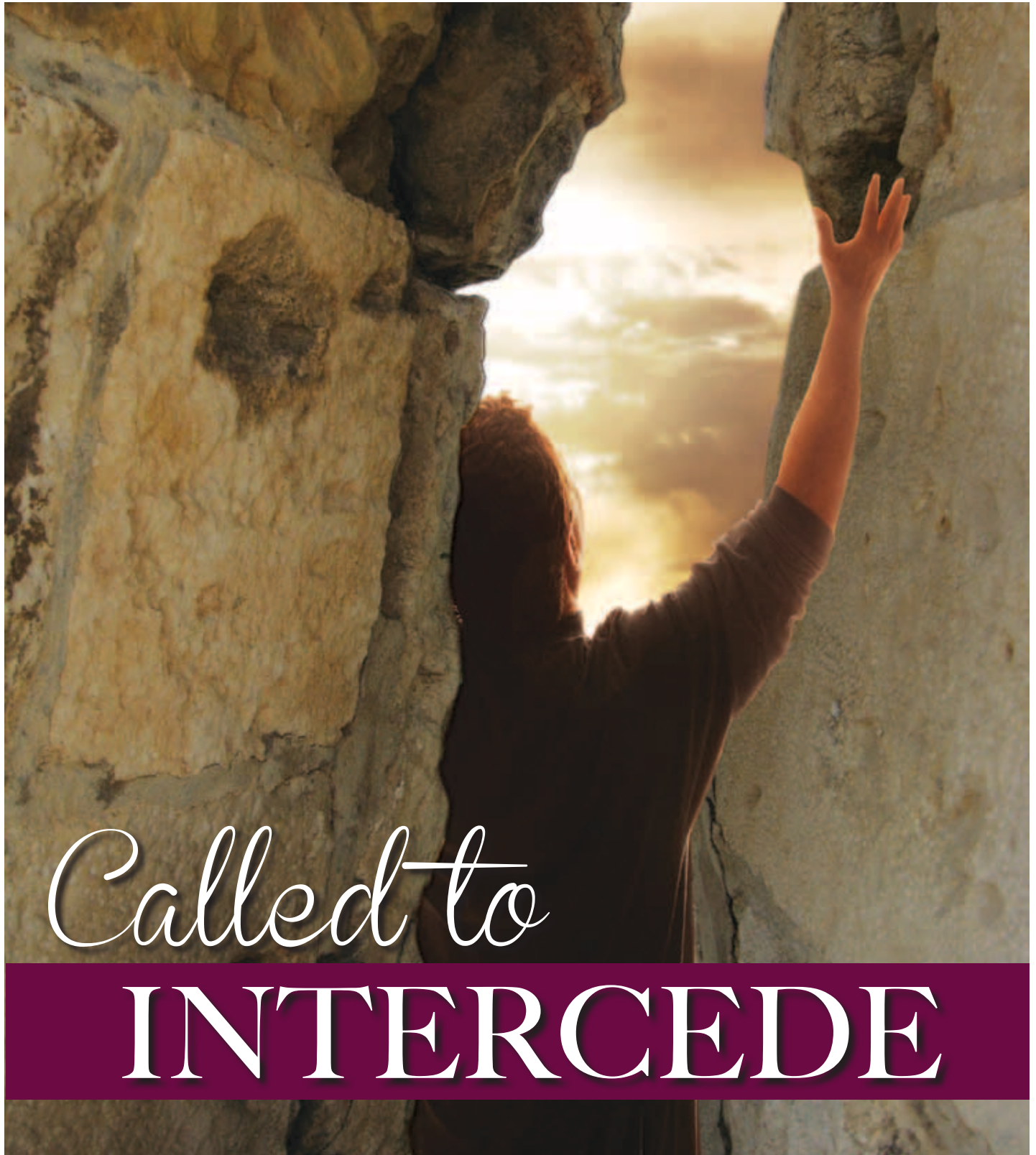


# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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Vol. # 770212 • February 2012



*Called to*

**INTERCEDE**

# standing in the gap

## Perhaps the saddest words

in the Bible are found in Isaiah 59:16, “He [the Lord] saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor...” Ezekiel recorded the same. After God enumerated the sins the Israelites had committed, He was still willing to be merciful, but there was no intercessor: “I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one...” (22:30–31). “No one”—what a heartbreaking word!

After Jeremiah saw the devastation brought against Judah and Jerusalem, he cried out five times in the first chapter of Lamentations that there was “none to comfort” (also see 4:4, 6; 5:8). When Joseph tested his brothers by putting his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack of grain, he was looking to see if one of them would intercede on Benjamin’s behalf (Gen. 44). God is always looking for intercessors (not just the “gifted” but people like you and me) because so many in the world have no one to pray for them.

What does it mean to intercede and why does God have such a hard time finding intercessors? According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, to intercede is “to intervene between parties with a view to reconciling differences, to mediate.” One of the Hebrew words for intercession that emphasizes the reconciliation role of intercession is *pagah*. However, it is often translated “to strike down.” How then can it be related to prayer? When one intercedes, one “strikes” a covenant to make peace; one “assails” with petitions.

Intercession is, therefore, not just a simple prayer of asking but has a sense of urgency to it; it pleads earnestly, even begs. It’s intense. Few people enter into such intensive prayer.

One of the great Christian intercessors in modern times was Rees Howells (1870–1950). In his biography, author Norman Grubb names three things that makes intercession distinctive from other prayer, which Howells lived out in incredible fashion: (1) identification: “he gives his life for those he pleads for...and as far as possible has literally taken their place.” (2) agony: he has to die to self and be willing to do anything the Lord requires, e.g., Isaiah went naked and barefoot for three years. (3) authority: once the price has been paid, God gives authority in prayer that can’t be gained any other way.

Christians can see that Yeshua (Jesus) was an example of each of Grubb’s points (Heb. 7:23–27). As our Intercessor, He expects us to help bring reconciliation for others as He does for us (2 Cor. 5:18–19), though we may never be required to be an Isaiah or a Rees Howells.

This is why there are few genuine intercessors—it’s costly. Indeed, Revelation 8:3–4 infers that the prayers of the saints are like sacrifices laid upon an altar. David Nekrutman, executive director of a Jewish center promoting Jewish-Christian understanding and dialogue, concurs: “Intercession is more than just praying. It’s an *ongoing commitment* to remain in a position before God for a particular situation until the case has been solved.” Isaiah 62 is an example of this. We are to pray for Jerusalem “until...” (v. 1) and be watchmen who “never hold their peace day or night” (v. 6).

“No one”  
—what a heart-  
breaking word!



“Have mercy, O Lord our God, upon the righteous and faithful of *all* peoples. Pour Your spirit upon the rulers of *all* lands; guide them that they may govern justly.” (from the Amidah)

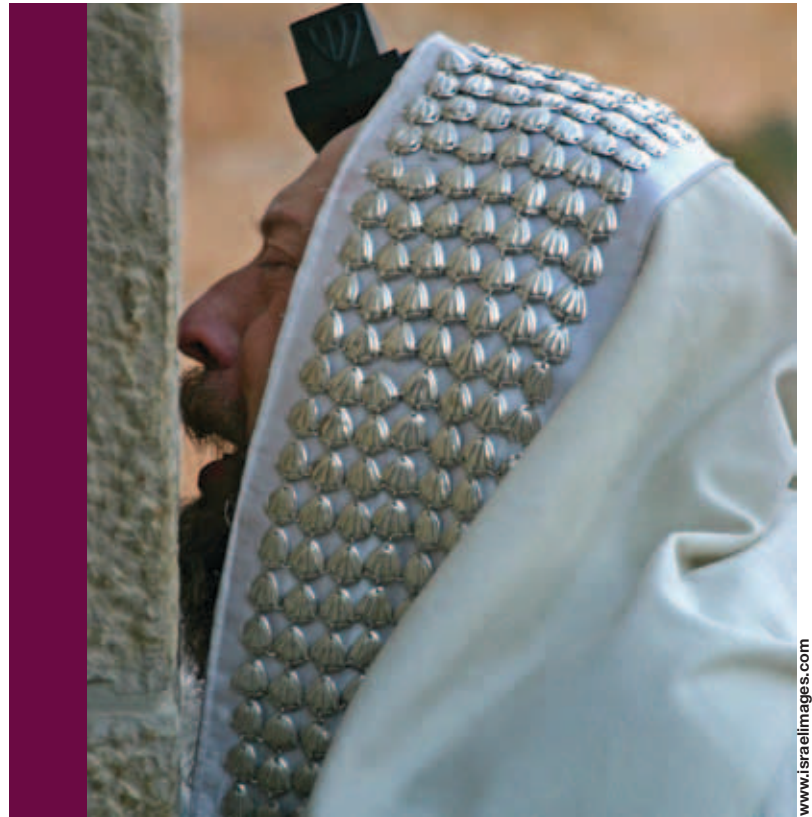
## Jewish Intercession

Do Jewish people today intercede like Christians? You won't find much written on Jewish "intercession" because it's so associated with Christianity. However, they do practice it. Most of their prayers are corporate and prayed in the plural ("we/us"), so for them, *all* petition is considered intercession because the whole community is always included.

The prayer prayed three times a day—since the fifth century BC—is the *Amidah* or the *Shemoneh Esrei* ("eighteen"), covering 18 topics, including praise, supplication, and thanksgiving. Rabbi Hayim Donin, author of *To Pray as a Jew*, once asked a group of young Jewish students who did not practice regular traditional prayer to tell the class what they hoped or wished for or might have whispered a prayer for. So inclusive is the *Amidah*, that each hope or desire was found to be included in one of its 18 categories.

While the prayers are particular to Israel, two categories have been more universalized (in some versions) to include other peoples as well. The prayers for the righteous now read, "Have mercy, O Lord our God, upon the righteous and faithful of *all* peoples." The prayer for justice (good leaders who judge righteously) have been changed from the traditional "restore our judges," to "Pour Your spirit upon the rulers of *all* lands; guide them that they may govern justly." So too, Christians are told that "*supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence*" (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

In Bible times, Israel offered sacrifices for the nations during *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles). A total of 70 bulls were sacrificed during the week (Num. 29). In Judaism, the number 70 has always referred to the nations, as 70 nations came from Noah's three sons (Gen. 10). The Midrash (Jewish writings) declares that if the nations had realized how much they benefited from those offerings, they would have sent legions to surround Jerusalem and guard it from attack!



“...supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for *all* men...” 1 Tim. 2:1

## The Prayers of the Righteous

Whether Jew or Christian, we need to pray for our world in these days. There's probably never been a time when intercession wasn't necessary, but the closer we come to the end of the age, the greater the need to make a commitment to "assail" God with petitions, for the righteous and the unrighteous.

As the turmoil of Arab Spring grips the Middle East, the Church in the region (a very small minority) desperately needs our prayerful support. As the nations who stand against Israel come closer to the time of God's judgment, we need to pray that they will turn from their evil ways and honor God's covenant promises to Israel. As hateful, venomous rhetoric increases against Jewish people around the world (especially in Europe) and surrounding nations aim more and more missiles at tiny Israel, more "watchmen on the wall" are needed who will offer up selfless, sacrificial intercession.

We can learn much from the Bible's great Jewish intercessors. Their prayers are wonderful guides to use in praying for today's needs. Let's see what we can glean from their experiences.



“Then the men  
turned away  
from there and  
went toward  
Sodom, but  
Abraham  
still stood  
before the  
LORD.”  
Gen. 18:22

## Abraham (Gen. 18:16–33)

The first prayer of intercession we find is Abraham’s. Considering that he had no precedent to look to as an example, his prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah becomes all the more amazing. Before we look at it, let’s consider why God chose to share His intentions to destroy these cities with Abraham. *“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?”*

Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, in the *Artscroll Tanach Series*, reasons that it was right for God to do so since Abraham was to be the “father of many nations.” These cities were part of the land bequeathed to Abraham, so how could God destroy them without telling him? In a sense, all of God’s plans to bring forth the nation of Israel and His Messiah were wrapped up in Abraham. Such a man needed to know that God was just and righteous and wouldn’t destroy the righteous with the wicked, so God gave Abraham the opportunity to challenge Him on the point.

Many times God tested Abraham to prove what kind of man he was, and this was one of them. God was giving him favored information to see what he would do with it. He knew that a man with such

a role in history needed to possess a tender heart of compassion.

The cities’ sin was possibly the most abominable—sodomy. Yet, Abraham interceded six times. God agreed each time, concluding that *“I will not destroy it for the sake of ten [righteous].”* However, there were not 10 righteous, so God could have destroyed everyone, but because of Abraham’s intercession, God saved Lot and his two daughters. Rabbi Zlotowitz concludes that Abraham could have been discouraged because his intercession didn’t save the cities, but Abraham “did not grieve over his failure for he had full faith that whatever God did was merciful and just.” But Abraham wouldn’t have known that unless God had given him the opportunity to ask. This truth he now would pass on to his descendants.

With every opportunity we have to intercede, God is testing us to see if we have His heart of compassion. We should never be afraid to ask and keep on asking, even for the most unworthy. Persistent prayer doesn’t push God over the edge. But when our prayers aren’t answered as we’ve asked, we should not be discouraged, but know that God is merciful and just in all His ways.



## Moses (Exod. 32–33)

David Nekrutman notes that Judaism “looks to Moses as its model” for intercessory prayer. Moses interceded many times for the “stiffnecked” Israelites, at great cost. After the golden calf incident, God was so angry, He wanted to consume them and raise up a new people through Moses, but Moses ignored the proposal. God said, “*Let Me alone,*” but Moses wouldn’t. Instead, he prayed the most humble, sacrificial prayer possible: “... *if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.*”

Nekrutman calls this spiritual audacity (*chutzpa kelapei shmaya*). Moses is actually arguing or “talking back to” God, but, according to Nekrutman, man is “endowed with dignity to defend the accused, even if it means going toe-to-toe with” God. It makes one ask: How much am I willing to suffer for the sake of another? Rees Howells was sorely tested when God told him, “On no account will I allow you to cherish a single thought of self.” Everything he had (money, clothes, time, etc.) was to be given to meet another’s need. Moses gave up the prestige and position of becoming another Abraham in deference to saving a multitude of rebellious people.

However, as much as Moses would have sacrificed himself, God told him, “*Nevertheless...I will visit punishment upon them for their sin,*” and God sent a plague. At times, we may fear (like Jonah) that if we intercede, God will hold back the just punishment deserved for sins committed. Yet, God is a just judge and never overlooks the seriousness of sin and the hurt it has inflicted on others.

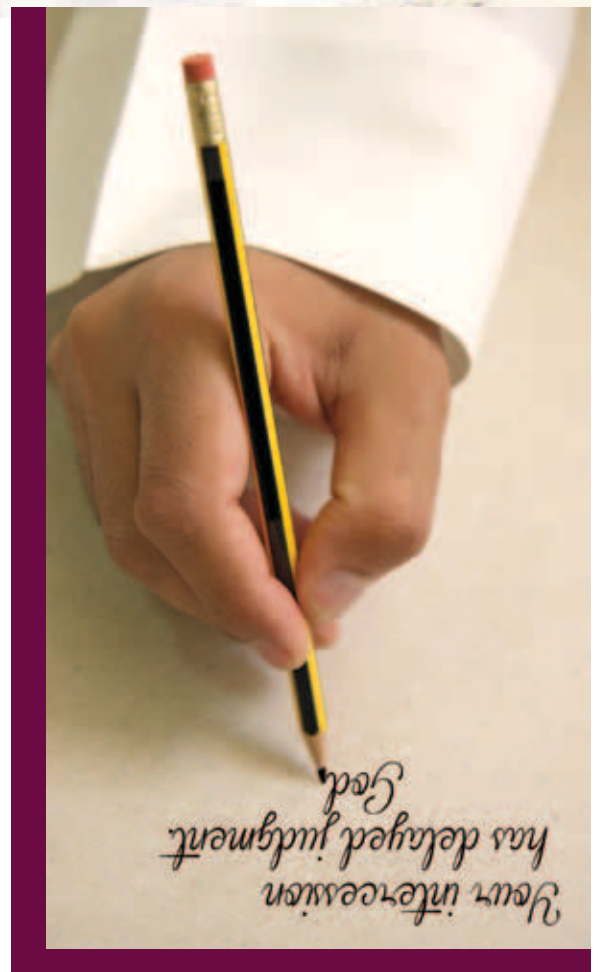
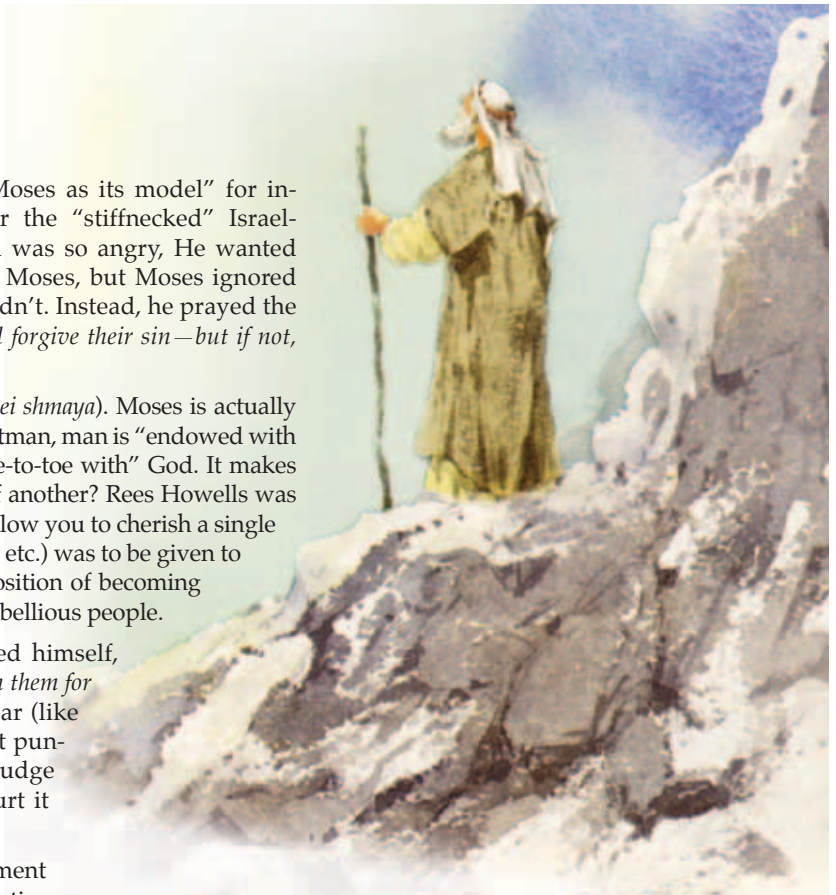
Sometimes repentance or intercession delays judgment for a season (as with Nineveh in Jonah’s time), and sometimes the consequences of sin have to be lived out, even after repentance (e.g., a criminal repents but still has to go to jail). Though we dispense mercy when repentance is made, proper restitution to those hurt should never be ignored. Ultimately, it is God who decides on the measure of judgment or punishment needed. What He requires of us is to intercede and leave the results to Him. We do not know when our intercession might hold back the full extent of His wrath (Ps. 106:23) or delay it.

But there’s more to this story. God told Moses He would not go with them on the rest of the journey “*lest I consume you on the way.*” An angel would go before them, but not the Lord. Moses could not entertain such a thought, so he went into deep intercession and pitched a special tent of prayer outside the camp.

“*Then Moses said to the LORD, ‘See, You say to me, “Bring up this people.” But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, “I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.” Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way...And consider that this nation is Your people.’*”

In effect, Moses was saying, “Don’t You want me to finish the job You gave me to do?” Later, Moses reminds God of His purpose for this people: “*If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.*” God was testing Moses just like He did Abraham. God knew the new nation’s leader had to be an intercessor who was true to God’s purposes or they would never become the nation He ordained them to be.

Are there people who won’t make it if I don’t intercede for them? Isaiah 58:6 says we are to “*undo the heavy burdens*” of others. Yeshua criticized the unjust rulers of His day, “*For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*” (Matt. 23:4). Instead, we are to “*bear one another’s burdens*” (Gal. 6:2); one way to do that is intercede for them.







## Nehemiah and Ezra

(Neh. 1:5–11; 9:5–38)

When Nehemiah, who was one of the Babylonian captives, heard about the broken down walls of Jerusalem, he pleaded with the Lord for the opportunity to return and rebuild the walls. In his prayer, he included the ingredient that always turns God's heart—confession and repentance. *"I pray...and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You..."* Like Jews today, He prayed "we," humbly including himself. Then he reminded God of His promise to bring the people back to the Land. God loves it when we remind Him of His promises.

Some 13 years after the wall was completed, Ezra, the priest, read the Word of God publicly for "one-fourth of the day" to an estimated 50,000 people (for possibly 23 days in a row!). They confessed and worshipped for another fourth of the day. Their prayer of confession is 33 verses long and is a great model to use when we pray for our country's needs.

After enumerating their sins, they prayed, *"But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them...When they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies..."* Again, God loves being reminded, not just of His promises, but also of Who He is and all He's done in the past.



## Esther (4:13–14)

The prayers that Mordecai and Esther must have prayed during the three-day fast are not recorded, but here we see that, in dire circumstances, fasting is essential. Mahesh Chavda is a Christian minister who fasts regularly. He writes, "Fasting helps release the power of the Spirit in our lives...it facilitates the freer flow of the Holy Spirit through you by dissolving and removing all the junk in your life." When miracles are needed, it's something to seriously consider.

Mordecai's words to Esther should motivate every intercessor: *"For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place..."* Sometimes, we are in a unique position to intercede where no one else is. Too often we tend to think someone else will do it, or we doubt that our prayers will make a difference, but James says, *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"* (5:16). Add fasting and you have a great recipe for victory.

## Daniel (9:4–19)

When Daniel—in Babylonian captivity like Nehemiah—read Jeremiah's prophecy that the captivity would last 70 years and realized the 70 years were almost to an end, he "set" his face toward God "with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes." The first sentence of his prayer reminds God that He is a covenant-keeping God. He too prays "we," not "they."

Then he uses one of Moses's arguments: *"...for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary...incline Your ear and hear...for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies"* (vv. 17–18). This is the basis for all answered





Thousands of Canadian *intercessors* gathered in sacred assembly *to repent* for their offenses towards the Jewish people.

prayer—His name's sake. God has made promises, and if He doesn't keep them, it will defame His character and the world's view of Him (see Ezek. 36:22–23). We can use this argument in our prayers also, reminding Him that when He answers prayer, His name is glorified.

## Making a Difference

We *can* make a difference, whether for an individual or a nation. Here's an illustration of both. One morning during staff devotions, one of our Canadian volunteers told us an amazing story of how Christian intercession changed her nation. Around 15 years ago, Canada was in profound crisis. The nation was fractured by deep wounds between people groups, scarred by political scandals, and paralyzed by a floundering economy. The long-standing division between French and English Canada was threatening to sever the nation.

The Lord revealed to a remnant of the Canadian Church that the root of the nation's condition was the spirit of anti-Semitism. With a mandate from the Lord to "fill the land with tears," thousands of intercessors gathered in sacred assembly to repent for their offenses towards the Jewish people, and God mercifully responded in line with 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Bridges for Peace experienced the effects of this when our Canadian office's donations topped the million-dollar mark two years ago. Today, Canada is experiencing His favor and has even been blessed with a strongly pro-Israel prime minister. You *can* help make a difference in your nation. Join gatherings in your area when special calls to prayer are convened.

My second example comes from one of the best Holocaust films I've ever viewed, *The Scarlet and the Black*. It is the true story of Irish Catholic priest Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty who had a post in the Vatican during WWII and helped rescue over 4,000 Allied POWs and thousands more Jews and civilians. He became one of the Nazis' most wanted men in Rome. The priest's most aggressive enemy was the head of the Gestapo in Rome, Colonel Herbert Kappler, who was responsible for capturing, killing, and torturing many of those O'Flaherty was attempting to rescue.

After the war, Kappler was prosecuted and imprisoned for his war crimes. His only visitor every month for 15 years was O'Flaherty! What compassion! In March of 1959, Kappler was baptized. O'Flaherty is one of the "Righteous among the Nations" at Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

We may never attain the greatness of those we have studied in this lesson, but that should not discourage us. Mahesh Chavda writes: "Don't feel condemned when you hear or read about the accomplishments of leaders or ministers of God and say, 'Well, I could never do that. I'll never measure up to them.' God never intended for you to measure up to another person's life; He wants you to measure up to His purpose for your life. God gives us such people as examples to encourage us to press into Him in certain areas of importance to His plans and purpose for our lives."



Photo by www.watchmen.org



Photo by Kathy DeGange

Stephen Harper  
Canadian Prime Minister



www.wikipedia.org/Remy Steinegger

Catholic priest  
Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty





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*Let's be watchmen on the wall.*

So let's be encouraged and make ourselves available for intercession. Though there are some who are gifted in intercession, none of us are exempt. Here's a few suggestions for beginners: Start with 10 minutes and gradually increase the time as you grow in the discipline. List prayer needs on a calendar, rotating them weekly or monthly. Pray for certain needs in the morning and others in the evening. Use Paul's prayers when praying for others (see box below). Use BFP's *Scripture Guide to Praying for Israel*. Join a prayer group; there's power in agreement, and you learn listening to others' prayers.

God is looking for those who care for this broken world. Unlike the times of Ezekiel when God found *no one*, we must be sure that in the 21st century, He will find *someone*. The question is: Are we willing to pay the price?

By Charleeda Sprinkle, Assistant Editor

#### PRAYERS FOR ISRAEL

Moses (Num. 14:13–19)  
Solomon (1 Kings. 8:23–61)  
Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:6–12)  
Nehemiah (Neh. 1:5–11)  
Isaiah (Isa. 63:15–64:12)  
Jeremiah (Jer. 14:7–9, 19–22)  
Daniel (Dan. 9:4–19)

#### PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

2 Cor. 9:10–11  
2 Cor. 13:14  
Eph. 1:17–20  
Eph. 3:14–19  
Phil. 1:3–6, 9–11  
Col. 1:9–11  
1 Thess. 1:1b–4  
1 Thess. 3:12–13  
1 Thess. 5:23–24, 28  
2 Thess. 3:16  
2 Tim. 4:22  
Philemon 4–6, 22  
Heb. 13:20–21  
2 Pet. 1:2

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

**Bridges for Peace** is a Jerusalem-based, Bible-believing Christian organization supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews worldwide through education and practical deeds expressing God's love and mercy.

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