

Prayers That Avail Much

Part I

As we continue from last week and move to the second half of chapter 1, the two angels have just told the disciples that their beloved Lord would return someday in the same way in which He ascended. Before Jesus left to be taken up, He gave the disciples and His followers instructions to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father, namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Acts is the history of the ministry of Jesus continued after He ascended by the apostles, His followers and of the early church. Today's message is also more of a lesson blending the history addressed by Luke and history of the church that followed after the early church. This will include serious error as the result of not holding fast to the eternal Word of God and allowing the world to influence the church. When I began studying, praying and preparing this message I did not see this as the direction I thought I was to go. I believe the Lord put this message on my heart because there are those who need to hear it.

As we begin exploring the 2nd half of chapter 1, notice with me how the followers of Christ are obedient and how they are all in complete unity. This is the result of complete trust in Jesus and His Words. They believe and they obey.

¹² “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of

Alphaeus (al·fah·yos) and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

¹⁵ “In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (*meaning brothers and sisters in faith*) (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶ ‘Brothers (*brothers and sisters*), the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.’ ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ ‘For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it”; (*Psalm 69:25*) and “Let another take his office.” (*Psalm 109:8*) ²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.’ ²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’ ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”

Our Alignment With God’s Will

The main theme of this 2nd half of chapter 1 is **when our prayers align with God's will, great things happen**. One thing this text greatly illustrates is that it is fitting and proper to pray for God's will be done and expect God to answer. This passage shows that proper prayer takes place when we pray for exactly the same things God promises to supply. When we pray for the Word of God to be fulfilled in our lives God begins to reveal His will. When we pray for the very thing God desires us to have then we can be confident He will answer in an affirmative way. This truly is a biblically solid and the reformed way of praying. We can have great confidence as we pray for the will of God to be made known and to be lived out in our lives. Jesus said for the disciples to go back to the city and wait for the promise of God to be fulfilled. The promise was God would send to them was the Holy Spirit. So, they obey and go back to the city. They pray in unity for God's promise to come to pass. The result of their prayers is the ending of the story, which we will get to next week.

As they gathered and prayed in the upper room, it does not appear they prayed for the healing of a loved one, although that would be good. They did not pray for money to do ministry, even though this would have been needed. They did not pray for Jesus to return and stand before them once more. Their prayers were centered on knowing, understanding and fulfilling God's will. Their prayers were powerful God-centered unified praying. Many prayers today sound a shopping list of wants or telling God what we want Him to do, instead of seeking God's will for our lives. God's will is revealed in His Word and by the wisdom given to each by the Holy Spirit and we need to seek God's will in our prayers.

What do the first three verses reveal? Reading at verses 12, [“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the](#)

upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” The first thing I would like to point out is verse 14 ends with the word “brothers”. This word could also be read as “brothers and sisters” depending on the context. The context of this sentence and passage reveal Luke is referring to the brothers and sisters of Jesus. The Greek word used here is (ἀδελφός -οῦ, ὁ) “*adelphos*” and as understood by the context of the sentence it is used to mean both brothers and sisters. Just as does the very next verse 15 also means brothers and sisters. Verse 14 is relating to the biological half-brothers and sisters of Jesus, whereas verse 15 is referring to brothers and sisters of the common faith in Christ. So, we understand why context is important. These verses have created great misunderstanding among church because they are not understood in context.

Also, in these verses, Luke shares with us some practical information; the disciples were at the Mount of Olives, which is elevated about 200 feet higher than the city of Jerusalem and as Luke reports it is a Sabbath’s Day’s journey away. It was **not** the Sabbath when this took place but Luke is just saying that it is a distance of about 1 ½ miles from the city, a traditional maximum Sabbath day’s journey. He continues to tell us that they arrived in the city and immediately found a room, probably the same upper room in which Jesus shared the last Passover meal with them and instituted the Lord’s Supper.

Luke lists the eleven apostles, minus Judas Iscariot and includes the fact that there are women and these include Mary, Jesus’ mother and His brothers and sisters. Luke does this to show that all present were united in prayer. All believed,

trusted and were praying in one accord. They prayed for what God already promised. This is significant. This is praying in Jesus' name. This is praying in the will of God. Beloved, we are called to pray for the things God desires for us and that will accomplish His plans. Jesus said God the Father would send the Holy Spirit and they were praying for Him to come. We can see here that they trusted in what Jesus told them and this gave them confidence to pray for His promise of the Holy Spirit and fully trusting God to do as Jesus said He would do.

Luke reports that women were there with the men and the number was 120 people. Many of these are the women who constantly traveled with Jesus and the disciples caring for them as they ventured throughout the land preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of God. Luke revealed some of these women's names in his gospel account, writing, "Soon afterward *Jesus* went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him,² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza (*khood-zas*), Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means." (Luke 8:1-3)

Some of these were also the women who had gone early in the morning to the tomb of Jesus to further anoint His body and found that He had already risen. Most were simply known as the women. We also know there was a crowd of faithful followers, who are unnamed but Luke makes a point of naming Jesus' mother Mary. She was also praying for the promise of the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled. There were also present, Jesus' brothers who had become followers of Jesus. In Mark's gospel account he records the names of Jesus' brothers, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not

his sisters here with us?” (Mark 6:3) Jesus had biological half-brothers and sisters. How many we are not sure and know only a some by name.

Aligning Scripture With God’s Will

These brothers and sisters are the offspring of Joseph and Mary. Some of Jesus’ brothers are named, His sisters are mentioned but remain unnamed. Unlike other religions that claim Mary was a perpetual virgin, the Word of God does not support this position. In order to try and force this position some even claim the brothers and sisters of Jesus were step-siblings by Joseph’s prior marriage. Which is found nowhere in the Bible or recorded history. There is no biblical or historical evidence to support any of these manmade traditions.

Let me take the time to review what we know about Jesus’ brothers. Why? Because the more we know about the people in the scriptures and the location and the audience and history, the more we understand God’s Word. The order of the names of Jesus’ brothers implies their birth order as was the custom of the writing at that time. We know Jesus’ siblings in the beginning were not believers. Reading from the Gospel According to John, “After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.² Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths was at hand.³ So his **brothers** said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing.’⁴ For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.’⁵ **For not even his brothers believed in him.**” (John 7:1-5)

Again the Greek word used here is “*adelphos*” and as understood by the context of the sentence it is used to mean both brothers and sisters or followers of Christ in verse 3. In verse 5 the context changes and means the biological half-brothers and sisters of Jesus did not believe Him to be the Messiah.

First mentioned is **James** whose Hebrew name was Ἰάκωβος *Iakobos* (ee·ak·o·bos). He was an unbeliever in the beginning of Jesus' ministry and converted at a later point but his conversion was before Jesus' ascension. James was the leader of the Jerusalem church in the middle of the first century A.D. James was a participant in the Jerusalem council and most likely saw the risen Jesus. He was highly esteemed by Jewish Christians of the second century A.D. and beyond. In early church writings, at times he is referred to as James "the Just" because according to the historian Eusebius, James was a man of piety and reverence for the God's law. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.1-15) The scriptures do not speak about James' death. However, Clemet of Alexandria, the Christian theologian of the second century wrote, "**James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple, and was beaten to death with a club.**" (Eusebius, *Church History Book II, Chapter 23*)

Joses whose Hebrew name was Ἰωσήφ *Ioses* (ee·o·sace) a shorten version of his father's name Joseph. Perhaps since his father's name was Joseph and they did not use the modern designation of "Junior" the son's name might have been shortened as to not confuse the two. The Catholic Church claims Joses is the brother of James the disciple of Jesus found in Matthew chapter 27, "**There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him,**⁵⁶ among whom were Mary Magdalene and **Mary the mother of James and Joseph** and the mother of the sons of Zebedee." (Matthew 27:55-56) We know little of this Mary other than what Matthew tells us a few verses later, "**Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.**"

(Matthew 27:61) The Mary in verse 56 and 61 is not Mary the mother of Jesus and thus this James and Joses are not Jesus' step-brothers by Joseph's first marriage. Joseph was never married before Mary. Scripture does not support the Catholic claim, it a misuse of scripture and taken out of context to support a manmade tradition and is

not the will of God. Joses was the biological half-brother of Jesus and he is only briefly mentioned in the Bible. We know nothing of his life and death.

Judas whose Hebrew name was Ἰούδας, Ἰωδᾶ *Ioudas* (ee-oo·das) and was also known by the name Jude begins his epistle with, “[Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James...](#)” (Jude 1) Since the Catholic Church falsely claims James is the son of Joseph by a prior marriage, then Judas is also a step-brother of Jesus, which defies the scriptures. The historian Eusebius wrote, “[Judas’ descendants being brought before Emperor Domitian as political enemies. Upon examining them, Domitian releases them and stopped the persecution of the church. However, during Emperor’s Trajan’s reign](#)” the persecution resumes and the children of Judas or Jude were martyred. (Eusebius, *Church History Book III, Chapter 19*) We do not know how long Judas lived or when he died.

Simon Σίμων (*see·mone*) the half-brother of Jesus is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark, but that is all that is known. It appears he came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, but do not know for sure.

I have given hints to the problems of man playing with or changing God’s Word. Now I am going to go deeper in dispelling some false teachings.

Adding Man’s Will To Scripture

Since I have taken time to dispel false teachings about Jesus’ half-brothers, I want to address one more false teaching especially concerning prayer and idol worship. It concerns another relative of Jesus. When a church begins to allow pagan traditions to be incorporated into the Word of God it opens the doors for manmade traditions that over time corrupt God’s Word and bring heresies into the church. Once heresies are allowed in, they grow and at some point, a church and

individuals are no longer worshipping the one true God. Having been saved from a cult of false worship of a false Christ this is a tender and raw subject for me, but also an important one.

The scriptures indicate in verse 14, [“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer”](#) and Mary is praying along with the others for the promise of God. She is praying with them - they are not praying to her in any way. Mary was a sinner like all humans and the Son she bore was her Savior as well everyone else’s Savior.

The scriptures are clear as is the writings of early historians, Mary had children after she gave birth to Jesus as shown in verse 14, [“Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”](#) As we saw earlier the word [“brothers”](#) means brothers and sisters by its context. The false teachings centered on Mary are the result of the early church mixing pagan religion and traditions with the truth of God. This is called syncretism and there are many religions guilty of this for various reasons. However, the motive behind syncretism in all false religions is men’s desire for control and Satan’s desire to keep people from worshipping the true Christ. Through the Word of God, we recognize Mary was a virgin and a very respectable Jewish young woman but the Bible never exalts her past this. I believe we need to take a short detour here and discover what is behind the Roman Catholic Church’s veneration or reverence of Mary.

Anytime men decide they know more than God or desire to be like God or desire control over others they open the door for Satan to enter and create falsehoods to distract people from the true God and people end up worshipping false gods. There is no salvation in worshipping false gods, there is only judgement and eternal death. Hear the Word of God concerning Himself, Christ and His

Word. In the Old Testament God told the prophet Malachi, “**For I the LORD do not change.**” (Malachi 3:6) Jesus, God incarnate said, “**Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.**”³⁵ **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**” (Matthew 24:34-35) The writer of Hebrews was inspired by God to write, “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**” (Hebrews 13:8) The Apostle Peter made clear, “**the word of the Lord remains forever.**” (1 Peter 1:25) There is no other religion that is unchanging. All other religions are manmade and inspired by the evil one. All other religions have had changes, corrections and progressive revelations to correct earlier revelations. God loves it when His children dig into His Word to see if it is true. Why? Because His truth never changes, God’s Word is eternal.

The Roman Catholic Catechism clearly states both “church tradition” and the Bible are equally sacred, equally God’s word revealed this is heresy. I am only going to deal with one area of corruption believed and taught by our Roman Catholic friends. The Catholic Catechism teaches that it is very appropriate if not preferred to pray to Mary. They teach she is seated next to Jesus in heaven, that she was immaculately conceived as well, because her mother was also a virgin, and that she is the “queen of heaven” because she is believed to be the mother of God. (*See Pope Pius IX on the Immaculate Conception*). The title of “Queen of Heaven” for Mary was made official in 1954 by Pope Pius XII. Mary co-reigns with Christ in heaven. The Catholic Church also teaches that she is an eternal virgin, of which there is no biblical or historical support.

Now, please understand me. I love all people, including the unsaved and those in cults and I desire that they know Jesus Christ. It is only against the error of their theology that I speak. In Jeremiah, chapter 44, beginning in verse 15 we are introduced to this false worship designed by men under the influence of the evil

one. Jeremiah addresses the original worship of the “queen of heaven” and it not Mary. Listen as I read and bear with me it is a long passage but I have taken the liberty to remove parts that do not matter for God’s clarity about the “queen of heaven”, beginning in verse 15 “Then all the men who knew that their wives had made offerings to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly ... answered Jeremiah: ¹⁶ ‘As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you. ¹⁷ But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the **queen of heaven** and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. ... ¹⁹ ... When we made offerings to the **queen of heaven** and poured out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands’ approval that we made cakes for her bearing her image and poured out drink offerings to her?’ ”

²⁰ “Then Jeremiah said to all the people, men and women, all the people who had given him this answer: ²¹ ‘As for the offerings that you offered in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your officials, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them? Did it not come into his mind? ²² The LORD could no longer bear your evil deeds and the abominations that you committed. Therefore your land has become a desolation and a waste and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is this day. ²³ It is because you made offerings and because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey the voice of the LORD or walk in his law ... ²⁵ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You and your wives have declared with your mouths, and have fulfilled it with your hands, saying, “We

²⁴ “Jeremiah said to all the people and all the women, ‘Hear the word of the LORD ... ²⁵ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You and your wives have declared with your mouths, and have fulfilled it with your hands, saying, “We

will surely perform our vows that we have made, to make offerings to the **queen of heaven** and to pour out drink offerings to her.” ... ²⁶ Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah ... ²⁷ Behold, I am watching over them for disaster and not for good. All the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, until there is an end of them. ... ²⁹ This shall be the sign to you, declares the LORD, that I will punish you in this place, in order that you may know that my words will surely stand against you for harm.” (Jeremiah 44:15-29)

Satan uses the same lies over and over and mankind falls for them if they do not hold tightly to the Word of God.

Do you know where the “queen of heaven” came from? It came right out of Babylonian and Assyrian idolatry. It has nothing to do with the New Testament at all. Now, lest you remain unconvinced, I read to you another passage, from Ezekiel, ⁵ “Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, lift up your eyes now toward the north.’ So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. ⁶ And he said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations.’ ... ¹² Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, “The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.” ¹³ He said also to me, ‘You will see still greater abominations that they commit.’”

¹⁴ Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD, and behold, there sat women weeping for **Tammuz**. ¹⁵ Then he said to me, ‘Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these.’”

(Ezekiel 8:5-15) Tammuz is the son of Ishtar, female goddess of fertility for Assyrians and Babylonians and known also as the “queen of heaven” and the wife of the Baal

the false god. Baal worship infiltrated Israel as found in the Old Testament Books of Judges, Kings and Chronicles. The problem is becoming clear as we bring all these strings of lies and false worship together.

The worship of the virgin in Jeremiah 44 and the worship of her son as they were weeping for his resurrection in Ezekiel 8 are pagan idolatrous practices and have been carried over into what is being falsely labeled as Christianity and, thus, Mary has been given the title that rightfully belongs to a false priestess and goddess of fertility. Modern Roman Catholicism, beloved, is not Christian; it is an abominable mixture of paganism and the Scripture. Mary is unable to answer prayers. She is not the mother of God in the way Catholics believe and she is not the Queen of Heaven.

Let me conclude with quickly showing the progression of perversion of the Catholic Church concerning Mary.

- Mary is called the “Mother of God” and “Spouse of the Holy Spirit” by Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in AD 431
- Beginning of prayers being offered to Mary for intercession. AD 600
- Immaculate Conception (Mary born sinless & lead a sinless life). AD 1854
- Mary is Co-Redemptrix with Christ. Mary has a principal role in people’s redemption. AD 1918
- Assumption of Mary (she did not die, but was taken directly to heaven). AD 1950
- Queen of Heaven 1954
- Mary proclaimed “Mother of the Church”. AD 1965

Official Titles for Mary by used by the Roman Catholic Church

- Advocate of God
- Benefactress (mediates divine grace for Catholics). **Mother of divine grace**
- Mediatrix (mediator between God and mankind) **“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”** (1 Timothy 2:5)
- Queen of angels **Queen of the prophets** Queen over all things
- Spouse of the Holy Spirit **Holy Mother of God** Mary Queen of the Apostles

Prayer to Mary is more central for most Catholics than prayer to Jesus because of these many falsehoods and because of the dominance of the Rosary which is focused on Mary. According to the Catholic Catechism by praying to Mary she delivers souls from the dead. (CCC paragraph 966) Mary by grace has been exalted above all angels and men to a position second only to her Son. (*Vatican II – p 421*) Mary did not suffer from original sin. (CCC 966) Mary was virgin all her life and had no other children other than Jesus. (CCC 510)

As you can now understand Catholic worship of Mary is idol worship and she is treated as a savior second only to Christ. The Catholic Church is heretical and not Christian any more than the Mormon Church I came out of. However, this is not to say there are no believers within these cults for some believe in Christ as their Savior but are ignorant or are baby Christians. Can they be true Christians? I am asking? I am not answering. However, if they studied the truth of the Word of God and are saved, they would leave these cults. This was how I was freed and brought to God's truth by reading and questioning and challenging the truth of God's Word and God showing me His eternal truth.

I feel the Lord had me go down this path and explanation of Mary because there is someone that needed to hear it. But, it about wore me out. So, for this morning I am finished. I hope this informed you and strengthen your faith and resolve to hold tightly to the Word of God. We will complete the 2nd half of chapter 1 of Acts next week returning to the theme of this passage **when our prayers align with God's will, great things happen**. Amen and amen!