

Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. A teacher will teach from the Bible that a disciple of Jesus prays. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

Today we will learn about “A DISCIPLE USES THE PRAYERS OF THE PROPHETS IN THE BIBLE - PART 2”. We will learn more from the prayers of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

### **POINT 3 continued. PRAYERS OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH**

In part 1, we learned from Isaiah that “sin hinders prayers”, that “confession of sin restores our relationship with and usefulness for God” and that “repentance promotes prayer”. In part 2 we will learn from Isaiah that “fasting during prayer must be the right kind of fasting”.

#### **Fourth. Fasting during prayer must be the right kind of fasting.**

In [Isaiah 58:3-12](#) God teaches what is the right kind of fasting that pleases him. The people of Israel asked, “Why have we fasted and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” Then God replied, “On the day of your fasting you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?” God says that he is not impressed with *traditional fasting*. God teaches what is the kind of fasting that pleases him. He says, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” God teaches that *true biblical fasting is on the one hand to make a clean break with sin and injustice and on the other hand to share your food and clothes with the needy in the world*. God promises that when his people fast like this, then he will answer their prayers and bless their lives. He says, “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.” Again God repeats what he regards as *true biblical fasting: fasting is NOT to abstain from eating food and drinking, but is to stop doing sin in your own life. Fasting is NOT performing a religious act, but is to give your possessions and efforts to help the needy and oppressed*. That is true fasting according to the Bible! God says, “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.” With regard to true biblical fasting, God’s blessings are much greater than the sacrifices you can bring. God promises, “The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and he will strengthen your frame (body). You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.” Conclusion. *True biblical fasting does not emphasise abstaining from food, but abstaining from sin and injustice and sharing of yourself and your possessions with the needy and oppressed in this world*.

### **POINT 5. PRAYERS OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH**

Jeremiah lived 2600 years ago. He was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah, just before and during their exile to Babylon. His task was not an easy one, because he had to speak God’s word to a rebellious people, who persecuted him for his words. Jeremiah has much to say about prayer.

#### **First. God will not prosper people, who do not pray.**

In [Jeremiah 10:21](#) he says, “The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the Lord; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered.” The “shepherds” of Israel are the political leaders of Israel. Jeremiah says that because they do not pray to God, they also do not prosper and their people are being scattered. When the leaders of a country do not pray to the living God, that country will not prosper spiritually, socially, intellectually or economically, but chaos will enter and destroy the people.

In [Jeremiah 23:21-22](#) God says, “I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds.” “The prophets” of Israel are the spiritual leaders of Israel. God says that because they do not pray to God, they never speak

God's message, but only "lies and the delusions from their own minds" (Jeremiah 23:26). When the spiritual leaders of a country pray to the living God, then they will proclaim the Bible to people and turn people away from evil to God. However, in Jeremiah 30:12-15 God says that Israel's wound is incurable and there is no one to plead Israel's cause. All their allies have forgotten them and care nothing for them. Therefore, *when the political and spiritual leaders of a country pray to the living God, then their country and people will prosper.*

**Second. God will not listen to prayers for people who persistently harden themselves against God.**

In Jeremiah 7:16-29 God says to Jeremiah, "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you" (verse 16). God saw that this people persistently provoked God with their idolatry and persistently refused to obey God's words and ways. "Instead they followed the inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward" (verse 24). Therefore God "has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath" (verse 29). In Jeremiah 11:9-17 God repeats his command and says, "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress" (verse 14). God saw that Israel had broken their covenant with God, they refused to listen to God's words and they followed other gods to serve them. God warns them that when they pray to the living God, he will not listen to them. And when they cry to their idols, their idols will not help them at all when disaster strikes." Again in Jeremiah 14:11-16 God repeats his threats. He commands Jeremiah, saying, "Do not pray for the well-being of this people. Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings, ... I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague" (verse 11-12). God heard how the spiritual leaders were prophesying lies, telling the people that they don't have to fear the judgements of God. God warned the people that his judgements would surely come exactly as he told them!

**Third. Pray to God for your enemies.**

In the Psalms and in Jeremiah there are prayers that call down the curse or judgement of God on enemies.

In Jeremiah 10:25-26, Jeremiah prayed against *the Gentile nations, who were destroying Israel*. He was angry and prayed, "Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the peoples who do not call on your name. For they ... devoured Israel completely and destroyed his homeland."

In Jeremiah 12:1-4, Jeremiah prayed against *the wicked people in his own country*. He looked at his country, which was suffering under the drought and hunger, because God was angry with the wicked people living in it. But he also saw how the righteous people in the country suffered even more, because the wicked people took advantage of them. He saw how the wicked people lived at ease and so he prayed, "Lord, ... I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? ... Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Set them apart for the day of slaughter!"

In Jeremiah 11:18-23, Jeremiah prayed against *his personal enemies, who persecuted him*. They were people of his own hometown. They made plots against him to kill him and thus silence him. So he prayed, "O Lord Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause."

In Jeremiah 17:15-18, Jeremiah complained to God about the difficulty of his task as a prophet. He continually spoke God's words of warning to the Israelites, but the Israelites did not believe that God would exile them and destroy their country. The Israelites taunted Jeremiah, saying, "Where is the word of the Lord? Let it now be fulfilled!" So Jeremiah prayed, "Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep me from shame; let them be terrified, but keep me from terror. Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction."

In Jeremiah 18:18-23, he prayed a very hard prayer against his persecutors. He asked God to bring invaders suddenly upon them, to kill them by the sword in battle, to let their children suffer hunger and to let their wives be widows and childless. Because his persecutors had hidden snares for his feet and had plotted to kill him, he prayed to God against them, "Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger."

How should we Christians view these prayers of Jeremiah?

*Before the first coming of Jesus Christ*, the only tangible way in which the truth of the Bible could be demonstrated to human observers was by the pragmatic test of disaster or deliverance. Disaster falls on those who are wicked, while deliverance is granted to those who walk in the righteousness of God. Therefore, as long as the wicked continued to triumph and live carefree lives, their prosperity seemed to refute the holiness, justice and sovereignty of God! The writers in the Old Testament times suffered deep affliction of soul as long as such a state of affairs continued. Therefore these writers identified themselves completely with God's cause and regarded God's enemies as their own enemies too. They expressed their love for God and their deep concern for God's honour, holiness, righteousness and truth by asking God to uphold his own honour and justify his own righteousness by inflicting a crushing blow to his enemies or by destroying those who denied God's words and ways. The intense feelings within the hearts of these writers brought forth violent language. They hated their enemies, desired that God punish them in terrible ways and asked God not to forgive them. Behind these prayers,

which call down evil upon enemies, is the belief that God is the sovereign and moral ruler of the world, that right and wrong are meaningful for God and that therefore judgement must operate in the moral order as well as grace. *But after the coming of Jesus Christ* and his death on the cross, it became possible for us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us and to pray for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:27-28).

**Fourth. Pray for guidance with regard to which country you should live in.**

In Jeremiah 42:2-16, Jeremiah prayed to God and asked him where the people who remained in the land of Israel after the exile should go and what they should do. God answered him very clearly, *“If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you”* (verse 10). However *“If you are determined to go to Egypt and you do go to settle there, then the sword you fear will overtake you there, and the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt, and there you will die.”* In spite of such a clear answer, the Israelites refused to follow God’s guidance. They went to Egypt and everything God predicted would happen, happened to them. They were destroyed in Egypt!

**Fifth. Pray for the prosperity of the country in which you live.**

In Jeremiah 29:4-14, Jeremiah wrote God’s word to the exiles in Babylon. God said to them, *“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ... Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. ... I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”* God assures his people that he is God everywhere in the world. God says that he will be with his people even when they are in a foreign country. God wants his people to pray to him wherever they are in the world and to especially pray for the country in which they live.

**Sixth. Pray to God for whom nothing is too difficult.**

In Jeremiah 32:16-19,24 we read to what kind of a God Jeremiah was praying. He said, *“Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. You show love to thousands and bring punishments for sins .... Great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve. ... What you have said has happened.”*

**Seventh. Pray to God and he will fulfil his covenant promises.**

In Jeremiah 33:3, God encouraged Jeremiah to pray to him, saying, *“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”* God encourages his people to call to him when they need help. *God promises to answer them not through words, but through deeds!* The deeds will be those God promised in Jeremiah chapters 30-33: God will break the yoke of foreign enslavement. He will draw them to himself with love, gather them, heal their wounds, lead them besides streams of water and on a level path where they will not stumble, watch over them like a shepherd, redeem from the hands of those stronger than them, comfort them and satisfy them with abundance. In short, God will give them rest! He will forgive them and remember their sins no more. He will write his teachings on their minds and hearts. They will become like a well-watered garden! He will inspire them to fear God for their own good and for the good of their children. God will forgive their sin and rebellion against him, cleanse them, heal them, rebuild them, restore their fortunes, let them enjoy peace and security and make them countless like the stars. These are the great things God will do! They are the fulfilment of God’s covenant promises to his people throughout the Old Testament. These promises are “not unknown”, because God has made these promises again and again. What is “unsearchable and unknown” is not *what* God will do, but *how* God will do these things. What goes above the human mind to grasp is *how* God will fulfil his promises.

**POINT 6. PRAYERS OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL**

Ezekiel lived 2600 years ago. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, but while Jeremiah stayed with the Israelites, who were left behind, Ezekiel was exiled along with the Israelites to Babylon.

**Pray that God may multiply his people and make them prosperous.** In Ezekiel 36:37-38, God said to Ezekiel, *“Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people ... numerous. . The ruined cities will be filled with flocks of people.”* Even in the midst of the exile in a foreign country, God did not forget his people. God desired that his people pray to him, so that he may again multiply them and make them prosperous. Years later, after the exile, we see that God fulfilled this promise.

**ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

**First.** If you are a spiritual leader in your church or country, then what do you pray for your people and leaders?

**Second.** See the workbooks “Go and make disciples” and Internet on www. Etc

**Third.** Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to “Discipleship training on the air”.