

Abraham, the Intercessor

Genesis 18:16-33

Intro: Many who have studied the life of Abraham have noticed that there were two things which characterized Abraham's life: one, his tent; the other, his altar. His tent showed that he was a stranger and pilgrim in the land which the Lord promised to him and to his descendants. His altar showed that he was a worshiper of the one true God.

The altar was the place where animal sacrifices were offered by fire to the Lord, and each one was typical of the greater sacrifice our Lord Jesus Christ would make in offering Himself to God on our behalf. Obviously Abel used an altar when he presented his offering of "the firstlings of his flock" to the Lord (see Gen. 4:4), but his altar was not mentioned. The first time the word altar is used in Scripture is when we are told what Noah did when he came out of the ark after the flood. This is what we read in Gen. 8:20:

And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

Obviously the Lord was very pleased with what Noah did. Although we are not told when, the Lord had instructed His people even at that early time concerning sacrifices.

Altars and worship were associated with prayer. And we read several times about Abraham calling upon the name of the Lord. In both verses 7 and 8 of Genesis 12 we are told that Abram (as he was called then) "builded...an altar unto the Lord," and in verse 8 these words are added: "And called upon the name of the Lord." This means that Abram prayed.

When Abram was expelled from Egypt, and returned to the promises land, we read these words in Gen. 13:3, 4 about his trip, and what he did when he got back to the place where he had been before:

3 And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai;

4 Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

So Abram was no stranger to prayer, which is the same as saying that he knew what it meant to have fellowship with God in prayer. And he did not just pray when there was a crisis in his life; he prayed as a way of life.

This is important to know when we come to his prayer in Genesis 18.

But we need to remember what we have learned about Lot. Lot's father, Haran, who was Abram's brother, died before Abram and Sarai left Ur of the Chaldees. After Abram and Lot came back to Canaan after their sojourn in Egypt, they had so many cattle that they could no longer live together. And so they parted, and it was then that Lot went to Sodom to live. That proved to be a tragic mistake. He was involved in a war of the kings of Canaan, and taken captive. Abram took his servants, defeated Lot's captors, and set Lot free. But unfortunately Lot went back to Sodom. Many things took place with Abram in the meantime, and several years passed until we get to Genesis 18. There we find that three men came to Abram's tent, and it proved to be the Lord and two angels. They appeared to Abraham as three men. The Lord had come for two reasons: (1) He came to tell Sarah that she would have a son. (2) He came to let Abraham know that He was going to see the situation in Sodom and Gomorrah because the cry of wickedness from those cities had reached his ears in heaven. And He had come to bring judgment upon them. As we pick up the story in verse 16 of Gen. 18, we learn that two of them went on to Sodom while the Lord remained behind to tell Abraham what He was about to do.

I want to discuss this passage under three headings, and I give them to you now so you will know what is ahead.

- 1) We have **WHAT THE LORD SAID ABOUT ABRAHAM** (Gen. 18:16-19).
- 2) Secondly, **WHAT THE LORD SAID TO ABRAHAM** (Gen. 18:20-22).
- 2) Thirdly, **ABRAHAM'S PRAYER** (Gen. 18:23-33).

Now let us consider the first point.

I. WHAT THE LORD SAID ABOUT ABRAHAM (Gen. 18:16-19).

Perhaps at this point the Lord was speaking to the two angels because we are not told that the angels left until we get to verse 22. Perhaps the Lord was musing in His heart. We must remember that the Lord is never in doubt as to what He is going to do, nor does He make up His mind as He goes along (like we often do). This is expressed as an accommodation to those of us who are reading this account. Obviously Abraham would not have known what the Lord's mission was with the two angels unless the Lord had made it known to him. And so it is clear that the Lord intended to tell Abraham so that Abraham would pray. The Lord knew Abraham's

great love for Lot, and his concern for Lot because Lot was living in that very, very wicked city of Sodom.

— Verses 17 and 18 give us a statement of the sovereign purpose of God for Abraham, that purpose for which Abraham had originally left his home in Ur of the Chaldees. God's purpose for Abraham was that through him a mighty nation would come, and from that nation the Redeemer would arise who would bring the blessing of salvation to "all the nations of the earth." They would be "blessed" with the gift of salvation.

Why did Abraham have such a unique place in the plan and purpose of God? The answer is in verse 19.

The word "know" is used in the sense of choosing. The NASB renders it, "For I have chosen him, i.e., chosen Abraham. He had not only chosen Abraham for salvation, and chosen him to head the nation from which the Lord Jesus Christ would come, but he had chosen Abraham to command his family to "keep the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment." You see, there were responsibilities resting upon Abraham which placed him under obligation to God in connection with the fulfillment of God's plan for him and his family. And I believe that the Lord was thinking here about Lot whom Abraham had taken into his family when his brother, Haran, died.

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I personally would have a hard time believing that Lot was a child of God except for the testimony given to him by the Apostle Peter. Peter was discussing in his second epistle how God had brought judgment upon angels and men in the past, and he mentioned Sodom and Gomorrah. This is what he said:

- 6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly;
7 **And delivered just Lot**, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:
8 (For **that righteous man** dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed **his righteous soul** from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)
9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver **the godly** out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Pet. 2:6-9)

— What did it mean that Lot's soul was vexed? It meant that he was oppressed. It meant that he was tormented by all of the sin that was going

on around him every day. And yet he didn't move away.

— The only other evidence we have that Lot was saved is seen in the way that he tried to protect the two angels who came into Sodom. They probably appeared to him, too, as men. The tragedy of it was that he was willing to sacrifice his two daughters in order to protect the men.

Lot's story may be given to us to show that it is possible for a person to be saved even though outwardly there is practically no evidence of salvation.

Anyway, the Lord knew that Abraham would do something about Lot if he knew what was going to happen.

This leads me to my second point.

II. WHAT THE LORD SAID TO ABRAHAM (Gen. 18:20-22).

— People usually feel that since God has not done anything about their sin, that He won't do anything. They may feel that He doesn't know, or that He doesn't care, but they go on in their sin not knowing what we are told about sin here in our text. The Lord informed Abraham that there was a cry rising from Sodom and Gomorrah, or about Sodom and Gomorrah which reached to heaven, a cry for help, a cry for vengeance, a cry invoking God to do something about the terrible sin which gets its name from the city of Sodom.

Do we want to know how the Lord feels about homosexuality? Our answer is here in verse 20. It is "very grievous" to Him. Romans 1 tells us that it is a sin which falls upon nations who don't want to have anything to do with God. It is the lowest of the low. Where the cry for vengeance comes from, we do not know. But we can be sure that even in the case of our nation, homosexuality without doubt invites the judgment of God.

Abraham knew what the Lord would find, and so he was assured that judgment was going to fall on Sodom and Gomorrah -- and his thoughts went immediately to Lot and his family.

— At this point the angels went on to Sodom and Gomorrah, "but Abraham stood yet before the Lord." What a solemn and yet precious picture those words set before us! And the opening words of verse 23 are equally wonderful: "And Abraham drew near." Drew near to what, or to whom?

He drew near to the Lord. Let us look in the remaining time at:

III. ABRAHAM'S PRAYER (Gen. 18:23-33).

— In Abraham's day he could pray, and the Lord would respond -- and this is what we see happening six times in Abraham's prayer:

- 1) Abraham's first request (vv. 23-25); God's answer (v. 26).
- 2) Abraham's second request (vv. 27-28a); God's answer (v. 28b).
- 3) Abraham's third request (v. 29a); God's answer (v. 29b).
- 4) Abraham's fourth request (v. 30a); God's answer (v. 30b).
- 5) Abraham's fifth request (v. 31a); God's answer (v. 31b).
- 6) Abraham's sixth request (v. 32a); God's answer (v. 32b).

With the sixth request, Abraham ended his prayer. The Lord went His way, and Abraham returned home.

The first request was that the Lord might spare Sodom if there were fifty righteous people there, the second was for forty-five, the third for forty; the fourth for thirty, the fifth for twenty, and the last for ten.

— Notice that as began his prayer Abraham was trusting in the righteousness of the Lord, and he knew that all men are responsible to the Lord for their actions. He was the Judge of all the earth, and He could be depended upon to do right. It was inconceivable to Abraham that God would do anything but what was absolutely just.

What we see throughout the prayer is Abraham's faith growing stronger and stronger. At the same time we see that Abraham felt each time he prayed that the numbers of the righteous were very small. It is interesting to see that although Lot was a righteous man, and vexed with what was going on in Sodom, he had not been an instrument for good in that wicked city.

— Before I make a few comments about the prayer, let me remind you of what happened. The angels found the city worthy of judgment. They wamed Lot to get his family out. He spoke to his sons-in-law, but they thought that he was mocking them -- and they refused to go. He took his wife and two daughters, and left, but only after they were pressured to go by the angels. Lot's wife looked back, and was turned into a pillar of salt. Only Lot and his two daughters survived. But the verses I want to read to you are verses 27 through 29 in chapter 19. They are truly very precious verses:

27 And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the LORD:

28 And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.
29 And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that **God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow**, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt (Gen. 19:27-29).

Why did Abraham stop with his request for ten righteous people in the city? I don't know for sure. Perhaps it was because he felt that if there were not ten righteous people in the city, the city had actually rejected the Lord and deserved to be punished. Or, as Matthew Henry also suggested, it may have been that the Spirit of God restrained Abraham from asking for more grace. Or Gen. 18:33 suggests that the Lord departed after the request that Abraham had made for ten righteous people.

Concl: What lessons can we learn from this prayer of Abraham?

First, we learn that God wants us to pray, casting our care upon Him. And it is important that we come to Him like Abraham did, in faith and yet in humility. And the worse conditions get, the more we need to give ourselves to prayer.

Second, we learn that the Lord's people are very precious to Him. It may very well be that the reason our country has not fallen under devastating judgments from the Lord is because there are so many believers in America.

Third, we learn that God knows and God is grieved by sin. In His mercy He may delay judgment, but, if sin is not forsaken, judgment will eventually come. Homosexuality is sin! It is well-known in heaven that we as a nation have accepted it, supported it, and legalized it. But only those who know the Word of God, know that there is a terrible price to be paid if our nation persists in the way it is now going. Our greatest need in this country is not political; it is moral. May Abraham's prayer make us careful that we are not guilty of anything that is displeasing to the Lord.

Fourth, we learn that God answers our prayers, and often goes beyond even what He has promised to do. There were not ten righteous people in Sodom, but God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow. Although Abraham never mentioned Lot in his prayer, the Lord knew that it was for Lot that Abraham was chiefly concerned.

Charles Simeon said in his sermon on this prayer that he considered it “an intercession the most instructive of all that are recorded in the sacred volume” (Vol. 1, p. 151). I don’t know that I would say that it is “the most instructive,” but I would say that it contains some of the most wonderful lessons on prayer that you and I need to learn. And may our hearts be moved to pray for our loved ones, and for the Lord’s people in our generation, that it might please the Lord to revive our fellowship with the Lord that we might be useful instruments in His hand in these very evil days in which we live.

Jacob's Fear and His Prayer

or

From Fear to Prayer to Peace

Genesis 32:1-12

Intro: The Lord uses various means to teach us to pray, and more often than not the means is trouble of some kind. Sin has given us a feeling of independence. Consequently we are inclined to believe that we can handle our problems, or at least most of them, even though we know that there are problems which will be too big for us.

Jacob was a man who had many problems. His big problem, trouble with his twin brother Esau, was of his own doing. Or we might say that it was one which his mother brought on him. It all started when Isaac their father was old, his eyes were failing, he did not know when he was going to die, and so he felt that he should give Esau the blessing of the firstborn. He sent Esau to hunt some venison, and to prepare for him a tasty dish which was his favorite. You find all of this back in Genesis 27.

Rebekah, Isaac's wife and the mother of the twins, heard what her husband was planning to do, and so she prepared that same dish for her husband, and sent Jacob in to get the blessing. Rebekah knew, and Isaac must have known too, that Jacob was to receive the blessing. But instead of waiting to see what the Lord would do to keep Isaac from giving the blessing to Esau, she took matters into her own hands, and sent Jacob in to his father to get the blessing before Esau got back. She did a good job of preparing Jacob to look like Esau, and so Isaac gave Jacob the blessing, thinking that he was giving it to Esau.

When Esau came back, and learned what had happened, he was shocked, and then became very angry, and vowed that as soon as his father died he would kill his brother Jacob for what he had done. Rebekah heard about what Esau was planning, and so she sent Jacob to her brother's home in Haran to give Esau time to cool off. She thought it would be only a few days, but the time extended to twenty years, and when Jacob finally did come back home, there is no mention of his mother, and so we must assume that she had died without seeing her son Jacob again.

During the time that Jacob was away, he married two of his cousins, Leah and Rachel. He had children by them and by the two handmaidens of his wives. The sons became the heads of the tribes of the nation Israel. Anyway, the time came for him to return home, but the problem facing him was meeting Esau. The last he knew about Esau was that Esau was

going to kill him. This brings us up to Genesis 32, passed all of the ways Laban had deceived Jacob, changing his wages ten times, and, in general, making life miserable for Jacob. I have passed over many of the details which I am sure most of you know. If you don't, you should read Genesis 27 through 32 to get the whole picture.

In our Scripture reading we learned that somehow Esau had learned that Jacob was coming home, and that he was on his way to meet his brother Jacob. But the news that caused Jacob to fear the worst was that Esau had four hundred men who were coming with him. This made him conclude that Esau still intended to kill him. Verse 7 of our text tells us that Jacob was "greatly afraid and distressed." His distress added pressure to his fears for himself because he had a large family to protect which would be at the mercy of Esau. And so he divided his family into two companies, and evidently felt that it would be nothing short of amazing if half of his family survived.

And then we have the prayer which I want to consider with you today. Jacob knew that only the Lord could help him. Moses in writing this account of the life of Jacob did not have a great deal to say about Jacob's prayer life. We know about the Lord meeting him at Bethel when he was leaving home. But then nothing is said about his prayers until we get to this time when he was returning home, and, of course, this was followed with Jacob's encounter with the Lord at the end of this chapter, at Peniel. However, it is not always right to base our beliefs about a person on silence, and so all that we can say is that Moses did not emphasize that Jacob was a man of prayer. Nevertheless, this is one time that Jacob prayed. It is a short prayer, but very much to the point. We don't know how Jacob prepared what he was going to say to the Lord--if he prepared at all. It is more likely that he simply began to pour out his heart, claiming all of the hope he could think of, pressured by the time it was taking him to prepare to protect at least half of his family. His prayer certainly stands as one of the great prayers of Scripture, one which holds many lessons for us who living almost 4,000 years later, even though it was very brief! And whatever may have been the nature of Jacob's relationship with the Lord before, we can see some very exemplary features to his prayer which may indicate how the Lord was working in his heart at the very time that he prayed.

Let us be sure to notice that from Jacob's point-of-view, it was fear that brought him to the Lord in prayer. We are told this in verse 7, and Jacob said so in his prayer in verse 11. One is reminded of Psa. 56:3 where it is recorded that David said, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." It

is not unusual at all for the Lord to teach us our greatest lessons in prayer when we are afraid. It often takes facing an impossible situation before we will see the face of the God Who delights to do the impossible for us.

— But now let us examine the prayer.

There are four verses to the prayer, and it seems clear that there four divisions to the prayer, one verse for each of the four points. In verse 9 we have the first point which we can call:

I. THE INVOCATION (Gen. 32:9).

By the word *invocation* I mean the way Jacob addressed God, appealing to Him for the blessing which Jacob needed at that very moment.

Historically God is known as *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. One example of this is what the Lord said to Moses when He spoke to him out of the burning bush. We read in Exodus 3:6 that the Lord said to him, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And then we are told that “Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.”

— When Jacob prayed his name had not yet been added to the name of his grandfather and his father, but it was an act of faith on Jacob’s part that he believed in the promises given to Abraham, and renewed to Isaac, promises which had to do with the nation that the Lord was bringing into being, and the land that would be given to them, but, most important of all, the promise which had to do with salvation.

In addition, he was recognizing the faithfulness of God. God had protected and blessed Abraham. And He had done the same for Isaac. And since the Abrahamic blessing had been placed upon Jacob, Jacob was claiming the faithfulness and blessing of the Lord upon His own life, and upon His family. And remember that the name “God” has inherent in its meaning that He is a powerful God. He is the God of creation, the almighty God, the God Who not only will not fail, but the God Who cannot fail. And He is uniquely God. There is no other God, none like Him wherever a person might look.

— And when Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac,” in effect he was saying, And my God! And he said this not just because he had claimed the Lord as his God, but because God had made Himself the God of Jacob. This took place at Bethel. See Gen.

28:13-15. (Read.) Then see also Gen. 28:20, 21.

How wonderful it is to be able to say, as Thomas did, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

But notice something else about Gen. 32:9. In his invocation, Jacob turned from God (Elohim) to Lord (Jehovah). The same mighty God Who chose Abraham and Isaac is the Lord Who is ever the same, never changing. He is the One Who told Jacob, “Return to thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee.” We see this in Gen. 31:3. (Read verses 1 through 3.) So Jacob knew that he was doing the will of the Lord. And he reminded the Lord of what He had said.

The Lord doesn’t speak to us today like He did to His people in OT times, but we have more of the Word than they had, and we have the Spirit to guide us and to bless us with peace, or not to give us peace. We must always be careful that what we are doing is the will of God. The Lord wants us to remind us of His promises, and to tell Him that we are resting upon His Word, depending on Him to keep His promises.

This is a wonderful way for any prayer to begin. Now let us notice Jacob’s second point.

II. JACOB’S HUMILITY (Gen. 32:10).

If you were to place Jacob on one side of a balance scale, and all of the blessings that the Lord had given him, according to what Jacob said of the Lord’s dealings with him, the blessings would be so wonderful and so weighty, that it would be like there was nothing on Jacob’s side of the scales. And be sure to notice that if Jacob were not worthy of the least of God’s blessings, this means that he was not worthy of any of them! His statement could be translated, I am less than all of your mercies, etc. God had been merciful to him time and time again. God had been faithful to him day after day. He had gone away from home by himself; he was returning home with two families, and he was a very wealthy man. In spite of the wrong that he had done, God had blessed him. And in spite of all the wrong that Laban had done, God had overruled it all and had blessed him. “Truth” here probably means faithfulness.

Pride often stands in the way of God’s blessing. Only the Lord can make us truly humble. And the Lord uses the impossible situations in our lives to show us how lowly and needy we are. The measures He often uses to humble us are never pleasant, but they are what He uses in our lives to

make us holy. Here Jacob was taking his place as a lowly servant of the Lord, and confessing that he really had no right to come to ask the Lord for a single additional blessing. And yet Jacob came, casting himself upon the mercy of God. Remember that “mercies” have to do with God’s sufficiency for our miseries. Jacob could not have been more miserable than he was here, and so he was asking the Lord to be merciful and faithful just one more time.

After worshiping God in verse 9, and humbling himself before God in verse 10, then he was ready to present his request to the Lord.

III. JACOB’S REQUEST (Gen. 32:11).

Notice how clear his request was. And the urgency of the situation meant that he did not have a lot of time to tell the Lord what he wanted the Lord to do. Even then Jacob understood that we are not heard for our much speaking. He did not have to use vain repetitions, saying over and over what he wanted the Lord to do. Jacob wanted the Lord to rescue him from the hand of Esau. He was asking the Lord to save him, to deliver him, to snatch him out of Esau’s hands. And he frankly confessed before the Lord that he was afraid of Esau. He felt that perhaps instead of cooling off, Esau’s anger had reached a fiery pitch so that he was not only wanting to kill Jacob, but all of Jacob’s family. Jacob feared the worst.

Keil and Delitzsch, their commentary on Genesis, wrote that the expression, “the mother with the children” was “a proverbial expression for unsparing cruelty, taken from the bird which covers its young to protect them” (The Pentateuch, Vol. I, p. 303).

There are two interesting verses in Deuteronomy 22 which refer to what Jacob had in mind:

6 If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young:

7 But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days (Deut. 22:6-7).

Our Lord was thinking of this when He said what we find in Matt. 23:37:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Jacob expected the worst! But by the mercy and faithfulness of God he hoped that Esau would not be able to strike.

Now we come to:

IV. THE CONCLUSION OF THE PRAYER (Gen. 32:12).

Jacob ended as he began--with the Word of the Lord! He was turning the promises of God into prayer. And this is what we need to do. Perhaps Jacob had learned this from his grandfather and his father. Paul tells us as much about the praying of Abraham. I am referring to Rom. 4:18-21. Speaking of Abraham, Paul wrote,

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 **And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.**

Jacob had a large family, but it was not yet like “the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” And so he was assured that the Lord would spare him--how, he could not possibly know. We don't need to tell the Lord what to do. We must leave that to Him. All we need to do is to bring our requests to Him; He will do the work.

Concl: What was the outcome?

The Lord did two wonderful things:

- 1) He met with Jacob at Peniel, and, after a struggle with Jacob, changed his name to Israel, and made him a prince who had power with God and with men.
- 2) He made Esau run to meet him. Then the two men embraced, kissed each other, and wept.

The trouble was over. The fear was gone. A breach of twenty years was healed. And God was glorified.

Next Sunday in our SS lesson in Ephesians 3 we are going to have that glorious benediction which comes at the end of the chapter. Our text today, Jacob's prayer, is a marvelous illustration of Eph. 3:20-21,

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Let us learn the lessons of this prayer well. Let us make much of the Word of God in our praying. Turn the promises of the Word into prayer. Begin and end with the Word. Then we can be sure that we are praying according to the will of God. Let us approach God humbly, in our unworthiness. And let us be simple and straightforward with the Lord, stating in simple terms what the burden of our heart is. Don't tell the Lord how to do it. Leave that to Him, and He will surprise us with the answers to our prayers. How wonderful it is that we, too, have access to the God of heaven and earth, the Lord--our all-powerful and ever faithful and unchanging God. Our worthiness to approach Him is through our Lord Jesus Christ.

MOSES FACE TO FACE WITH GOD

Exodus 33

Intro: In our consideration of some of the prayers of the Old Testament, we come today to one of Moses' prayers. I say "one" because more is made of Moses' fellowship with the Lord than any other person in the OT, with the possible exception of David. I do not say that Moses and David enjoyed more fellowship with God, or closer fellowship with God, than anyone else in the OT, but simply that more is said about their prayers, and their fellowship with the Lord, than anyone else.

The chapter I want us to consider today is one of three chapters which have to do with one of the most critical periods in all of Israel's history. In fact, from Israel's standpoint, it threatened the continuation of the work that the Lord started when He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt.

The people had passed miraculously through the Red Sea. When the Egyptians tried to do the same, their army was destroyed. God moved His people down to Mount Sinai where He called Moses to go up on the mountain to receive the Law from God. Exodus 24:18 tells us that "Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights."

Not even Moses knew how long it was going to take for him to receive the words that God would give him, but it became a special problem to the people. In Genesis 32 we find that the people came to Aaron, Moses' older brother, and said,

Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him (Ex. 32:1b).

And Aaron did what the people wanted him to do. And the outcome is described for us in the latter part of Ex. 32:6 where we are told that "the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." These words do not just describe a big party, but behavior of the worst kind. The people threw off their clothes, and behaved in a manner that was most sinful in the eyes of the Lord. It is really amazing that a nation which had seen the miracles which God had performed, could turn so quickly to engage in such terrible sin.

The Lord sent Moses down from the mount to see what the people were doing, and at that moment would have destroyed the whole nation for their sinful behavior. In fact, the Lord destroyed 3,000 men that day (see Ex. 32:28), but Moses intervened, and we have his prayer in Ex. 32:11-13. (Read.)

As a result the nation was spared. But we learn from the latter part of chapter 32 (v. 34) that the Lord had decided not to go with the children of Israel, but to send an angel with them to guide them. This is what prompted the prayer in chapter 33 which I want to consider with you today. The account actually begins in verse 12 and goes on to the end of the chapter.

There are two main requests:

- 1) "Show me now thy way" (v. 13)
- 2) "Show me thy glory" (v. 18).

In this prayer Moses was mainly concerned about the presence of the Lord. He could not be satisfied with an angel if that angel were a replacement for the Lord. Angels are wise and very powerful. One angel would have been more than a match for all of the nations Israel was to face, but a man like Moses, who had tasted the blessing and joy and peace of the presence of the Lord could not be satisfied with any angel.

You may remember that when Moses was still in the land of Midian where the Lord first appeared to him, his first objection to the call of God was,

Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? (Ex. 3:11).

And the Lord responded to Moses immediately by saying, "Certainly I will be with thee" (Ex. 4:12). That promise was the very foundation of Moses' agreement to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and to the promises land. And so he felt that if the Lord would back down on his promise, he could back down on his former willingness to lead the people of Israel.

But let us look at Moses' first request in the prayer found in Ex. 33.

I. "SHOW ME NOW THY WAY" (Ex. 33:12-17).

You will find the request in verse 13. (Read.)

This is a wonderful request, and it holds some very precious lessons for us for our praying.

In considering this request, I do not believe that Moses was saying, "Show me now thy way to Canaan." I might think that if we did not have this same request from David. For example, in Psa. 25:4 we read this request that David presented to the Lord: "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths." And then in the ninth verse of the same Psalm we have these words from David: "The meek will he guide in judgment: and

the meek will he teach his way.”

Perhaps David learned to pray this way from Moses. In Psa. 103 we read these words from David, “He [the Lord] made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel” (v. 7).

There is a tendency in all of us to assume that we know the ways of the Lord, or we are satisfied by what some professor in class may tell us, or some pastor in church, without really going to the Lord to present this petition to the Lord ourselves. We have the advantage of possessing the whole Bible, and we can learn much from God’s dealings with His people in Scripture, but each one of us needs to realize that we do not instinctively know the ways of the Lord. We have to learn them, and the place to start is by asking the Lord to teach us. One of the characteristics of a meek and humble person is that he is teachable. Moses was teachable. He did not assume that he knew the ways of the Lord. And one reason that we need to know the Lord ways is because His ways are different, and His ways are better. Remember Isaiah’s words in Isa. 55:8-9:

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

This is a big problem in the Lord’s work today. People think that they know the Lord’s ways when they don’t. And so we see church services and religious telecasts patterned after what the world does, and so we put ourselves in the position of doing the Lord’s work in the world’s way. That may attract a crowd, but it does not at all bring the blessing of the Lord. We need to know God’s ways.

But will you notice that Moses did not pray, “Show US thy way.” No, he prayed, “Show ME NOW thy way.” Here again we see Moses’ humility. We see his meekness. He had not done anything to bring upon himself the judgment of the Lord, but he took this as an opportunity for the Lord to teach him some things which he needed to know. Read verse 13 again. It was not “show US now thy way that WE may know thee, that WE may find grace in thy sight.” Moses was praying for himself.

What does it seem that Moses may have been thinking about at this time? Let me make some suggestions.

First, notice in verse 12 that Moses began by reminding the Lord of His

Word. We saw last week how Jacob turned the Word of God into prayer, and here we run into the same thing.

— Let me suggest to you that Moses was asking if the Lord will stand by His Word, or not. He said to the Lord, if I may paraphrase, “You told me to bring this people out of Egypt and into the land. Now they have sinned very grievously against you. Are you going to stand by your Word, or not? Can the disobedience of your people cause you to back down on your Word?”

Obviously the answer is “no”! Paul said it this way to Timothy: “If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). God will always stand by His Word. His promises are sure, and His purposes are unchangeable. These are basic truths which help us to understand the ways of the Lord.

Here is a second point which Moses may have had in mind.

— Do you notice that Moses mentioned the grace of God to himself in verse 12, and in verse 13, and in verse 17. The latter is a promise of continued grace. But the idea in all of this would be: Does God withdraw His grace from His people once He has given it to them? Moses was thinking of himself. He never did think that he was qualified for the work that the Lord had called him to do. He was relying heavily upon the enabling grace of God, and he needed to know if that grace would continue, or would it be cut off.

What is the answer? See verse 17. Again we see that the Lord does not turn away from His people. We may grieve Him with our failures or with our sins, but He will never forsake us. Nothing could be more comforting to Moses than this. The children of Israel could not ruin his ministry, and he had earlier learned that even in his own sin of killing the Egyptian and hiding his body, did not cause the Lord to forsake Moses to get someone else. Truly the ways of the Lord are amazing, and they are lined by the grace of God.

But let me give you a third reason for Moses’ first request.

— He knew that it is in observing the ways of the Lord that we come to a deeper knowledge of Him. In the Lord’s ways we see His power. We see His infinite wisdom. We see His love. We see His righteousness. We see His mercy and His continued grace. When the Lord makes us wait on the answer to our prayers, it is because He intends to teach us something

about Himself that we apparently cannot learn in any other way. Moses knew that he could not be the best leader of his people that he could be unless he knew something more about the ways of the Lord. But more important than that, he knew that he could not know God like he wanted to, and like God wanted him to, if he remained ignorant of the ways of the Lord.

But now let us go on to the second of Moses' requests.

II. "SHOW ME THY GLORY" (Ex. 33:18-23).

Moses had seen something of the Lord's glory in the burning bush. He had seen the Lord's glory in the pillar of fire by which the people were led at night, and by the cloudy pillar by which the people were led in the daytime. The Lord was in the cloud and in the fire. He had seen more of the Lord's glory on mount Sinai. We learn in Exodus 34 that when Moses came down from the mount the second time the glory of the Lord was upon him to such a great extent that the people could not look upon him, and he had to cover His face.

The glory of the Lord is the Lord Himself, His glorious presence, that which Moses knew would identify Israel as the people of the living God for the benefit of the nations of the earth. These were visible evidences of the glory of the Lord which Moses had seen. But I don't believe that this is what Moses had in mind, and I am basing my belief on what the Lord said to Moses in verse 19.

God's glory is revealed in His attributes. We see His glory in the characteristics which He displays in His dealings with us.

Notice what the Lord mentioned:

- 1) His goodness.
- 2) His Name, Jehovah -- the ever-living, unchanging Lord.
- 3) His grace.
- 4) His mercy.

Now in some way which is not explained for us, all of this was to be displayed for Moses in a way that he would understand when he was hidden in the "cleft of a rock," with the Lord's hand covering him, and the Lord passed by, so that Moses could only see the Lord's "back parts," but not His face.

What an experience this was for Moses! Which Person of the Godhead

did he see? In the light of John 1:18 I would say that Moses saw our Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. John 1:14. But even then our Lord's glory was veiled.

But let me point out another fact about the glory of the Lord which we must not overlook. It has to do with the Lord's grace and with His mercy which, of course, are a part of His goodness.

The Lord said, I

will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

This is in verse 19. But it is also quoted in Rom. 9:15 in a passage where Paul was discussing the doctrine of election. Some people in that day were accusing God of being unrighteous because He did not choose everybody if He were going to choose some. People still say that today. But what did God say to Moses about showing mercy and having compassion on those whom He chooses? He said that it was a part of His glory! And this means that to deny the doctrine of election is to take away from God a major part of the glory which rightfully belongs to Him. If we are responsible for our salvation, if we chose the Lord instead of having Him choose us, then we share with Him in His glory. Look at the Israelites. Is there any reason you can come up with as to why God would have chosen them except for the fact that He wanted to glorify Himself. And for the Lord to go with His people, and to stand by His original purpose and promises, was to the Lord's glory -- not to Moses' glory, and certainly not that we might glorify the people of Israel.

Concl: As I close, look at the first part of verse 11 here in Exodus 33 to see the testimony which the Lord gave to Moses. It is one of the greatest testimonies that any man could receive:

And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

And let me add to this the testimonial that was given to Moses in Deut. 34:10:

And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.

This speaks of the intimate relationship which Moses had with the Lord. It speaks of the love that the Lord had for Moses, and the sweet fellowship which they enjoyed together. Moses knew that he could open his heart to his divine Friend, and the Lord, Moses' Friend, assured Moses that nothing had changed their friendship nor their relationship to each

other.

May the Lord enable us to have a life of greater friendship and fellowship with our dear Lord. And knowing that His promises are secure, and that His purposes never change, that His goodness, grace, and mercy are just as available as ever, we should love Him more fervently and seek by our obedience that it is the greatest honor that can be conferred upon us to be known by our Lord as not only His people, but His friends.

But don't forget to follow Moses by praying that the Lord would show you His ways, and show you more of His glory. For the rest of Moses' life, the Lord was answering these requests. And He will do the same for us.

A GRATEFUL MOTHER'S PRAISE

1 Samuel 2:1-11

Intro: The story of Hannah is one of the most delightful stories to be found any place in the Word of God. And yet she is only mentioned in these first two chapters of 1 Samuel -- eleven times in chapter 1, and twice in chapter 2. Many expositors have honored her by noticing a similarity between her prayer of thanksgiving here in 1 Samuel 1 and the prayer of the virgin Mary in Luke 1:46-55. It is very reasonable to think that Mary was well acquainted with Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving, and it is very likely that Mary saw in Hannah's prayer statements which were prophetic of the birth of her own Son. I will leave it to you to read Mary's prayer and to compare it with Hannah's.

The background for Hannah's prayer is given in 1 Samuel 1.

Hannah was the wife of Elkanah, a man from the tribe of Ephraim. The problem was that she was one of two wives. The other wife's name was Peninnah. Elkanah had disobeyed the Lord in taking two wives, and, as was usually the case when a man had more than one wife, there was trouble between the women. In this case it was because Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. This was a reproach to Hannah, and Peninnah made it worse by taunting Hannah because of her barrenness. Peninnah was undoubtedly provoked to ridicule Hannah because she knew that Elkanah loved Hannah more than he loved her. How long this conflict between Hannah and Peninnah went on, we do not know, but it had to have been a matter of years. Elkanah tried to comfort her by reminding her of his love for her, but that did not satisfy Hannah's heart. And so we find statements in chapter 1 to the effect that Hannah was provoked by Peninnah, and that she fretted (v. 6). And verse 7 indicates that Hannah's unhappiness became acute each year when her husband went up to Shiloh to present his offering to the Lord. Hannah often wept, and her heart was sorely grieved by the way Peninnah provoked her. Verse 10 tells us that Hannah "was in bitterness."

So she did the only thing that she could do: she brought her case before the Lord. And we have the first of her prayers in 1 Sam. 1:11. Verse 13 tells us that she prayed silently. Her lips moved, but she did not speak so anyone but the Lord could hear her.

One fact that emphasizes the importance of what Hannah was going through, was the spiritual condition of Israel at the time. Eli, a very permissive father, was a priest in Israel. He had two very wicked sons

who also were priests. They repeatedly committed adultery with the women who came to worship the Lord. And for this they eventually were killed by the Lord. But the low level of spiritual life among the leaders should help us to understand why Eli did not understand the terrible burden which was on Hannah's heart. And so when he saw her lips moving without speaking aloud, he accused her of being drunk. Hannah's response is given to us in 1:15-16. Evidently Eli was enabled to speak prophetically to her that God would answer her prayer, and this time Hannah returned home happy.

The Lord remembered Hannah, and she gave birth to one who was destined to be among the greatest men in all of the Old Testament. She became the mother of Samuel. And she gave him that name because he was given in answer to her prayers. Samuel means asked of God.

In her prayer in verse 11 Hannah had made a vow to the Lord that if He would give her a son, she would give him back to the Lord "all the days of his life." So when Samuel was weaned (at perhaps 3 or 4 years of age), Hannah kept her promise, and took Samuel to the house of the Lord in Shiloh, and gave Samuel to Eli. She came to see him each year, and every time she came she brought a new coat which she had made for him.

But it was on the occasion when Hannah left Samuel for the first time that she prayed this prayer that we have in the first part of chapter 2. The prayer was prompted by the fact that God had given Samuel to her, but you will not find Samuel mentioned in her prayer. Instead, as many have pointed out, Hannah, as much as she must have loved Samuel, was not concerned with the gift God had given her, but her thoughts were focused up God, the Giver of this precious gift. And all of us, but especially those of you who are mothers, can see how much Hannah loved the Lord by her willingness to give her son to the Lord when he was so young, and when he must have been the cutest and most loveable that he had ever been. And her love for the Lord is brought out in her prayer.

One thing her prayer reveals is what God had taught her through all the years when she had experienced unanswered prayer. And this ought to be an encouragement to all of us. As we read the first part of chapter 1, it seems that God was being cruel not to give her a son so she would not have to listen to the taunting of her adversary, Peninnah. Perhaps there was some physical reason which kept Hannah barren; we don't know. But God could have answered much sooner than He did. Why didn't He? It was because He wanted to do something in Hannah, and not just for her. And her prayer shows some of the precious lessons that she had

learned not only about the Lord Himself, but about the ways of the Lord. And I want to point out some of those great truths as we consider her prayer today.

— There are three parts to her prayer:

- 1) Hannah's great joy in the Lord. We see this in verses 1-3.
- 2) Hannah's joy in the works of the Lord; we could call it, His providence. We have this in verses 4-8.

Then you will notice that after speaking in the present tense in verses 4-8, Hannah spoke about the future in verses 9 and 10. And so we can say that she was really speaking prophetically, especially in verse 10. The NKJV and the NIV are clearer on this point than the NASB. But the NASB makes the last part of verse 9 and all of verse 10 future. And so we have as our third point:

- 3) Hannah's joy in the goal the Lord has for all of creation, extending to the ends of the earth. This is what we see in verses 9 and 10.

Verse 11 simply tells us that Elkanah (and Hannah) went home, and Samuel stayed in Shiloh to serve the Lord assisting Eli, the priest.

— We can see from Hannah's prayer that God does not waste our time by giving us the trials which come our way. He is at work even when as far as we can see He isn't doing anything. He is humbling us. He is showing us how much we need Him. He is making us see that we have no one who can help us except for the Lord Himself. Teaching us these lessons takes time, and that is why so often the Lord waits before He answers our prayers.

Now let us examine this wonderful prayer. Our first point is:

I. HANNAH'S GREAT JOY IN THE LORD (1 Sam. 2:1-3).

What was it about the Lord that caused her to rejoice the way she did? Let me point out four reasons for her joy in the Lord which we find in these verses.

A. She rejoiced in His salvation (v. 1).

She made three statements in verse 1 to express how happy she was, and then concluded by giving us the reason: "Because I rejoice in thy salvation."

— "Salvation" in the OT is capable of more than one meaning -- and I believe that there probably were two things which she had in mind here.

I believe she was expressing her joy in the fact that she was saved. She was thankful that she was numbered among the people of God, and that the Lord had saved her from her sins.

— But, secondly, she was rejoicing in the way the Lord had delivered her from her affliction. She was rejoicing in answered prayer! When we have prayed about a matter as long as Hannah had prayed about her burden, and then the answer comes, it is hard to find words to describe the joy that we feel in our hearts. And she gave the Lord all of the glory for the way He had answered her prayer.

Remember: when the Lord answers our prayer, we need to follow Hannah's example and delight more in the Lord than we do in the answer. You and I can be sure that Hannah loved that little boy the Lord had given her, but it is very clear from the first verse of her prayer that she loved the Lord even MORE!

B. She rejoiced in the holiness of the Lord (v. 2a).

— It often may seem to us that the Lord is not doing the right thing. We cannot understand why He doesn't answer our prayers sooner than He does. But Hannah came out of this experience firmly convinced that the Lord was "holy" in all that He did. Furthermore, she believed that He was the only One Who could claim that title. Perhaps she had been inclined, as we often are, to pass judgment upon God. But then we learn that whenever we are in conflict with the Lord, He is always right and we are always wrong.

C. She rejoiced in the power of God (v. 2b).

"Rock" not only suggests strength, but it suggests faithfulness and immutability. Again, we are often confused by unanswered prayer. It seems like God has forgotten to be faithful. But He shows us that He is mighty enough to meet any need, faithful to all of His people, and unchanging in His love and in His constant concern for us. Hannah was rejoicing in all of this.

D. She rejoiced in the knowledge of God (v. 3a).

— God knows when the time is right to work, and He knows exactly what to do. Further, He knows what we are going through. He bottles our tears. In all of our affliction He is afflicted. He knows the very thoughts that are going through our minds. Eli couldn't read Hannah's lips as she

prayed, but the Lord knew all about her need before she asked Him, before she cast her burden that last time upon Him. Hannah would have agreed completely with Psalm 139.

— And so this is the reason we need to be very careful about a mouth that speaks proudly as though we are in charge instead of recognizing that God is the One to Whom we are responsible and to Whom we must be submissive..

Finally,

E. Hannah believed in the sovereignty of God (v. 3b).

Hannah was helpless before Peninnah. There was no way that Hannah could answer her. But God is the One Who “weighs” our actions, and He knows those who are trusting in Him. The outcome of everything in our lives is under His sovereign control. Hannah learned that through her sufferings. Peninnah could do her worst, but Hannah’s life was in the hands of her God. God weighs our actions, and He measures out to us that which is His will for us. And no one can stand in the Lord’s way.

— One of the verses many of us are learning this week is Prov. 19:21:

There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.

As we come to this point in Hannah’s prayer she gives some illustrations of how God weighs, how He sovereignly measure out what happens in the lives of all people on the earth. I have called this:

II. HANNAH’S JOY IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD (1 Sam. 1:4-8).

We can call this the works of the Lord.

Notice the contrasts which Hannah mentioned. And remember that she sees the changes she mentioned as all the work of the Lord, His providential dealings with people.

— **A. The mighty men compared with those who had stumbled (v. 4).**

B. Those who were full in contrast with those who were hungry (v. 5a).

C. The barren woman as opposed to the woman who had children (v. 5b).

— Surely Hannah was thinking of herself and Peninnah here. It may have been that Peninnah had no more children after Samuel was born.

D. Some of the sovereign actions of the Lord (vv. 6-8).

At this point in her prayer Hannah made it clear that she could now see the hand of the Lord in all that happens to people.

- 1. The Lord kills and He makes alive; He brings down to the grave, and lifts up (v. 6).**
- 2. The Lord makes poor, and makes rich (vv. 7, 8).**
In these two verses (7, 8) Hannah elaborated on this theme.

It is clear that Hannah's experience of waiting on the Lord, the long time of unanswered prayer, had taught her to look beyond all that Peninnah was saying and doing, to recognize that the Lord was on Peninnah, that she could not say one word nor do one thing that the Lord did not allow to accomplish His own purposes in Hannah's life.

— But now what about the future?

It is wonderful when we see that the sovereignty of the Lord in the present teaches us to expect the sovereignty of the Lord in the future.

III. HANNAH REJOICED IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD FOR THE LAST DAYS (1 Sam. 2:9, 10).

(Read.)

The Lord will keep His people. The wicked shall be overcome. No man can by His own strength overrule the will and purposes of the Lord. From heaven the Lord will thunder upon His adversaries. Does this not sound like the book of The Revelation? He will judge the ends of the earth. And the last statement of this verse is the most important of all, that which we are still waiting for.

— This is the first time in the OT that the Messiah is mentioned as the Messiah, "his anointed." We can see from verse 10 that Hannah was looking for the Messiah, and that God would give His strength to His

King, “and exalt the horn of his anointed,” the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ

— This horn is not like the horn mentioned in verse 1. That was a horn to blow. This is a horn of an animal, a weapon of offense, descriptive of the mighty power the Messiah will exercise when He comes to “judge the ends of the earth.”

So we can see how Hannah had her understanding of the truth enlarged as a result of all of the years of trial that she had experienced. Under the guidance of the Lord, she was the first one to call our Lord the Anointed One, the Messiah, Christ.

Concl: What are some of the lessons that we can learn from the experience of Hannah, and from her prayer?

— First, this ought to encourage you ladies to come to the Lord in prayer, and to cast every burden you have upon Him. Do you want a husband? Take that burden to Him. He understands. He gave you that desire. If Hannah prayed for children, that means that it is right for every wife to pray the same prayer. And it may be that some of you have prayed for children, the Lord has given them to you, and perhaps they are not all walking with the Lord today. Tell that to the Lord, too. Hannah’s prayer is an encouragement not just for ladies, but especially for ladies.

Second, let us believe from Hannah’s prayer that the Lord hears when it doesn’t look like He is hearing. He has His own time and way in which to answer us, and we must leave all of those details to Him. That applies to our need for a building. It applies to the people we are praying for who do not know the Lord. It applies to personal needs and burdens we have which we don’t mention to anyone else. God has made provision for us to pray, and He intends to answer our prayers. His Word is very clear on this.

— Finally, let us learn from the Lord’s delay in answering Hannah’s prayer, and His delays in answering our prayers, that He has things to teach us, and so He waits until He gets our attention. Perhaps we have been too self-sufficient. The Lord may want us to humble ourselves before Him and to learn what Hannah learned, that “by strength,” that is, our strength, “shall no man prevail.” What a wonderful Lord we have? He is too strong ever to fail us. He is too wise ever to make a mistake with us. He loves us too much to forget us. So let us trust Him, learn from Him, and wait patiently for Him.