



Preface



I have often been helped profoundly by studying and preaching about prayers in the Bible. This is a book about ten specific prayers recorded in the Bible, not about the topic of prayer. I have done this because too many books already exist *about* prayer, and especially about how to pray. What we have lacked is the insight that comes from eavesdropping on some of the most significant prayers in human history. They were recorded for our learning and I felt they were being neglected.



I had always realized that a book about the prayers the Bible records would differ from a book about prayer. Yet I had never realized how profound the difference would prove. When I began, I assumed that in looking at prayers I would learn about prayer. And so I have. But I have learned much more.





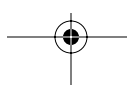
If you want to learn about windows, you will do well to take a look at a few of them. The problem will be that you will not only look *at*, you will look *through*. And if your curiosity is anything like mine, the windows themselves will at times disappear.

Bible prayers are like that. It is what you see through them that matters. For they are windows on eternity, looking out on the profoundest issues of life and death. Before long you forget you are dealing with a prayer, so startled are you by what you see beyond it. From time to time I have had to tap on the glass pane so that I would not forget what I was doing.

It has been difficult to know what prayers to include and which to leave out of this book. It would be impossible (or at least very hard work) to include all the psalms, for instance. In general I have tried to select those prayers in which we know something about the persons who prayed and the circumstances driving them to prayer.

I have omitted some outstanding prayers. For many reasons I left out the Lord's Prayer (books without number have been written on it; it did not arise out of the Lord's personal conflict and so forth). I also omitted his high priestly prayer in John 17, to which I felt unequal. I left out Nehemiah's prayer—which I dearly love—hoping I might be able to devote an entire book to it and all it led to. In any case Daniel's prayer, which I have included, covers almost the same ground.

I have also included things which would hardly be con-





Preface

15

sidered suitable in books on prayer. Is dancing ever prayer? David danced before the Lord and so do many people today. I have therefore widened the definition of prayer beyond what some people would consider appropriate, looking at it in the broader sense of a divine-human interaction.

Yet in this sense, just as in the narrower sense of the term prayer, the lesson that has become more basic to my thinking than any other is that prayer begins and ends with God. It is the thrust of my opening chapters and a theme, I hope, that links the book together, making it a whole. To me the adventure of preparing this book has been one of growing more deeply aware of who and what God is. If you can gain from reading it what I have gained from writing it, we shall both be blessed.

