

PRAYER AND FASTING

BIBLE TEXT : Genesis 18:23-32; 32:9-12, 24-28; Isaiah 58:1-11; Daniel 9:3-23; Matthew 6:16-18; 17:21.

LESSON 267 Junior Courses

MEMORY VERSE: “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Genesis 18:23-32

²³ And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

²⁴ Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that *are* therein?

²⁵ That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

²⁶ And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

²⁷ And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which *am but* dust and ashes:

²⁸ Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for *lack of* five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy *it*.

²⁹ And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do *it* for forty's sake.

³⁰ And he said *unto him*, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do *it*, if I find thirty there.

³¹ And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy *it* for twenty's sake.

³² And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy *it* for ten's sake.

Genesis 32:9-12

⁹ And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:

¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Pleasant Conversation

Prayer is talking with God. Even little children can pray; and God listens to them, and answers. “The prayer of the upright is his delight” (Proverbs 15:8).

Well-trained children pray when they get up in the morning, thanking God for a night's rest, and asking Him to keep them through the day. Before they go to bed at night they pray again, asking God to take care of them through the night and to bless their father and mother, their sisters and brothers, and all their friends. They say thank you to Jesus, too, for the food they eat.

All those prayers are as pleasant conversations between friends and loved ones. Jesus wants to be our Friend, and the more we talk with Him the more He loves us, and the more we become like Him.

When the children grow a little older they begin to realise trouble at times. Perhaps they become ill, or they injure themselves. Then they call upon the Lord to help them and heal them. They are happy that they have made Him their Friend when they were well, so that He is near to help when they want to be healed.

The Age of Accountability

When children reach the age of accountability — that age when they feel conviction for sin — there is need for more prayer. If they want to be ready to meet Jesus, they have to pray to Him to forgive their sins. When they repent, and promise to serve Him forever, He forgives them and they are born into the family of God. Being a child of God is a closer relationship than being a friend.

Time goes by, and as a person grows older greater problems arise. God calls His children to make deeper consecrations. Perhaps we have gone along planning our own lives and activities, and all at once God asks us to leave all of that to do what He asks. We may have to pray very hard before we can conquer our wills and be willing to follow the will of the Lord.

Jacob's Prevailing Prayer

We read of such a prayer that Jacob prayed. He had given his heart to God, and wanted to serve Him. God had forgiven him for his deceitfulness to his brother when he was young; but Jacob was still living far from his home, away from his brother.

Jacob had cleverly won the birthright from Esau, had deceived his blind father into giving him the blessing, and had become rich through his cunning work for his father-in-law. But when God told him to go back home and face the brother who had been wronged, Jacob was helpless. He had to pray to God for help, and he prayed earnestly.

Let us pay attention to the way Jacob prayed. God had promised Jacob that He would go with him if he returned home. Still Jacob had to pray in order to claim that promise.

First, Jacob honoured God as the God of his fathers. God had

my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.

¹¹ Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, *and* the mother with the children.

¹² And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

Genesis 32:24-28

²⁴ And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

²⁵ And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

²⁶ And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

²⁷ And he said unto him, What *is* thy name? And he said, Jacob.

²⁸ And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

Isaiah 58:1-11

¹ Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

² Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

³ Wherefore have we fasted, *say they*, and thou seest not? *wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

⁴ Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as *ye do this day*, to make your voice to be heard on high.

⁵ Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? *is it* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *under him*? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

⁶ *Is not this the fast that I have chosen?* to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

made covenants with them and had answered their prayers. That gave Jacob faith that God would hear him also. We gain faith and courage to trust God to answer our prayers as we think of other prayers He has answered for us, and our loved ones. Or if a person has just become acquainted with Jesus, and has not known of answered prayers, he can read about such prayers in the Bible, and from them receive faith.

Then Jacob humbled himself: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." None of us deserve anything from God. We have all sinned, and it is only by the Spirit of God that we are called to repentance. We are saved because Jesus loved us enough to die on Calvary; and it is through the Blood that He shed that we can conquer the enemy of our soul, and win the blessings that God has promised to us.

Jacob next reminded God of His promise: "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." If we want something from God, we must first look into the Bible and see if it is according to His Word. When we are sure that our desire is right, then we can pray with confidence that He will hear us.

Next, Jacob began consecrating. He sent all his flocks and herds over the brook. They were his earthly possessions, all he owned. He, in a figure, gave them to God. Then he sent his family — his loved ones who were nearest to his heart — across to the other side. He had nothing left but himself. And he must give himself to the Lord, too.

There was no sleep for Jacob that night as he wrestled with the angel. The blessing that God had promised was more important to Jacob than the rest he might have thought he needed. If it was necessary to pray all night in order to receive the blessing he wanted, he was willing to do it. The angel put Jacob's thigh out of joint, and still Jacob prayed on. And he prayed through!

Jacob was so victorious in his prayer that the angel changed his name. No more would he be called Jacob, the supplanter who had taken his brother's birthright, but was to be called Israel, "For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." It had cost Jacob a long hard night of prevailing prayer. It had cost him a complete consecration of all that he had. Was it not worth it? Think of the blessings he received! Not only could he meet his brother in peace the next day — that was what he had asked for — but he was called a prince of God; and God's chosen people from that time on carried his name as Israelites. Jacob's twelve sons became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel — all because Jacob prayed until he received an answer.

Abraham's Intercession

Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, was another man who prayed. He obeyed God in all things, and he prayed often. God could say of him: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgement; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

There was such close communion between God and Abraham that God told Abraham the sad news of the destruction before He sent judgement upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham knew that God was just, and would not do anything but what was right. God had promised that He would not destroy the righteous with the wicked. Yet a great burden came upon him to pray to God to

⁷ *Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

⁸ Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward.

⁹ Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I *am*. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

¹⁰ And *if* thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness *be* as the noonday:

¹¹ And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Daniel 9:3-23

³ And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

⁴ And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

⁵ We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

⁶ Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

⁷ O Lord, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, *that are near, and that are far off*, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

⁸ O Lord, to us *belongeth* confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

⁹ To the Lord our God *belong* mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

spare the righteous in Sodom.

Abraham asked God if He would spare the city for 50 righteous people. God answered that He would. What about 45? Yes, God would spare the city for 45 righteous people. But what if there were only 40? God would spare the city for 40, or even 30, or 20. Still Abraham was burdened. What if there were not even 20? Would those who were there have to lose everything they had in the destruction of the city?

How long would God have patience to listen to Abraham's pleading for souls? Would we have become impatient with his continual asking? God did not tire of Abraham's prayers.

Abraham realised that God had yielded to him greatly, and finally he said: "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there." God answered: "I will not destroy it for ten's sake." That was the end of the prayer. Abraham had prevailed with God, and the burden was lifted, although judgement did come. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because there were not even ten righteous in all that country. Those who were righteous were taken from the city, and then fire and brimstone rained down from heaven to burn up all the sin and the sinners who were left.

A Life for God

Jacob and Abraham could get answers to their prayers because they lived to please God and because they earnestly prayed until the answer came. There were people in Israel's history who prayed earnestly, and even fasted, but who did not get an answer. The trouble was that they did not live godly lives. These were the things they were to do instead of making a big pretence of fasting and mourning for their sins: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:6, 7).

Of what good were their long prayers and fasts if men were not good to the people with whom they lived? The Apostle James wrote: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (James 2:15, 16).

Fasting

Fasting (which means eating no food) is not to be done to make a good impression upon people. Jesus said: "When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:16-18).

We have examples in the Bible of fasting, when God put a heavy burden upon His people. Moses went into the mountain and prayed and fasted for 40 days when God gave him the Law. He felt the responsibility of leading 3,000,000 people into the Promised Land, and he needed help from God. He prayed earnestly, and went without food.

Many years later, when Daniel was a Prophet in Israel, he, too,

¹⁰ Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

¹¹ Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that *is* written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

¹² And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem.

¹³ As *it is* written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

¹⁴ Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.

¹⁵ And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly.

¹⁶ O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people *are become* a reproach to all *that are* about us.

¹⁷ Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake.

¹⁸ O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.

¹⁹ O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

²⁰ And whiles I *was* speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God;

felt the burden of those sinning Israelites. He set his face to seek the Lord by "prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Daniel 9:3). He first reminded God of His promises. Then he confessed his own sins and the sins of the people. His deep earnestness in prayer and fasting brought wonderful blessings upon him. The angel Gabriel came to him with prophecies so wonderful that they are written in the Bible.

When Jesus was tempted of Satan in the wilderness, He fasted for 40 days. Jesus communed daily with God in prayer, but during this severe testing time, He did not eat. One time when His disciples came to Him, wanting to know why it was that they could not cast out certain devils, He answered: "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21). Sometimes it takes more than earnest prayer to have power from God for certain tasks. We may become so burdened that the desire for food will go from us; or we may, through denying ourselves food, show the Lord our earnestness and gain additional blessings from Him.

Some people have made fasting a ritual, without the Spirit of God, and carry it on until it injures their health. Such is not of the Lord. Three days of fasting at a time is as long as can be considered advisable. When a person is inspired by the Lord to lay aside his food for a time to give all his attention to laying his petition before the Lord, the Lord will answer and reward.

QUESTIONS

1. What do little children ask of the Lord when they pray?
2. For what should a child pray when he feels conviction for sin?
3. What did Jacob do before he started his prayer at Jabbok?
4. What did Jacob pray for? How much more did he receive?
5. What did Abraham do when God told him that Sodom was going to be destroyed?
6. For how many people was God willing to spare the city of Sodom?
7. Why could Jacob and Abraham expect God to answer their prayers?
8. What does the word "fasting" mean?
9. When should a person fast?
10. How should a person conduct himself when he is fasting?

²¹ Yea, whiles I *was* speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

²² And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.

²³ At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew *thee*; for thou *art* greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

¹⁷ But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

¹⁸ That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 17:21

²¹ Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.