

# *Praying in the Old Testament*

## *Part I*

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## Abraham

We're going to be considering persons in Old Testament history who were outstanding in the blessings they received from God. Our interest will be to watch them in their praying. We want to see how they prayed and why they prayed.

This particular study is on Abraham. He has been called the "Father of the Faithful!" because, of course, he was the first one whose life was lived according to what the Bible speaks of as the life of faith. He was a pioneer in believing.

It's of interest to me, no personal description of Abraham is given to us. You don't know whether he was tall or short, dark or fair I take that to mean that personal appearance is not important to receiving God's blessing. You're just as eligible for the blessing of God, as was Abraham.

Again there is no personality description. It doesn't say that he was quick or slow, eager or dull, smart or foolish. Here again the lesson to be learned is that it doesn't depend on your background. It doesn't depend on you at all. The life of Abraham is largely an action report. What he did, and what God did.

By the way, there is no report of Abraham seeking God, God called Abraham, God calls you. Oh, it's natural that there might be in you some disposition to know God, you'd like to turn to God. God Himself could give you that urge. But don't ever fail to remember it all starts with God. It comes from Him.

The call of God was very simple. He called Abraham to come out of everything that was his own and into what God would give him. This principle of separation, of coming out of that which was his, was an operation that was active through out Abraham's career. This is a very important aspect. Abraham became a great servant of God, but that didn't take place on his own initiative. It wasn't something that he did. It's not important that we should teach our children to go out and make something big out of themselves. It's important that we should teach them to listen to God. God has something for you. Find out what God has for you and do that; then you'll be walking in the ways of Abraham. The Scripture will say to you, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not" (Jeremiah 45:5).

This has a very real bearing on what we're going to learn about praying. This man didn't pray for selfish things. I wonder if it isn't all too often true that we understand prayer as a way of getting what we want. Abraham would stand right here before you and say, "Oh no, never what you or I want." Abraham didn't do it that way. He was receiving those things which God gave to him.

Abraham passed through a series of crises, each of which was solved by separation. Abraham was going to become rich, he was going to become great. But this was done by leaving off, letting go and turning away from any number of things. He was called to separate from his own country and his own people "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." And we read that he obeyed and went out, not knowing whither he went. He went first to a place called Sichem and when he got there, he built an altar. He made it a point wherever he went to turn to God.

A little later in his life he was obliged to separate from Lot because of a situation that arose over their cattle. Here you find him turning away from his own family, his own kith and kin. He said to Lot, "It isn't fitting that our servants should be quarrelling. It doesn't make a good impression on people. The country is big. You go one way, I'll go the other." And he gave Lot first choice. Lot took the best opportunity — the well-watered plains of Sodom. Abraham was left with the rest, the mountains — not a good place for cattle. But up there he found a plateau called Hebron, and there, on the plains of Mamre,

he made his home. You know what he did? He built an altar. That's what he did every time. Here you have separation from his own, but in the separation he drew close to God.

Can you learn from that? Is it possible in considering your own problems that you may need to give up some of your own things, your own people. You won't be empty-handed. Turn to God. Draw close to God.

Later in Abraham's life, after he had married Hagar and had a child by her, named Ishmael, there came a day when he was obliged to cast out this child. He went to God in prayer about it, and God told him that this was going to be necessary. In sorrow and grief, it says, because he loved his son, Abraham yielded to the necessity. Here you have him separating from his own flesh. He set him aside. This is hard to learn. In our day and time and in our culture, it's such an easy thing for us to suppose that the bonds that we have in the flesh, the biological relationships we have, the children that we have begotten out of our own bodies, have a spiritual significance. Very gently I would like to say to you, "No, no, they'll have a spiritual significance if you bring them to God." There are some of you who have had children "go bad," so to speak. That's a sorrow and a grief. But you may see it happen. It happened to Abraham.

Finally, his own hopes were tied up in Isaac, the only son of his wife Sarah. He was called on of God to offer up Isaac, and he did not hesitate to offer up the very son in whom all the promises were placed. It says in the book of Hebrews that he counted that God was able to raise him from the dead. This is the story of Abraham's career.

As Abraham prays, I want you to notice the kind of a man that's praying. Here is a man that could turn away from his own country and his own people to turn to God. He could turn away from his own family, from Lot, his nephew, to turn to God. He could turn away from his own flesh, Ishmael his son, to come to God. He could turn away from Isaac in whom were the promises, to turn to God. Above everything else, *God was first with this man.*

When each call implied that he would have to deny himself more and more and more, how could he do it? Abraham believed in God, God first, nothing else.

This call to yield, to surrender, was sustained, so far as Abraham was concerned, by appearances from God which strengthened his faith. Because, you know, if you're going to have faith, that's much more than determination; more than will power; much more than wishes. Faith needs conviction grounded in some participation. If you go through the life of Abraham, you will find the Lord spoke to Abraham and gave him His covenant. The Lord said, after Lot was separated from Abraham, that He would be with Abraham and that He would watch over him. And so Abraham built an altar unto the Lord. Later on we read that after the rescue of Lot from the kings of the plain, and when Abraham refused to take any booty of the King of Sodom, the Word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Abraham asked Him, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" And he got the promise, "He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And God took him out and showed him the stars. He said, "Can you count them? Well, that's the way your seed shall be." When Abraham was ninety-nine years old God appeared to him and said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."

Now I have taken a good deal of time to set before you this man Abraham, because we are going to watch him when he prays. In the 18th chapter of Genesis you have the great example of the prayer of intercession. You remember the circumstances. God had sent three angels down to Abraham. First, to confirm the promise that Sarah would have a child, and, secondly, they told him that Sodom would be destroyed. Then Abraham began his prayer. Praying first, "Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?" And God

promised to spare the city for the sake of such. "Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty?" And God said, "For forty and five I will not destroy it." Then he said, "Peradventure there shall be forty." And God said, "For forty I won't destroy." And then Abraham said, "Let not the Lord be angry. Probably there are thirty." And God said, "For thirty I will not do it." And then he said, "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there are only twenty." God said, "For twenty I will not destroy." Finally he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Suppose there are only ten." And the Lord said He wouldn't destroy it for ten.

Many people will say that Abraham just didn't have enough faith. If Abraham had more faith, he could have gone on and got right down and saved the city of Sodom. Whenever I hear this I always think of somebody that hasn't had any experience in praying. Would you understand if I tell you that was not Abraham's intention? The Lord went His way as soon as he had left communing with Abraham. Then Abraham returned to his place.

Here is the master lesson for our interpretation of praying today. This is a believing man with confidence in God, exploring the possibilities in the grace of God, to find out if the name of God could be honored by sparing this city. I don't think that Abraham ever gave expression to one single idea that he didn't feel free to express before God. And when God was through speaking, He left.

Now I want you to notice in Chapter 19, verse 29, a wonderful truth. God can do more than we can ask or think. Abraham could not ask more than he did, but God did more. "God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt." There you have it. God remembered Abraham and delivered Lot.

Oh, how many parents, how many friends could wish to God this would be the case with them. And it can be. If you will be the kind of person who will seek only to honor God, this can actually be the case with you.

So far as Abraham is concerned, one thing marked his life — he wanted God to be honored. This kind of a man can pray. In his praying, this man would always seek to praise and glorify God. God blessed him and Abraham was thankful.

## Jacob

"Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated" (Romans 9:13). These words are quoted by Paul from the Old Testament indicating the scriptural report of the judgment of God about the twins, Jacob and Esau.

We want to learn about praying by studying men and women with whom God had dealings. Jacob is one of these men. Jacob himself, you will remember, was the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham, and he became the ancestor of Israel. Jacob's name was changed to Israel. What was commonly called the sons of Jacob can also be called the children of Israel. By studying the life of this man we can learn much about living by faith and what it means to be living with God.

I am sure you have seen, as I have, many times the motto "Prayer changes things." Now I don't doubt that, but I want to point out to you that one of the things that prayer most commonly changes is the *person doing the praying*. While we're studying the case of Jacob, we're going to recognize that the blessing of God is not earned. It's not the nicest person or the most popular person or the kindest person or the strongest person who is blessed. It is those who do the will of God, they are blessed.

We're going to learn some things about Jacob. But the things that we find out about Jacob are not going to be the things that account for his blessing. Yet we must keep before us this word of Scripture with which I began, "Jacob have I loved."

What brought blessing was the relationship that Jacob accepted and adopted with reference to God. We could ask, "Did Jacob then do something that pleased God?" And in this we're going to get close to the truth.

One of the things we're going to learn about praying in the Old Testament is that while it would appear that "whosoever will may come," and it seems that anybody can, the truth of the matter is that it's not quite that simple. It will be if he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. And if he doesn't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I don't care who he is, no! It's "*whosoever believeth in him*" shall have everlasting life.

It's true that Jacob did have a godly heritage. His father and mother were Isaac and Rebecca. His grandfather was Abraham and his grandmother was Sarah; all were real believing people. I want to draw your attention to the fact that Esau had the same heritage, and the truth still is "Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated." So you see it isn't the heritage that makes the difference.

Jacob was a grasping person. When he was born the Bible says in Genesis, that he was born second — he was a twin. When he was born he was clutching his brother's heel. That's where he got his name Jacob, because in Hebrew language the word Jacob means heel.

Jacob recognized value wherever he saw it, and he sought to possess it, no matter where it was. It's not true that Jacob stole or that he took by force. It will be true that he connived and manipulated. Even though there are some things about the way he did it that you won't like, Jacob had an appreciation of spiritual values. He really thought it mattered about God.

You remember the occasion when he traded his meal that he had prepared for the birthright of Esau. Esau had been out hunting all day and came back at night. He hadn't been able to get any deer. He was hungry and faint, and he came to Jacob, who was preparing his evening meal after working in the field, and he asked him to give him a meal. Now you won't fully understand this incident unless you will remember that Jacob would be just as hungry as Esau. You can get just as hungry working in the field as you can out hunting. They were two hungry men. But Jacob had prepared the meal, and he had the food there. Esau came along and asked him for it. Jacob was willing to sell it to him. What would he give him?

And the only thing Esau had to give to Jacob was his birthright. Now Jacob offered him the meal for the birthright. It's true, but Esau willingly gave up the birthright to get the meal. As a matter of fact, he said in effect words something like this, "I will die if I don't get something to eat. And if I die the birthright won't be any good. The birthright doesn't have any real practical value. What I need is some food."

Here is one of the reasons why God would say, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Jacob appreciated the blessings of God. Esau didn't appreciate it. Esau had the opportunity to get it, but he'd rather have something to eat. Jacob would give up what he had to eat that he might get this blessing.

Many people have a lot of trouble understanding the time that Jacob and his mother connived to deceive their old father. His eyes were dim and he couldn't see clearly who came up before him, and he was ready to give his blessing. The blessing would normally have come to Esau as the older, but Jacob had gained that birthright in the deal that they made. Whether or not Isaac knew about it, I don't know. The way you read it, it sounds as though Jacob and Rebecca, working together, deceived Isaac as to who was going to get the birthright.

I'll let that stand as it is. But I hope you won't mind if I point out to you this is not exactly stealing from a stranger. This is inside the family, and it is true that so far as Jacob is concerned, he was going to get the birthright. Don't forget so far as Esau is concerned, he did give up the blessing.

Now we come in Jacob's life to the instances of his praying. There are two instances of prayer, both are very famous. The first is the instance where people speak about Jacob having his vision of the ladder. Actually, it was a vision of a stairway, ascending steps. I want you to notice particularly that what Jacob saw in the vision was God blessing him. This isn't a case of Jacob seeking something. This is the case of Jacob being told, Jacob being shown, God seeking him, God doing things for him. The principle thrust of this vision is that God will bless him.

So far as Jacob is concerned, I underscore two things. *He believed the promises*, he believed what he saw and what he heard, and *he vowed a fitting response*. He said that the Lord would be his boss, that he was going to worship Him, and that of all the Lord gave him, he would give a tenth back to God.

Now we go on from there to twenty years later. In this time he served his uncle Laban, and he won Leah for his wife and Rachel for his wife as well as two hand-maidens. The twenty years that he was working for Laban were featured by an appearance of God, Laban didn't mind having Jacob work for him; he tried to keep him working for him, and Jacob didn't mind working for Laban, his uncle. As a matter of fact, they both got rich, and Laban said that he never was as well off as when he had Jacob working as his foreman. At the end of twenty years, however, Jacob was rich and he started home.

Now we come to the big crisis of his career. When Jacob started home, word came that Esau was coming to meet him. Twenty years before Esau had said that he would kill Jacob for deceiving his father and getting the blessing. Now that he is coming home with four wives, children, oxen, and herds, Jacob realizes how vulnerable he is. He cannot defend himself against an angry brother, and the angry brother has said that he is going to kill him. Jacob made what plans he could. First of all he divided his company of people, his flocks and his herds into several companies so that if one fell to the enemy, the others might escape. Having done that he sent gifts to his brother. He sent first one servant, then another, then another with gifts, hoping to soften his brother's attitude. But Jacob didn't have full confidence in what he did. Then he went to prayer.

At the end of Genesis chapter 24 we have this remarkable story of Jacob praying at the ford of Jabbok, in the place that is called Peniel. You remember how Jacob, left alone, wrestled with a man until the breaking of day. And when the man saw that he prevailed not, he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and it went out of joint as he wrestled. The man said, "Let me go, for day breaketh." Jacob said, "I

will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Even with that injury, Jacob held on. Finally, you remember, Jacob's name was changed to Israel, because he had prevailed.

This was the showdown in Jacob's life. The evil that he had done as a youth came back now to loom over him and threaten him. He was in danger of being destroyed because of the wrong he had done before.

Under these circumstances, doing everything he could to help himself and having no confidence, he turned to God. That's a picture of each of us. We are going to face God one day. When we do, the things of the past will come up and stand there before us. When Jacob's past stood up, he went into prayer. For a long time his prayer had no results. Finally, his flesh was crippled so that he couldn't struggle any longer, but he wouldn't let go. This was persistent, prevailing prayer with the result that he finally won. His name was changed from Jacob to Israel, from the word meaning *heel* to the word meaning *prince*. His whole personality and everything was changed. The man became a new man in his praying experience. He threw himself upon the mercy and the grace of God and wouldn't let go until God would bless him. Although he was forever crippled in his flesh, he became Israel, a prince with God. And further, the meeting with Esau was marvelously blessed and the two reconciled. This is a great encouragement to us to persist and to prevail in prayer with our God, who is minded to bless us. Remember, "Jacob have I loved."

## Moses

"Moses my servant." These are the words that are used in Scripture (Joshua 1:2) as spoken by God concerning this great man of faith. When the writer to the Hebrews was comparing Jesus Christ to beings and creatures that God had made, he compared Him to Moses as a servant. The particular aspect in which he compared Christ Jesus to Moses was in the matter of being faithful. "Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant" (Hebrews 3:5). It says about him in the book of Hebrews that he was a man that "endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

As we study persons presented to us in Scripture, we are told about their praying, and it is here that we can learn. Perhaps every one of us thinks that a large part of prayer is almost routine; it should be as routine as breathing. You certainly need to breathe; if it were cut off, you would die. Then, spiritually speaking, we need to pray.

We're not told about the prayer habits of Moses in any biographical sense. Moses was a believing man, because a man must believe that God is and that God is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). And certainly so far as Moses is concerned, nobody would question that every single day he was aware of the reality and character of God.

In addition, there are certain exercises of worship that are to be expected day by day. There is the matter of *adoration*. I could have used the word *contemplate* to stress the idea that you think about God. Like the Psalmist said, "I have set the Lord always before me" (16:8). In our day and time we are given the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will take the things of Christ and show them unto us. So welcome the thoughts of God, as you go from one room to another in your house, when you go about your business. Keep it in mind, "I have set the Lord always before me." That's part of worship, and in a certain sense it is a part of prayer.

There is also the matter of *praise*. You praise God when you think of what He is like and what He has done and what He has promised. You praise God for His faithfulness. You can praise Him for His grace and mercy, "the goodness of God endureth continually" (Psalm 52:1). You can praise Him for His loving kindness, His eternal unchangeableness. Praise God for what He is. Just give the Lord thanks. "In everything give thanks."

This kind of praying, believing in God, worshipping God, adoring God, praising God and thanking God, should be just as normal and natural as breathing.

Should one ever ask for anything? "Yes!" Listen to the Lord Jesus Christ: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7). Can you get it any better than that? "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2). God wants you to ask Him, because when He hears your request and answers your prayer, it's to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this study we're looking into the truth about Moses. We're going to see a man who asked God for various things. Here again, and this will be true for anyone we study, anybody can come to God. "Whosoever will may come to God." But just not anybody can come in any way.

Let me put it to you this way. Moses was not just anybody. The way is open for whosoever will, but there is a blessing on a person who has people praying for him. In the Book of Hebrews in the 11th chapter there is quite a lengthy comment on Moses. It begins by mentioning the faith of his parents. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid" by his parents (11:23). Remember what Paul said about



Timothy? "I remember the faith that is in thee that was in thy grandmother and thy mother, and I am persuaded is in thee also." Anybody can come; God will graciously receive him. But it's also true, to the glory of God, that there is blessing on a person because of godly parents.

I suppose I am making this comment because I want to come around and ask you this question very simply, "Did your parents pray for you?" Now if perchance they didn't, if you should be one of those whose parents didn't pray for you, I can tell you one thing, the Lord Jesus Christ has been praying for you. But there are some of you who are going to have to say, "Yes, they did." Well, that should make a difference to you.

I'd like to ask you the second question. "Are you praying for your children? Are you praying for your loved ones? Do you want them blessed? Pray for them!" It matters. But even when you pray for your children and for your loved ones, they must themselves turn to God. There is a sense in which every man must deal personally with God. This is what Moses did.

You will remember his call at the burning bush. After he had been out in the desert for forty years, when he was eighty years old, he saw this burning bush. When he went over to look at it, this is what he heard: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). I wish we could stop right there. Are you going to have any dealings with God? Do you want to turn to God in prayer? I tell you right now God is gracious. God is holy. And the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

You'll remember that when God called Moses to service Moses said, "I cannot speak. I'm not good enough. I am not strong enough." Now I want to remind you what the Lord said to him: "Who made you? Who made your mouth?"

Some of you right now in the matter of prayer may be troubled because you think you're not good enough. That's never a sound basis. Don't ever do that. God made you. You're just you. You're just your size. God made you, and He can help you. When Moses said, "They will not believe," God said, "I'll be with you and I'll help you."

Now when we see Moses leading the people through all of those various plagues that came, we note none of that was done at Moses' own judgment. He was constantly in prayer. He did everything the way God showed him in answer to prayer. He would go to God in prayer, and God would tell him what to do. When the children of Israel were coming out of Egypt and were up against the Red Sea and the army of Egyptians were following, Moses cried to God, and God heard him. When they were on the march starting out in the desert and they'd never been over that road before, you can just imagine what a tremendous problem it would be to lead all those people into a strange place. Do you remember what God did for Moses? Every day the cloud overshadowed him; every night the pillar of fire and lightning were round about them. They were always reminded of the presence of God. If you don't remember one other thing, this would be one of the most important. You will never have to take one step alone.

The Israelites came to various problems one after another. They found that Moses would turn to God. They came to a place where the water was bitter, called Marah. Moses turned to God and God showed him what to do. They were traveling along and had eaten up all the bread they had brought from Egypt. They had no food. Moses cried to God, and God told him about the manna that would fall every day from that day on. They ran out of water; this great company of people was out in the wilderness without water. God showed them a rock that if Moses smote it, would open up and the water would gush forth. Whenever they struck a situation that was absolutely impossible, Moses would turn to God. This is a man who believed in God, understood about God. This is a man who was walking with God. This is a man who was doing the will of God. When he got into trouble, he called on God.

I don't want to make it as though you would think that you have to qualify in the sense that you have to be good enough or have to be strong enough. But I do want you to think and to see that if you're going to have power in prayer, you need to be an obedient person. You need to be following the will of God. Let's have one thing clear right now. I can't do as I please and then, when I get into trouble, ask God for help and expect Him to help me fix everything up to go along the way I was going. That's foolishness.

Did you get the point? If I want God to be with me, I must walk in His direction. I must turn my face in His direction. I must want to be close to Him. And as surely as I seek to yield myself into His will and walk with Him, one of the blessings of being with God is that He will hear and answer prayer. Moses is a man who emphasizes this a great deal. We can remember that so far as Moses was concerned, God was with him.

## Joshua

"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Joshua 1:5). These are the words that were given to Joshua, the son of Nun, when he was called in to take the position that Moses had held. We are going to look at this man who followed Moses in leadership.

Much of his preparation took place as he served as an assistant or as a worker with Moses. Because he was associated with and followed Moses, the life, career, and testimony of Joshua could be dwarfed in comparison to Moses who was a giant among the believers. And yet Joshua was a great man, known principally as a military leader, yet there was much more to Joshua. We are going to notice him in prayer.

To understand the matter of prayer, it's more than just saying prayers. Prayer is going to have to be the expression that comes out of the heart and the life. This was certainly the case with Joshua.

In Exodus 33:11, you will read, "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." I think that's wonderful! And so we read: "And he [Moses] turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle." Now pause right there and think a moment. Joshua was right there while this communion with God was taking place.

Surely that speaks to your heart as it does to mine that Joshua continued in prolonged communion with the presence of God. It seems to me that this is very important in understanding Joshua, who took time to be holy and spoke oft with the Lord. This strengthens conviction. We need to take time before God. When we are conscious of the presence of God and think about the things of God, we should be careful not to take just another snapshot picture. Take a time exposure. Open the lens of your heart, focus it upon the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look upon Him, gaze upon Him, and keep Him before you. Joshua stayed in the tabernacle in the presence of God. I think it has a lot to do with everything we know about Joshua.

The next thing I want to bring to your mind is one of the earlier reports we have of him and his leadership in battle. In Exodus chapter 17:8-13 we have the story of this battle. It was here that Joshua learned his real dependence upon God — I could almost say his final dependence upon God. Now Joshua was a very clever leader, a very clever military tactician. Those of us who read the accounts of his battles can be impressed with the way in which he oft times maneuvered to win. But in this case, it was obvious that he did nothing personally to win that victory. Joshua learned that, except the Lord help, he would be defeated. Victory was possible in that battle with Amalek only because there was united intercessory prayer on his behalf.

By the way, there is a very interesting indication here. You see, the story is not one of Joshua praying. Isn't that interesting? We are talking about Joshua. I'll tell you what Joshua is doing, he is fighting for his life. Joshua was in the battle, evidently pre-occupied with the actual needs of the moment, yet he benefitted by the praying that other people did.

You might be helped a great deal if you would keep this in mind. Perhaps you believe that other people pray for you. It is possible that your daily life at times has so much activity in it, so many things for you to do that you scarcely have time to pray. Well, would you say that praying was no help to Joshua? According to this 17th chapter of Exodus, it was the praying of Moses, Aaron and Hur on the mountain that turned the tide of victory for Joshua. He won because they prayed. We need to learn that

there is power in united prayer, in joint intercessory prayer.

Consider this whole battle. Joshua went into that battle with Amalek while heavy fighting was going on. Amalek would have defeated Joshua; keep that in mind. Then Moses went on the mountain to pray. As long as Moses prayed, Joshua was winning. But Moses got tired. And when you get tired you just can't do any more.

Then Aaron and Hur came. True, they couldn't fight like Joshua nor pray like Moses. But I'll tell you what they did. They held up the hands of Moses. They helped him to pray. They held up his hands until the going down of the sun, and Joshua won a notable victory on that day. What a wonderful lesson is in this whole story.

I have oftentimes said that if I ever organized a group of people in Christian work, it would be an A and H Club — that's Aaron and Hur. And this is the inspiration for the A and H club that we have in support of our ministry. We need help in this program. *We need people to help us pray.* So we have asked people to say that they would pray for their pastor and for me in this ministry. Those who will be enrolled as members of our A and H Club. We send out a bulletin every three months to show you what we're praying for next. It's a marvelous thing. I can feel the uplift that comes from people who are praying for me because they have joined in this prayer fellowship that we have. This is what Joshua saw happening to him.

In the life of Joshua, there are a few other things that you and I could profitably look at. One is the insight into his faith at Kadesh Barnea. Kadesh Barnea is the place from which the children of Israel sent spies into the land to see whether it was a good enough land to try to take and whether they were strong enough to take it. Moses directed 12 men, one from each tribe, to go. These twelve men came back and made their report. The interesting thing was that their report ran something like this — there were three questions. On the first question, "Is it a good land" they were unanimous. Twelve said yes. Nobody was against it. "Are there difficulties?" Here again they were unanimous. Twelve said, "Yes, there are difficulties. There were high walled cities and the soldiers were giants in that land." Certainly there were difficulties. The third question was, "Are we able to take it?" And then there was a difference of opinion. Ten said, "No, we can't take it, we're just like grasshoppers in their sight." Two said, "Yes, It's true that there are difficulties, it's true that there are high walled cities, it's true that they've got soldiers that are like giants and we're like grasshoppers in their sight, but our God shall fight for us. If God be for us, who can be against us?" Now the two men who said, "Yes, let's go ahead because God will help us" were Joshua and Caleb.

As it happened in that particular time, the majority prevailed. The result was that Israel didn't go forward, they had to go back into the desert for 38 years. And so Joshua knew what it was to go through a period of 38 years of frustration and dissatisfaction because his fellow believers were not ready to go forward when the time came. All of this would have been in the mind of Joshua. He himself was ready to go, but they were not ready to go. And because they were not ready to go and the majority ruled, they didn't go.

Now up until the death of Moses, Joshua was working along as the leader of the armed forces and working with Moses. But on the death of Moses, Joshua was called into his place. In the first chapter of Joshua you will read that the Lord gave to Joshua a certain rule he could follow, a certain law that he could use. Every place that the sole of his foot tread upon was to be his. The whole land was before him. He was entitled to go in any direction he wanted to go. Every place where he put the sole of his foot was to be his. This is the principle of appropriation for all the promises of God. All the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. We could say and we could claim that any Christian person can have all

the promises of God. The truth of the matter is that while you can have all the promises of God, you're only going to get as much as you use.

This is the principle that is true in spiritual things. God offers things to us in Christ Jesus. Will you reach and take them? If you will reach and take them they are yours. If you don't reach and take them they are not yours. This is what Joshua learned. And in communion with God, Joshua was given to understand that this would be the principle that he was to follow.

After he was shown exactly what he should do, Joshua led the whole nation of Israel in crossing the River Jordan. They also set up memorials to commemorate this crossing so other people would be convinced that God had done this. After the crossing, Joshua had all men circumcized. That was something that had been omitted while they were traveling in the desert. Now he wanted everything to be done right. Joshua was a man who obeyed to the letter every commandment that was given to him from God.

Then just before he moved into his first big problem, which was Jericho, Joshua had a vision. One evening he saw a certain man coming toward him, an armed person. Joshua didn't know who it was. He went out to meet him to ask him if he was for him or against him. He found this person speaking to him. The person said, "As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come" (Joshua 5:14). This was a vision to Joshua to show him he was not boss. God was in charge. Joshua was His servant. What a wonderful thing to learn! And then while he was learning this he was told, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." You remember that's what Moses learned, and that's what Joshua learned.

All the way through Joshua's life, over and over again, in God's dealing with him He was ready to help him and give him rich promises. But Joshua was to be strong and of good courage and do what God wanted him to do. The truth of the matter is that as Joshua went forward obeying, doing exactly what he was supposed to do, God blessed him.

## Gideon

"The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12). These were the words spoken to Gideon by the angel who came to call him to service for God.

Concerning the men we have studied so far, again and again it seems that their obedience in response to God's call seemed most important in their lives. It's almost as though you'd have to look for the times when there was petition, so far as their praying was concerned. We have no reason to suppose these men did not regularly pray. This would be the normal thing for a godly man to do. Day in and day out, as the time would go by, he would have certain worship practices and activities that he would follow in which he would adore God, praise God for His great promises, and thank God for His providence in what He had done. When Abraham called upon God, at the time when he heard that Sodom would be destroyed, he prayed that long prayer of intercession. Jacob called upon God when he understood he was going to meet his brother Esau and was in grave danger of having Esau destroy him. When Moses was face to face with a rebellious people and God was on the point of destroying them. Moses stepped into the breach and prayed that God would keep them for His own name's sake. When Joshua was in battle, he found that it was God who helped him.

It was just a question of having the exercise of God's power in each particular instance.

Then again in each one of these cases there would be a humble admission on the part of the person doing the praying of personal unfitness. So far as Abraham was concerned, there never was the slightest intimation that Abraham thought he was good enough to ask God for the blessing. The same is true with Jacob. All that Jacob could do was just humbly hang on. So far as Moses was concerned, it was a humble, contrite man who didn't think he could speak, who didn't think he was able, who didn't think the people would want him. But he did feel that God could do it if He wanted to. And the same was true with Joshua. When Joshua was in battle, he knew right well he would have been defeated if God had not intervened on his behalf. There was in each one of these cases a humble, frank admission of personal unfitness.

And one more thing — in each case there was a deep desire on the part of the man praying to see God's name magnified. It's almost as though that were the most important thing. So far as Abraham was concerned, the thought of destruction of people in Sodom, who might be innocent, appalled Abraham. He called on God for His name's sake to spare it if there were any righteous people there.

We come in our studies to Gideon whom you read about in the Book of Judges. Here right away will come to your mind one of the most famous ideas that has ever been understood or released in the whole history of prayer, known as Gideon's fleece. You'll remember that on a certain occasion Gideon had called together a large company of soldiers and they were facing the Midianites, an even larger army. The question was whether Gideon should attack the large forces of the Midianites. You'll recall that he decided it by using a fleece. He put the fleece out on the ground, and he first asked that the Lord should let the dew during the night be on the fleece and let the ground around the fleece be dry. And so the next morning Gideon took the fleece and wrung water out of it, it was so wet. The ground around it was dry. Then you'll recall that Gideon said to the Lord, "Now don't be angry with me, but I wanted to know for real sure. Tonight let the ground be wet and the fleece dry." And that's the way it happened.

This particular procedure has struck the fancy of people everywhere. So we want to take a closer look at it and see if it is just a simple as it seems. Here I begin again with Gideon himself.

Anybody *may* call on the Lord, but not anybody *will* call on the Lord. Gideon believed in God. Gideon was conscious of the plight of God's people. Gideon was conscious of the fact that there were people not being blessed, and that the lack of blessing was a shame to the name of God. So far as Gideon was concerned, he took the first step, the first opportunity, to openly defy the pagan powers that ruled in his day and time. You'd enjoy the whole story in Judges, Chapter 6.

Now let me point out something else. Gideon took the initial step to defy the Midianites. He had already said he was going to fight. It was just a question of when. The test that he put before the Lord was not merely curiosity to find out if God would answer. It was actually related to the service that he was committed to render.

Then Gideon set up another test that would indicate the leading of God. But a better way is this "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5).

## Samson

"And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Hebrews 11:32-34).

This is a part of that famous honor roll of men and women of faith, who were listed to give us some idea of how God had honored the faith of His people throughout generations. Note the name of Samson. Who was this man? Why should he be listed with these heroes?

What is popularly known about Samson would make him only a horrible example. And yet here he is in Hebrews listed among giants, among great men of God. We're going to examine the record concerning this man. We're going to find before we are through that there was an occasion when he definitely prayed to God. But the greatest thing about this man is the way in which he was serving God.

There is one truth we should not fail to notice and to remember — not all prayers are alike. There is a general line of truth you can keep in mind in this, as well as in all Christian living, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matthew 9:29). Not according to what you said, where you stood. According to your faith, how much inward actual real faith did you have, that's what is going to be involved.

Now we're going to study this man Samson, and we'll find his story in Judges, chapters 13-16. Most of chapter 13, interestingly enough, primarily discusses the home into which Samson was born. Both mother and father had personal relations with God. An angel came and talked with his mother, then his father, then he talked to them both. Before the child was born, an angel came and talked with the mother, telling her that she would bear this son who was to be a Nazarite unto God and who would serve God as the deliverer of Israel. The mother shared with the father what she had been told. There was a close fellowship among these people. The father then asked and received God's confirmation of the promise. We read, "The woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him." That covers the whole case. You know why that's so important to me? It makes me realize that in the ordinary experience of the human being before God, it's his relationship with God that counts.

In Chapter 14 we have the first glimpse of trouble, so far as this man is concerned. We read that Samson saw a woman, one of the daughters of the Philistines, and fell in love with her. This might seem to you very natural, but it's not spiritual. This is the beginning of trouble for him. He went down there and fell in love with a woman who did not have the upbringing of faith. Remember who Samson's father and mother were. Remember the kind of a home in which he was raised.

Samson was warned. His father and his mother said unto him, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcized Philistines?" I want you to notice the adjective uncircumcized. The Philistines didn't have any trust in God; the Philistines didn't have any relationship with God, His parents asked, "Couldn't you find a girl among these around here who are believers?" Samson said unto his father, "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well." He seems like a young person, doesn't he?

In Judges 14:4, however, we are given insight into the real significance of all this. It led into a course of hostility and violent break with the Philistines. If you look back in 13:1 you will see "the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines



forty years." For forty years they had been dominated by these unbelieving, ungodly people, Now in 14:4 we find that God is overruling.

It's God power and God's amazing wisdom that are able to overrule. He lets a thing develop in such a way that the trouble will be brought out into the open and there will be a break. As long as Israel is hobnobbing around with the Philistines it will not be good for them. I use that word hobnobbing to indicate that this young Israelite could fall in love with a young Philistine woman and expect to get married and nobody objected to it. Apparently the danger was so subtle that the Israelites would not have recognized this in time or in degree to see how bad it was.

I have already commented on the fact that Samson's parents were believing people. They believed that man was a creature of God. They believed that God was the Judge of all the earth and the Judge of man. They understood that God was the Savior. They knew about the covenant with Abraham. They knew that the way of faith was to obey God. They knew that God could deliver because they knew about the Exodus. They knew that God could restore because He had done this under the various Judges who had served in the time of Gideon and others. All this was a part of Samson. But he could leave all of this in the background and go out and fall in love with a Philistine woman.

Also we should note in chapter 14:10 that "Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do." This would show that there was free and easy access to those who were actually his enemies. Then in the rest of chapter 14 we get something as a lesson that you might not want to hear — once a Philistine, always a Philistine. In other words, if you're going to deal with worldly people, just keep one thing in mind; they are worldly people. And except a person is born again, they are still worldly people. Ignoring the character of other people is a serious, dangerous thing when coming to have fellowship with them. As it turned out this woman deceived him and gave him away. This was in line with her nature, because she was a Philistine. Angered and insulted, Samson went home.

In chapter 15 we read about the further deterioration of Samson's relationship with the Philistines. When he came to get his wife, he found that she was married to another. Then Samson actually began to do things that were hostile. By a clever trick he burned the crops of the Philistines. Again, by a daring maneuver he managed to slay a thousand of them in battle. In this manner he broke the bondage of the Philistines from his people. Remember God was going to use him for this very thing.

Chapter 16 is the part that is commonly known by most people all over the world. This is the notorious story of Samson and Delilah. You might wonder how a great man like Samson could ever get into something like this? Here again Samson showed his proclivity to trust strange women. The Philistines worked through Delilah to discover his secret.

All the way through, Samson was a man that had a personal relationship with God, and God was dealing with him. Apparently Samson himself didn't fully appreciate this. He risked it and he risked the matter of association with the Philistines. Great man that he was, he had no consciousness of danger here. But he learned it the hard way. You tolerate, you touch, then you trust, then you're in trouble. And so he was betrayed, he was enslaved, he was abused, he was ridiculed.

We have gone through all of this story because we wanted to get down to his prayer. There was a time when he actually prayed to God. Look in chapter 16:28. You will remember that the Philistines had arranged a big day when they were having sporting events, so to speak. They were going to bring out Samson to make sport of him. They had put out his eyes; they had blinded him. They had shaved his hair and in so doing he had lost his strength because he had broken his relationship with God. But here is an amazing wonderful marvelous thing! It will sound awfully common to you when I say it. This is all that happened. His hair grew out. Do you know what that means? It means that if you have a true

relationship with God, even though you pass into the dark, even though you get into trouble, it can come out alright. God will not forsake His own.

Now Samson called unto the Lord and said, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once." You might feel that was a pathetic kind of prayer. But notice what was involved. In verse 30: "let me die with the Philistines." And so Samson by this one act of committing himself to death, accomplished more in his death than he did in all the years of his life.