

Standing In The Gap

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.”

1 Tim 2:1

Paul tells us that the first priority of a Christian assembly is prayer. He mentions various forms of prayer, of which one is intercession. To ‘intercede’ means literally “to come in between.” The intercessor is one who comes in between God and those who deserve His just wrath and punishment. They lift their hands to God and say, “God, these deserve Your judgment; You have every right to punish; but if You do, You have to punish me first, because I am standing in between You and them.”

In the Old Testament we find various accounts of cities and nations being spared God’s judgment through the ministry of an intercessor. We will study some of these examples, but first, let us consider the ministry of intercession in the life of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

INTERCESSION IN JESUS’ LIFE

Intercession was one of the great marks of the ministry of Jesus. Isaiah 53 gives a description of His atoning work, concluding with verse 12:

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

There are four things recorded there of Jesus. First, He poured out His soul unto death. Leviticus 17:11 says that the soul of all flesh is in the blood, so Jesus poured out His soul unto death when He poured out His blood.



Second, He was numbered with the transgressors; He was crucified with thieves. Third, He bore the sin of many; He became the sin offering for us all. Fourth, He made intercession for the transgressors; He did this from the cross when He said, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”** (LUKE 23:34). He was saying, “The judgment that is due to them, let it come upon Me.” And it did.

Hebrews 7 speaks of Jesus after His death, resurrection and ascension. We’re told that Jesus is our High Priest at God’s right hand. Because He has an unchangeable priesthood, one that never passes from Him, **“He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”** (HEBREWS 7:25).

If we do a study of the life and ministry of Jesus, we arrive at a rather interesting comparison: He spent thirty years in obscurity in perfect family life; three and one-half years in dramatic public ministry; and nearly two thousand years in intercession, unseen by the natural eye. Ever since He ascended He has been interceding for us before the Father.

OLD TESTAMENT PATTERNS—ABRAHAM

The greatest saints were often the greatest intercessors for they were the closest men to the heart of God. The Old Testament contains examples of some great intercessors.

In Genesis 18 we find the Lord with two angels, coming to visit the tent of Abraham. At the end of his visit the Lord says, **“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?”** (VERSE 17). In other words, the Lord sees Abraham as His close personal friend with whom He will share His thoughts and plans. So the Lord tells Abraham: **“Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know”** (20–21).

Abraham was much concerned about Sodom because his nephew, Lot, was living there. Abraham knew that if judgment came upon Sodom, Lot and his family would suffer with the rest.

The scene continues: **“Then the men [angels] turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD [to hold Him back]. And Abraham came near and said, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”** (VERSES 22–25).

It took courage for Abraham to speak to the Lord that way. Abraham knew that it would be totally out

of keeping with the character of God, and contrary to His justice, to let judgment fall upon the righteous.

Psalms 91:7–8 sets forth this principle: **“A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked.”** Whatever comes as just judgment upon the wicked will never touch the righteous. The righteous may be in the very midst of such judgment, but it will not come upon him.

Note, however, that there is a difference between judgment and persecution for righteousness’ sake. The Bible says the righteous will experience persecution. The difference is judgment for wickedness comes upon the wicked from God; but persecution for righteousness comes upon the righteous from the wicked.

So, with holy boldness and intense conviction that God has to be absolutely just, Abraham sets forth to challenge the Lord upon this principle: **“Lord, if there are fifty righteous in that city, will You spare the city?”** The Lord answers Abraham that He will spare the city if fifty righteous persons can be found. **“What about forty-five? Will You spare it for forty-five righteous?”** And the Lord says He will spare it if forty-five righteous persons could be found in it. And so goes the conversation . . . forty . . . thirty . . . twenty, until finally Abraham arrives at his last challenge: **“Suppose there are only ten righteous persons in that whole city. Will You spare it for the sake of ten?”** And the Lord says He will spare it for ten righteous persons.

That is a tremendous revelation! If my calculations are correct, Sodom was a major city for its day with a population of no less than 10,000. For the sake of ten out of 10,000, God was willing to spare the entire city. That is one out of a thousand!

One out of a thousand! The Bible apparently uses this phrase to single out a man of outstanding righteousness. God says, “If I can find in Sodom one such righteous person in every thousand, I will spare the whole city.”

If we apply this proportion to our own city, would we qualify as one of those righteous ones?

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TAKEN FROM A NEW WINE ARTICLE FEBRUARY 1980.

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THE INTERCESSION OF MOSES

Our second example of an intercessor is Moses. In Exodus 32 we find him ascending Mt. Sinai to receive the covenant from God. After he had been gone many days, the people became impatient and urged Aaron to make gods for them to worship. So Aaron took golden earrings and made a molten calf, around which Israel began to dance and worship.

As this was occurring in the camp, God spoke to Moses on the mountain and said, **“Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molten calf, and worshiped it”** (VERSES 7–8).

At this tense moment with the fate of Israel hanging in the balance, there is a note of humor in the ensuing conversation between God and Moses. Speaking of Israel to Moses, God calls them “your people.” But Moses, unwilling to accept this responsibility, casts it back upon God and says, “Your people.” Neither God nor Moses wished to be held responsible for Israel at that moment! Meanwhile, Israel continued to dance around the calf, completely unaware that their fate was being settled by this dialogue between God and Moses.

God declared to Moses, **“Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them”** (VERSE 10). Note that God would do nothing unless Moses would allow Him to. But Moses would not get out of God’s way. As an intercessor, he remained standing between God and the people.

Finally, God says that He will use Moses to redeem His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by starting all over with Moses and making a great nation from him. Even though these people had been nothing but a burden to him since leaving Egypt, Moses interceded for them (verses 11–12).

Moses’ concern was for God’s reputation. He said, “God, if You bring these people out and they perish in the mountains, the Egyptians will say You had evil intentions against them when You brought them out.”

In Exodus 32:30–32, we find the consummation of Moses’ intercession. After he had returned to the camp and set things in order, he speaks to the people:

“You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”

That is intercession! “God, they deserve Your stroke; forgive them. But if not, Lord, let their judgment come upon me.” The intercessor is the one who stands in between God and the object of His just wrath. Psalm

106:19–23 provides a divine commentary on this incident:

They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped the molded image. Thus they changed their glory into the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, awesome things by the Red Sea. Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.

Moses stood in the breach made by the sin of God’s people and said, “Lord, I am stopping the gap. Your blow cannot fall upon them unless it first falls upon me.”

Numbers 16 records another example of intercession. Here Moses and Aaron together are the intercessors. God had sovereignly dealt with the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram by causing the earth to open and swallow them alive. But:

On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You have killed the people of the LORD.” Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. . . . And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” And they fell on their faces. (VERSES 41–45)

That is the position of the intercessor—prostrate on his face before God, knowing that judgment is about to fall.

Personally, I marvel at the grace of Moses and Aaron. The people had turned against them without reason. Yet for these who criticized them, they were willing to intercede—even at the risk of their own lives. Moses spoke to Aaron and directed him:

“Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense in it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement

“the position of the intercessor: prostrate on his face before God”

for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun.” Then Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly, and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. (VERSES 46–48)

The language in this passage emphasizes the **urgency** of intercession. Moses said to Aaron, **“Go**

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quickly..." Aaron did not walk; he "ran." Every moment cost lives.

The word **plague** suggests something infectious and to make atonement Aaron had to deliberately expose himself to that contagion. He risked his life. As he stood swinging the censer, the smoke rose in a white line and dividing the living from the dead. Where that white smoke went up from the censer, the plague stopped. That is intercession: coming—at the risk of your own life—between the dead and those who are due to die, then offering up fervent prayer and supplication, like the white smoke, until the plague ceases.

THE LACK OF INTERCESSORS

Ezekiel 22:23–31 records a different scene - similar to the last one in that it portrays the sins of God's people, yet it is different in that no intercessor was found to stand between the sin of the people and God's judgment.

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, say to her [the land of Israel]: 'You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.' The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst... Her priests have violated My law... Her princes in her midst are like wolves... The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy... So 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. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them."

All sections of the population had utterly failed—prophets, priests, princes, people. Each of these stands for a certain element in society. The "prophets" are those responsible to bring a message direct from God. The "priests" are the leaders of institutional religion. The "princes" are the secular rulers. The "people" are the rest of the population, the common people. The order in which these four elements are listed is significant. The process of decay began with the spiritual leadership; then the secular government was corrupted; finally the whole nation was affected. (This has been the order in modern America and many other nations.)

Even though every part of society was corrupted, the situation was not yet hopeless. God looked for one man, an intercessor, to stand in the gap and make up the hedge so that He could spare the whole nation. But because He could find none, He poured out upon

them His indignation and "**consumed them with the fire of [His] wrath.**" One man—one intercessor—could have saved an entire nation from judgment!

THE NEED FOR INTERCESSORS

The Bible reveals that judgment is according to the light that has been granted. The greater the light, the more severe the judgment. When we consider the media by which the truth is being spread today—television, radio, books, digital media, I would say that no generation on the face of the earth has ever had greater spiritual light available to it than now.

God spoke to me audibly in 1953 when I was still a pastor in England. He said: "There shall be a great revival in the United States and Great Britain." For this, God laid down one basic requirement: obedience. I believe that great revival is coming—if God can find intercessors to stay His judgment and call down His mercy.

In closing let me give you four qualifications that I see in every true intercessor. First, an intercessor, like Abraham, must have an absolute conviction of God's righteousness: that God will never bring judgment on the righteous, which is due only to the wicked. At the same time, he must have a crystal clear vision of the absolute justice and inevitability of God's judgment upon the wicked.

Secondly, he must have a deep concern for God's glory, like Moses, who twice declined God's offer to make him the ancestor of the greatest people on earth. God's glory is more important than his personal reputation.

Thirdly, an intercessor must have an intimate acquaintance with God. He must be prepared to risk his own life, like Aaron who ignored the contagion of the plague to take his place between the dead and the living.

And finally, to be an intercessor takes holy boldness. You have to risk your life, be like Aaron and say, "I'll run the risk of the plague, but I am going to stand here!"

There is no higher calling than that of an intercessor. When you become an intercessor, you have reached the throne. Man will not see you because you will be out of his sight, beyond the second veil; but in the Kingdom of God your life will count for time and for eternity. ▲

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Standing in the Gap

GROUP BIBLE STUDY GUIDE



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OVERVIEW

Paul tells us that the first priority of a Christian assembly is prayer and mentions intercession, meaning “to come in between.” The intercessor stands in the gap. They lift their hands to God saying, “These deserve Your judgment and Your punishment; but if You do this, You have to punish me first, because I am standing in the gap.”

- What’s your attitude towards those who mistreat or don’t understand you? Consider interceding for them. Intercession does not have to be convoluted and ‘deep’. God is interested in the small and the big.

3 WILL YOU STAND IN THE GAP?



Could you be the one needed to stand in the gap?

- Encourage people to write in their journals 3 areas in which they think intercession is needed, e.g. for someone with cancer, someone’s salvation, or even for the sale of a house! Anything at all. The more impossible it seems, all the more reason to intercede!
- Now with felt pens, each person is to write at least one of these areas or topics on the large piece of paper which becomes a group topic to intercede for.

IN THIS STUDY WE WILL

- Discuss what ‘intercession’ means
- Consider who should intercede and when
- Brainstorm ways to intercede and what to intercede for
- Intercede as a group - we’ll have a go!

YOU WILL NEED

1. Bibles and individual copies of this Teaching Letter
2. Individual journals/notebooks and pens etc.
3. A large piece of paper pinned on a free wall or board
4. Assorted felt tip pens

RELEVANT SCRIPTURES

1 Tim. 2:1, Is. 53:12, Lev. 17:11, Luke 23:24, Heb. 7:25, Gen. 18:22-25, Ps. 91:7-8, Ex. 32:7-12; 30-32, Num. 16:41-48.

1 WHO CAN BE AN INTERCESSOR?



There are 4 conditions for intercessors. They have:

- An absolute conviction of God’s righteousness.
- A deep concern for God’s glory/reputation.
- An intimate relationship with God.
- A ‘holy boldness.’

Discuss these conditions as a small group or split into 4 groups, getting each group to discuss one condition and what it means, then come back together to share.

2 WHY SHOULD I INTERCEDE?



Read aloud: Exodus 32:7-12; 30-32; Numbers 16:41-48

- What moves you to stand between God and the unrighteous? Remember, even though Moses and Aaron were criticized, they still interceded.

4 SO HOW DO YOU INTERCEDE?



Intercession has no set process, but one of the conditions of intercession is being intimate with God.

- It may help to put on some worship music, to pray in tongues for a time, or to read your Bible before praying. Try these out, or whatever method of prayer works for you... it may feel awkward at first, but that doesn’t mean that it’s wrong, it’s just different.

5 GROUP INTERCESSION

Pray: together for the intercession topics on the paper.

- Remind each person that this is about being led to pray with holy boldness and not to worry about getting each topic ‘ticked off’, but rather seeking God and ‘standing in the gap’ for the topic. Stay focused on each topic until all who wish to, have prayed.

It’s also effective to pray out loud as individuals and as each person prays, the others agree in prayer.

Matt. 18:19-20: “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”