

Prayers: Mortals Seeking the Lord’s Divine Favor

Old Testament prayers were heartfelt and offered by men and women, prophets, kings, laypersons, servants, and others. They were generally addressed to the lord, to God, or to the lord God; but some prayers have additional expressions such as “lord God of Israel,” “the lord God of heaven,” “the lord God of my master Abraham,” and “lord, the great and dreadful God.” Prayers were offered for one’s personal needs, such as Jeremiah praying for deliverance from his afflictions or David pleading for forgiveness. They were also offered on behalf of others, such as Abraham praying for Sodom’s inhabitants, Abraham’s servant seeking a wife for Isaac, or Ezra praying for members of the house of Israel.

The purposes for offering prayers varied during ancient times just as they do in our own day—to be blessed with a baby, to find a spouse for a loved one, to ask for forgiveness or mercy, to confess one’s sins, to plead for deliverance from one’s enemies, to praise the lord’s name, or to dedicate the temple.

Even the posture of prayer is God-focused, which included bowing down (Gen. 24:52; Ps. 95:6), bowing the head (Isa. 58:5), and kneeling (1 Kgs. 8:54; 2 Chr. 6:13; Ps. 95:6)—each posture points to the humility of the one uttering the prayer. Gestures of prayer also include raising the hands to heaven (1 Kgs. 8:38–39; Ps. 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; Isa. 1:15; Lam. 2:19; 3:41).

With regard to frequency, the scriptures record that Daniel prayed three times a day; Daniel 6:10 records that he “kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God.”

The chart sets forth several prayers from the Old Testament; the columns indicate the name of the supplicant (column 1, listed alphabetically), the opening words of the prayer (column 2), the prayer’s chief purpose (column 3), and the scriptural reference (column 4).

Supplicant	Opening Words	Chief Purpose	Reference
Abraham	“Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”	For the righteous of Sodom	Gen. 18:23–33
Abraham	“lord God, what wilt thou give me”	For childless Sarai	Gen. 15:1–9

Supplicant	Opening Words	Chief Purpose	Reference
Abraham's servant	"O lord God of my master Abraham"	To seek a wife for Isaac	Gen. 24:12-14
Asa	"lord, it is nothing with thee to help"	For deliverance	2 Chr. 14:11
Daniel	"O lord, the great and dreadful God"	For supplication, blessing, and forgiveness for Israel	Dan. 9:4-19
David	"Blessed be thou, lord God of Israel our father"	To praise the lord for His greatness and goodness	1 Chr. 29:10-13
David	"The lord is my shepherd"	To details the lord's greatness and deeds on behalf of individuals	Ps. 23
David	"Have mercy upon me, O God"	To ask forgiveness	Ps. 51
Ezra	"O my God"	To confess Israel's sins and mention God's mercies	Ezra 9:5-15
Habakkuk	"O lord, I have heard thy speech"	To set forth the greatness and majesty of the lord	Hab. 3:1-19
Hannah	"My heart rejoiceth in the lord"	To praise the lord and His power, greatness, and great deeds	1 Sam. 2:1-10
Hezekiah	"O lord God of Israel"	For deliverance from the Assyrian invasion	2 Kgs. 19:15-19
Jacob	"O God of my father Abraham"	For deliverance from Esau	Gen. 32:9-12
Jeremiah	"O lord"	For his afflictions	Jer. 20:7-18
Joshua	"Alas, O lord God"	A wish that the Israelites had not entered the promised land	Josh. 7:6-9
Levites	"Stand up and bless the lord your God"	To praise the lord for His great deeds on behalf of Israel	Neh. 9:5-38

Supplicant	Opening Words	Chief Purpose	Reference
Moses	"lord"	To plead on behalf of Israel after they make a golden-calf idol	Ex. 32:11-13, 31-32
Nehemiah	"I beseech thee, O lord God of heaven"	To confess the sins of the children of Israel	Neh. 1:4-11
Solomon	"Blessed be the lord God of Israel"	To dedicate temple	1 Kgs. 8:15-53