

Introduction: As we continue our study of the all-important Old and New Testament theme of prayer, what a relief it should be to us to see how *careful* the Holy Spirit is to preparing the ground for our prayers, setting events in motion so that God's mighty, saving works among His people take place. Every eventuality is planned, and each holy purpose set in place before any believers, such as Samson's parents, are approached, called and instructed in the path of obedience. In terms of Romans 8, it is always the Holy Spirit who works with the Father to not only inspire and direct prayer, but also to search the hearts of those called to pray – compare Romans 8:27 with Romans 8:26 to see the whole gamut of what the Spirit of God does in the heart of the weakest believer, when it comes to helping them in prayer! May we be encouraged this week to learn that prayer is the evidence of God's *initiative in our lives* – instead of the pagan view that prayer is our twisting the arm of an unwilling and inactive God to get on His feet and start to care!

Mon/Tues: Judges 13:8-25. Before we speak about the Holy Spirit *in His helping the prayers of His people*, we must see that the Son of God Himself *lays His own sacrificial foundation* for the work of God in Judges 13. There the Son appears as the “Angel of the Lord,” whose mission all through the Old Testament is that of redeeming His people from evil (Gen 48:16). He appears twice to Samson's parents and instructs them about Samson's supernatural life. Then, when the realization dawns on Manoah that he and Samson's mother have spoken to God Himself (Judges 13:22), she is able to reassure her husband of God's grace and favor by citing one fact: Their sacrifice in Judges 13:19-20 was accepted by this Angel, whom Manoah's wife calls “the Lord” in Judges 13:23!

Notice how the Angel of God demonstrated His acceptance of this sacrifice from Samson's parents in Judges 13:20: He ascends in the flames. He becomes *their burnt offering*, substituting Himself in place of their imperfect sacrifice and rendering their worship acceptable to God by *His being consumed*. The sins of Samson's parents point to the wholesale destruction which all God's people deserve. However, because the Son of God steps in, their worship and sacrifice become a well-pleasing sacrifice! It was “*as the flame went toward heaven from the altar*” that the Angel of the Lord offered Himself up. This is how Samson's mother knew that she and Manoah were forgiven, cleansed and accepted by God; seeing their burnt offering taken up in the hands of the Angel of God made them know it was accepted on their behalf!

Meditate and Pray: How often Samson's mother's mind must have travelled back to the day of that burnt offering – especially when Samson was breaking her heart with his disobedience and rebellion. When by his lust and waywardness Samson epitomized the sin of Israel, she would have been reminded of the day when her family was set apart for God's purposes of salvation and mighty deliverance! In the same way, when we suffer the heartbreaks of sin, and see the consequences of our foolish choices, what a comfort to go back to the Cross where our sins were paid for, using hymns such as # 512:

1 I lay my sins on Jesus,
the spotless Lamb of God;
he bears them all, and frees us
from the accursed load:
I bring my guilt to Jesus,
to wash my crimson stains
white in his blood most precious,
till not a spot remains.

2 I lay my wants on Jesus;
all fullness dwells in him;
he heals all my diseases,
he doth my soul redeem:
I lay my griefs on Jesus,
my burdens and my cares;
he from them all releases,
he all my sorrows shares.

3 I rest my soul on Jesus,
this weary soul of mine;
his right hand me embraces,
I on his breast recline.
I love the name of Jesus,
Immanuel, Christ, the Lord;
like fragrance on the breezes
his name abroad is poured.

4 I long to be like Jesus,
meek, loving, lowly, mild;
I long to be like Jesus,
the Father's holy child;
I long to be with Jesus
amid the heav'nly throng,
to sing with saints his praises,
to learn the angels' song.

Wednesday: Judges 13:23-25 and Job 1:1-5. In her recollections of God's accepting herself, her husband and their son through their "burnt offering" offered in the name of the Angel of God, Samson's mother would have been much like Job, who every week went to his altar to offer up a burnt offering for his successful and numerous children (Job 1:1-5). May God likewise consecrate our lives as godly parents so that we more and more obey the command of Lamentations 2:19 to "cry out in the night, lifting our hands for the lives of our children, who faint from hunger on every street corner." Sing about such parental commitment which we assume Samson's mother possessed and which is to be ours also. Sing hymn # 717:

1 Blest the man that fears Jehovah,
walking ever in his ways,
by your toil you shall be prospered
and be happy all your days.

2 In your wife you shall have gladness,
she shall fill your home with good,
happy in her loving service
and the joys of motherhood.

3 Joyful children, sons and daughters,
shall about your table meet,
olive plants, in strength and beauty,
full of hope and promise sweet.

4 Lo, on him that fears Jehovah
shall this blessedness attend,
for Jehovah out of Zion
shall to you his blessing send.

Thurs/Fri: 1 Samuel 1:24-28 and Judges 13:23-25. When we think of Samson's parents' obedience to God's commands about their son's upbringing, we are reminded of the pattern of family life that occurs when God sets apart a godly child for His service. God works in the parents to prepare the ground for the child's spiritual growth via prayer. For example, Hannah, the mother of the last judge Samuel, prayed for God to provide her son with a particular life's vocation of serving God. She says as much to Eli the priest in 1 Samuel 1:27-28. In the same way, the Holy Spirit began to work in Samson's young life through his parents' prayers and adherence to God's will for their son. That much we can infer from Judges 13:25. In this way, both Samuel and Samson were claimed by God's promise and by prayer for the calling which God would place on their lives. Matthew Henry writes this about comparing the prayers offered in the young lives of both these judges:

The history of Samuel here begins as early as that of Samson, even before he was born, as afterwards the history of John the Baptist and our blessed Savior. Some of the scripture-worthies drop out of the clouds, as it were, and their first appearance is in their full growth and lustre. But others are accounted for from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. What God says of the prophet Jeremiah is true of all: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee", (Jeremiah 1:5).

But some great men were brought into the world with more observation than others, and were more early distinguished from common persons, as were Samuel and Samson. God, in this matter, acts as a free agent. The story of Samson introduces him as a child of promise, Judges 13. But the story of Samuel introduces him as a child of prayer. Samson's birth was foretold by an angel to his mother; Samuel was asked of God by his mother. Both together intimate what wonders are produced by the word and prayer.

Meditate and Pray: Ask God, especially in this crucial area of raising and nurturing covenant children, that He would enable you to, "pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). "Please, Lord Jesus, give us the spiritual grace of perseverance, knowing that our labor in our children is not in vain. By your grace, please ensure that the burning question, "when Christ returns, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8), be answered in our lives with a resounding "yes"! Sing about such perseverance, and how God encourages it in our lives, using this paraphrase of Isaiah 40 by Isaac Watts:

1 Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard
That firm remains on high
The everlasting throne of him
Who formed the earth and sky?

2 Art thou afraid his pow'r shall fail
When comes thine evil day?
And can an all-creating arm
Grow weary or decay?

3 Supreme in wisdom as in pow'r
The Rock of Ages stands,

Though him thou canst not see, nor trace
The working of his hands.

4 He gives the conquest to the weak,
Supports the fainting heart,

And courage in the evil hour
His heav'nly aids impart.

5 Mere human pow'r shall fast decay,
And youthful vigor cease;
But they who wait upon the Lord
In strength shall still increase.

6 They with unwearied feet shall tread
The path of life divine,
With growing ardor onward move,
With growing brightness shine.

7 On eagles' wings they mount, they soar -
Their wings are faith and love -
Till, past the cloudy regions here,
They rise to heav'n above.

Sat/Sun: Judges 14:1-3; Judges 15:1-20 and Job 27:7-10. Persevering in prayer is surely a mark of true, saving grace in the soul of believers. Here is where presumption falls away but where real parental faith stands its ground. When things are going well in our kids' lives, we can presume that their success and progress in life come from God's easily bestowed blessing. When things go wrong, and our hearts are broken in the same way as Samson's parents grieved over their son's involvement with the Philistines (Judges 14:3), then it is that a real spirit of supplicating prayer is needed. Thankfully, Samson must have learned from his parents as a little boy how to cry out to God, as we see in the unfolding events of Judges 15.

After his lonely pursuit of alliances with the Philistines, when even his own fellow-Israelites betray him into Philistine hands (Judges 15:12-14), there comes a time when, at his lowest, God's Spirit moves Samson to finally cry out to the Lord in faith and desperate need (Judges 15:18-20). How fitting was that place-name (where God split the rock and water flowed for Samson to drink) as it became a memorial to Samson's cry for salvation (Judges 15:19).

Meditate and Pray: It was not Samson's good deeds which moved God to answer him and send water, for even Samson's greatest feats of strength were marred by his lusts and personal vengeance against the Philistines. Rather, it was something *in God and not in Samson* that moved the Lord to have mercy upon him in his dying thirst. Isn't *this* the reason why we can have confidence in prayer, knowing that it is because God is *by nature* a prayer-answering God, who accepts us as righteous because of Christ's death in our place, that we can be sure He will have mercy on us when we cry to Him? He is a prayer-answering God because He is a merciful God who shows grace and love to sinners in their need!

My, how many verses in the Psalms come to mind when it comes to *God's willingness to help us at our lowest and most undeserving!* For example:

On Psalm 46:5: "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early."

Psalm 37:3: Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

We close with Matthew Henry's description of the peace that is ours because we have a God who *always hears and helps us*:

"*Verily thou shalt be fed*, as Elijah in the famine, with what is needful for thee. God himself is a shepherd, a feeder to all those that trust in him, Ps 23:1."

Verse 3. *Thou shalt be fed.* A manner of speech taken from cattle feeding securely, under the conduct and keeping of a good shepherd. *Henry Ainsworth.* **Verse 3.** *Thou shalt be fed.* Fed in plenty. *Thomas Secker (Archbishop), 1768.* **Verse 3.** Fed in security. *John Parkhurst.*

It was a tree of permanence and of long continued verdure, and so the prosperous wicked seem to be. They look as if their happiness would be eternal; yet, for all that, those who carefully note the dealings of providence, observe with holy wonder that divine justice cuts short their glory, and they perish utterly. *C. H. S. Verse 35.* I have seen the wicked

in great power (terrible, fierce, violent), *and spreading himself like a green bay tree* (a tree in its native soil, vigorous, and luxuriant, that had never been transplanted). A striking figure of the ungodly man of the world, firmly rooted in earthly things—his native soil, grown proud and wanton in his prosperity, without fear or apprehension of any reverse. *William Wilson.*

Verse 35. *Like a green bay tree*, which produces all leaves and no fruit. *Matthew Henry.* **Verse 35.** *I have seen the wicked*, saith David, *in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.* And why like a green bay tree? Because in the winter, when all other trees—as the vine tree, fig tree, apple tree, etc., which are more profitable trees—are withered and naked, yet the bay tree continueth as green in the winter as the summer. So fares it with wicked men when the children of God, in the storms of persecutions, and afflictions, and miseries, seem withered, and, as it were, dead, yet the wicked all that time flourish, and do appear green in the eyes of the world: they wallow in worldly wealth, but it is for their destruction; they wax fat, but it is for the day of slaughter. It was the case of Hophni and Phinehas: the Lord gave them enough and suffered them to go on and prosper in their wickedness; but what was the reason? Because he would destroy them. *J. Gore's Sermon at St. Paul's, 1633.*

Verses 35-36. —Today he puts forth
The tender leaves of hopes, tomorrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours upon him:
Third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
And—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a ripening—nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do.
—*William Shakespeare, in Henry VIII.*

PSALM 118 Verse 5. *The LORD answered me, and set me in a large place.* It may be rendered, *The LORD answered me largely*;...as he did Solomon, when he gave him more than he asked for; and as he does his people, when he gives them a sufficiency and an abundance of his grace; not only above their deserts, but above their thoughts and expectations. See Eph 3:20. *John Gill.*

Verse 6. *The LORD is on my side.* The reason which the Psalmist gives here for his trusting, or for his not fearing, is the great fact, that the Lord is on his side; and the prominent idea which this brings before us is *Alliance; the making common cause*, which the great God undoubtedly does, with imperfect, yet with earnest, trusting man. We know very well the great anxiety shown by men, in all their worldly conflicts, to secure the aid of a powerful ally; in their lawsuits, to retain the services of a powerful advocate; or, in their attempts at worldly advancement, to win the friendship and interest of those who can further the aims they have in view. When Herod was highly displeased with the armies of Tyre and Sidon, they did not venture to approach him until they had made Blastus, the king's chamberlain, their friend. If such and such a person be on their side, men think that all must go well. Who is so well off as he who is able to say, *The LORD is on my side?* *Philip Bennet Power, in "The I Will's of the Psalms," 1861.*

Verse 6. God is with those he calls and employs in public service. Joshua was exhorted to be strong and of good courage, "For the Lord thy God is with thee" (Jos 1:9). So also was Jeremiah, "Be not afraid of their faces; for I am with thee to deliver thee" (Jer 1:8). God's presence should put life into us. When inferior natures are backed with a superior, they are full of courage: when the master is by, the dog will venture upon creatures greater than himself and fear not; at another time he will not do it when his master is absent. When God is with us, who is the supreme, it should make us fearless. It did David; *The LORD is on my side; I will not fear what man can do unto me.* Let him do his worst, frown, threat, plot, arm, strike; the Lord is on my side, he hath a special care for me, he is a shield unto me, I will not fear, but hope; as it is in the next verse. "I shall see my desire on them that hate me, "I shall see them changed or ruined. Our help is in the name of the Lord, but our fears are in the name of man. *William Green hill.*