

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAYER: INVITING THE FIRE OF GOD TO FALL

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Interfaithfulness



Consider the elements of Elijah's sacrifice on Mt Carmel, a context for his act of prayer.

¹⁶So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah.¹⁷When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?"

¹⁸"I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead. ¹⁹Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel.^(a)"

²⁰So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. ²¹Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent.

²²Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. ²³Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. ²⁴Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!” And all the people agreed.

²⁵Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “You go first, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls, and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood.”

²⁶So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

²⁷About noontime Elijah began mocking them. “You’ll have to shout louder,” he scoffed, “for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself.^[b] Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!”

²⁸So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. ²⁹They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.

³⁰Then Elijah called to the people, “Come over here!” They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been torn down. ³¹He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel,^[c] ³²and he used the stones to rebuild the altar in the name of the LORD. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons.

^[d] ³³He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood.^[e]

Then he said, “Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood.”

³⁴After they had done this, he said, “Do the same thing again!” And when they were finished, he said, “Now do it a third time!” So they did as he said, ³⁵and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench.

³⁶At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,^[f] prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. ³⁷O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.”

³⁸Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! ³⁹And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!"

(1)The Stones of our Altar

QUESTIONS:

- Elijah used 12 stones to build his altar. Why twelve?
- Consider other times 12 stones are specified:

Moses and all Israel at Sinai –

Ex. 24 - ³Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." ⁴And Moses wrote down all the words of the **LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain**, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." ⁸And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Joshua and the Israelites at the River Jordan :

When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ²"Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, ³and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.' "

Joshua 4:¹⁹The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ²⁰And those

twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. ²¹ And he said to the people of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ²² then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’”

A CONCLUSION ABOUT BUILDING OUR OWN ALTAR OF STONES

The sacrifice of prayer is offered in the context of our covenantal relationship with God as part of a people with a history with a particular kind of God who in word and action has revealed to our people and to us his character, his will, his promises and his expectations. This is our altar which we need to recognize, build, maintain, and sometimes rebuild.

Let’s talk:

1. For Jews who are also Messianic, what is the covenantal context we need to recognize, build, maintain, and sometimes rebuild?
2. What are some communal aspects of this project?
3. What are individual or familial aspects of this project?
4. What are some earmarks of this being done well?
5. What are some earmarks of this being done badly?

- 2) **The Fuel of our Sacrifice of Prayer - The Word** - We take our the promises of God, his covenants with us, and his track record into our time of prayer, and this is the fuel by which a sacrifice of prayer is offered.
 - a. Knowledge of God, his ways, his promises.
 - b. All of us need to develop an intimate relationship with the Bible. Think of Scripture like an iPad Facetime message through which God extends His Presence to us.
 - i. It is nice to have a utilitarian knowledge of the Bible—knowing its story, its “facts,” where to find stuff. But we need something more.
 - ii. We need to develop an intimate relationship with Scripture.

1. Read it daily, fall back into it, returning again and again to it.
2. Learn to meditate on the Word.
 - The term “meditation” has all sorts of meanings and associations, many of them borrowed from Eastern religions. But what is biblical meditation? I like the way Deut 31:14 expresses this, in four phases: “The word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it.” Notice the progress.
 - *The word is near us*—we encounter it in some way, most often, through our reading and study of the Bible. Often some key text, something in the text you have been studying, seems “to have your name on it,” it “speaks to you.” That is usually the text upon which you will want to meditate.
 - *The word is in our mouth*. Biblically, mediation is mulling over the text, chewing on it, repeating it, ruminating on it. We keep speaking it, articulating it, chewing on it in our thoughts and in our speech to ourselves.
 - *And in your heart*. As we think about it, mulling over its meaning, perhaps intuiting some connections we didn’t think of before, the weightiness of the text trickles down into our hearts—the command center of our being.
 - The desired end result is *that we might do it*, that is, what the word says to us. A process like this inspired, instructs, and shapes resolve and action. The word is meant to shape our lives, and such a meditative process helps make that happen.
 - c. Develop the habit of reading the Bible out loud and from the same translation the same edition of the Bible. This will help you to visualize the Bible text at other times when you need it.
 - d. Pray reading the Bible as a tremendous fuel for our prayers. At its essence this means consciously turn the text of Scripture into prayer.
 - i. Take it personally
 - ii. Talk about it to God

- iii. Simply convert it to prayer
- e. When you go to prayer always ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to help you to pray—One of the reasons He is given us is to assist us in our praying, for we do not know how to pray as we ought.
- f. Pray with kavvanah—value intentionality, focus, putting your who self into prayer.
- g. Do not be afraid to pray with the understanding and to pray with the Spirit also—an overflow gift—when the words won’t come, when they are not adequate, when you know that you want to say something but do not really know what it is.

(2)Prayer as the Oxygen in which the Fire of our sacrifice burns, the environment in which the lightning of God is more likely to strike

- a. Predicated on faith (WHAT IS FAITH? – The conviction that we are not wasting our time trusting and addressing this God who is able, aware, present, and faithful).
- b. Like creating an environment where lightning is apt to strike, in prayer we create an environment where we are apt to encounter God and His agents:

Yeshua’s Immersion at the Jordan River

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Yeshua also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

At the Mt. of Transfiguration

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Zechariah, father of John the Baptist

5In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,^a of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

8Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, **9**according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. **10**And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.**11**And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. **12**And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. **13**But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

Moses and Aaron at the dedication of the Tabernacle and priesthood

2Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. **23**And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. **24**And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

(3)The Fire – The Holy Spirit –

When the fire of the Spirit fell upon the 120 of Yeshua's disciples in the Upper Room on the Day of Shavuot/Pentecost, what were they doing?

13 After entering the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. The names of the emissaries were Kefa, Ya'akov, Yochanan, Andrew, Philip, T'oma, Bar-Talmi, Mattityahu, Ya'akov Ben-Halfai, Shim'on "the Zealot," and Y'hudah Ben-Ya'akov. **14** These all devoted themselves single-mindedly to prayer, along with some women, including Miryam (Yeshua's mother), and his brothers. **15** During this period, when the group of believers numbered about 120.

a. Four modalities of interaction with the Spirit

- i. The Spirit prior
- ii. The Spirit within
- iii. The Spirit upon
- iv. The Spirit among

b. Our mentality about the Spirit

- i. Since the Ascension of Yeshua, his people are meant to be the community of the Spirit
 1. This is not a Pentecostal thing
 2. This is a Biblical thing
 3. This is normal and life enhancing, not special nor meant to be quirky-strange.
 - a. No shift to King James English

- b. No exalted in-group lingo
- c. No superstars
- ii. Substance not style. Being “naturally supernatural”
- iii. Flexibility in vocabulary (Baptism? Filling? Fillings?—all YES)
- iv. Asking for more
- v. Expressing thirst
- vi. Earnestly desiring
- vii. Living between the already and the not yet
- viii. Communal well-being, not personal enhancement
- ix. Weakness not strength
 1. Our essential experience is one of weakness and vulnerability not some sort of strident adrenalized spirituality.
 2. It is HIS strength and power, not ours
 3. His strength is perfected in our weakness
 4. See APPENDIX – FROM FEE

(4)The Sacrifices we Bring – Hebrews 13, and Romans 12

- a. We come through Yeshua, who brings himself as an offering (Hebrews 13:12)
- b. Through him we offer a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name (v. 15)
- c. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (v.16)
- d. We offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship. Thus,, we ought not to be conformed to the world (following the desires of body and mind and by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind), but we ought to be transformed by the renewal of our mind (adopting a radically new mindset) that by testing we may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

SUMMARIZING - ALTAR – FUEL – OXYGEN – FIRE - SACRIFICES

The sacrifice of prayer is offered in the context of our covenantal relationship with God as part of a people with a history with particular kind of God who in word and action has revealed to us his character, his will, his promises and his expectations. This is our altar which we need to recognize, build, maintain, and sometimes rebuild.

We take the promises of God, his covenants with us, and his track record into our time of prayer, and this is the fuel by which a sacrifice of prayer is offered.

Prayer is the oxygen in which the fire burns that consumes our sacrifice. Like creating an environment where lightning is apt to strike, in prayer we create an environment where we are apt to encounter God and His agents.

The fire we seek is the fire of the Holy Spirit. We cannot force this to happen: Nadab and Abihu made that mistake (Numbers 10), but we can create an atmosphere where the fire of the Holy Spirit is more likely to come.

The sacrifice through which we come into the Presence of God is always the sacrifice that Yeshua brought, the sacrifice of himself.

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HENDRICKS APPENDIX

The WHY of The Hendricks Method (Modified)

Howard Hendricks was a legendary Bible teacher who taught thousands of people how to study and interpret the Bible. The problem with experts is that often they overwhelm us with details and with impressive sounding rhetoric. Howard Hendricks avoided that because he knew that a teacher's job is not to impress but to equip. And like I said, he equipped thousands. And his WHY is that he was equipping people with a sturdy approach to the Bible that would enable them to go on and teach others. I am reminded of what the Apostle Paul said to Timothy: “. . . the things you heard from me, which were supported by many witnesses, these things commit to faithful people, such as will be competent to teach others also.”¹ Hendricks' method is designed to make you competent to teach others what you have learned in the Bible. If you don't already know this to be true, just take it from me: it is one of life's deepest satisfactions.

The WHAT of the Hendricks Method

Like any really good teacher, he impressed everyone by making the complicated easy to understand. He spoke of *four steps in Bible study*. To his four steps, I am adding six more, making ten altogether. Although his four steps should be done in order, the others six do not. And rather than think of these as steps, it might be helpful to think of these ten items as *aspects* of studying the Bible – items of which we ought to remain aware. And this is not meant to be time-consuming. The steps describe a mentality we ought to bring to the study of the text, and staying within these boundaries need not be demanding, except when you detect matters that bear deeper examination, or if you, like me, are a study junkie. In contrast to the Horner Method, which focuses on what the Bible says, the Hendricks Method helps us to grasp what the Bible *means* by what it says, while focusing on smaller units of text.

More About The WHY of the Hendricks Method

Frequently, while studying the Bible with a group of people, having read a brief segment of the text, I will ask a question about what we just read. More often than you would guess, instead of looking at the text under their noses and finding the answer to the question raised, people will guess the answer, pulling out of the air (not out of the text) some socially approved religious cliché. For too many, it is

¹ 2 Tim 2:2 (CJB)

as if there is no connection between the text before them and the answers they give. Yes, I know it's hard to believe, but it is so. People tend to treat group Bible studies like a game called "Whoever Guesses the Right Answer First Wins." The "right" answer is whatever the teacher thinks it is, and our job is to be the first person to guess what the teacher has in mind. It's like a game of charades. Instead, the name of the game *should* be, "What clues does the text provide to the author's intended meaning?" Or perhaps we could call it not, "Let's Play Charades," but rather, "Let's Play Sherlock Holmes."

So the "Why" of the Hendricks method is to increase our penetration into the text, unearthing there reliable clues to its intended meaning.

The details of the text are like the evidence at a crime scene, and as we study the Bible, we are Columbo, or Monk, or Sherlock Holmes, inspecting the evidence, looking for clues as to what the author meant by what he/she said and how his hearers most likely understood him.

Hendricks' steps discipline the process. Generally, his four steps must be followed in the order they are listed here. Otherwise we are in danger of putting the cart before the horse, in which case neither cart nor horse is going anywhere good. This is because, when departing from this order, we are apt to project subjective conclusions onto the text, distorted by being based on a partial rather than thorough examination of the evidence. Everyone who studies the Bible is in danger of reading into the text ideas and assumptions resident in the reader, unrelated to what the text is trying to say.

The WHAT of the Hendricks Method

Here are Hendricks' four basis steps.

1. Observe the evidence of the text
2. Interpret what that evidence meant to its original author and audience
3. Apply that meaning to your own situation
4. Capture and Communicate the impact of this text for the benefit of others

To these I added six more steps, making ten in all. Here they are. You will see that within this format, the order of Hendricks's steps is preserved.

1. Prayerful Reliance upon the Ruach, the Divine Presence

2. The Jewish Bible Study Question – Why does the text say it *this* way and not another?
3. Reason
4. Observe the evidence of the text
5. Interpret what that evidence meant to its original author and audience
6. Double check your understanding with at least two translations besides the one you normally use.
7. Apply that meaning to your own situation
8. Meditate on the text to sense its significance for your own life and situation
9. Tradition - Process all of this within the Jewish tradition and in consultation with the best insights of the Christian world.
10. Share--Capture and Communicate the impact of this text for the benefit of others

Material on Hendrick adapted from an early draft of an upcoming discipling book by Rabbi Dauermann