consequent anger and judgement.

Through prayer and intercession, and spiritual warfare, God is again calling us to tear down the evil high places and declare the Name and the glory of God in the high places of the earth. "The earth is the LORD'S, and all its fulness" (Ps. 24:1).

QUESTIONS

1. How important is it that Christians actually go to the physical high places (hilltops) overlooking cities and towns, to pray for their towns?
 2. What Scriptures encourage us to make confession of the truth: proclamations confessing the Lordship of Christ, the victory of Calvary, the Sovereignty of God, etc?
 3. How can we "tear down the strongholds of the enemy" in our locality?
 4. Many people (non-Christians) passively allow the enemy to have his way in their lives and in their towns. Do Christians have the authority to bind what non-Christians so readily allow?
 5. What are some other spiritual, moral and political high places in our country?
 6. What false gods are worshipped in our country?
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Chapter 12

BINDING AND LOOSING

To "bind" means to restrain. This may be physically or spiritually. For a person to be bound spiritually means that they are hindered from being free in God – free to do all that God wants them to do; they are not "free indeed" (John 8:34-36).

To "loose" is to set free. Notice, however, that when Jesus sets us free we are not free to abuse that liberty and use it as an excuse for sin. Just as God set the boundaries (limits) of the Promised Land for the nation of Israel (see Ex. 19:12, 23; 23:31) so the Christian who has been set free must not use this freedom to give expression to the flesh (Rom. 6:1-23).

Some physical Old Testament examples

The words "bind", "bound", "bondage" and "loose" (and their derivatives) occur often in Scripture. Let us first look at three physical Old Testament examples of binding and loosing.

1. **Genesis 22:9-14.** Abraham bound his son Isaac, but God told him to loose him, set him free, and in his place to bind a lamb that God provided as the sacrifice on the altar.

Sin binds us. Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb who was bound and offered as a sacrifice so that we, who should have died for our sin, could be loosed and set free.

2. **Judges 15:9-14; 16:4-21.** Samson, who no one could bind while he was obedient to God, lost his strength when his vow to God was broken. Then he was bound, blinded and became a slave (which is typical of what persistent sin does to us!)

3. **Daniel 3:19-25.** Three men were bound (the words "bound" and "bind" occur 4 times in 5 verses) and were cast into the fiery furnace, but Jesus set them free! King Nebuchadnezzar said, "I see four men loose ... and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of God". Praise God, when Jesus sets us free we are free indeed!

Though the above are literal, physical, historical examples of binding and loosing, we can still learn spiritual principles from them.

The prophetic Old Testament books

In the prophetic books of the Old Testament (especially Psalms and Isaiah) we see some further examples of binding and loosing, this time primarily spiritual examples.

4. **Psalms 102:18-22.** God looked down from His sanctuary "to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death" (v. 20 AV). This thought is further amplified in Isaiah, as mentioned below.

5. **Isaiah 61:1-2.** "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted [the works of the evil one], to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (See also Ps. 147:3; Is. 30:26; Luke 4:18-19; 10:34).

6. **Isaiah 58:6-7.** In this passage God indicates that there is more to a true spiritual fast than simply going without food. Fasting should be positive and constructive, not just a denial of food. "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs (straps) of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke". In other words, we fast (and pray) in order to see those who are bound, loosed and set free. Loose the chains, undo the binds, break the yokes and set people free in Jesus' Name through prayer and fasting!

Some physical New Testament examples

7. **Acts 9:1-31.** Before Saul's conversion he was bound by a religious spirit (a zealous spirit of tradition) and persecuted the early Christians, bringing them into physical bondage and prison (Acts 22:4-5). Then, on the road to Damascus he met Jesus, the One Who he was really persecuting! Jesus loosed Saul and set him free. Now he became zealous for the things of the Lord – he was free indeed!

As a result of his zealousness for Christ, he was eventually physically bound by those who still did not believe in Jesus the Messiah. He was bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles (Acts 21:10-14, 33; 28:20). But while bound physically, Paul was still free spiritually. God had warned Paul of what he would suffer in Jerusalem but Paul was willing to suffer for the sake of his Saviour and for the sake of the Gospel. Thus he went up to Jerusalem "bound in the Spirit" (that is, willing to be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit; Acts 20:22-23). Like his Saviour, He laid down his life willingly (John 10:14-18).

In summary, at first Saul was free physically but bound spiritually. Later he was set free spiritually but was bound physically!

8. **Acts 16:16-34.** Paul and Silas were imprisoned for their faith in Christ and their preaching of the Gospel (physical freedom is not guaranteed to those who are saved, especially in some countries). But God set them free: an earthquake loosed their bonds and opened the doors. As a result the jailer and his family came to the Lord. See also Acts 12:1-17.

9. **Philemon 8-21.** Onesimus is another interesting example. He was a slave who set himself free (he ran away from Philemon, his master). But because both Onesimus and Philemon were Christians, Paul sent Onesimus back to his master, to serve him again, but Paul wrote to Philemon begging him to treat Onesimus as a brother in the Lord and therefore free.

Three people in the New Testament who were loosed

10. **A woman with an infirmity** (Luke 13:11-17)

This physical problem clearly had spiritual origins. In verse 11 it says that the woman "had had a spirit of infirmity for 18 years". Jesus said "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity" and she was immediately healed. When challenged by the ruler of the synagogue because He had healed on the Sabbath, Jesus replied "ought not this woman, ... whom Satan has bound for 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" This was a Satanic bondage, with a physical manifestation. Jesus set her free physically and spiritually.

11. **Lazarus** (John 11:1-44)

Lazarus became ill and died. Four days later Jesus raised him from the dead, and when he came to the entrance of the tomb, still bound in grave clothes, Jesus cried those immortal words: "LOOSE HIM, AND LET HIM GO!" (v.44).

Lazarus was bound by death and decay; he was bound by the grave clothes, but Jesus set him free because He has power and authority over even death itself. Hallelujah!

12. **Jesus** (Acts 2:24)

We all know that Jesus, too, rose from the dead, triumphing over sin, Satan and death. Peter puts it so beautifully in this verse when he says: "God raised Him up, having LOOSED the pangs of death, because IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE for Him to be held by it". Praise God, nothing that Satan could do, could destroy the Son of God. Bound by grave clothes, entombed and sealed in that tomb, with a Roman guard; dead and buried, but "He arose! He arose! Hallelujah, Christ arose!"

[Continued in the next chapter]

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to be "spiritually bound"?
2. In what ways can a person be spiritually bound?
3. What brings about spiritual bondages?
4. How can you tell if a person is spiritually bound?
5. How can a person be loosed and set free from spiritual bondage?
6. What does it mean to be "free indeed" (John 8:34-36)?

Chapter 13

BINDING AND LOOSING *(continued)*

Three examples of spiritual bondages

13. **Gadarene demoniac** (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

Here is a man who was possessed and bound by a large number of demons ("Legion"). He was so bound and possessed by evil spirits, under whose influence he had great physical strength, that no-one could bind him with chains. But when Jesus bound the powers of darkness and loosed this man from spiritual bondage, he was healed and set free. Jesus allowed the demons to go into a

herd of pigs but He forbade them to stay in the man. The enemy binds people, but God can bind the enemy, loose people and set them free.

Notice, too, the destructive powers of the enemy (Mark 5:4-5, 13). Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy" (John 10:10)

14. **Simon the sorcerer** (Acts 8:9-24)

Simon was a magician in Samaria who had great influence until Philip went to Samaria and proclaimed Christ to them, with signs and wonders following, so that demon possessed people were set free from unclean spirits and many were healed. (Not all sickness is due to demon possession, of course).

Simon saw the signs and wonders that God did through Philip and he believed and was baptized (v.13). Note: the same Greek word for "believe" is used in verses 12, 13 and Acts 16:31, so it appears that Simon's faith was genuine. However, later Peter said to him, "Your heart is not right before God ... Repent ... You are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Simon was still bound in unrighteousness. Simon asked Peter to pray for him that he might be set free, and although we are not told anything further that happened, the implication is that he was set free.

15. **Girl with a spirit of divination** (Acts 16:16-18)

In this case a slave girl had a spirit of divination so that she was a fortune-teller who brought her owners much financial gain. Even though what she called out for many days was true ("These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation"), Paul discerned the evil spirit behind it and wanted nothing to do with such an association. He therefore commanded the evil spirit to come out of her and she was immediately loosed and set free.

Binding the strongman

Jesus, on one occasion, was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons (that is, Satan; the name literally means "lord of the flies"). In reply, Jesus said, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then he may plunder his house" (Matt. 12:22-29). In other words, before a person can be loosed from demonic power, the evil strong man occupying his "house" (body) must first be bound, then the person can be set free. See also Mark 3:22-27; Luke 11:14-22.

"Whatever you bind on earth ..."

Jesus said: "Whatever things you bind on earth shall be, having been bound in Heaven, and whatever things you loose on earth shall be, having been loosed in Heaven" (Matt. 18:18, literal Greek translation). The tenses of these verbs indicate that the initiative for all binding and loosing comes from God in Heaven. But as we follow His leading we can bind the powers of darkness here on earth and loose those people who have been in bondage to them; and it shall be done on earth, even as it has been done in Heaven!

However, in praying for people, Jesus warns us that there must be a willingness on their part to be filled with the Holy Spirit instead of evil spirits. "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came', and when he comes he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself and they enter and dwell there. So the last state of that man becomes worse than the first" (Matt. 12:43-45)

Jesus not only binds the powers of darkness, casts them out and sets people free; He also baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire! (Matt. 3:11). He wants our "houses" (lives) swept, put in order, AND filled with His Holy Spirit. We need to be delivered, cleansed and filled with the Spirit – loosed and set free in our spirits – in order to fully follow the Lord.

Enemy strongholds

On the same theme of demonic strongholds, and binding and loosing, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 "For though we are walking in the flesh, we are not fighting according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but have the power of God to overthrow [evil] strongholds, overthrow reasonings and every high thing that rises up against the knowledge of God, and take every design (thought or plan) captive to obey Christ, being ready to avenge all disobedience whenever your obedience is fulfilled."

Three situations

(a) Individuals. When an individual person desires to be set free then we have their authority to pray with them, and on their behalf, that the powers of darkness be bound and the person be set free in Jesus' Name. God respects our wills, even though they may be contrary to His will. But when we truly surrender our whole lives to the Lord, and allow Him to work fully in our lives, great things can happen; evil is bound and we are set free!

(b) Situations, cities and nations. When we are interceding for, or waging spiritual warfare over, situations, cities or nations, which involve a large number of people, then the situation is very different. The problem arises because many of the people are unwilling for God to loose them and set them free from evil. We can pray against the evil, pray that people will become willing to obey God, but we cannot over-ride their God-given wills, which even God respects! Jesus once said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but YOU WOULD NOT!" (Matt. 23:37). Jesus Himself allowed ungodly people to over-rule what He longed to do for them; He has that much respect for our will!

We cannot force people to do things by our intercession and spiritual warfare. "Whoever will may take of the water of life ..." (Rev. 22:17) but whoever will not will be allowed to go to hell – to a Christless eternity. We should pray, and do all we can to encourage people to follow the Lord and His ways, but ultimately the decision rests with them.

(c) Satan. Satan himself is the prince over the principalities and powers of darkness. Nowhere in the Bible are we given authority to bind Satan himself. He was stripped of his authority at the Cross (Col. 2:13-15) and today he only works by deception, lies, fear and usurped authority (if we allow him). We are told to submit ourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee from us – he has to! (James 4:7)

The day will come when Satan will be bound for 1000 years. After that he will be loosed for a short time and then he will be cast into the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:1-10). Hell was created for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41) and their time will come. In the meantime we are called to preach the Good News of God's saving grace, and freedom to all who desire to be set free from all the works of the enemy.

The choice is ours: total freedom in Christ, loosed from all that would hold us back, or bound in the ways of darkness. "Choose today who you will serve ... As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!" (Josh. 24:14-15)

QUESTIONS

1. What did Jesus mean when He talked of "binding and loosing" (Matt. 18:18)? Can any Christian "bind and loose"?
2. Does participation in occult activities always lead to spiritual bondage?
3. Why would a spirit of divination tell people that Paul and the other disciples were "servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation" (Acts 16:16-18)? Why did Paul allow the spirit to manifest for several days before he dealt with it?
4. What did Jesus mean when He talked about a "strongman" (Matt. 12:22-29)?
5. Why is it so important that people want to be set free, before praying for them?
6. What is one of the main differences between praying for individuals and praying for communities (cities, towns and nations)?

Chapter 14

BREAK THE YOKE!

A yoke is a wooden cross-piece which is fastened to the necks of two oxen or other animals, and attached to a plough or wagon which they are to pull. The yoke binds the two animals together; where one goes, the other must also go.

The term "yoke", in the Bible, is used both literally and figuratively. Figuratively, it is used of the yoke of bondage or slavery; the yoke of affliction; the yoke of punishment for sin, and the yoke of union with Christ in His life, service and ministry.

A yoke can be good or bad, depending on to whom, or to what, we are yoked!

In using the expression "Break the Yoke!" we are referring to breaking the yoke of bondage to sin and the powers of darkness, both personally and in society as a whole.

The yoke of bondage to another person

When Jacob "robbed" his brother Esau of his birth-right, Esau went to his father Isaac, pleading with him for a blessing too. Isaac replied, "By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother. But when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck" (Gen. 27:38-40)

One of the yokes some people are under is the yoke of bondage to some other person. This dominating or controlling spirit can bind a person into always doing what the other person wants. Sometimes the domination comes from a person who is no longer alive. Such spirits are particularly strong in witchcraft and spiritism, where controlling spirits order a person's life. God's answer: Break loose! Break the yoke from off your neck! Be free – free to be the person God created you to be!

The yoke of bondage to sin

"My transgressions were bound into a yoke. By His hand they were fastened together. They were set upon my neck. He caused my strength to fail. The Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand" (Lam. 1:14).

Perpetual sin, of which we do not repent, can become a yoke around our necks that breaks our spiritual power and authority, and leaves us ineffective in God's service. Beware of the deceitfulness of sin! Especially beware of becoming careless about sin and unrepentant. God's answer: Ask God to search your heart (Ps. 139:23-24). Ask the Holy Spirit to bring about Godly sorrow and repentance in your heart (2 Cor. 7:10). Confess your sins whenever you are aware of them; keep short accounts with God; walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7 - 2:1). Don't allow your sins to "build up" and be bound into a yoke about your neck which strips you of your spiritual strength.

The yoke of legalism

When some Jews tried to re-enforce the rite of circumcision according to the Law of Moses, the apostles and elders gathered together to debate the matter. The issue at stake was whether Christians (especially Gentile Christians) were still bound by the Law of Moses regarding circumcision. Peter summed up the position by saying, "Why are you testing God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? We

believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (Acts 15:10-11)

The whole issue of legalism (a return to obedience to the Jewish law) is dealt with quite extensively in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Sometimes the yoke of legalism is put upon us by other people; sometimes the enemy puts legalistic thoughts in our minds. Am I really saved? Have I committed the unpardonable sin? Has God really forgiven me? Perhaps if I try harder and do more for God, then He will forgive me?

The scribes and Pharisees were legalistic. Jesus said: "The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' [judgement] seat, so practise and observe whatever they tell you, but do not do what they do. For they preach but do not practise. They bind heavy burdens on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men" (Matt. 23:1-5). It is right to be obedient to God. In this age of the Spirit God has written His laws on our hearts; we obey from the heart because we love God. We are not under a yoke of bondage to legalistic men, but under the control of God's Spirit.

"For FREEDOM, Christ has set us free! Stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). "Whoever the Son sets free is free indeed" (John 8:36). Hallelujah! If the Son makes you free, you will be truly free. (This does not, of course, mean that we are free to sin. We are free within the perfect boundaries of God's Word and God's Spirit).

Unequally yoked to unbelievers

In our daily lives we constantly work and associate with people and have various kinds of relationships with them. The closest and deepest of all human relationships is in marriage. But we are also in other working relationships in our jobs, friendships and other commitments. It is therefore of great importance that we do not allow ourselves to get into any relationship which leads us to become unequally yoked together with unbelievers in a way which is harmful to our Christian lives and witness. (See 2 Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1)

Two oxen may be yoked together. Two horses may be yoked together. But you don't yoke a horse and an ox together; they are just not compatible.

Conversely, we should be yoked together with true believers as partners, in fellowship, with the Body of Christ. Paul said, "I ask you also, true yoke-fellow, help these women [to agree in the Lord], for they have laboured side by side with me in the Gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the Book of Life" (Phil. 4:3)

Yoked together with Jesus

Jesus said, "Come to Me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). Many people labour under all sorts of yokes. Jesus calls us to come to Him and be yoked to Him. He will take the weight and

burden, and we will find rest for our souls.

Moreover, if we (as Christians) are all yoked to Him, then we will also be yoked together to one another – in fellowship, in communion, in partnership, in the work of the Lord. We will be "fellow workmen for God", or "God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9), not working against one another, in opposition, but "working together with Him" (2 Cor. 6:1); yoked together by one yoke – Christ's yoke!

Let us, then, break off every evil yoke and take His yoke upon us, for His glory and our blessing!

The yoke of other nations

Not only can individuals be in ungodly yokes, but even nations can be yoked in unholy alliances. Those nations which are essentially Christian-based, need to be very careful with whom they form alliances, treaties, etc., or they may end up serving Godless foreign nations whose laws are far from God's laws. Let such nations beware!

At one time Israel was in bondage to Egypt and the Israelites bore the burden of that yoke until the Lord set them free (Lev. 26:13). In Ezekiel 30:18 God says, "when I break the yoke of Egypt". In Jeremiah 27 we read that God gave Nebuchadnezzar permission to put nations under his yoke, but in chapter 28 we read that some years later God broke the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian yoke was described as being "exceedingly heavy" (Is. 47:6)

While God punishes sin, He does not keep His anger forever. In Nahum 1:12-13 we read, "Thus says the Lord, 'Though they are strong and numerous, they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break his yoke from off you and will burst your bonds asunder'."

If our nation is under any ungodly yokes to other nations, we need to fast and pray that God will set us free. "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" (Is. 58:6). These yokes may be economic, spiritual, legal, moral and so on.

Isaiah 61:1-4 and Luke 4:18 apply this same concept on the individual basis rather than national.

The yoke of iron because of disobedience

Apart from the yoke of ungodly alliances, a nation may also come under a "yoke of iron" because of its disobedience and rebellion against God, and especially because of ingratitude for all of God's goodness and blessing (see Deuteronomy 28:47-51).

Over the centuries Israel, who knew God and had been blessed by God, failed to give God thanks for His goodness, and backslid into idolatry. Many of the Old Testament references to yokes have to do with this yoke of iron (bondage and servitude to other nations, especially Babylon) because of their sin and disobedience.

A nation which has known the Lord's ways and His blessings, and yet turns its back on Him, disobeys His laws, and becomes ungrateful and turns to idolatry, is in a very serious state. Like Israel of old it may experience a yoke of iron because of its rebellion – the yoke may be economic, servitude to other nations, "natural" disasters, or being bound in some other way.

"Let My people go"

In chapters 3-14 of Exodus we read of the very real battle to set God's people free from the yoke of Egypt. The words "let My people go", "the king of Egypt will not let you go", and similar phrases, occur 22 times in these chapters. The yoke was not easily broken, battles were not quickly won, but of course God did win, and His people were set free to worship and serve Him in the Promised Land.

O the blessing of repentance and returning to the Lord and His ways, so that every yoke of bondage is broken and we are set free – gloriously free! (see Ezek. 34:25-31)

Yokes to break

Yokes may come for many different reasons and may take many different forms. The following are a few that may need to be broken; seek the Lord about any others that need to be broken.

- (a) In our own personal lives: fear, negativity, control by other people, compulsive bad habits, fear of man.
- (b) In the Church: traditionalism (man-made traditions), worldliness, humanism, nominal Christianity, compromise, apathy.
- (c) In society: curse of idolatry, sexual immorality, abortion, Godlessness.
- (d) In the nation: economically, ungodly conventions, submission to the control and domination of other world powers.

In Jesus' Name we need to repent, break the yoke and BE FREE!

QUESTIONS

1. What does the word "yoke" mean in its figurative sense?
2. How do people or nations come under a yoke?
3. What were the main reasons why Israel came under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar?
4. How can yokes be broken?
5. What are some of the other yokes that need to be broken in the church, society, or our nation?

6. What did Jesus mean by the words "My yoke", in Matthew 11:28-30?

Chapter 15

PRAYING IN FAITH

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1)

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6)

The Greek word for faith means "a firm persuasion" or "a conviction based upon hearing". Thus Paul writes in Romans 10:17 "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes through a word (*rhema*) of Christ."

Three aspects of faith

Ephesians 4:5 speaks of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism", yet each of these is a compound unity; a trinity of three aspects: "one Lord" (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), "one faith" (see below), "one baptism" (water, Holy Spirit, fire – Matthew 3:11).

The Bible clearly speaks of three aspects of faith:

1. Saving faith

Faith is essential for salvation: "By grace you have been saved, through faith; and that is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, it is not of works lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). We are saved by God's grace, which we receive as a gift by faith.

Until we have been saved and cleansed from our sin by Jesus' Blood, our sins are a blockage to our prayers being heard by God. Some people feel their prayers "never get any higher than the ceiling" – that ceiling may be a ceiling of sin (see Isaiah 59:1-2)

For effective prayer – prayer that is heard by God and answered (1 John 5:14-15) – we must have been saved by faith in Jesus' atoning death and our sins must be washed away (cancelled) by His Blood.

2. Daily faith

The faith we exercised for salvation, sometime in the past, must not remain just a thing of the past.

Saying, "I was saved [sometime in the past] ..." must become "I am saved ... NOW!" We need daily faith; we must walk day by day in faith (2 Cor. 5:7). This is a step by step walk (Ps. 119:105). Nowhere does the Bible speak of "a leap of faith"!

"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20)

The prayers we pray in faith today are heard in Heaven not just because we once exercised faith for salvation but because the life we now live, we live by (daily) faith in the Son of God Who loves us! Every moment of every day we need to walk by faith. Every prayer we pray each day we pray in faith. We have a loving God Who loves to communicate with His sons and daughters!

3. Supernatural gift of faith

Sometimes we are faced with humanly-impossible situations. Praise God, nothing is impossible to Him! Whatever is God's will, if we pray in faith and persevere to overcome all obstacles (often Satanic) then the "impossible" is possible with God.

1 Corinthians 12:9 lists the "gift of faith" as one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit – a supernatural gift for a supernatural need! Even when everything else (except God's Word) points in the opposite direction, we can pray in the Spirit, exercise the gift of faith, and see the "impossible" happen, to God's glory.

Faith is based on a word from God

There are many things we would like to receive or we would like to happen. Not only are there things we need, but also additional things that we want. Faith involves more than merely asking God to supply all the things we would like. We might hope that God will do something, but faith involves a word from God first; faith is the substance, assurance, or foundation, upon which our prayer is based and built.

A literal translation of Romans 10:17 is "faith is from hearing, and the hearing through Christ's word."

Faith is based on a word from God, either written (logos) or spoken (rhema), but in either case it is quickened (made alive) to us by the Holy Spirit (Psalm 119:50 says "Your word has quickened me.")

Faith is acting when we know God has spoken to us personally. God may speak to us through other people, but primarily faith is based on God's word to us. Faith then involves action; it is not just saying "I believe God can do such-and-such"; it is acting on that belief (see Matthew 14:28-33)

"Claiming" promises

The Bible contains many promises that God has given to people down through the ages. We need to be careful about taking God's promises to other people out of context, and "claiming" them for

ourselves, unless God specifically gives that promise to us.

Moreover, many of God's promises have explicit or implicit conditions to them. Unless we fulfill the conditions then there is no point in "claiming" the promise! In fact, since God always honours His word, if we fulfill His conditions then we never need to "claim" the promise – He will always fulfill what He has promised if we do our part. Instead of "claiming" promises we should make sure we are being obedient to what God has told us to do. When we fulfill the conditions, God will look after fulfilling the promise!

Be careful of promises which are only half a verse – the blessing half, without the conditions half!

When we know God's will – when we have the word (*rhema*) of God on a situation revealed (quicken) by the Holy Spirit to us, then we can pray in faith, knowing that we are praying according to God's will because He has spoken to us, and therefore we will be heard and answered (1 John 5:14-15). Then, it is not the size of our faith that is important (it may be "as small as a grain of mustard seed" – Matt. 17:19-20) but the greatness of the God in Whom we place our faith.

No matter how much "faith" we may have in a cheque we have been given, whether it is for \$1 or \$1,000,000 it is the size of the bank account that is all important, not so much the size of our faith!

We can have great faith in a weak bridge, or little faith in a strong bridge; but it is the strength of the bridge, not the size of our faith, that matters. How great is your God? Then even if your faith seems small and weak, trust Him, for He is able to do all that which He has promised!

Faith and humility

Sometimes people pray "very impressive" prayers – loud, long, fast, flowing and eloquent – but this neither generates faith nor helps to get our prayers answered. Often, a lot of what appears to be "faith" is merely presumption! Sincerity is important, for God looks on the heart, not on outward impressions (1 Sam. 16:7).

Jesus cast out demons with a word – "Out!" (Matt. 8:16)

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead He simply thanked His Father for hearing Him – no great long "impressive" prayers! (John 11:41-42)

Look at the prayers of the two people whose faith Jesus was astonished at, and to whom Jesus said, "great is your faith": the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt. 15:21-28) and the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13). They were two people of great humility, as well as great faith.

Humility, sincerity and trust in God are important when we pray (See the parable of the Pharisee and the sinner who went into the Temple to pray – Luke 18:10-14)

Confession

To "confess" means "to agree with" or "to say the same thing as". When we confess our sin, we are agreeing with God that we have sinned. God, by His Holy Spirit and through our conscience, or by His Word, says "You have sinned". When we confess our sin, we agree with God and say, "Yes, I have sinned".

But as well as this "negative" confession of sin, the Bible teaches us that we should also positively confess our faith – confess God's Word, confess the Truth. Don't utter negative doubts and unbelief, especially after you have prayed "in faith"!

We need to watch what we say and think. Often the devil would have us think and express negative doubts; let us resist this firmly (James 4:7)

Jesus said, "According to your faith, be it done to you" (Matt. 9:29). Perhaps the converse is also true: "According to your unbelief, be it done to you!"

We need to watch carefully what we think and say; we must not give the enemy any opportunity to block our prayers from being answered! How can we pray in faith if we also utter negative doubts – they are not compatible! (James 3:11-12)

Don't be an "unbelieving believer"! If God has spoken, believe His word, act upon it and pray it into being.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between faith, hope and presumption?
2. In what ways might God respond differently to prayers for our "needs" as distinct from prayers for our "wants"?
3. "Faith is active. Hope is passive". Discuss this statement.
4. In what ways did the Syro-Phoenician woman and the centurion show great humility and great faith?
5. Why is it important to be careful what we confess with our mouth?
6. What should we do if we "don't have the faith" to pray for something?

Chapter 16

HOW TO HAVE FAITH, AND GROW IN FAITH

Faith is a gift from God

This fact emphasises God's sovereignty. Ephesians 2:8-9 says that we are saved by God's grace, and that we accept this grace by faith. But even that faith is a gift from God.

1 Corinthians 12:9 speaks of the "gift of faith" – a supernatural gift to believe what is humanly impossible, for with God all things are possible.

In Mark 11:22 Jesus says, "Have the faith of God" (literal translation) – not merely "faith in God" but the faith which God imparts to the believer.

One of the interesting things about God's gifts is that they are given to those who ask: ask and receive! We usually think of gifts as being something given to us without asking, but Jesus said that if we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him (Matt. 7:11). "Ask and it will be given to you", Jesus said (Matt. 7:7). In 1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul says to "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts".

So, we don't just sit back and wait; we come to God and ask! Moreover, whatever God wants us to do, He will also give us the faith for, and He will provide all we need to do the job. He is the great Provider – Jehovah Jireh (Gen. 22:14). So come to God and ask!

Faith comes by hearing a word from God

Romans 10:17 says "Faith comes from hearing the rhema (quicken word) of Christ". Therefore we need to read God's Word and listen to what He is saying to us. God speaks to us, we hear, believe and obey!

This word may be part of the general teaching of Scripture, given to all of us, or it may be a specific word which God speaks to us. It may come through the Bible, or directly inspired by the Holy Spirit to our spirit. No matter how it comes, if it is the word of God then we can have absolute faith and trust in that word.

Faith comes from knowing God

As we seek God, spend time in prayer, meditation, reading His Word; as we begin to see Him as He really is, then faith will come and our faith will grow. Our faith is strengthened as we learn more and more about our faithful, trustworthy God; the only one who never fails. True, sometimes what He allows may not be what we would have chosen but that is merely because He knows so much better than we do!

Some Psalms which speak of God's greatness and faithfulness are Psalms 8, 23, 91, 121, 139. It is great to read and meditate on these Psalms and then turn to Him in prayer and praise.

Faith comes by remembering what God has done in the past

Many of the celebrations we have are remembrances of past events. Israel's feasts and memorials were their way of remembering God's goodness. The Passover (Ex. 12:21-27), crossing the Jordan River (Jos. 4:1-7), the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26), and Pentecost (Acts 2:1-42) are four of the many events we celebrate as we remember God's goodness to us. We remember Jesus' birth at Christmas, His death and resurrection at Easter, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and so on. Our anniversaries (birthday, wedding anniversaries, etc) all encourage us to remember God's goodness in the past and have faith in Him for the future. In spite of our weaknesses, failings and sins, God is ever-faithful. "For the Lord is good; His steadfast love endures for ever and His faithfulness to all generations" (Ps. 100:5)

Faith grows with exercise

Faith is like a muscle – it grows with exercise, experience and testing (1 Pet. 1:6-9). We need to keep on asking, keep our ears open to hear what the Lord is saying, and act on His Word. We need to press on to know God more and more intimately – let us not grow complacent and think we need no more.

Remember also to give thanks to God for all His goodness and faithfulness; this helps to build faith as we remember what God has done, and thank Him for it.

Obedience is a key to faith

If God speaks and we continually disobey, we cannot expect that God will continue to speak to us and give us faith. Jesus said that He would reveal Himself to those who obey Him (John 14:21). If we want faith, we need divine revelation, and this comes as a result of obedience.

It is a "waste of time" God speaking to us and giving us faith if we fail to obey and exercise the faith He has given us. Faith unused, like a muscle unused, will weaken and perhaps even die.

Hope has to do with the future and is, in a sense, passive. But faith is active, NOW! We must "step out of the boat" in obedience to the Lord (Matt. 14:28-33). Peter's faith faltered because he looked at the circumstances instead of keeping his eyes on the Lord, but at least he had the faith to step out of the boat and walk on water when Jesus gave him the word, which the other disciples didn't – they just sat in the security of the boat!

As God leads and directs you, step out of the boat! Go further each time. Just as an athlete constantly pushes himself further and further in his training, so let God "stretch" your faith. But "walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7), don't try to take a "blind leap of faith", which may only be human presumption.

Twice in Romans (1:5; 16:26) Paul speaks of the "obedience of faith", for we can hardly claim to have faith if we are not obedient to the word God has given!

So faith comes by hearing (or reading) the Word of God, confessing it, believing it, and acting upon it (Rev. 1:3)

Remember the greatness of the God in whom you put your trust.

It is not the size of our faith which is important but the greatness of the God in Whom we put our faith (Matt. 17:20). One of the main reasons we doubt is because we look at the circumstances, believe a lie from the devil, take our eyes off the Lord, and forget Who has spoken to us. See Luke 17:5-6; Habakkuk 2:18-20; 1 Kings 18:21-39.

What if things don't work out as we expected?

God's ways are not our ways (Is. 55:8-9). Sometimes things do not turn out as we expected. It is very easy to get pre-conceived ideas of what God will do, or should do, or what we would like Him to do! These are not always God's ways! When things "go wrong" the prayer of faith says "Lord, I don't understand, but I still trust You!" That is real faith! After all Job suffered, he was still able to say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). That is faith!

Habakkuk (3:17-19) said "Though the fig tree does not blossom and there is no fruit on the vine, though the produce of the olive tree fails, and the fields yield no food, though the flock is cut off from the fold and there are no herds in the stalls [and that would be real devastation in those days] yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation". THAT IS FAITH!

Proverbs 20:24 (Living Bible) says "Since the Lord is directing our steps, why try to understand everything that happens along the way?" Trust Him!

QUESTIONS

1. How do we receive God's gifts?
2. Why should people who have been Christians for a long time be stronger in faith and have greater faith than younger Christians?
3. What is the purpose of memorials, anniversaries and celebrations such as Christmas, Passover and Pentecost?
4. Why is obedience so important to faith?
5. If faith is like a muscle, how can it be developed and strengthened?
6. "Faith reaches its greatest height, not when prayers are answered but when we trust God in spite of outward circumstances". Discuss this statement.

Chapter 17

DEALING WITH DOUBTS AND UNBELIEF

The Bible teaches that unbelief is one of the factors which leads to eternal separation from God. Revelation 21:8 says that the unbelieving will be cast into the lake of fire. Here the "unbelieving" refers to unbelieving non-Christians. Now this, of course, does not apply to Christians, but how tragic it is when we, who know so much, are guilty of unbelief – of not believing what God has said to us (Luke 12:48; James 3:1). To be an "unbelieving believer" is surely a tragic thing. Yet many born again Christians do not really believe all that God says. At times we can be plagued with doubts and unbelief.

Romans 14:23 says "he who doubts is condemned ... because he does not act from faith, for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin".

In Matthew 21:21 Jesus said that if we have faith and never doubt, we could say to a mountain "be removed and cast into the sea" and it would happen. Even in the worldly sense some mountains (or at least hills) have been bulldozed into the sea because some people believed it was possible, and did it in order to provide more flat land!

There is a story told of a person who longed for a hill, that blocked out their sun, to be moved, so they prayed with great earnestness that God would remove the hill and let the sunshine it. After much "believing" prayer one night they went to bed, having "claimed" God's promises and prayed with great "faith". Next morning they awoke and opened the curtains, only to find the hill still there. "Just as I thought", they said! Sometimes we try to convince God that we believe, when in reality, deep down, there is much unbelief, even in our praying.

How often, after God has answered someone's prayers in an amazing way, have you heard the person exclaim, "I can't believe it!"

Mark 9:23 says "All things are possible to those who believe".

Confess your faith positively

It is important that we, as Christians, learn to confess our faith positively and not let negative words or thoughts destroy our faith. "According to your faith be it done unto you", Jesus said (Matt. 9:29).

One of the benefits of singing Scripture choruses and many other hymns is that we are positively confessing our faith in God and His Word.

Don't harbour negative doubts – cast them out. "Submit yourself (including your thoughts and words) to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

The importance of faith

When we realize the importance of faith we can understand the sin of unbelief:

1. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9). Jesus told us to ask our Heavenly Father and He will give us good gifts (Matt. 7:11). So ask for the gift of faith!
2. Faith is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). As Christians, we should be developing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and all the more so as we mature in Christ. The fruit of faith should be very evident in the lives of mature Christians. We are to be fruit bearers!
3. One of the three "abiding" qualities is faith (1 Cor. 13:13). One day there will no longer be any need for some of the gifts of the Spirit, but faith endures forever: faith in a faithful God!
4. Faith is absolutely essential for salvation (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8; Heb. 11:6)

The rest of faith

The third and fourth chapters of Hebrews talk a lot about faith and the "rest of faith". Christians cannot enter into their full inheritance apart from faith. The sin of unbelief will keep them from resting in faith (Heb. 3:18-19). We will struggle and strive in the energy of the flesh until we come to that place where we learn to rest in faith.

Faith is important because it differentiates between the carnal, unspiritual and unregenerate people and the true believer. Moreover, faith is not just a thing of the mind – we walk by faith. In other words, people should be able to see by our daily lives, our words, our attitudes, our lifestyle, and so on, that we are people of faith. Faith is practical; faith works.

Faith is an acknowledgement of the goodness and greatness of God

1. God loves us with a perfect, unfailing, eternal love.
2. God longs for the very best possible for us.
3. God has the wisdom to know what is best for us.
4. God has the power to bring it to pass! (Rom. 8:28-39)

Faith is knowing the truth of those statements and believing them. Unbelief is to deny the very nature and character of a good and loving God, and to deny His Word.

Faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8) – so accept it! Doubt is from the devil (Rom. 14:23) – so reject it! Most of us have "incomplete faith". We believe God for many things, such as our salvation, but find it very hard to believe God for some other things.

Like the man whose son was possessed by an evil spirit, we may feel like praying "I believe; help

my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

We are often like the disciples who said to Jesus, "Why could we not cast it out?", to which Jesus replied, "Because of your little faith" (Matt. 17:18-20)

What can we do about unbelief?

For the Christian, unbelief is denying that God's word is true. To not believe is to deny God's nature, His character, His word, His love and power. While most Christians have problems in this area at some time, nevertheless it is important that we deal with doubts and unbelief and not allow them to continue.

Because it is a sin not to believe what God has said, we need to confess it as a sin. Ask for faith. Read, listen to, confess and believe God's Word. Resist all lying thoughts.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is unbelief sin?
2. What two things will keep us from the rest of faith? (Heb. 3:18-19)
3. Sometimes Christians are plagued with doubts. What can we do about this?
4. What is the difference between doubts and unbelief?
5. What could be the end result of an "unbelieving heart"? (Heb. 3:12)
6. In what ways can Christian parents encourage their children to grow in faith?

Chapter 18

PRAYER – FROM GOD'S POINT OF VIEW

Being human, we naturally tend to look at most things from a very human point of view. However, one of the reasons God gave us the Scriptures was so that we could see some things from God's point of view, not just our own.

For example, we often discuss church services after the meeting and say whether we feel it was a "good meeting" or not. Usually our judgement is very subjective, based mainly on "what I got out of it". We even say worship was good if we enjoyed it. Seldom, if ever, do we ask the question, "What did God feel about the meeting? Did He enjoy it?" After all, worship should primarily be for God's benefit and enjoyment, not ours! How self-centred we can be – even in our worship!

Let us, then, look at prayer from God's point of view, as revealed in the Scriptures.

God wants us to talk to Him in prayer

It is not hard to come to God in prayer when we are desperate or in need! But God wants us to talk to Him at all times, not just when we are desperate (1 Thess. 5:17)

God longs for fellowship with us in prayer, just as a Father longs for fellowship with his children. Jesus commenced the Lord's prayer with the words, "Our Father ..." (Matt. 6:9). In Jesus' prayer in John 17, He used the name "Father" no less than 6 times. Prayer is fellowship with our Heavenly Father and He longs for that fellowship sometimes even more than we do! (1 John 1:3)

God says, "Call unto Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you do not know" (Jer. 33:3). The Bible says that "Whoever calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved (or delivered, in the time of need)" – see Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21.

God is waiting, listening for our call. What does He hear?

The words "Quench not the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19-20) were written in the context of prophecy – God's desire to speak to us. Jesus expressed it this way as He wept over the city of Jerusalem: "I would have gathered you together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings" (Matt. 23:37). There is a longing on God's part to fellowship with us. Is there a longing in our hearts for fellowship with Him?

Revelation 8:3-4 shows us that our prayers are like sweet-smelling incense ascending from us to Heaven. May the altar of incense never go out, day or night! (Ex. 30:7-8)

Praise and worship

Psalm 22:3 tells us that God so enjoys our praise that He "inhabits" the praises of His people. Indeed, God rejoices over us with singing, because He loves us, and loves our praise and worship (Zeph. 3:17).

We need to rejoice in the Lord, sometimes in spite of difficulties (Hab. 3:17-19). You see, we do not worship God primarily for our blessing, but His! Therefore, no matter how we feel, we offer our sacrifice of praise to Him Who is worthy to receive all praise and glory.

It is true that in blessing God, we also are blessed. But let us get our motives right: our aim is to

bless God's Name, not merely to get blessed ourselves. May we keep our eyes on Him, not on ourselves and our needs!

Jesus told a woman at a well in Samaria that God the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24)

(a) Spirit – not just with our minds (intellectually), not with meaningless ritual, vain repetition or mere words, but worshipping Him with our spirit, in the Spirit.

(b) Truth – sincerely, genuinely, without hypocrisy – our lives backing up our words of praise and worship.

Thanks

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says that this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you:

(a) Rejoice always (no matter what happens)

(b) Pray constantly (at any time, in any situation)

(c) Give thanks in all circumstances

Contrast this with the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15, especially verses 12-13) – the younger son never gave thanks; in greed and ingratitude he squandered what he was given and ended up in misery!

See also the story of Jesus and the 10 lepers (Luke 17:12-19). Note Jesus' disappointment at their lack of gratitude when He said "Were not 10 cleansed? Where are the (other) nine?"

How much time do we spend in thanking God, compared with the time we spent asking?

Ingratitude is so prevalent today – people expect "their rights" without being willing to pay the price, or even be grateful for it! Tragically we can treat God in the same way, expecting Him to do things for us, to answer our prayers, and yet forgetting to give Him thanks for all He has done. It is so easy to grumble; so hard to really express true gratitude.

How sad it is when parents give things to their children and then have to ask, "What do you say?" In many ways we live in a selfish, self-centred, ungrateful age.

Intercession

God looks for watchmen and intercessors – people who have spiritual discernment to see the approach of the enemy, and people who will come to God to intercede on behalf of others. Both in Isaiah 59:14-16 and Ezekiel 22:29-30 we read that God looked for an intercessor, but in both cases He could find none. God wants intercessors! God does not want to have to punish the wicked – He would far rather that intercessors prayed for them, that they were warned of their evil

ways, and that they repented so that He could forgive them!

Most parents hate having to punish their children but because they love them it is sometimes necessary to punish them, especially if they are not repentant for the wrong things they have done.

Just as there is no forgiveness without repentance, so there must be judgement and punishment if there is no intercessor, and no turning of people back to God.

Psalm 47:9 tells us that "The shields of the earth belong to God". What are the shields of the earth? As Christians, God is our shield (Ps. 5:11-12), and we use the shield of faith in spiritual battles (Eph. 6:16). But what are the shields of ungodly nations – what protection do they have? What stops God pouring out His wrath in judgement, instead of acting in mercy? Intercession! People standing in the gap (the gap in the wall of defence).

Note, however, that sometimes God says, "Enough! Stop interceding" (See Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12; Gen. 6:3)

2 Thessalonians 2:3-8a suggests that intercessors have a restraining influence over evil, rebellion and lawlessness. No wonder God wants watchmen and intercessors! In fact, God says, "Give Me no rest" – day and night His watchmen and intercessors are to be on their guard and interceding (Is. 62:6-7)

Continual prayer

The story Jesus told in Luke 11:5-8 shows that the Lord is our Friend Who can help in the time of need. No matter what time of the day or night, the earnest intercessor can come to Him for help. In fact, the intercessor links two friends – one with a need, and the One Who can supply that need! Intercession (and prayer in general) is an expression of our friendship with God.

Therefore, "Ask and keep on asking, ..." (Luke 11:9-13). Jesus emphasised this further by telling His disciples the story of the widow and the unrighteous judge, to the end that people should always pray and not give up (Luke 18:1- 8)

"You do not have because you do not ask", James reminds us (4:2). God is not a reluctant Giver, but He gives in answer to the persistent prayer of faith.

"Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations as your heritage", the Lord said (Ps. 2:8)

In fact, God will even share with intercessors what He is about to do; He enables them to "discern the times" in which they live (1 Chr. 12:32; Amos 3:7)

In Genesis 18:17-33 God chose to share with Abraham what He was about to do, knowing that Abraham will intercede (bargain?!) for the cities. God answered every request of Abraham – and more! When Abraham stopped at 10 righteous, God still delivered the only 4 He could find (19:15-23)

Confession

God wants us to pray, He wants to hear our prayers, but there is one major hindrance to Him hearing our prayers – sin! Isaiah 59:1-2 says that our iniquities separate us from God so that He cannot hear, and therefore cannot answer our prayers.

Our approach to God is only through Jesus Christ, and when we come with "clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:3-5)

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). If there is no repentance, no confession – then no forgiveness! But He has already paid the price! Our sins have already been paid for!

There is only one approach, one access to God: with clean hands and a pure heart by way of His Son.

The Son gives us access to the Father, for the Son always has access to His Father!

Let us come to the Father and see how He would have us to pray!

QUESTIONS

1. How can we really see prayer from God's point of view?
2. Why does God want us to pray?
3. What does it mean to "worship God in Spirit and in Truth" (John 4:24)?
4. What does it mean to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 4:17). Can a Christian really do this?
5. Often our prayer-times are mostly asking God for things. How can we enlarge our prayers to cover more than just asking?
6. In what ways can my prayer life be improved?

AN HOUR OF PRAYER

"Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:40-41)

If you spend an average of only 7 minutes on each of the following, you will have spent over an hour in prayer!

1. **WAITING ON GOD.** "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). "Take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5)
2. **MEDITATING ON THE LORD.** Isaiah 40:28-31; Psalm 1:1-3.
3. **WORSHIPPING THE LORD.** "Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise!" (Psalm 100:4)
4. **COMMITTING MYSELF AND THE DAY TO THE LORD.** "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act" (Psalm 37:5)
5. **PRAYING FOR MYSELF AND MY FAMILY.** "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the Faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8)
6. **INTERCEDING FOR OTHERS.** 1 Timothy 2:1-2.
7. **CONFESSION OF SIN.** 1 John 1:7-9.
8. **THANKSGIVING.** "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6)
9. **LISTENING TO GOD.** "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go. I will counsel you with My eye upon you" (Psalm 32:8)

Some suggested passages for meditation

Joshua 1:8-9	Joel 2:12-14	Philippians 4:6-8
1 Chronicles 29:10-13	Joel 2:28-29	Hebrews 11:6
2 Chronicles 7:14	Jonah 1:1-3	Hebrews 12:1-2
Psalm 1:1-3	Matthew 6:33-34	Hebrews 13:20-21
Psalm 19:14	Matthew 16:18	James 4:7
Psalm 23:1-3	Luke 10:27	1 Peter 1:6-7
Psalm 24:3-5	Acts 9:31	1 John 1:1-3
Psalm 133:1-3	Romans 12:1-2	Jude 24-25
Isaiah 55:6-9	Ephesians 6:10-12	Revelation 3:20
Jeremiah 29:11-14	Philippians 2:6-8	Revelation 5:12

INTERCESSORY PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

THE CHURCH, EVANGELISM, REVIVAL

For unity, faith, vision, holiness, Christian witness.

Against liberalism, humanism, worldliness, apathy.
For revival and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
For divine conviction of sin.
For a recovery of true Biblical Christianity and Church life.
For evangelism, evangelistic organisations and outreaches.
For new Christians, their growth, maturity and discipleship.
For Church leaders.
For prayer and Bible study groups.
For Bible schools and Christian education.
For Christian use of the media.

THE GOVERNMENT

For those in positions of authority.
For God-fearing leaders.
For Christian leaders in the nation.
For wisdom in legislation, especially in moral issues.
For justice, police, judges and law courts.

THE NATION

Against immorality, drug abuse, lawlessness, violence, cults, the occult, false religions, materialism, Godlessness, humanism, subversion, unemployment, suicide.
About social, moral, economic and racial issues.
For industrial and racial harmony.
For the media.
For peace and unity.
For those who are derided, poor, oppressed or discouraged.

THE HOME AND FAMILY

Against immorality, adultery, divorce, abortion, rebellion, physical and sexual abuse.
For love, discipline, respect.
For strong, loving, united families.
For Christian homes and families.
For young people: their early conversion and strength to resist temptation.
For Christian youth organisations, Sunday Schools, Bible classes, youth groups.

A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP OF OUR PRAYER LIVES

- Are we really in a right relationship with God when we pray?

- Are our hands clean, our hearts pure (Ps. 24:3-4), our minds renewed (Rom. 12:1-2), and our lips cleansed (Is. 6:5-7)?
 - Are we really worshipping God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24)?
 - Are we really praying at all times:
 - in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18)?
 - in faith (not merely human hope)?
 - according to God's will (1 John 5:14-15)?
 - inspired by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27)?
 - Are we really:
 - listening to God?
 - reading His Word, meditating on it and on Him?
 - waiting patiently on Him?
 - hearing His voice?
 - Are we giving thanks for prayers answered and God's goodness, mercy and grace to us (Phil. 4:6)?
 - Are we really praying with divine authority against principalities and powers (Eph. 6:10-12)?
 - Are we clothed with the armour of God, using spiritual weapons, and binding and loosing (Eph. 6:13-17; Matt. 18:18)?
-

"PRAY FOR THE NATION!"

I woke early one Sunday morning in November 1971 and felt that the Lord was saying to me to call the Christians of New Zealand to 'Pray for the Nation'.

Those four words – **"PRAY FOR THE NATION"** – have helped shape and motivate my life and ministry ever since!

The ministry of *Pray for the Nation* commenced in January 1972 and later also took the name *Intercessors for New Zealand*, to identify it more closely with a number of other similar intercessory prayer movements around the world.

This book contains further Bible studies on the theme of prayer, especially as it relates to praying for cities and nations.

Will you join us and "*Pray for the Nation*"? <https://www.pray-for-the-nation.org>