



Minutes With Messiah

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Esther And Moses

In the *Megilla*, the scroll of Esther, the fourth chapter, we find Mordechai, uncle to Esther, Queen of Persia, sitting at the palace gates in sackcloth. This is reported to the queen who sends him a change of clothes through Hatach the Chamberlain. The scripture then says:

And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to show it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Apparently Esther had been unaware of her husband's decree that would lead to the destruction of all Jews in the empire. She was isolated from her people because of her elevated station. In this, perhaps, we can see a little bit of Moses.

Both Esther and Moses spent time in the court of their respective kings. They were part of the king's family, and accorded honors and privileges not given to their kinsmen. In both cases they had been fully taught about God and their people. But at a certain, critical time each was isolated by their royal position.

Moses realized the condition of his people one day as he traveled around "his" kingdom. (Ex. 2:11) Perhaps his mother had told him about the cruel servitude his people were enduring. It is one thing to hear about suffering and another to see it, though. The first time he actually saw the plight of his people, he killed the Egyptian taskmaster, and in so doing killed "Prince Moses." He spent the next forty years of his life learning to be a shepherd, a Hebrew, and (incidentally) a leader.

Esther, living in the harem where she had little contact with even her husband, knew nothing of the fate

planned for her people. Since "no Jew lives in the palace," the decree had nothing to do with palace gossip. When faced with her uncle's sorrow, her first reaction is, "get up and get properly dressed." Only after she is forcibly presented the evidence of what was planned for her and her people did she react.

What has all this to do with us? We are not royalty. We are not isolated in some harem. TV and the internet keep us informed. And yet people of our faith are being beaten, enslaved, even killed because they refuse to deny their God. And we sit in our royally outfitted rooms in the palace called America, and don't want to hear, of the plight of God's people. What we do hear is like Moses hearing it from his mother. Only when some Mordechai presents us with a copy of the document might we begin to understand.

What can I do, though? Am I Esther, at the center of the controversy. Am I Moses, that God calls me before kings? No, I am not Moses, and I am not Esther. But I am I. There is something I can do. Could the Jews of Susa go before the king? Not likely! But Esther asked them to do what they could. "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." (Esth. 4:16) I, too can fast and, especially, pray. In the final analysis, going before The King may be the most important thing I can do.

Purim falls on March 18 this year.

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The Lord's Supper, Part 3

This is the third in a series looking at the prayer commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." In this issue we look at the final phrases of that prayer. As in the previous articles, perhaps there is nothing new here. Or maybe someone will get an insight they have not previously had.

Was James wrong?

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matt 6:13) "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." (Jas 1:13) How can we reconcile these passages? If God tempts no man, then asking him to lead us not into temptation is unnecessary. If God can lead us into temptation, then John appears to be wrong? Can this be that long-sought contradiction in the Bible?

If we look at the contrast given in this verse, we may understand better what the Master was saying.

God doesn't need to lead us into temptation because there is one who will do it anyway.

Scholars say the Greek word translated "lead" really means "bring with" someone. The word for "deliver" means "draw unto" someone. With these in mind we should be praying that God not walk precede us into our trials, dragging us along. There will be trials, and trials may be good for us, but we need God to be beside us during these trials, helping us through them.

On the other hand, there is one who is trying to drag us kicking and screaming (or, more often than not, fighting to go first) into temptations and trials. Many newer translations more properly translate what God is to deliver us from as "the Evil One." God doesn't need to lead us into temptation because there is one who will do it anyway. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet 5:8) Our prayer, then, is that if God is going to bring us with Him, he draw us to Him and away from the devil. The contrast is in the direction we are going, toward trials or away from them, and a reminder that we should always be going toward God. "Submit yourselves therefore to

God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." (Jas 4:7-8)

The other thing to consider is the nature of temptation. The word simply means a test or trial. In itself it is neither good nor bad. It is the manner of the temptation that determines its value. David prayed that God test him, to prove his faithfulness (Ps 26:2). God withdrew from Hezekiah in order to test him (2 Chron 32:31). James said temptation could have a positive result: "Knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience." (Jas 1:3) Trials are the crucible in which our metal (or mettle) is purified. But they can also destroy. Sometimes God needs to protect us from excessive trial. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Rev 3:10)

Again, though, how do we reconcile this prayer and the statement of James that God does not test anyone? For that we need to look at the entire verse (and, indeed, the entire book). He says that God is not tempted with evil. This phrase modifies the other phrases around it. The temptation, or trial, he is talking about is temptation using evil. That is something Satan is good at, but God can't do at all. When God tests us he uses circumstances and hardships that may be neutral in themselves, but temptations to do evil come from another source. We may, as a result of God's testing, do evil, but that is through our own or Satan's additional efforts.

The Doxology

Some, though not all, translations include a doxology, a praise of the glory of God, at the end of the prayer. "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever." Although it is not included in all translations, it certainly fits the style of many prayers on record. Paul was especially fond of such praises, using them nine or ten times in scripture; Peter also uses a doxology three times and Jude once.

In the context of the Lord's Prayer, however, it seems almost redundant. The prayer starts with praise; why should it end that way as well?

One possible reason would be to remind us to whom we are talking. As much as many people today like to familiarize God in their prayers, it is important to remember that we are not just talking to some dude at the checkout counter at Wal-Mart. I grant that we need to look upon God as being accessible to us; we sometimes need to reduce the distance between us. We do, however, need to remember that He is still God. After we have asked for the spiritual blessings and the physical

blessings, we need to remember that He is able to fulfill our requests. By beginning and ending with praise, we are reminded that we can not consider ourselves as equals with God. It is similar to the old “boot camp” formula of responding to the drill instructor with a “Sir, yes sir!” Respect must be shown first, last, and always.

Another thing to consider is that there is a slight difference between “hallowed be thy name” and “thine is the kingdom, and power, and glory forever.” The praise at the beginning acknowledges God’s holiness. We come before him crawling on our faces because of his holiness and our sinfulness. We are saying, “God, we know we have no right to come to you except that you have allowed it. Please hear what we are about to say.” In the closing we are recognizing more than just his holiness. His holiness makes us come to him in humility; his power and glory make us come to him in confidence.

The phrase begins with a simple, but important, word: For. When you see such a “for” you should ask what it is for. Here we find a summation of the whole prayer. We have asked for blessing from God. Then we finish with “because you are eternally ruling, powerful, and glorious.” Sometimes we ask someone for something with the phrase, or at least the idea, “if you could possibly do this for me.” With such an approach we are leaving the door open for someone to say that they just can’t meet our request. With God we say that we know he can grant our petition because “with God all things are possible.” (Matt 19:26)

What makes a man a “born leader,” a naturally charismatic person? There are, I am sure, a number of factors. Here God is attributed with what must be three of those factors: authority, ability, and personality. By acknowledging these characteristics we are submitting ourselves to one who is superior.

God is our king; we are in his kingdom. Granted, that kingdom is being ruled for the present by the Son of God. “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” (Col 1:12-13) The Son, however will return the kingdom, his church, to God. “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” (1 Cor 15:24-26) At the time Jesus taught his disciples this prayer he had not assumed his own kingship, and the kingdom was God’s as it will be again.

Perhaps one of the best, and least known, descriptions of the power and glory of God is that given by Habakkuk. He show graphically just what Jesus meant when he gave God those attributes.

His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting. (Hab 3:3-6)

The Last Word

Jesus ends this prayer, as most Jews and Christians do, with an “amen” (properly pronounced ah-main). This little word has a wealth of uses and meanings which will not be studied at this time. Frequently, however, it is used at the end of a prayer or statement to say, “What I have said is true,” or “So be it.”

Normally it is unnecessary for an individual to say amen to a prayer unless it is a spoken prayer and he

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wants the listeners to respond with their own acknowledgement. In this case, though, it appears to be a rare case of the one praying adding emphasis to his own prayer. It is as if he is saying, “I said it, Lord, and I mean it.”

The Hebrew word “amen” means “truth.” Thus saying amen to a prayer of another is a statement that one accepts that it is a true or accurate statement of one’s beliefs and desires. Paul says one can not “amen” a prayer he does not understand or hear.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? (1 Cor 14:15-16)

It is appropriate for us, as we hear or speak this prayer of Jesus these many years later, to agree with the Lord in his prayer. Whether or not it is in the original manuscripts of the book of Matthew, the amen has a proper place there.

Innie Or Outie?

You are standing next to a door. It is locked. On the other side is God. There are two choices. Some people would say we should open the door and let God in. The other choice is to open the door and go out. Actually, there is a third choice. That is to let God open the door and you go in. You see, it is all a matter of point of view. We often consider ourselves to be “in” and God “out,” but God sees himself as the “in crowd” and we are on the outside.

How do we know which is right? Several years ago I was in Australia. One of my sailor buddies complained about them driving on the wrong side of the road. One of the locals asked how we knew that we drove on the right side and they on the wrong. My immediate reply was that we invented the car, we have the right to say which side is right or wrong. It is the same with God. He came first. Man was with him at the beginning. But when man chose to leave, obviously he went out. Therefore God is in.

Besides, God has already told us that if we are not in with him, we are outside without him. “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt 25:30) With God is joy and peace; outside is weeping. Outside is away from God.

What difference does it make? Either way, we need to get back into a proper relationship with God. What does it matter whether we let God into our hearts or God lets us into his? It makes all the difference in, and out of, the world.

One of the problems of the ancient world is that people tried to fit God into their mold. They wanted God to be like them, rather than the other way

around. To them, the gods looked like men, or animals, or other natural phenomena. More importantly, the gods acted like men or animals. Many of us were raised on a cleaned up version of the Greek and Roman myths. We weren't told about Zeus turning into a swan or a bull and fathering a child to a woman. We may have been told about the gods acting like us in other ways. The gods were often just men on a grander scale. Man tried to bring God into this existence.

On the other hand, Paul told those people that our God was different. We don't make Him fit our mold; He created us to fit his.

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being. (Acts 17:24-28)

Man and God stand on opposite sides of a door. He wants us to come in out of the dark. Don't insist that He come out to you; go in to Him. He will welcome you home.

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