

WitnessKit 1 Faith and Reason

Class 13 Miracles and Prayer

In our first session we discussed

- Modernism
- Postmodernism
- And Christianity.

Modernism sees religious experience as disconnected from reality. Modernism views physical reality as the only reality.

Postmodernism sees religious experience as totally subjective, but emotionally valid.

Postmodernism thinks religious experience is all inside your own head.

True Religious Experience versus Mysticism.

- Postmodernism attempts to equate all religious experience. It assumes all religious experience is subjective. It assumes that all religious experience is equally valid (or invalid). It assumes that all religious experience is just opinion.
- Postmodernism's framework for understanding religion is a framework of mysticism.
- The Biblical framework is a framework of objectivity and real world experience.

Subjectivity and Miracles

- The place where objectivity meets subjectivity in our own lives is PRAYER. The Bible gives us guidelines for prayer, and the Bible is trustworthy.
- We experience results from prayer.
- Even NO ANSWER is a result of prayer sometimes. Just like a person refusing to answer a questionnaire affects the statistics of a study, even so, unanswered prayer causes something. It motivates soul searching.

Subjectivity and Miracles

- Vague prayers or “formula prayers” can be used to prevent dealing with the question of miracles in real time. Does God intervene in the present world, or not? Does God answer prayer? Only specific prayer can answer that question experientially.
- In the Bible, the Assyrian Rabshakeh put it this way to King Hezekiah’s men. ³¹ *“Don’t listen to Hezekiah! These are the terms the king of Assyria is offering: Make peace with me—open the gates and come out.”*

Subjectivity and Miracles

□ *Then each of you can continue eating from your own grapevine and fig tree and drinking from your own well. Then I will arrange to take you to another land like this one—a land of grain and new wine, bread and vineyards, olive groves and honey. Choose life instead of death! Don't listen to Hezekiah when he tries to mislead you by saying, 'The LORD will rescue us!'"*

□ Here the Rabshakeh is being VERY devious, tapping into the strongly held belief in choosing life, while telling the people to abandon their trust in God.

Subjectivity and Miracles

- *” Have the gods of any other nations ever saved their people from the king of Assyria?³⁴ What happened to the gods of Hamath and Arpad? And what about the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Did any god rescue Samaria from my power?³⁵ What god of any nation has ever been able to save its people from my power? So what makes you think that the LORD can rescue Jerusalem from me?”* 2 Kings 18:31-35 (NLT)

Postmodernism's view of religion matches the Rabshakeh's.

The Rabshakeh's attitude would fit very well with postmodernism's attitude toward prayer. All religions are treated as the same thing. If answers don't come for the rescue of the capital Samaria where idols were treated as gods—and that capital fell to the Assyrians—answers won't come from anywhere. Assyria had the superior army and the utter ruthlessness proven to prevail in all those places the Rabshakeh named. What did trusting God have to do with anything?

To make matters worse,

The Assyrian army had defeated the surrounding Judean countryside. The king of Assyria had the Judean city called Lachish under siege, and Lachish fell.

What basis did King Hezekiah have for thinking God would protect Jerusalem?

These things really happened in history. We have an inscription from the ancient Assyrian empire where Sennacherib describes King Hezekiah as “shut up like a bird in a cage.”

Sennacherib's Inscription

“As to Hezekiah the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts, and to the countless small villages in their vicinity. I drove out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.” McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, page 111.

God's answer to the inscription

hundreds of years ahead of time.

Psalm 124

¹ A song of Ascents. Of David.

"If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,"

Let Israel now say—

² "If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,

When men rose up against us,

³ Then they would have swallowed us alive,

When their wrath was kindled against us;

God's answer to the inscription

⁴ Then the waters would have
overwhelmed us,

The stream would have gone over our
soul;

⁵ Then the swollen waters

Would have gone over our soul."

⁶ Blessed *be* the LORD, Who has not given
us *as* prey to their teeth.

God's answer (ahead of time) to the inscription

7 Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers;

The snare is broken, and we have escaped.

**8 Our help *is* in the name of the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.**

Psalms 124:1-8 (NKJV)

- Because God is alive, and because God is the maker of heaven and earth, He is able to rescue when His people call on Him for help.

What is prayer?

- Was Hezekiah's prayer for help an exercise in wishful thinking? Did he have reason to trust that God would rescue Jerusalem? Jerusalem was surrounded by defeated cities.
- The Bible gives us multiple accounts of these events: 2 chapters in Second Kings, plus chapters 36 and 37 in Isaiah, plus chapter 32 in 2 Chronicles. Earlier chapters in Chronicles reveal Hezekiah's leadership in prayer.

God prepared His people for the situation much earlier.

God announced the situation a generation earlier in the time of Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, in **Isaiah chapter 8**—that Assyria would take Samaria captive and would be like the river Euphrates engulfing Judah, “reaching even to the neck.”

- This description fits the words of the Psalm as well.
- Isaiah 10:12-14 tells that the King of Assyria saw himself as a fowler, gathering from the nests of people of the earth.

In addition

- Isaiah chapter 10 promised that God will rescue Jerusalem/ the people living in Zion at that time—that the king of Assyria will shake his fist at Jerusalem, but God will chop his warriors down—verse 32 and 33. Then Isaiah chapters 36 and 37 describe the events as they occurred.
- Every detail fell into place from earlier Scriptures as events unfolded.

A Basis for Trusting Prayer

King Hezekiah had this basis for expecting a positive answer to prayer:

- God had given clues about the matter ahead of time to the prophet Isaiah. God has promised that the king of Assyria would not destroy Zion, but would shake his fist at Zion. The fist-shaking events matched the details of the prophecy.
- The basis for trusting prayer was God's earlier promise.

A Second Basis for Trusting Prayer

- When Hezekiah brought the matter to Isaiah's attention, God gave Isaiah **a new specific promise**—that the king of Assyria would hear a rumor and return to his own land, where he would die by the sword.
- The rumor happened. This new detail matched the prophecy. The promise followed the prophecy.

A Second Basis for Trusting Prayer

- However, the Assyrian king did not go directly home after hearing the rumor. Instead, he responded with a letter to Hezekiah repeating the fist-shaking.
- This called for more prayer.

Hezekiah's prayer

- ¹⁴ And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. ¹⁵ Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying: ¹⁶ "O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, *the One* who dwells *between* the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

Hezekiah's prayer

- **17** Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.
- 18** Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands,

Hezekiah's prayer

¹⁹ and have cast their gods into the fire; for they *were* not gods, but the work of men's hands-- wood and stone. Therefore they have destroyed them. ²⁰ Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You *are* the LORD, You alone." Isaiah 37:14-20 (NKJV)

Hezekiah's third basis for prayer:

God's characteristics.

- God's power—maker of heaven and earth.
- God's identity as the only REAL God.
- God's goodness—God's desire for everyone to believe in the true and living God for their eternal good.

“that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You *are* the LORD, You alone.”

God's Verbal Response

□ ²¹ Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent this message to Hezekiah: “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Because you prayed about King Sennacherib of Assyria,²² the LORD has spoken this word against him: *“The virgin daughter of Zion despises you and laughs at you. The daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head in derision as you flee.*

²³ *“Whom have you been defying and ridiculing? Against whom did you raise your voice? At whom did you look with such haughty eyes? It was the Holy One of Israel!²⁴ By your messengers you have defied the Lord.*

God's Verbal Response

- *You have said, 'With my many chariots I have conquered the highest mountains— yes, the remotest peaks of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars and its finest cypress trees. I have reached its farthest heights and explored its deepest forests.²⁵ I have dug wells in many foreign lands and refreshed myself with their water. With the sole of my foot, I stopped up all the rivers of Egypt!'*

God's Verbal Response

26 *“But have you not heard? I decided this long ago. Long ago I planned it, and now I am making it happen. I planned for you to crush fortified cities into heaps of rubble.²⁷ That is why their people have so little power and are so frightened and confused. They are as weak as grass, as easily trampled as tender green shoots. They are like grass sprouting on a housetop, scorched before it can grow lush and tall.*

God's Verbal Response

28 *“But I know you well— where you stay and when you come and go. I know the way you have raged against Me.²⁹ And because of your raging against Me and your arrogance, which I have heard for Myself, I will put My hook in your nose and My bit in your mouth. I will make you return by the same road on which you came.”*

God's Verbal Response

30 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Here is the proof that what I say is true:
“This year you will eat only what grows up by itself, and next year you will eat what springs up from that. But in the third year you will plant crops and harvest them; you will tend vineyards and eat their fruit.³¹ And you who are left in Judah, who have escaped the ravages of the siege, will put roots down in your own soil and grow up and flourish.

God's Verbal Response

For a remnant of my people will spread out from Jerusalem, a group of survivors from Mount Zion. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

³³ “And this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria:

God's Verbal Response

“His armies will not enter Jerusalem. They will not even shoot an arrow at it. They will not march outside its gates with their shields nor build banks of earth against its walls.³⁴ The king will return to his own country by the same road on which he came. He will not enter this city,’ says the LORD.³⁵ ‘For my own honor and for the sake of my servant David, I will defend this city and protect it.’” Isaiah 37:21-35 (NLT)

God's Response in the Physical World.

- ³⁶ That night the angel of the LORD went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere.³⁷ Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land. He went home to his capital of Nineveh and stayed there.³⁸ One day while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with their swords. They then escaped to the land of Ararat, and another son, Esarhaddon, became the next king of Assyria. Isaiah 37:36-38 (NLT)

Both descriptions match.

- Sennacherib's inscription is coherent with the Biblical account, while allowing Sennacherib to temporarily save face.
- The death of 185,000 in the Assyrian camp was attributed to the angel of the LORD in Isaiah, and in 2 Chronicles 32:21, we find that all the officers died.
- In 2 Chronicles 32:23, we find that other nations elevated their opinion of King Hezekiah, and brought gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem.

The faith of other nations

In the true and living God
Was strengthened by Hezekiah's
answered prayers.

Many religions have formula prayers.

- Jesus Christ gave us an example prayer in Matthew but He preceded it with words directing us to avoid formulaic repetitions. Even a formula needs to express what you really mean. God wants prayer to be real.
- “⁷ And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”

The Example Prayer

- 9 In this manner, therefore, pray:
 - Our Father in heaven,
 - Hallowed be Your name.
 - ¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
 - Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven.
 - ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

The Example Prayer

- ¹² And forgive us our debts,
 - As we forgive our debtors.
 - ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
 - But deliver us from the evil one.
 - For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.
- ¹⁴ "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Prayer is between you and God, not for show.

- ¹⁶ "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,
- ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Matt 6:6-18 (NKJV)

We want to understand

- The effects of testing for truth upon faith.
- If we test for truth, and we are properly following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is the source for truth in this world, our faith will become better grounded in reality and stronger.
- We want to proceed from a basis of thinking “The Bible is a good candidate for religious truth,” to “The Bible IS truth, and therefore, I can follow its guidance regarding prayer.”

Real Prayer Points to a Real Idea of God

Think about the example prayer and Jesus' directions about not fasting to be seen by other people.

Think about ritual or formulaic prayers.

Which of those two ideas strikes you as a pretend situation, and which strikes you as a REAL situation?

Wouldn't a REAL God want REAL prayers?

It is possible to read prayers

And mean them. In that case they become real prayers. The Bible is full of prayers that are helpful to read and memorize and apply to one's own situation, and to personalize to fit one's own needs. It is often helpful to use such prayer as a starting point, to pray for specifics in each of the prayer's categories.

But if one's idea of prayer is an exercise like running laps, that idea needs some thoughtfulness, and points to an inadequate view of God.

We want our faith

- To be both grounded in OBJECTIVE truth
- AND experiential in the real world.
- We want the faith of our mind and heart to match the reality of who God really is.
- Prayer is the place the two worlds meet.
- It is not the ritual of prayer that matters. It is the CONTENT of prayer that matters, and the attitude of the heart.

Recommended Resource

- Lifeway Publishers' workbook, *Disciples' Prayer Life* by T.W. Hunt and Catherine Walker is an excellent study. The book is out of print, but worth finding at a used book sale or a church library—really a treasure for growing in prayer.
- It develops the discipline of prayer on a regular basis, in practical matters.
- The ideas in the following slides are distilled from it.

Biblical Suggestions for Prayer

Consider the need for repentance in preparation for prayer, and ask forgiveness as needed.

1. Attitudes
2. Actions
3. Words

Consider your trust level: Give God a reason that you trust Him. Pray in faith, trusting God.

Pray for God's goodness to become visible to others in answer to your prayer. Pray for His name to be held in high esteem.

Biblical Suggestions for Prayer

- Pray for God's good and perfect and acceptable will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Think of areas where you would like to see that, and picture those situations before God.
- Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.
- Pray for the people of the world to understand the message of the Bible.
- Pray for those who suffer to find God's goodness, and not to lose their grip.

Biblical Suggestions for Prayer

Consider the need to forgive others. Place their situation before God, and intercede for them, that they might find His forgiveness and freedom to do what is right. Forgive them based on His payment already made for their sins, not based on their response to you.

Ask God to help you think of any hindrance to prayer in your life, and place that matter before Him, asking for His help.

Biblical Suggestions for Prayer

Think of your needs and ask God to supply each one, with thanksgiving.

- Food, Clothing, Shelter
- Transportation
- Health and security
- Social life
- Wisdom
- Ministry and spiritual growth
- Education or job
- Family
- Finances

Biblical Suggestions for Prayer

Pray for those in authority and for those you love and for those you know are in harm's way.

- Family
- Job or school
- Church
- Government
 - National
 - State
 - Local
 - International Decision-makers

Biblical Suggestions for Prayer

- Pray for God to raise up good leaders, who will make the world a safer place for learning about Him.
- Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6. Pray for the possibility of leading peaceful, quiet lives in godliness and dignity so that others can learn about God. It is right to pray for persecution to stop.
- Pray for people around the world who are willing to witness for Christ.

Biblical Suggestions for Prayer

Give God reasons to answer, and thank Him for those reasons.

- His power
- His character
- His promises
- His wishes
- The eternal good of those He loves.

Pray for good to triumph over evil, and for deliverance from temptation.

Pray for opportunities to witness, and for people to find God.

Suggestions for Prayer

- Ask God to help you remember your prayers and to NOTICE when they are answered, so you can thank Him.
- Pray without ceasing. Keep your heart in tune with God all the time.
- Consider an area where your prayers have not been answered over time. Ask God for perseverance in trust for that area.

Truth

- The truth of a Biblical worldview is visible in the many directions of thought that converge to its truths.
- The truth of a Biblical worldview is visible in answered prayer.
- God is so concerned that we find and believe truth, that He LOVES to answer prayer. Jesus said, “If you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you.”
John 16:23 “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”
John 15:7 “If we ask according to His will, He hears us... and we have the requests.” I John 5:14-15.

His Good Will Produces Answers to Prayer.

- God wants us to seek His good and perfect will and ask in accord with His will.
- To know God's good and perfect will, we have to become acquainted with Him. The best way to do that—spend time in the Bible and in prayer, and be committed to His goodness. Become His disciple.
- Romans 12:1-2 says we must place our lives before Him to completely belong to Him rather than ourselves, and then we also must renew our minds, in order to know and prove His good and perfect and acceptable will.

More courses are available.

- *WitnessKit Bible Study—Bible Doctrines as a System of Thought*—the basics and where to find them. Watch for this course to be posted on the website.
- *God and Creation: A look at the creation-evolution controversy: Flaws at the heart of the modernist worldview.* Use the “contact us” email to find out more about this course and the rest of the courses.

More courses are available.

- *Religions and Biblical Christianity*: Comparing and contrasting various approaches to Monotheism:
 - Modernist Existentialist Christianity—Disbelief in the Bible
 - Postmodernism's System of Thought and Its Implications
 - Biblical Christianity
 - Biblical Judaism
 - Islam

More toolkits are available.

- *The Bible and the Future*: An approach for studying Bible prophecy—becoming a student of all Biblical truth.

The Most Important Prayer

- For any individual is the prayer to receive God's Kingdom in your heart. The Four Spiritual Laws explain such a prayer.
- This link has those laws in English.
- <http://www.campuscrusade.com/fourlawseng.htm>
- This link has the Four Spiritual Laws in other languages.
- http://www.campuscrusade.com/four_laws_online.htm

Homework

Chapters 39, 40, & “The Four Spiritual Laws” in *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*

Class 13 Set 1

- Read Proverbs 24:13-14. What promise goes with finding wisdom?
- Read Chapter 38 in *THE NEW EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT*. Degrees of certainty are quantified in statistics. If, for example, a physicist chooses a level of 95% degree of certainty, he can use the equations of statistical mechanics to draw the shape of electron orbitals. These shapes can be verified independently by measuring the angles of crystal lattices and by measuring the angles of attachment of portions of large molecules. So even though there is a “five percent uncertainty” in his drawings, the truths they express can be independently verified and they represent real knowledge. Statistical uncertainty is not a basis for thinking that you cannot know things.
- What are the four types of natural certainty discussed in this chapter?

Class 13 Set 1

Read Exodus 3:1-22 and 4:1-17. What were the miracles Moses saw and what were their purposes?

Read Chapter 39 in THE NEW EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT. If God exists, miracles are possible. They cannot be categorically ruled out without ruling out God's existence.

To please God, according to Hebrews 11:6, one must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. Thus, openness to miraculous reward is an attitude that reveals a heart who seeks Him.

Why does God have a right to supersede natural law?

Class 13 Set 1

- How did Kreeft and Tacelli define miracle?
- Geisler notes that miracles are immediate and successful. One miracle is found in Mark 8:22-25 that differs a bit from Geisler's description. How does it differ?
- The miracles discussed in this chapter are the easily recognized **BIG EVENTS**. However, God has the authority as well to intervene "behind the scenes" in answer to prayer. We owe Him credit and thanks when He does so.

Class 13 Set 1

- What are some purposes of miracles mentioned in this chapter?
- How are miracles different from magic?

Class 13 Set 2

Read Proverbs 18:17, 19:28, and 21:10. What do these verses advise when testimony is one-sided?

Read Chapter 40 in **THE NEW EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT.**

Define the following terms:

- History
- Historiography
- Historical method
- Geschichte

Class 13 Set 2

What are 4 facets of historiography?

What are 7 “rules of thumb” for examining historical evidence?

What two questions are absolutely necessary to ask of historical records, according to Gottschalk?

What separates knowledge from opinion?

What are Beard’s six areas of doubt related to the ability to know history?

What methods may be used to overcome some of these doubts?

Class 13 Set 2

- How does Geisler define the word “objective?”
- Can a fragmentary account be true without being the whole truth?
- Which technique is more objective, telling the facts of a historical event along with the opinions of people of the times, or telling the facts of a historical event along with present day political issues of concern, or telling the facts of a historical event from the mouths of fictional characters without informing the reader that they are fictional?

Class 13 Set 2

- Can reports from eyewitnesses plus corroborating evidence of miracles be objective?

What was Bultmann's error?

We are commanded to love God with all our mind. We have been doing so as we study these books. What is the ratio of head to heart references in the Bible?

Class 13 Set 2

The heart is the center of the person, and includes emotions, mind, and will. What sin of the heart mentioned in the text causes God to hide Himself from us, and what virtues or choices bring Him near?

Read Zephaniah 2:3 and Isaiah 55:3-11 for further insight.

Class 13 Set 2

Read Revelation 3:20 and Isaiah 25:1-9.

What are some implications of Christ's dining with us and seating us beside Him on His throne?

How do we open our hearts to His Spirit?

Class 13 Set 3

- Read “The Four Spiritual Laws,” page 757. What are the four spiritual laws?
- See if you can put the Four Spiritual Laws into your own words.
- See if you can learn them well enough to tell someone else what they are.

Class 13 Set 3

- Take notes from the slides to create a prayer reminder chart. Place that chart with your Bible so that you will be reminded to pray specifically on a regular basis.

Thank you so much for taking the time to go through this course.

□ Here is a prayer of benediction from the Bible: Philippians 1:9-11

- And this I pray,
 - that
 - your love
 - may abound still,
 - more and more
 - in real knowledge
 - and all discernment,
 - so that you may approve
 - the things that are excellent,
- in order to be sincere and blameless
 - until the day of Christ,
 - having been filled with
 - the fruit of righteousness
- which comes through Jesus Christ,
 - to the glory and praise of God.