

# Walking in Prayer: Old Testament

## Lesson 8: Prayers of Ezra to Daniel

### Vocabulary:

prophet	embarrassed	to whisper	skilled
to attack	guilty	to frighten	talented
to take / hold captive	captivity	revenge	administrator
treasure	to repair	to curse	lion's den
to set fire	to ruin (adj. ruined)	sorrow	In accordance with
to destroy	ancestry	testimony	throne
royal	to overtake	magician	to be proud
nobility	frustration	astrologer	arrogant
to rebuild	to be fooled	to demand	condition
to intermarry	joke	to interpret	tragedy
practice (n.)	to make fun of	court	exhausted
shame / ashamed	to insult	to reveal	to the point of

### Discussion:

In Lessons 6 and 7, we learned from David how to express our hearts, feelings, and needs through writing Psalms.

Share one way that your life or relationship with God was impacted from the last lesson. In what ways do you still want to grow?

In this study, we will walk in prayer with three prophets: Ezra, Jeremiah, and Daniel, who lived during the time when the king of Babylon attacked Jerusalem, taking captive thousands of Jewish people. We will see how they struggled staying faithful to God through the most challenging situations.

### The Prayer of Ezra (Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah 8-10)

On March 597 B.C.E., a king from ancient Babylon attacked Jerusalem, stealing the temple treasures and setting fire to the Jewish temple and palaces. After tearing down the walls of Jerusalem and destroying the city, the king took captive ten thousand of the most highly educated and talented Jewish men. These men included members of the royal Jewish family and other nobility. The king kept them as prisoners in Babylon and forced them to work as slaves. Fifty-eight years later, God used the king of Persia, Cyrus the Great, to rescue the Jewish people and free them to return to Jerusalem to worship God and rebuild their holy temple<sup>1</sup>. Upon returning, however, the Jewish people were unfaithful to God and intermarried with nearby Gentile, or non-Jewish, communities. This practice was against God's Law.

During this time, we meet the Jewish chief priest and a teacher of the Law, Ezra, who helps the people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. As a descendant of the ancient chief priest Aaron, brother of Moses, Ezra is highly educated in the Law of Moses and is responsible for making sure that Israel knows and

<sup>1</sup> See Ezra 1:2-4 and Isaiah 45:1-13.

obeys God's laws. When Ezra hears about Israel's sin, he tears his clothes in **shame**, falls to his knees, reaches his hands out to the Lord, and prays this prayer:

<sup>6</sup>“My God, I am too **ashamed** and **embarrassed** to look at you. I am ashamed because our sins are higher than our heads... <sup>7</sup>We have been **guilty** of many sins from the days of our ancestors until now. We sinned, so our kings and priests were punished. Foreign kings attacked us and took our people away...<sup>8</sup>“But now, finally, you have been kind to us. You have let a few of us escape **captivity** and come to live in this holy place. Lord, you gave us new life and relief from our slavery. <sup>9</sup>Yes, we were slaves, but you would not let us be slaves forever... You made the kings of Persia be kind to us... You gave us new life so that we can rebuild your Temple and **repair** it like new. (Ezra 9, ERV)

How does Ezra feel about his people and their sins?

How has God responded to this problem?

Even though Ezra feels the guilt and shame of his people's sin, he remembers God's faithfulness. Even so, Ezra grieves over what his people have done.

<sup>10</sup>“Now, God, what can we say to you? We have stopped obeying you again. <sup>11</sup>...You said, ‘The land you are going to live in and own is a **ruined** land. It has been ruined by evil things the people living there have done...<sup>12</sup>So Israelites, don't let your children marry their children. Don't join them. Don't want the things they have. Obey my commands so that you will be strong and enjoy the good things of the land. And then you can keep this land and give it to your children.’ <sup>13</sup>“What has happened to us is our own fault. We have done evil things, and we have much guilt... <sup>14</sup>...God, if we continue to marry these bad people, we know you will destroy us. Then there would be no one from the Israelites left alive...<sup>(9)</sup>

How have the Jewish people sinned? Why is this a problem? *Consider the importance of Jewish **ancestry** and Jesus's birth.*

What is Ezra think God will do to discipline the people?

Ezra is passionate about helping the Jewish people become a people who please the Lord. For this reason, Ezra faithfully reads the Law of Moses to the people. Because of Ezra's prayer and faithfulness as a teacher, the Israelites confess what they have done and recommit their lives to God.

What sins do you see in your life, your family, community, city, church, or nation that concern you?

How have you seen God's discipline over these sins? How have you seen his kindness?

On a card, write a prayer to God about some of your concerns in these areas and where you have seen God's discipline and kindness.

In the New Testament, God continues to teach his people the importance of marrying and dating faithful believers and living righteously in these relationships. What does this mean, and why is this important?

Consider your own life – your marriage, your dating relationships, or your desires for these relationships. Write a prayer about this area of your life. How can you grow in your faithfulness to God in one of these areas?

### The Prayer of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1-52)

During this time, we also meet the son of a priest, Jeremiah, who is also serving as a prophet when the king of Babylon conquers Jerusalem. Before the attack, Jeremiah prophesies and warns the Jewish people living in Jerusalem that God is going to allow the Babylonian king to **overtake** the people if they don't turn away from their sins and turn back to God. Yet the people do not obey. In fact, they attack Jeremiah and punish him for his negative prophecy against them. Jeremiah in turn cries out to the Lord in **frustration**, pain, and distress. Here is his prayer:

<sup>7</sup> Lord, you tricked me, and I certainly **was fooled**. You are stronger than I am, so you won. I have become a **joke**. People laugh at me and **make fun of** me all day long.<sup>8</sup> ... I tell the people about the message that I received from the Lord, but they only **insult** me and make fun of me. <sup>9</sup>Sometimes I say to myself, "I will forget about him. I will not speak anymore in his name." But when I say this, his message is like a fire burning inside me! It feels like it is burning deep in my bones! I get tired of trying to hold his message inside. And finally, I am not able to hold it in. (20, ERV)

Jeremiah receives a message from the Lord to tell the people. He is so excited to tell his friends and warn them of the great danger that is ahead. But what happens? How do they respond?

Jeremiah struggles with this rejection. How does he feel toward God and toward God's message?

Jeremiah continues:

<sup>10</sup>I hear people **whispering** against me. Everywhere, I hear things that **frighten** me. Even my friends are speaking against me... We will finally be rid of him. Then we will grab him and take our **revenge** on him. <sup>11</sup>But the Lord is with me. He is like a strong soldier. So those who are chasing me will fall... <sup>13</sup>Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! He saves the lives of the poor! He saves them from the wicked! <sup>14</sup>**Curse** the day I was born! Don't bless the day my mother had me... <sup>18</sup>Why did I have to come out of her body? All I have seen is trouble and **sorrow**, and my life will end in shame. (20)

Here Jeremiah is experiencing what is called spiritual persecution, or rejection for his beliefs. Describe how Jeremiah is feeling. How does he try to encourage himself?

Have you ever been rejected for sharing your faith, a **testimony**, or a message from God's Word? What happened? How can you relate or not relate to Jeremiah?

We can see from Jeremiah's prayers that being strong and staying strong during persecution can be difficult and emotional. If you have experienced rejection for your faith, write a prayer to God about your feelings. Speak to your spirit about the goodness of God.

Finally, consider others around the world who are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus. Write a prayer for these people, including situations or people that you know.

### The Prayer of Daniel (Daniel 1-12)

While the king of Babylon is **holding** the Jewish people in **captive**, he begins to have dreams that bother him. He wants to know the meaning of the dreams, so he calls upon his **magicians** and **astrologers** for understanding. To test their powers, he **demand**s that they first tell him the dreams that he had and then **interpret** them. The magicians and astrologers reply that they can interpret the dreams only if the king first tells them the dreams. This makes the king angry, but the men insist that only gods can reveal secret dreams. The king then orders all of the magicians and astrologers to be killed.

During this time, Daniel,<sup>2</sup> a true prophet of God and one of the Jewish captives, is serving in the king's **court**. When he discovers what is going to happen to these men, he asks the king to wait before killing them so that he can **reveal** and interpret the king's dreams. Daniel then gathers his faithful Jewish friends serving with him in the court and asks them to cry out to God in prayer for him. That night, the Lord reveals the king's dreams and their meaning to Daniel. In response, Daniel praises the Lord with this prayer:

<sup>20</sup> Praise God's name forever and ever! Power and wisdom belong to him. <sup>21</sup> He changes the times and seasons. He gives power to kings, and he takes their power away. He gives wisdom to people, so they become wise... <sup>22</sup> He knows hidden secrets that are hard to understand. Light lives with him, so he knows what is in the dark and secret places. <sup>23</sup> God of my ancestors, I thank you and praise you. You gave me wisdom and power. You told us what we asked for. You told us about the king's dream. (2, NIV)

Here we see that Daniel knows and trusts that God can speak to people through dreams. According to Daniel, why does God send dreams to people?

Have you ever had a spiritual dream? If so, share about your dream.

Daniel's ability to interpret the king's dreams convinces the king of Babylonia that Daniel is a true prophet who serves the true "King of heaven" (4:37). A **skilled** and **talented** servant, Daniel is invited to stay in Babylon to serve the kings of Persia, even after many of the Jews have returned to Jerusalem. While serving as one of the three **administrators** of King Darius, Daniel continues his regular routine of praying three times daily. Since Daniel will only pray to God and never to the king, Darius is forced to place Daniel in a **lion's den in accordance with** Persian law. During the night, however, God shuts the mouths of the lions and rescues Daniel.

Because of Daniel's faithfulness through the worst situation, God begins sending Daniel spiritual visions during his times of prayer – visions of heaven; the **throne** of God; the coming Messiah, who is also called

<sup>2</sup> Daniel is also known as Belteshazzar [bel-TESH-uh-zar], a Babylonian name.

in this book the Son of Man; and the future of Israel. During one vision, God reveals to Daniel how God will discipline the Jewish people through persecution and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem for a second time in 175 B.C.E.<sup>3</sup> Here is Daniel's prayer:

<sup>4</sup> "Lord, you are a great and awesome God. You keep your agreement of love and kindness with people who love you... <sup>5</sup> But we have sinned. We have done wrong. We have done evil things. We turned against you. We turned away from your commands and good decisions... <sup>16</sup> Lord, we and our ancestors sinned against you, so your people and your city became a disgrace to everyone around us...

<sup>17</sup> Now, our God, hear your servant's prayer. Listen to my prayer for mercy...<sup>18</sup> See what has happened to the city that is called by your name. I am not saying we are good people. That is not why I am asking these things. I am asking these things because I know you are kind. <sup>19</sup> Lord, listen to me! Forgive us! Lord, pay attention, and then do something! Don't wait! Do something now! Do it for your own good...and your people who are called by your name." (9, ERV)

How does Daniel pray about the sins of his people? What does he ask God to do?

In humility, Daniel takes responsibility not only for his own sin but also the sins of his community. Go back to the prayer that you wrote about the sins in your life, your family, community, city, church, or nation. How could you imitate Daniel's prayer?

Even with all of his visions and spiritual gifts, we see from Daniel's prayer that he never **becomes proud** or **arrogant**. His prayers before God are humble, filled with confessions of sins and sadness over the spiritual **condition** of his people. He even takes responsibility for his role in the sins of his community.

Throughout the book of Daniel, the Lord continues to send Daniel spiritual visions. When Daniel sees the Messiah, the Son of Man, the future of Israel, and the end of all time, Daniel realizes the spiritual **tragedy** that this world will face – during his lifetime and at the end of all time – because men do not follow God. With this realization, Daniel is completely **exhausted** and sleeps for three days. But the Son of Man, the Messiah, leaves Daniel with this hope: All who are faithful to God will receive eternal life. In this hope, Daniel finds his strength again and returns to his duties to the king.

Have you ever had a vision from the Lord? If yes, describe. How did you feel about your vision? How did you respond? If you have never had a vision from the Lord, pray that God will reveal his will to you in this way.

Are you facing in situations in your life where you need God's direction, wisdom, or understanding? Write a prayer asking God for what you need.

Consider the faithfulness of David to God – to stay faithful even **to the point of** death. Are you willing to be faithful to God in any situation? Discuss what types of situations would be the most difficult for you. Write a prayer that asks God for strength if you ever have to face this test.

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<sup>3</sup> We know from history that Antiochus Epiphanes was responsible for this destruction.

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Collect the prayers that you wrote today. Write them on cards so that you can use them during your times of prayer.
2. Collect the prayers you wrote from the other lessons and write these on cards as well. You can use these also during to your times of prayer.
3. Using your cards, create sets of prayers that you can pray throughout your week. Bring your cards to the final class.