



RABBI YECHIEL ECKSTEIN

WORK OF THE HEART

TEN BIBLICAL LESSONS ON THE
POWER OF PRAYER



International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews®

Work of the Heart — Ten Biblical Lessons on the Power of Prayer

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Cover and interior design by MarketOne Consultants, Fort Worth, TX

Cover illustration, “Hannah Prays at the Tabernacle,” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld.

Back cover photo of Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein by Yossi Zwecker

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Published by the International Fellowship of Christians & Jews, Inc. with offices in Brazil, Canada, Israel, South Korea, and the United States.

First Printing: 2016

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*The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*

— Psalm 145:18

INTRODUCTION



Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” — Genesis 18:23

IN THE JEWISH ORAL TRADITION, IT IS WRITTEN: “THE WORLD stands on three pillars: *Torah* (Bible study), work, and acts of kindness.” We can easily understand what it means to study God’s Word and serve others. But what is meant by “work”?

The Oral Tradition is referring to what Judaism calls “work of the heart” — the Jewish definition of prayer.

Defining prayer as heart-based work is profoundly different than the typical definition of prayer. The word “prayer” originates from a Latin word that means “to beg” or “to entreat.” And for many people that is their understanding of prayer. When we pray, we ask God for what we want and hope that He obliges.

However, when we change the definition of prayer to “work we do in our hearts,” the act of praying changes entirely. It becomes an act that transforms who we are, not what God does.

It’s not that Judaism doesn’t see asking God for our needs as an essential part of prayer. On the contrary, Jewish prayer is comprised of praise, gratitude, and requests. However, all three aspects have to be viewed in the proper context.

We don’t praise God because He needs our compliments. We don’t thank God because He needs our gratitude. And we don’t make requests because God doesn’t know what we need. Rather, we

do all these things in order to change our hearts — to increase our awareness of God, the Source of all things.

Jewish prayer is first and foremost about communing with God. The fact that we might get our requests met is a byproduct of that connection. Perhaps this is why the first prayer recorded in the Bible goes seemingly unanswered. It teaches us that God is not the proverbial “genie in a bottle,” and that prayer is about more than getting immediate results.

That was Abraham’s prayer for the wicked people of Sodom. Knowing that God planned to destroy the city, Abraham prayed that the people might be saved. However, they were destroyed even though Abraham prayed fervently for their salvation.

Wouldn’t it have been more inspirational if the first prayer was one that moved mountains and resulted in miracles? But God wanted us to learn that while He hears every prayer, prayer is not limited to granting our requests. Sincere prayer is about coming closer to God and co-creating a better world — but not necessarily in ways we might have imagined.

Prayer is both mysterious and simple, both beyond the natural and yet the most natural act of all. In this study, we will examine the prayers of 10 biblical characters and discover insightful teachings about the purpose of prayer, how to pray effectively, and the power of our prayers.

It is my personal prayer that as a result we will all pray more effectively and powerfully.

With prayers for *shalom*, peace,



Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein

ISHMAEL'S PRAYER



God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.” — Genesis 21:17

THE LATE BIL KEANE, AWARD-WINNING CARTOONIST OF THE FAMED comic strip *The Family Circus*, left us this gem of a quote: “Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present.”

Today truly is a gift. We learn just how much so from the story of Hagar and her son, Ishmael.

Ishmael, Abraham’s son with his maidservant Hagar, was causing trouble. He was a horrible example for the younger Isaac, and according to tradition, Ishmael even tried to kill Isaac on more than one occasion. Sarah decided that it was time for Hagar and her son to go.

Abraham (reluctantly) sent Hagar and Ishmael off into the wilderness with food and water, but the resources were quickly depleted in the hot desert. Ishmael became deathly ill, so his mother placed him under a bush and left him, not wanting to see her son die. This looked like the end, but then a miracle occurred.

An angel appeared to Hagar and said, “*Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.*” Ishmael had prayed to God for salvation, and God heard his prayers. The Jewish sages notice the seemingly extra words at the end of the verse, “*as he lies there,*” from

which we learn a profound lesson about prayer and the power of the present.

The sages teach that when the angels heard God was planning to save Ishmael, they were very upset. Given Ishmael's wicked past, the angels knew that his future would be just as evil, all the way to the end of time! How could God possibly save him?

However, God explained to the angels that He heard Ishmael's prayers "*as he lies there*." Not as he was in the past, not as he will be in the future, but as he was in the *present*. At that moment, Ishmael was righteous; therefore at that moment, he deserved salvation.

If God hears the prayers of an evil person in a moment of clarity and sincerity, imagine what is possible for the righteous who love Him!

Sometimes we feel unworthy before God. We look at our history of mistakes and failures, and we feel that we are bound to repeat them. "What's the use in praying? God knows I'm flawed!" However, we can learn from Ishmael that God has given us the gift of the present. We need not worry about our past or fret about our future. God wants to know who we are right now in this very moment, and based on that, He will hear our prayers.

PRAYER: *Hear our voice, Lord our God, pity and have mercy on us. Accept our prayer with compassion and favor, for You are God who hears prayers and supplications. Do not turn us away from You, our King, empty-handed, for You hear the prayers of Your people with compassion. Blessed are You, God, who hears prayer.*

This prayer is part of the *Amidah*, also known as "The Silent Meditation," the central prayer in Jewish prayer services that is recited three times a day. It was composed by the elders and prophets shortly after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the 2nd century CE.

ELIEZER'S PRAYER



*Then he prayed, “LORD, God of my master Abraham,
make me successful today, and show kindness to
my master Abraham.” — Genesis 24:12*

ABRAHAM'S SERVANT, ELIEZER, WAS GIVEN A VERY DAUNTING TASK. He was asked to find a wife for Isaac — a woman who would be suitable both as Isaac's wife and as a matriarch for Abraham's descendants. The woman also had to be Abraham's relative and agree to leave her own family and live in Canaan. How would Eliezer succeed? It was like finding a needle in a haystack!

I love Eliezer's response to this challenge. He simply turned to God and humbly prayed, *“LORD, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today . . .”*

This is the first time in the Bible that we see an individual ask God for help outright. Sure, Adam, Noah, and Abraham all had faith in God and placed their trust in Him, but this is the clearest example of a human asking for God's assistance. And God answered in abundance. *“Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder”* (Genesis 24:15). Out walked Rebekah — she was beautiful, kind, and met all Abraham's criteria. God had indeed made Eliezer successful.

Never underestimate the power of asking God for help. When the challenge looks daunting, ask for help. When it feels like the walls are closing in around you, ask for help. When you feel overwhelmed,

outnumbered, and out of luck, ask God for help.

This is what happened when King Jehoshaphat of Judah was told that the armies of three enemy nations were quickly approaching. Jehoshaphat realized that he didn't stand a chance against his enemies. In a more elaborate and lengthy prayer than Eliezer's, he essentially prayed the same thing: For God to make him successful. Jehoshaphat ended his prayer, *"For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you"* (2 Chronicles 20:12).

God answered Jehoshaphat in abundance as well. The next day, God caused the enemy armies to fight against each other. By the time the Israelites reached the battlefield, their enemies were already dead. Not only that, but the ground was laden with spoils. It took the Israelites three days to collect everything!

Friends, in everything we do, we must remember to ask God to make us successful. It's so simple that it is easily overlooked or forgotten. On the way to work each day, say, "Lord, make me successful today." As we care for our children, say, "Lord, make me successful today." At the grocery store, say, "Lord make me successful today." As we ask, so shall we receive.

PRAYER: *Master of the Universe: In Your holy Writings it is written: "Kindness surrounds him who trusts in the Eternal." Eternal, God of truth, bless me with success in all my endeavors, for I have trusted in You to send me good fortune. May I merit that the following verse be fulfilled in me: "Cast your burden upon the Eternal and He will sustain you. He will never let the righteous falter." Amen.*

This prayer was composed by the prominent Rabbi Isaiah Horovitz of Europe, who later lived in Safed, Israel. The Rabbi lived at the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th, serving as a scholar and leader in communities across Europe and the Holy Land. Many of his prayers, like this one, remain popular today.

ISAAC'S PRAYER



Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. — Genesis 25:21

IN READING ABOUT ISAAC'S PRAYER ON BEHALF OF HIS CHILDLESS wife Rebekah, it seems fairly straightforward: Isaac prayed, God answered his prayers, and Rebekah became pregnant. However, it wasn't as easy as it seems at first glance.

This wasn't the first time that Isaac prayed for children, nor the second, nor the third. In fact, Isaac and Rebekah had been praying that same prayer for 19 years! Now, finally, after nearly two decades of waiting, their prayer was answered. This was a prayer marathon, and it was no easy sprint to the finish line.

So often this is exactly how prayer works in our own lives as well. Sometimes, we pour out our hearts to God and our prayers are answered immediately. However, more often than not, we don't get instant results from our prayers. It's easy to give up after praying for the same thing over and over again. The powerful lesson that we learn from Isaac and Rebekah is that we must press on and press forward with our prayers. The very next one may be the last one — the one that opens the door.

The Hebrew word used in our verse that means "to pray" can also mean "to dig." The Jewish sages teach that praying is like digging. Praying hollows out a tunnel between us and what we are praying

for, until at last, we can reach it. However praying, like digging, takes time and patience. Just because we haven't reached our goal yet doesn't mean that nothing is happening; we are moving forward, we're just not there yet.

The sages also point out that this word also shares a root with the Hebrew word for "pitchfork." They explain that our prayers are like pitchforks. A farmer uses a pitchfork to overturn piles of grain so that the grain won't rot. Little by little, the whole pile is overturned. Similarly, prayers overturn piles of judgment into piles of mercy. Little by little, our prayers change God's judgment into mercy until we are deserving of what we are praying for.

I want to encourage us all to keep praying — no matter how long we've been praying already or how impossible our situation might seem. According to Jewish tradition, Rebekah was born without a womb. It was physically impossible for her to have a baby. And yet, after 19 years of prayer, a breakthrough occurred. She and Isaac dug through the impossibilities, and God made a way for her to birth twins.

Friends, pray and pray again. Some things require only a few prayers, and some require many. Keep digging through until you arrive at your own breakthrough.

PRAYER: *Dear God, give me strength to pray to you continuously. Let me never give up calling out to You or believing in the power of prayer.*

This prayer was composed by Rabbi Nachman Goldstein, also known as the Tcheriner Rabbi, from the town of Tcherin, Ukraine. The Rabbi lived in the 19th century and left behind a treasure trove of prayers as part of his legacy.

LEAH'S PRAYER



*Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure
and was beautiful. — Genesis 29:17*

BEGINNING IN GENESIS 28, WE MEET THE FINAL MATRIARCHS — Rachel and Leah. Scripture teaches us that “*Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel . . . was beautiful.*” Many people have been puzzled by this information in the Bible. What does it mean that Leah had “weak eyes” and why do we need to know that?

According to Jewish tradition, Leah’s eyes were weak in the sense that they were puffy, red, and sensitive from all her crying. From the time that Leah was small, people remarked that it was perfect that Laban had two girls, while Rebekah, his sister, had two boys. The elder daughter, Leah, would marry the elder son, Esau, while the younger daughter, Rachel, would marry the younger son, Jacob.

Leah understood that these remarks were not just empty words. They were her destiny. Leah believed that God’s plan for her life was that she would marry Esau and produce six of the 12 tribes, while Rachel and Jacob would produce the other six. There was just one problem: Leah did not want to marry Esau. She understood that he was a wicked man who was not fit to be a patriarch of the nation of Israel. This is why Leah cried. While she cried, she also prayed.

Leah’s tears and prayers changed history and her destiny. God saw Leah’s tears and He heard her prayers. God, not Laban, was behind the switching of the brides that caused Leah to become

Jacob's first wife, although Rachel was more beautiful and more loved. In addition, God made it so Leah would bear more sons than any of Jacob's wives.

This is the astounding power of tears. Leah's "weak eyes" were actually a sign of great strength. Through them, she was able to alter history and change her destiny.

According to tradition, after the destruction of the Holy Temple, all gates to heaven were locked, except for the Gates of Tears. Even today, we possess the same immense power that Leah harnessed in her own life. We, too, can cry out to God with tears in prayer and change the course of our lives.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for "crying" is numerically equivalent to the Hebrew word for "heart." This teaches us that true tears come directly from the deepest recesses of our hearts. When our prayers, via our tears, come straight from our hearts, they go straight to heaven.

Friends, never underestimate the power of tears. As one rabbi once put it, "The Gates of Tears were never locked. What a shame if no one bothers to walk through them!"

PRAYER: *May You open the Heavenly Temple gates for those who are red-eyed. May you open the gates of purity for those who are pure. May you open the gates of sincere prayer to those You have not forsaken. Open the gates of Heaven and open Your bountiful treasure; save us, our God of salvation.*

This prayer is based on liturgy from the *Yom Kippur*, or Day of Atonement, prayer service. The Day of Atonement concludes with a service called *Neilah*, meaning "the locking," because it is at this point during the High Holy Days that our judgment for the coming year is sealed in the Book of Life. Therefore, during the waning moments of the day, we implore God to thrust open the gates of heaven to our prayers before "locking" them as the High Holy Days come to an end.

JACOB'S PRAYER



“And to you I give one more ridge of land than to your brothers, the ridge I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow.” — Genesis 48:22

IS THERE A SCIENCE TO PRAYER?

Studies about the efficacy of prayer are inconclusive. Some studies prove that prayer helps, while other studies produce results that suggest otherwise. Ultimately, it's hard to study something that can't be seen or measured. For believers, it's from faith and experience that we know how deeply prayer impacts our lives.

However, even among those of us who believe, is there a science to our prayers? Are some prayers more effective than others? According to Jewish tradition, the answer is yes, and we learn from Jacob's life two of the most valuable tips.

As Jacob neared the end of his life and bestowed blessings upon his children, he blessed Joseph with a double portion of land. Among that land was the city of Shechem, *“the ridge I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow.”* The city of Shechem became inseparable from Joseph. He was buried there, and people still pray there at his tomb today.

Although there is no doubt that Jacob bequeathed the city of Shechem to Joseph and his descendants forever, we do have to question how Jacob received this land. While Jacob said that he captured it with his own sword and bow, the Bible clearly tells us that Simeon

and Levi captured the city after the inhabitants disgraced their sister Dinah (Genesis 34:25). How could Jacob claim credit for conquering Shechem and then give it away to another one of his sons?

The Jewish sages explain that Jacob's terms "*sword and bow*" refer to his "prayers and supplications" before God. Jacob recognized that anything done on a physical level had a spiritual cause. While Simeon and Levi may have been successful at physically capturing Shechem, it was Jacob's prayers that led to their success. According to Jacob, prayers and supplications are the real instruments in life, and they are the cause for our victories and successes.

But that's not all that Jacob revealed about the power of prayer. The terms "*sword and bow*" also teach us about the most effective ways to pray. Just as a sword is most effective when it is sharp, so, too, are our prayers most piercing when they are focused and defined. Just as an arrow travels the farthest when it is most drawn back on the bow, so, too, do our prayers travel "closer to God" when they emanate from the deepest depths of our hearts.

So next time we pray, let us remember to bring Jacob's sword and bow with us. Let us clearly and concisely express to God our deepest, innermost requests and needs. Prayer is a powerful force, and we are wise to make use of it.

PRAYER: *Blessed God, help me pray to You with concentration and energy, so that through the vitality of my prayers, I can find renewed life.*

This prayer was composed by Rabbi Noson Sternhartz, who lived and taught in Ukraine during the 19th century. Rabbi Noson wrote hundreds of prayers during his lifetime.

MIRIAM'S PRAYER



*His sister stood at a distance to see what would
happen to him. — Exodus 2:4*

WHAT IF GOD ANSWERED EVERY PRAYER WITH A RESOUNDING “YES”? Would the world be a better and happier place or a worse one? For example, what if God had answered Miriam’s prayer as she stood among the reeds next to the Nile River where her baby brother Moses floated in a basket designed to protect him as he drifted in the water?

As you remember the story, Miriam and her mother had placed Moses in the basket as a last resort. The Egyptians had resolved to kill every Hebrew baby boy. Miriam and her mother hoped that a non-Egyptian would find the infant and have mercy on him.

Miriam watched to find out her baby brother’s fate, and as the Jewish sages teach, while she waited, she prayed, “God, please watch him. Please make sure no Egyptian officials find him.” Who should come along but the daughter of Pharaoh himself! The daughter of the very man who proclaimed: “*Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile*” (Exodus 1:22).

Miriam continued to pray: “God, please don’t let her see him!” But Pharaoh’s daughter did see him and she reached for the basket.

Miriam begged: “Please God, don’t let her reach him!” Again, God didn’t listen to her. Pharaoh’s daughter did reach the basket, and according to tradition, God even performed a miracle to lengthen her arm so that she could reach Moses.

Miriam pleaded: “Oh, God, please make her think that he is ugly and no good.” But Pharaoh’s daughter was smitten and she decided to take Moses for her son.

And God said: “Good thing I didn’t answer you, Miriam! Had I done what you asked, Moses would have drifted off and drowned. Instead he will grow up in Pharaoh’s home where he will become a noble, a leader who can redeem Israel.” And indeed he did!

Like Miriam, we don’t always get what we pray for. But we always get what we need, and that makes all the difference. When we pray for one thing and we don’t get what we asked for, it feels as though one of two things has happened. Either God didn’t hear our prayers, or He has denied us a gift. But neither is true.

God hears every one of our prayers. Sometimes He says “yes” and other times He says “no.” But when God says “no,” it’s not because He doesn’t want us to have good things. When God says “no” to what we asked for, it’s because He has something even greater to give us!

Our unanswered prayers are often the greatest gifts of all.

PRAYER: *Help me, dear God, to merge with Your truth so that I might know that everything is for the best. Help me to believe that everything is ultimately good and that there is nothing that is really bad. Help me to understand that all of the difficulties and challenges that come to the world are for a greater purpose, until — in the merit of our faith — you remove all suffering from the world.*

This prayer was also composed by Rabbi Noson Sternhartz, who lived and taught in Ukraine during the 19th century. Rabbi Noson wrote hundreds of prayers during his lifetime, relating to a vast array of life events, emotions, challenges, and the desire to become closer to God.

THE ISRAELITES' PRAYER



During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. — Exodus 2:23–25

AT THE END OF THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS, we read that the children of Israel cried out to God in prayer because of their bitter enslavement. Next, we learn that God heard their prayers and He remembered His promise to their forefathers. Finally, the chapter closes by telling us that God was concerned about the Israelites.

Now, here's the problem: God already told Abraham that his descendants would go down to Egypt and be oppressed by the Egyptians. He also promised Abraham that his descendants would eventually be freed and prosper. So the question is: Why did the children of Israel need to cry out to God at all in order to awaken God's compassion and salvation? It was already promised and predicted. In addition, when the verse tells us that God "remembered" His promise to the forefathers, are we supposed to believe that God had somehow forgotten the promise? Does God need us to remind Him of our plight so that He may take notice of us?

I once heard this dilemma explained with the following analogy.

Imagine that a school is awarded an enormous grant. The principal is excited about all the new programs that he will be able to implement and all the ways that he can make the school a better place for his students. Months go by and the money that had been promised fails to appear. More months go by, and the principal is concerned.

He goes to the director of the foundation, who promised the money in the first place, and asks him where the money is. The director reminds the principal that he has forgotten to do the one thing that will allow the money to reach the school. “You were supposed to open a bank account for us to put the money into!” the director explains. Without the bank account, there was no way to channel the funds.

Friends, God has all sorts of blessings to give us and promises to fulfill. But He cannot do so if we don’t “open a bank account.” What that means is that we have to open our mouths in prayer. Prayer is the vehicle through which we draw down God’s blessings into the world.

It wasn’t that God forgot about Israel or His promises to them; they only needed to pray for them. As soon as they opened the channel of prayer, the blessings began to flow. Similarly, we need to open our mouths in prayer for all our needs. God is ready to give them; we need to get ready to receive them.

PRAYER: *My Lord, open up my lips so that my mouth can declare Your praise.*

This short prayer, based on Psalm 51:15, is recited before saying the *Amidah* prayer. The *Amidah*, or “Silent Meditation,” is comprised of 19 segments that form the main prayer of every service. This verse from the Psalms recognizes that we must ask God for help in everything — even for the ability to pray to Him.

HANNAH'S PRAYER



Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”

“Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.” — 1 Samuel 1:13–15

HANNAH'S HEARTFELT PRAYER REVOLUTIONIZED THE WAY WE PRAY. Hannah, who was barren, quietly poured out her heart to God at the Tabernacle in Shiloh, begging for a child and promising to dedicate him to God. The way she prayed was so unusual that the priest Eli was sure she was drunk and scolded her. Hannah, most dignified, told Eli that she wasn't intoxicated; she was crying out to God.

From this short exchange, we learn many lessons about prayer. First, potent prayer is deeply emotional prayer. Second, a powerful way to pray is to speak directly to God, privately and quietly, like conversing with a parent or confidant — as opposed to formal prayers offered publicly, in grandiose fashion, which must have been the norm at that time. Third, prayer must be expressed through our lips, not just in our hearts. Even if prayer is quiet, our thoughts must become words. Words help create reality.

Hannah's request was granted, and she gave birth to the prophet Samuel. However, the Jewish sages wonder why God had made so

many holy women barren? They answer: “Because God desires the prayers of the righteous.” God intentionally made those women, like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah, childless so that they would turn to Him in prayer.

I once read the following, “We don’t pray so that we will get an answer; our prayer *is* the answer.” Prayer is not for God’s benefit; it’s for ours. Through prayer, we grow and change.

Prayer is the greatest change agent that there is. When we pray, we evaluate what is truly important to us and regret past mistakes; we pledge to move forward with greater appreciation and dedication. Most importantly, we grow closer to God, deepening our connection to Him.

God wants the prayers of His people because He wants us to be the very best that we can possibly be. Sometimes God puts us into desperate situations because He wants us to turn to Him in prayer and grow into better people. We must realize that our challenges are never meant to be cruel — rather, they are given with great love for our own good. As we change through our heartfelt prayers, we increase our capacity to receive greater and greater blessings into our lives.

PRAYER: *Please God, open up the Gates of Mercy and the Gates of Heaven for me. The Lord is King, the Lord has always been King, and the Lord will always be King. As for us, we bend our knees and bow while we acknowledge before the King of Kings that it is He who spreads out the Heavens and establishes the earth. For God alone is in Heaven above and earth below; there is no other. Please God, free my soul, for I have waited only for Your salvation, and lead me in the ways of righteousness.*

This prayer is known as “A plea to open the Gates of Mercy.” Although its author is unknown, it has remained part of the Jewish tradition and is said by many during times of desperation and extreme difficulty.

MANASSEH'S PRAYER



In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God. — 2 Chronicles 33:12–13

THERE ARE NO WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE WICKEDNESS OF KING Manasseh. He sinned greatly and caused his whole generation to do likewise. He undid all of the good that his father, King Hezekiah, had done. He promoted idolatry and erected an idol in the House of God. He murdered Isaiah, his own grandfather. He sacrificed his own children. No one was more evil.

Then one day, the enemy captured Manasseh. They placed him in a copper cauldron and lit a fire underneath. Manasseh called out to every god that he had ever worshiped, but to no avail. Finally, when there were no choices left, he remembered the God of his fathers and he called out to Him in prayer. As the verse above tells us, God heard his prayers and answered them. Manasseh was saved.

Jewish tradition teaches that when Manasseh called out to God in prayer and repentance, the ministering angels shut all of the windows in heaven. They pleaded before God, “Lord of the Universe, how can You accept the prayers of such a terrible person.” But God replied, “If I do not accept him in repentance, I am locking the door before all repentant sinners.”

This powerful story reminds us that God's door is always open to any who wish to return to Him. If God could find a way to forgive the wicked Manasseh, our Almighty Father can find a way to forgive anyone! It is never too late and never too difficult.

Turn to God, and confess your sins to Him. Then feel the freedom and gift of forgiveness.

PRAYER: *Our Father, our King, be gracious with us and answer us, although we have no worthy deeds; treat us with charity and kindness, and save us.*

The *Avinu Malkeinu*, "Our Father, Our King" prayer, is one of the most well-known prayers in Jewish liturgy. It is featured prominently during the High Holy Days and recited on fast days throughout the year. The prayer includes dozens of requests that all commence by addressing God as both our Father and our King, both loving and powerful. The prayer here is the concluding verse which, unlike the other verses, is expressed in song by the congregation.

SOLOMON'S PRAYER



“May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.” — 1 Kings 8:29

AT THE DEDICATION OF THE FIRST TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM, KING Solomon offered a beautiful prayer that transformed the power of our prayers.

In verse 27, Solomon began: *“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”* Solomon recognized that God cannot be confined to a single structure; He is everywhere. So what would be the purpose of the Temple?

Solomon prayed that God would make Himself *more* present in the Temple than in any other place, and that He would listen more attentively to all who prayed there. This simple but heartfelt request is what has given rise to our houses of worship today — sacred places where people of faith can come together in corporate prayer.

Once the Temple was destroyed, the Jewish sages declared that houses of worship would take its place. Because of Solomon's prayer said thousands of years ago, we can be assured that if we go to a house of God, He will be more present there just as He was at the Temple. While some people don't see the need to go to a synagogue or church, here is the biblical basis for why we should.

Solomon also gives us another treasure in his dedication prayer.

This lengthy supplication contains the main elements for an ideal model for all prayer—that God be present in our lives; that we have a desire to do His will in everything; that we have the ability to obey His commands; that we receive help with our daily needs; and finally, that God’s kingdom will spread throughout the world. (Read vv. 56–61.)

Solomon’s prayer is an example of liturgy that has informed and shaped many of our corporate prayers today. While worshipers often feel that liturgy is unnecessary, one need only to study Solomon’s prayer to see how the words of someone greater than ourselves can give us the tools we need to pray our most powerful prayers.

When Solomon dedicated the Temple, he initiated much more than an era that would last only 400 years. He gave us the very foundations for our sacred sanctuaries and our liturgy that have enriched our faith and served to keep us connected not only to the Master of the Universe, but to each other.

PRAYER: *May it be Your will God, to have compassion upon us and upon Your Sanctuary, to rebuild it soon and to cause its glory to be great. Our Father, our King, speedily reveal the glory of Your Kingdom over us, appear and be exalted above us before the eyes of all the living. Draw the scattered ones from among the nations, and gather the dispersed from the ends of the earth. Bring them home to Zion, Your city, in jubilation; to Jerusalem, site of Your sanctuary, in eternal joy, to do Your will wholeheartedly.*

This is the first paragraph of the prayer traditionally recited at the Western Wall, the last remaining remnant of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem that was destroyed in the 2nd century CE. This lengthy prayer recounts the prayer offered by Solomon and God’s promise to answer all prayers said at this holy site.

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RABBI YECHIEL ECKSTEIN

In 1983, Rabbi Eckstein founded the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews* (*The Fellowship*), devoting his life to building bridges of understanding between Christians and Jews and developing broad support for the state of Israel. He is an internationally respected Bible teacher and acknowledged as the world’s leading Jewish authority on evangelical Christians. Since its founding, *The Fellowship* has raised over \$1.3 billion for its philanthropic work, blessing Jews in need around the world.

Rabbi Eckstein is the author of 10 highly acclaimed books, including *How Firm a Foundation: A Gift of Jewish Wisdom for Christians and Jews*, and *The One Year® Holy Land Moments Devotional*. His newest book, *Passover — An Inspirational Guide* was released in March 2015, and an authorized biography titled *The Bridge Builder: The Life and Continuing Legacy of Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein*, written by respected author and journalist Zev Chafets, was released in August of the same year. In addition, he is a renowned Israeli Hasidic singer and has recorded four CDs. His daily radio program, *Holy Land Moments* (*Momentos en Tierra Santa*), is now heard in English and Spanish on more than 1,500 stations on five continents, reaching more than 9.1 million listeners weekly.