

IV. MOSES, THE MIGHTY INTERCESSOR

Intercessory Prayer is a powerful means of grace to the praying man. Martyn observes that at times of inward dryness and depression, he had often found a delightful revival in the act of praying for others for their conversion, or sanctification, or prosperity in the work of the Lord. His dealings with God for them about these gifts and blessings were for himself the divinely natural channel of a renewed insight into his own part and lot in Christ, into Christ as his own rest and power, into the "perfect freedom" of an entire yielding of himself to his Master for His work--Bishop Handley C. G. Moule.

Prayer unites with the purposes of God and lays itself out to secure those purposes. How often would the wise and benign will of God fail in its rich and beneficent ends by the sins of the people if prayer had not come in to arrest wrath and make the promise sure! Israel as a nation would have met their just destruction and their just fate after their apostasy with the golden calf had it not been for the interposition and unfainting importunity of Moses' forty days' and forty nights' praying!

Marvelous was the effect of the character of Moses by his marvelous praying. His near and sublime intercourse with God in the giving of the law worked no transfiguration of character like the tireless praying of those forty days in prayer with God. It was when he came down from that long struggle of prayer that his face shone with such dazzling brightness. Our mounts of transfiguration and the heavenly shining in character and conduct are born of seasons of wrestling prayer. All-night praying has changed many a Jacob, the supplanter, into Israel, a prince, who has power with God and with men.

No mission was more majestic in purpose and results than that of Moses, and none was more responsible, diligent and difficult. In it we are taught the sublime ministry and rule of prayer. Not only is it the medium of supply and support, but it is a compassionate agency through which the pitying long-suffering of God has an outflow. Prayer is a medium to restrain God's wrath, that mercy might rejoice against judgment.

Moses himself and his mission were the creation of prayer. Thus it is recorded: "When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place." This is the genesis of the great movement for the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage.

The great movements of God have had their origin and energy in and were shaped by prayers of men. Prayer has directly to deal with God. Other ends, collateral and incidental, are secured by prayer, but mainly, almost solely, prayer has to deal with God. He is pleased to order His policy, and base His action on the prayers of His saints. Prayer influences God greatly. Moses cannot do God's great work, though God-commissioned, without praying much. Moses cannot govern God's people and carry out the divine plans, without having his censer filled full of the incense of prayer. The work of God cannot be done without the fire and fragrance are always burning, ascending and perfuming.

Moses' prayers are often found relieving the terrible stroke of God's wrath. Four times were the prayers of Moses solicited by Pharaoh to

relieve him of the fearful stroke of God's wrath. "Entreat the Lord," most earnestly begged Pharaoh of Moses, while the loathsome frogs were upon him. And "Moses cried unto the Lord because of the frogs which God had brought against the land of Egypt, and the Lord did according to the word of Moses." When the grievous plague of flies had corrupted the whole land, Pharaoh again piteously cried out to Moses, "Entreat for me." Moses went out from Pharaoh and entreated the Lord, and the Lord again did according to the word of Moses. The mighty thunderings and hail in their alarming and destructive fury extorted from this wicked king the very same earnest appeal to Moses, "Entreat the Lord." And Moses went out from the city into privacy, and alone with Almighty God, he "spread abroad his hands unto the Lord, and the thunderings and hail ceased, and the rain was not poured out upon the earth."

Though Moses was the man of law, yet with him prayer asserted its mighty force. With him, as in the more spiritual dispensation, it could have been said, "My house is the house of prayer."

Moses accepts at its full face value the foundation principle of praying that prayer has to do with God. With Abraham we saw this dearly and strongly enunciated. With Moses it is dearer and stronger still if possible. It declared that prayer affected God, that God was influenced in His conduct by prayer, and that God hears and answer prayer even when the hearing and answering might change His conduct and reverse His action. Stronger than all other laws, and more inflexible than any other decree, is the decree, "Call upon me and I will answer you."

Moses lived near God, and had the freest and most unhindered and boldest access to God, but this, instead of abating the necessity of prayer, made it more necessary, obvious and powerful. Familiarity and closeness to God gives relish, frequency, point and potency to prayer. Those who know God the best are the richest and most powerful in prayer. Little acquaintance with God, and strangeness and coldness to Him, make prayer a rare and feeble thing.

There were conditions of extremity to which Moses was reduced which prayer did not relieve, but there is no position of extremity which baffles God, when prayer pats God into the matter.

Moses' mission was a divine one. It was ordered, directed and planned by God. The more there is of God in a movement, the more there is of prayer, conspicuous and controlling. Moses' prayer rule of the church illustrates the necessity of courage and persistence in prayer. For forty days and forty nights was Moses pressing his prayer for the salvation of the Lord's people. So intense was his concern for them which accompanied his long season of praying, that bodily infirmities and appetites were retired. How strangely the prayers of a righteous man affect God is evident from the exclamation of God to Moses, "Now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." The presence of such an influence over God fills us with astonishment, awe and fear. How lofty, bold and devoted must be such a pleader!

Read this from the divine record:

"And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold!

"Yet now if thou wilt forgive their sin--and if not, blot me, I pray

thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.

"Therefore now go, and lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee. Behold my angel shall go before thee."

The rebellion of Korah was the occasion of God's anger flaming out against the whole congregation of Israel, who sympathized with these rebels. Again Moses appears on the stage of action, this time having Aaron to join him in intercession for these sinners against God. But it only shows that in a serious time like this Moses knew to whom to go for relief, and was encouraged to pray that God would stay His wrath and spare Israel. Here is what is said about the matter:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying,

"Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.

"And they fell on their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?"

The assumption, pride and rebellion of Miriam, sister of Moses, in which she had the presence and sympathy of Aaron, put the praying and the spirit of Moses in the noblest and most amiable light. Because of her sin God smote her with leprosy. But Moses made tender and earnest intercession for his sister who had so grievously offended God, and his prayer saved her from the fearful and incurable malady.

The record is intensely interesting, and follows just here:

"And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them and the cloud departed from off the tabernacle and behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow; and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and behold she was leprous.

"And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my Lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin unto us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.

"Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.

"And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her, O God, I beseech thee.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received again."

The murmurings of the children of Israel furnished conditions which called into play the full forces of prayer. They impressively bring out the intercessory feature of prayer and disclose Moses in his great office as an intercessor before God in behalf of others. It was at Marah, where the waters were bitter and the people grievously murmured against Moses and God.

Here is the Scripture account:

"And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah; for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was called Marah.

"And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

"And Moses cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet; there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them."

How many of the bitter places of the earth have been sweetened by prayer the records of eternity alone will disclose.

Again at Taberah the people complained, and God became angry with them, and Moses came again to the front and stepped into the breach and prayed for them. Here is the brief account:

"And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost part of the camp.

"And the people cried unto Moses, and when unto the Lord, the fire was quenched."

Moses got what he asked for. His praying was specific and God's answer was likewise specific. Always was he heard by Almighty God when prayed, and always was he answered by God. Once the answer was not specific. He had prayed to go into Canaan. The answer came but not what he asked for. He was given a vision of the Promised Land, but he was not allowed to go over Jordan into that land of promise. It was a prayer on the order of Paul's when he prayed three times for the removal of the thorn in the flesh. But the thorn was not removed. Grace, however, was vouchsafed which made the thorn a blessing.

It must not be thought that because Psalm 90 is incorporated with what is known as the "Psalms of David," that David was the author of it. By general consent it is attributed to Moses, and it gives us a sample of the praying of this giver of the law of God to the people. It is a prayer worth studying. It is sacred to us because it has been the requiem uttered over our dead for years that are past and gone. It has blessed the grave of many a sleeping saint. But its very familiarity may cause us to lose its full meaning. Wise will we be if we digest it, not for the dead, but for the living, that it may teach us how to live, how to pray while living, and how to die. "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. Establish thou the work of our hands, yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."
