

## Prayer in Apocayptic

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

2009-08-08

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Location: Mentone Seventh-day Adventist Church, CA, USA  
Delivery: 2009-08-18 01:30Z  
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2009-08-08 00:02Z  
Type: Sermon

CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: Larry Kirkpatrick, "Prayer in Apocalyptic" ONLINE AT:  
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## Introduction

Today some general thoughts about the privilege of prayer, and then a focus on one apocalyptic prayer in particular: Jacob's prayer in his time of trouble. We will see that we need to learn how to persist and wrestle with God in prayer.

Is Prayer Important?

Someone might find the topic of prayer uninteresting. Is it? It runs throughout the Bible. Enoch walked with God and finally God took him to heaven.

Communing thus with God, Enoch came more and more to reflect the divine image. His face was radiant with a holy light, even the light that shineth in the face of Jesus. As he came forth from these divine communings, even the ungodly beheld with awe the impress of heaven upon his countenance (Ellen G. White, *Prayer*, p. 122).

When we come to apocalyptic texts, such as Daniel and Revelation, we see it too. In Daniel 2 it is through intercession that God grants the request telling Daniel what the king's dream was and its interpretation. In Daniel 6 prayer is at the center of the conflict. In Revelation 1, John is in the Spirit on the Lord's day (1:10), almost certainly he had been in prayer. Then there are the prayers of the saints, ascending to God long ago and today and in the very end, prayers for help and deliverance and protection.

We are warned:

In the last great conflict in the controversy with Satan those who are loyal to God will see every earthly support cut off. Because they refuse to break His law in obedience to earthly powers they will be forbidden to buy or sell (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 121, 122).

The failure of every earthly support is not the failure of every heavenly support. God will still hear our prayers. Never is His heart closed to our prayers. He promises to be with us always, even to the end of the age.

Prayer is a privilege. It is not to bring God down to us but to lift us up to Him. It is like a key in the hand of faith, that is, it is like a gate, or a switch, that unlocks the storehouse of Heaven's power. God wants to labor with us so that by our free choice and His infinite power, good will triumph over evil in our lives. What kind of Christians will we be if we refuse to throw the prayer switch?

In the garden of Eden man sinned. Human nature was weakened. But communication between the divine and the human was still necessary, indeed, more than ever. This gap is bridged in two primary ways: through the gift of prophecy, and the gift of prayer. Remember, Adam and Eve used to converse with God face-to-face. Now, it is different. Now we have all these reminders and alternates, temporary arrangements to maintain the connection between man's Fall and his Glorification. Therefore, there is a real sense in which prayer is especially related to the end-times. Jesus identified Himself with our needs and weaknesses. His humanity made prayer a necessity and a privilege. How many times in the gospels do we find Him—Jesus—praying! If it was necessary for Jesus, what is it for us?

Prayer is a temporary arrangement; not makeshift, but temporary. Between Adam's Fall and the Second Coming and the moment when we are glorified, prayer stands alongside prophecy as a primary connector of God and man.

## **Seventh-day Adventist Interest in End-time Prayer: The Sanctuary**

We have a special interest in the end-times. Every religious group has a self-understanding; so do we. We see ourselves as a people raised up for duty in the last days. We read the scenario offered in the book of Revelation. We see a blending of church and state power, a use of force, imposition, coercion, death decree. We see a people singled out, forbidden to buy or sell. We look to a time when men are under severe pressure, and, what's more, a time when Jesus leaves off His intercession preparatory to His return in the Second Coming. We anticipate being alive then, living through that time when all forgiveness has been dispensed and men face the ultimate test of their lives, having been changed or not.

Thus it was with the Hebrew sanctuary. Throughout the year men came and confessed their sins, and the record of these sins was made. Blood was sprinkled in the sanctuary and there remained. Once a year, on the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary will be cleansed. The record of sins was removed from it. On that day the people stood all quiet in their tent doors afflicting their souls while the high priest made atonement for them (Leviticus 16:29-34).

During the year they had opportunity to make their offerings and confess their sins over them. But at last the sanctuary would be cleansed. All year long the sinner had opportunity to repent. If he refused during the year, he might yet find hope even as Yom Kippur commenced. But he must afflict his soul or be cut off from God's people (Leviticus 23:27-32).

But that is not from the New Testament. What about an example of "cutting off" from it? Find it in Luke 13:22-30. There, Jesus speaks of a time when men will seek to enter into God's kingdom but not be able. The story is not difficult to understand. People come seeking entrance

to the Master's house but He has already shut the door and they are not allowed to come in. In Matthew 25 we have yet another example. There are ten virgins attending a wedding, five are wise and five are foolish. The bridegroom is delayed and some do not have enough oil to keep their lamps lit. While they go to get more, the bridegroom comes and after admitting those who were ready, closes the door and will not open it (Matthew 25:1-13). These texts, and others, demonstrate the close of probation as a biblical idea.

There are several important apocalyptic prayers we might study. Today, we will limit ourselves to exactly one: Jacob's prayer, which serves as a type for us as end-time people. Those who live at the end will experience something we call the "time of Jacob's trouble."

### **Jacob's Sin**

You will remember Jacob and Esau. Esau was the elder son and the family birthright his to inherit. But Jacob entered into a deception with his mother and tricked his father, Isaac into bestowing the birthright upon him instead of his brother. The operation went sour almost immediately. Jacob fled with almost nothing. Many years later Jacob is returning and his brother is approaching with a group of armed men. He offers this prayer (Genesis 32:9-12):

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

Jacob wrestled with God through that night in prayer. Here is the part of the story we remember (Genesis 32:24-31):

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a Man with him until the breaking of the day. 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. And He said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except Thou bless me. And He said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. 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. And Jacob asked Him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, Thy name. And He said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

### **No Concealed Wrongs to Reveal**

As he prayed it seemed as though one assaulted him, but it was God Himself come, Jesus in fact. The confrontation seems to have taken hours. But Jacob prevails, and is named an overcomer. And here we have a word of insight from Ellen G. White's book, *The Great Controversy*, p. 620:

Had not Jacob previously repented of his sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud, God would not have heard his prayer and mercifully preserved his life. So, in the time of trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them while tortured with fear and anguish, they would be overwhelmed; despair would cut off their faith, and they could not have confidence to plead with God for deliverance. But while they have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins have gone beforehand to judgment and have been blotted out, and they cannot bring them to remembrance.

So Jacob comes to the ultimate test of his life, and prevails. He wrestles with the angel, indeed, with Jesus Himself. Clearly this is the time of Jacob's trouble that is referred to in Jeremiah 30:4-9:

And these are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the Lord; we have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them (Jeremiah 30:4-9).

Jeremiah prophesies of the end-time, using the ten northern tribes (Israel), and the two southern tribes (Judah) to stand for the totality of God's people.

Notice what they experience: fear, travail, trouble. It looks as though all will be lost in this supreme trial, but the Bible promise is that he will be saved out of it. Notice, not saved *from* it, but saved *out of* it. He goes through the experience. Jacob had already repented. He was ready for the test. Have you and I repented? Are we clearing away sin? Are we seeking repentance and forgiveness? Do we have sins still with us that have not been confessed to God?

Notice in the text that God promises that He will break his yoke off of Jacob's neck. That is, He, God, will break his, that is, Babylon's, yoke off of Jacob's neck, that is, God's repentant people in the last days. A remnant returned from Babylon in those days, and a remnant prevails against Babylon in these.

Doubtless we are in many ways contaminated by Babylon. To whatever extent this is true, we are in a sense, wearing the yoke of Babylon. Satan beclouds our way but God delivers. The needful thing is that we engage in the very close communion with God that is only possible in prayer. In His light we see light (Psalm 36:9). We need to place ourselves where we can receive His light, and that means persistent entry into prayer.

## Conclusion

It has been our purpose today not to enter into a detailed exposition of the many wonderful truths about prayer, but more simply, to provoke the hearer to engage in prayer. My brother, my sister, pray to God. You are Jacob today. The end-times are our very expectation. Unless we get to know God now, we will not be ready in the time of trouble. We do not pray enough. We do not talk to God enough. If we did, our behavior would show it with crystal clarity.

If any people should be a praying people, it should be us: Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Prayer is basic. In a busy world we must not lose our way. If we need to redouble our determination to seek God, then let's do it. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, and that includes learning by experience what it means to prevail in prayer.

**Biographical Note:** Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick is a convert to the Adventist faith. Since 1994 he has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds degrees from Southern Adventist University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His work has included research assistant for the Ellen G. White Estate, pioneering Adventist internet ministry, involvement in GYC, and presenter at the 50th Anniversary *Questions on Doctrine* Conference. He is author of the books *Real Grace for Real People* and *Cleanse and Close*. For many years his sermons and papers have been published on the internet. Larry and wife Pamela have served churches in Nevada, Utah, and California. The Kirkpatricks presently serve at the [Mentone church](#) near Loma Linda, California.