

The Church Ethic 312: A Study of All Biblical Prayers



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Addendum: 46 Notes on Prayers and Calvinism

Note 1 – Genesis 24

Genesis 24:1 And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: 3 And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: 4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. 5 And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? 6 **And Abraham said** unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. 7 **The LORD God of heaven**, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; **he shall send his angel before thee**, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. 8 And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again. 9 And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter. 10 And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. 11 And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. 12 **And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.** 13 **Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water:** 14 **And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.** 15 And it came to pass, **before he had done speaking**, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. 16 And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. 17 **And the servant ran** to meet her, and **said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a**

little water of thy pitcher. 18 And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. 19 And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. 20 And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. 21 **And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not. 22** And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; 23 **And said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? 24** And she said unto him, **I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. 25** She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in. 26 **And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD. 27** And he said, **Blessed be the LORD God** of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: **I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren. 28** And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things. 29 And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. 30 And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. 31 And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the LORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels. 32 And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him. 33 And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on. 34 And he said, I am Abraham's servant. 35 And the LORD hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses. 36 And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath. 37 And my master made me swear, saying, **Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell: 38** **But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son. 39** And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me. 40 And he said unto me, **The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way;** and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house: 41 Then shalt thou be clear from this my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give not thee one, thou shalt be clear from my oath. 42 **And I came this day unto the well, and said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go: 43** **Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; 44** **And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: let the same be the woman whom the LORD hath appointed out for my master's son. 45** And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, **Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder;**

and she went down unto the well, and drew water: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. 46 **And she made haste**, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also. 47 **And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter art thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son**, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands. 48 **And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the LORD**, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, **which had led me in the right way** to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son. 49 And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left. 50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the LORD: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. 51 Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the LORD hath spoken. 52 And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth.

As we can see, this passage contains a prayer from Abraham's servant in which he petitions God to help him find a daughter from Abraham's larger family for Isaac to marry. There are at least two ways to interpret this.

Concerning the first option, perhaps the servant is praying that God will cause the right woman to say the designated phrase. This would imply that the servant expects God to control what people say. The idea that God inspires people to say certain words is, of course, not unusual in scripture although it is presented as unusual and does not imply that God always determines every word (or action) of men. The high priest in John 11:49-51 is an example of this. The text presents this as a special, noteworthy occasion. The high priest, after all, is presented as chief among those who are opposing God's work in Jesus' ministry. If this passage were meant to suggest that every word of sinners was inspired by the Holy Spirit, then God would even be inspiring lies. Consequently, it would be contrary to the sense of the text to deduce that John intends to convey that every word of the high priest, let alone every man, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. In short, as we can see from John 11, there are times when God inspires someone to say particular words, but this is rare and the vast majority of human communication is not directed by God.

Concerning the second option, we must take note of the instructions that Abraham gives his servant. Abraham demands that the bride not be Canaanite but be from his relatives in the land from which Abraham came (verses 3-4). He states that God would send his angel to guide the servant to the house of Abraham's relatives to find such a bride (verse 7). And in the midst of his exchange, the servant's primary concern is whether or not he will find a woman who is willing to travel the long journey to become Isaac's wife (verse 5). In response (verse 8), Abraham acknowledges that it is distinctly possible that the servant will not find a willing woman in which case he will be freed from this duty.

When the servant arrives in the land of Nahor (verse 12), his words and actions are intriguing.

First, it is noteworthy that according to verse 21, after the woman says exactly the words designated by the servant in his prayer, the servant is still wondering whether or not his prayer request has been granted. This tells us that the words designated in the prayer were not necessarily peculiar enough to distinguish the right woman from the wrong woman. In other words, it was not sufficiently unlikely that any woman might say those words, with or without God answering the prayer. If the words had been unlikely without God's answering the prayer, then the use of the designated words would have immediately signaled that God had indeed answer his request. Consequently, when the woman said the words, the servant was still left wondering if God had granted his petition. From the servant's perspective, the designated phrase was something that any woman (or at least more than one woman) was likely to say even the wrong woman who was not related to Abraham.

Second, the fact that the servant considered the designated words as a reasonably likely response from any woman, right or wrong, has implications for the servant's intention when he prayed. If the servant's intention was to ask God to cause the right woman to say the designated words and prevent the wrong woman from saying them, he would have chosen a response that was unlikely to be uttered apart from God's intervention. For example, petitioning God that the appointed woman would say, "Hello" would be an incredibly ineffective way to identify the right candidate. Many women might say, "Hello." Therefore, petitioning God while designating a reasonably likely response, such as "Hello," suggests the purpose of the prayer is not to determine the identity of the woman by means of God causing her to say the designated response. So, the question remains, what is the servant's intended purpose for his prayer?

Third, it seems plausible that the servant could easily enough have gone to the well, identified himself as the servant of Nahor's brother Abraham (as he does in verse 34), and asked the women for the location of Nahor's house. But instead, he mentions nothing of payment for water or service, nor his identity, nor the household that he seeks until after he has tested the character of the first woman he sees at the well. Given that the servant's primary concern was that he would find a willing woman, it is not surprising that he would begin by testing the hospitality and sense of social responsibility of the potential candidates even before he tests the other criteria, which is her ancestral relationship to Abraham's family. It is very possible that instead of praying that God cause the right woman to say the designated words and prevent the wrong women from saying them, instead the servant is petitioning God that the woman who met Abraham's criteria would be one of the women who met him with a favorable, hospitable, and socially responsible reply at the well. Does this mean the servant is praying that God would control the character of the woman? Not really. There is more to the story.

Fourth, it is easy to see the servant's petition as a request that God would find acceptable one of the woman who greeted him at the well with a favorable demeanor. This would imply nothing about God controlling the character of the

woman. It would merely be a request that God would be satisfied with certain characteristics, particularly a woman with a willing and helpful heart, especially since the servant's primary concern was finding a woman willing to come with him. In this case, it would be possible to consider the prayer of Abraham's servant in verse 14 as simply a request that if he encountered a hospitable and kind woman at the well, God would appoint that helpful woman to be the wife of Abraham's son. But still, God couldn't just approve of any woman. The candidate needed to be from among Abraham's extended family. It is plausible that there may have been many young women from Abraham's family in that city or even coming out to the well. After all, in Exodus 2:16-17 Moses encountered seven daughters of Jethro at the well in Median. Likewise, when Samuel the prophet was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint a new king, Jesse had eight sons and God informed Samuel that His selection depended upon the characteristics God saw in each son's heart (1 Samuel 16:1-12). Consequently, it is very plausible that Abraham's servant is praying that among all the women of the region that he might encounter at the well and among any potential young women of Abraham's extended family, God might select a woman who was not only of Abraham's kin, but who was also willing and helpful in demeanor, the kind of woman who would respond hospitably to a stranger at a well even before he offered her payment.

Fifth, another piece of information in the prayer suggests that Abraham's servant was petitioning God for "speed" in his task. In fact, the English version of the servant's prayer begins in verse 12 with the phrase "I pray thee, send me good speed." However, it would be potentially misleading to leave this solely at the English translation. The Hebrew words underlying this phrase are "paniyim" (Strong's No. 06440), which means "face, presence, before, or in front of" and "qarah" (Strong's No. 07136), which means "to encounter." So, the Hebrew language could simply convey a petition that God might help the servant encounter or come before the right woman. Even based solely on this information, it would still be very easy to comprehend the servant's prayer as a petition that the first woman who he met at the well would be the right one, rather than a petition that God would cause the right woman to say specific words.

But there is more. The only other occurrence of these two Hebrew words coupled together is just three chapters later in Genesis 27. In this chapter, an aging Isaac asks his son Esau to catch him some venison. Isaac's wife, Rebekah, hears this request and decides to send Jacob in with some food to impersonate Esau. When Jacob enters, Isaac asks him about the speed with which he acquired the food. In verse 20, Isaac says, "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? Jacob responds, "Because the LORD they God brought (07136) it to me (06440)?" The word Isaac uses for "quickly" is "mahar" (Strong's No. 04116), which means "to hasten" or "quickly." When Jacob answers, he uses the phrase "paniyim" (Strong's No. 06440) and "qarah" (Strong's No. 07136) coupled together and, in doing so, equates his speedy success in his father's mission with God's intervention.

As we return to Genesis 24, we see that a short while later in the chapter Abraham's servant explains his mission to Abraham's family. Like Jacob, in verse 48 the servant credits God, saying "the LORD God of my master Abraham

led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son." And he makes two other statements. After recounting his prayer to them in verses 42-44, he states in verse 45 that "before I had done speaking in mine heart, Rebekah came forth." And not only did he encounter her quickly, but when he requested water from her, he says that she "made haste." The word the servant uses for "made haste" is the Hebrew word "mahar" (Strong's No. 04116), the same word used by Isaac when asking Jacob how he accomplished his father's request so quickly. Comparing these two stories, just three chapters apart, allows us to see the association that these two Hebrew words have to do with the idea of speedy success enabled by God's intervention. What is the servant's point when retelling this to Abraham's family? His point is that he had petitioned God to bring him across the right woman quickly and God faithfully brought him quickly to her. And as we saw earlier, he didn't know God had granted his request by her words, which were common enough that any woman might have said them, but only when she told him who her father's family was. At that moment, the servant knew that God had answered his prayer to find the right woman quickly.

We find another indication that the servant was chiefly concerned with speedy success in verse 55 where Rebekah's mother and brother petition the servant to abide there with them for a few days, "at least ten" saying "after that she shall go." The servant responds immediately by saying, "Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master." Here the servant argues to Rebekah's mother and brother that God himself wants him to succeed quickly and he offers God's previous help to him along the way as proof. Clearly, we see the servant repeatedly concerned with speedy success on his journey and his conviction that God would aid him in that haste. (No doubt this desire to avoid staying long in the land may have been motivated by Abraham's repeated warnings in verses 6 and 8 not to let Isaac return to or remain in the land to which the servant traveled. Such warnings could have instilled in the servant a strong sense of urgency not to abide long in that place.)

Ultimately, the servant's prayer is not for God to cause the right woman to say certain words or for God to prevent the wrong woman from saying them. The servant does not expect God to control people's words or thoughts. Rather, the servant is praying for speedy circumstances. And unlike controlling the words on a person's tongue, it is easy to comprehend how God can influence such things through external factors outside of a person's mind so as to bring the successful completion of a God-given task. Consequently, this prayer doesn't necessitate anything more than the servant's petition that God would select from among Abraham's relative a specific woman who was willing and helpful and the servant's expectation that God influence external factors that might affect which women came to the well first, at what time they arrived, or how soon.

We might also consider Genesis 24:7, in which Abraham tells his servant that "The LORD God of heaven...he shall send his angel before thee." Similarly, in verse 27, the servant expresses his gratitude that "the LORD led" him directly to Abraham's family. Again, in verse 40, the servant retells Abraham's instructions in which he said, "the LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee."

And finally, in verse 48, the servant declares, “the LORD God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way.” Does this language of the servant being led by God or by God’s angel suggest an inner, spiritual compulsion?

In the context of the Old Testament, the answer is a clear “no.” We can see this in the very famous exchange between God and Moses in Exodus 23. Here, we find a very similar type of statement to what is expressed by Abraham and his servant in Genesis 24. In Exodus 23:20, God tells Moses that “I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.” There are two points worth noting here that relate to the events of Genesis 24.

First, throughout preceding chapters in Exodus (as well as in Numbers and Deuteronomy), we see such phrases as either “the Lord” or “the angel of God” going before the Israelites in a pillar of cloud. In fact, at night, this pillar of cloud turned to a pillar of fire enabling the people to see it (Exodus 13:21). In this prominent example from Exodus, we see that the idea of being led by God or by God’s angel was understood to be a very tangible, external thing. The angel was outside of you, visible to you, and you could watch where the angel went and follow him.

Second, the angel of God doesn’t always lead people swiftly to their intended location. After God told Moses that he would send his angel to guide the Israelites into the Promised Land, because of their unfaithfulness, God made the Israelites wander in the wilderness for forty years before they arrived there (Numbers 14:33-34). In Deuteronomy 29:5, God says, “I have led you forty years in the wilderness.” Yet, according to Deuteronomy 1:2, what took forty years was really only an eleven-day journey. Clearly, God did not lead them quickly to their destination. Again, the details between Genesis 24 and the Exodus journey seem quite relatable to one another and we must understand the prayer of Abraham’s servant in this setting.

While the text of Genesis 24 does not include details like this concerning the servant’s experience on his travels, we should not mistake the absence of these details for a denial of the kind of familiar, external leading that we see featured in the Exodus. This is especially true given the fact that the language is so similar in phrasing to the Exodus journey and both accounts involve the idea of persons being led along physical routes to particular locations at either notably fast or notably slow speeds by God’s angel. We may not know exactly how the angel led Abraham’s servant, but we have as much reason (if not more) to assume in this cultural, historical setting that the ancient Israelites would have understood this to be a tangible, physical leading rather than an internal, subjective compulsion of some sort.

Consequently, when read in the linguistic and cultural context of the Pentateuch, Genesis 24 contains no indications of an expectation for God to guide people through inner compulsion of some kind or to control their thoughts, words, or actions. Nor do we find any such expectations in the prayer recorded in this chapter.

Note 2 – Genesis 43 (as well as Nehemiah 1:4-11 and 1 Kings 8:50)

Jacob expresses a hope, expressed in terms of hope that God might act, that Joseph (not yet identified to his brothers) would act with mercy toward his sons and release Benjamin their brother back to them. **Note 2 – Genesis 43 (as well as Nehemiah 1:4-11 and 1 Kings 8:50)**

Jacob expresses a hope, expressed in terms of hope that God might act, that Joseph (not yet identified to his brothers) would act with mercy toward his sons and release Benjamin their brother back to them.

Genesis 43:13 Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. 14 **And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man** so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you.

The phrasing here seems to reflect 2 possible meanings. The first meaning would imply that Jacob expects God might cause Joseph to act mercifully. However, the word translated as “grant” in English is the Hebrew word “nathan” (Strong’s 5414). “Nathan” means “to give, put, set” and including nuances such as “permit, pay wages, lend, entrust, extend.” From these nuances, a second meaning can be seen. Given that ancient patriarchal figures perceived God as the ultimate authority with all human (and angelic) rulers acting as delegated and subordinate authorities, Jacob’s remarks here infer at the most an expectation that God had authority to override and permit or disallow any mercy shown by the Egyptian.

This perception is well-founded. After the Flood, in Genesis 9, God gave a command to Noah and his sons. Prior to the Flood, God had set a precedent regarding Cain that humans should not kill each other even as a just punishment for the crime of murder. But in Genesis 9, God set a new precedent.

Genesis 9:5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. **And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.** 6 **“Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.”**

Here in verse 5, in contrast to the shedding of Abel’s blood by the hands of Cain, here God establishes that whenever a man sheds the blood of another man and ends his life, God will “demand an account.” In verse 6, God defines that “accounting” in terms of the requirement that other human beings should put to death the murderer. Herein lies not only the permission, but the requirement, that humanity in general was receiving the delegated authority to execute justice, at least in the case of murder. And this authority was being delegated by God.

Although Jacob’s son Reuben expressed fear that their treatment in Egypt was punishment for their sin against Joseph (Genesis 37:19-22, Genesis 42:22), the

presumption based on the textual evidence is that Jacob was not aware of their complicity with regard to Joseph. Therefore, Jacob's statement in Genesis 43:13-14 should not be taken as an expectation of retribution for spilling Joseph's blood.

However, it is not necessary that Jacob's statement express such specific suspicion or reference to capital punishment as retribution. It is only important that Jacob would have perceived human governing authority to be delegated by God and subordinate to God's own judicial authority. Genesis 9 substantiates this fundamental perception.

So, Jacob's remarks simply express his perception that God had jurisdiction over human authorities and could overrule any mercy or punishment that they enacted. But another important piece of information concerning Jacob's remark pertains to historical precedent. This precedent shows exactly how Jacob perceived God might intervene concerning the action of the Egyptian ruler.

In Genesis 12:10-20 and similarly in Genesis 20:1-18, Jacob's grandfather Abraham had 2 experiences that would probably inform Jacob's perception of how God might relate to the current situation with his sons in Egypt. First, like Genesis 43, Genesis 12:10 begins by noting that there is a famine in the land. Second, like Jacob's sons in Genesis 43, Abraham goes to Egypt for relief from the famine. Third, just as Jacob's sons deal with Pharaoh's second-in-command in Genesis 43, in Genesis 12 Abraham deals with Pharaoh himself. Both instances are involving the Hebrew patriarchs and high-ranking rulers of Egypt in a time of famine. Fourth, both instances involve fear regarding safety in the presence of the Egyptian ruler. Abraham fears for his life because he worries that Pharaoh may desire his wife Sarai. The events in Genesis 20 are similar but involve King Abimelech rather than the Pharaoh of Egypt. Likewise, Jacob fears that the ruler of Egypt may do harm to his sons. Fifth, in Genesis 42 one of Jacob's sons is taken into custody by the Egyptians to be returned only if Jacob's sons bring their youngest brother to Egypt. Similarly, in Genesis 12 and 20, Abraham's wife is taken from him by the Pharaoh and by King Abimelech. So, all these passages involve a foreign ruler taking a dear loved one.

What happens in Genesis 12 and 20? God directly intervenes in order to protect Abraham and Sarai. And how does God intervene? Does he control the kings' minds or direct their hearts and wills by some sort of inner compulsion to be merciful to Abraham? Not at all. God intervenes, but his methods are external. In Genesis 12, Pharaoh realizes that Sarai is Abraham's sister when God sends a great plague on his house. In Genesis 20, God appears to Abimelech in a dream and threatens to kill him if he does not rectify his ignorant error against Abraham and Sarah and treat them justly. In both cases, God gets directly involved and overrules the 2 kings for the sake of his people, but without exhibiting any direct, internal control on their desires or wills. His methods are external persuasion by consequences and threats. Notice also that both Genesis 12 and 20 involve God threatening the health and life of the rulers. The rulers had authority to harm Abraham, but God had authority to harm them. God's authority over them and his means of exerting influence on them is parallel to their authority and means of

exerting influence over Abraham. Both are based on the fear of bodily harm by a party of superior power. Neither authority entails an internal control to dictate human will or desire. Moreover, the result in both Genesis 12 and 20 is that the foreign rulers both let the captive loved one go free, which is exactly what Jacob is hoping for in Genesis 43.

In fact, not only is Jacob drawing upon these 2 experiences of his grandfather Abraham, but his father Isaac also had a similar experience. In Genesis 26:1-2, there is another famine and Isaac goes to King Abimelech. (Interestingly, God specifically tells Isaac not to go down to Egypt.) Like his father Abraham, out of fear of harm, Isaac tells the king and the people that his wife is instead his sister. When the king discovers the deception, he is outraged. In verses 10-11, Abimelech expresses his fear that they might have taken his wife and been found guilty. In fact, he is so worried about being guilty of wrongdoing in this matter that he imposes a penalty of death upon any man that harms Isaac or his wife. But who is it that Abimelech is so afraid of? From our examination of Genesis 20, we already know. Abimelech is afraid that if he or his people mistreat Isaac or his wife, that God will kill him. So, even though God does not intervene in this account in the way that he does with Abraham, the outcome is the same. Based on God's previous intervention and threats on behalf of Abraham, Abimelech is motivated by his fear of God's superior power, which could be used to do him harm.

With these essential historical elements in place, we can better understand Jacob's remarks in Genesis 43. The Hebrew phrasing, "may God Almighty grant you mercy before" the Egyptian ruler does not express an expectation that God controlled the wills and desires of men or of this ruler in particular. Rather, it reflects Jacob's awareness that human rulers have authority to put men to death but these rulers are themselves subject to God's authority who can, in turn, put them to death. And it reflects Jacob's perception that God might externally intervene and threaten the ruler of Egypt in the same manner that God had done twice for his grandfather Abraham with the Pharaoh of Egypt and King Abimelech and force the return of the captive loved one. (And it reflects Jacob's awareness of a similar incident between his father Isaac and King Abimelech.) When taken in its cultural and historical context, there is simply nothing in Jacob's words in Genesis 43 that reflects an expectation that God causes men to make particular choices or take particular actions by means of internally directing their desires or wills.

This precedent also explains similar expectations in Nehemiah 1:4-11 and 1 Kings 8:50 regarding how God might direct rulers by speaking to them either directly or in dreams, etc.

Note 3 – 1 Samuel 14:6-12

1 Samuel 14:6 And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, **Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that**

the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few. 7 And his armourbearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart. 8 Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto these men, and we will discover ourselves unto them. 9 **If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them.** 10 **But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for the LORD hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us.** 11 And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves. 12 And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armourbearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will shew you a thing. And Jonathan said unto his armourbearer, **Come up after me: for the LORD hath delivered them into the hand of Israel.**

1 Samuel 14 is a passage that essentially records a conversation between King Saul's son Jonathan and his armor bearer in which Jonathan expresses his hope that God might deliver a Philistine garrison into their hands despite the fact that they are greatly outnumbered. There are several items worth noting about this passage.

First, Jonathan's words do not actually take the form of a prayer addressed to God but instead they take the form of comments addressed to his servant. The critical point comes when Jonathan proposes to the servant that they can determine whether or not God will give them victory over the Philistines based on which one of two possible responses the Philistines give to them. He does not specifically refer to this as a sign "from God" but he does refer to it as a "sign" and it is clear that he believes God's intentions will be communicated to them by means of how the Philistine's speak to them.

Second, the events of this passage are relevantly dissimilar to Genesis 24 in which Abraham's servant prays to God regarding the way a woman responds to him. Unlike Jonathan, Abraham's servant was not petitioning God for a sign. Rather, he was petitioning God for speed as we established at length earlier.

These first two points alone already demonstrate that this passage simply cannot, by its nature, constitute proof of a prayerful expectation for God to control men's actions.

Third, unlike the idea of God outright controlling people's actions (which we have seen no support for so far in this study), the Bible does frequently depict God as either directly or indirectly telling men what to say or how to respond to various circumstances. For instance, Numbers 23:5 and 16 describe how God "put a word" in the mouth of the prophet Balaam. Yet, as the text immediately states, God does not cause Balaam to say these words without Balaam's knowledge or willing consent. Rather, the narrative also presents God as relaying to Balaam what to say and God warning him not to deviate from those words (Numbers 22:18-20, 35), which of course implies that Balaam retained the choice to

potentially yield to temptation and say something other than what God wanted. Similarly, 1 Kings 22:22-23 describes how an angel volunteered before God to speak erroneous predictions and counsel to the false prophets. Of course, the false prophets were clearly willing participants, seeking after spiritual communion and insight. They are not depicted as innocent bystanders who suddenly begin to speak contrary to their intentions.

Fourth, there must have been some consultation among the Philistine men or their officers as to how to proceed when Jonathan and his armor bearer showed up. Perhaps they even briefly considered whether it was a trap of some sorts or whether other Israelites might be waiting unseen. After all, it must have seemed incredibly suspicious to them that two lonely, barely armed Israelites would announce themselves to an encampment of Philistine soldiers. Moreover, they would have had to decide whether it was better for some of their number to go and retrieve the Israelites or for the Israelites to come to them. The simple fact that the biblical authors either could not (or did not feel the need to) recount this aspect of the narrative in no way infers the absence of reasonable, basic consultation among the Philistines regarding how to react to this curiously odd scenario. This leads us to our next point.

Fifth, there is further relevance to the absence of a detailed description by the biblical authors concerning exactly how the Philistine's came to reply in this particular manner. Number one, the biblical authors arguably go out of their way to avoid having either Jonathan or the narrator use any phrase directly linking God as the cause of the Philistine's reply. The text does not say, for example, "God caused the Philistines" or "God put a word in the mouth's of the Philistines," when it easily could have done so in short order. Number two, the absence of any description regarding what reasonably involved at least some minor deliberation makes other possibilities plausible. For instance, perhaps the Philistines quickly consulted their own gods in some manner concerning how to respond to the two Israelites before them. Perhaps one among them was known to be a seer or to retain a familiar spirit.

Sixth, 1 Samuel 28:6-7 provides a list of avenues by which men sought a word from divinities regarding things like warfare. This list includes dreams, Urim, prophets, and people with familiar spirits. While the true prophets and dreams would have been exclusively present in Israel, certainly false prophets or pagan seers would have been equally available in counterfeit forms among the pagans who would have likely used them for similar purposes. We'll return to that point momentarily, but first it is necessary to further establish the use of such things for military strategy.

We find proof for this in 1 Samuel 14 itself. In verses 35-37 in which a priest is present and Saul builds an altar to consult God about whether he should "go down after the Philistines." When God does not answer, verse 42 describes how Saul and the people "cast lots" to determine who is guilty before God. In fact, the word "Urim" (Strong's No. 224) in 1 Samuel 28 refers to "stones kept in a pouch on the high-priest's breastplate, used in determining God's decision in certain

questions.” It is reasonable that what was “cast” in chapter 14:42 is the Urim mentioned in chapter 28. Together, these passages indicate that consulting God by means of casting things like stones was somewhat common.

In addition to priests and devices like the casting Urim, we also find familiar spirits providing insight and counsel in the ancient world in passages like Acts 16:16. In fact, we even find familiar spirits in 1 Samuel chapter 28 giving military advice. And, similar to chapter 14, in 1 Samuel 28:4-19 we find Jonathan’s father Saul seeking spiritual guidance as to how to proceed in a military scenario. This suggests that seeking military advice from a person with a spiritual source (including a person with a familiar spirit) was an ordinary occurrence in the times of Samuel and Jonathan.

It also reasonable to suppose that the pagan nations, such as the Philistines, had equivalent means of consulting their gods and may likewise have kept pagan wise men, such as the “wizards” mentioned in 1 Samuel 28:9, with their military detachments just as the Israelites did with their priests. And after all, witches, wizards, familiar spirits are pagan. Since we knew such things were present in Israel (and even sought by Israelite kings such as Saul), why wouldn’t we expect them to normally be present among pagans or for the pagans to use them when similarly seeking military insight? If Saul had to explicitly outlaw these in Israel (1 Samuel 28:3, 7) and yet some remained, are we to assume they were naturally absent among the pagan philistines? When Saul himself no longer had access to the righteous avenues, he immediately sought out the pagan counterparts and no one seemed surprised in the text that a familiar spirit could be used in this manner. If Saul’s first recourse was to seek someone with a familiar spirit for military advice, shouldn’t we presume that was a normal function of persons with familiar spirits among the pagans who originated such persons and practices? The idea that a pagan priest or seer of sorts may have been a fixture among the Philistines becomes all the more probable given the fact that the word “garrison” in 1 Samuel 14:4 is “matstsab” (Strong’s No. 4673), which refers to a “station” or “outpost.” In the elements we have seen in 1 Samuel, it is natural to assume that Philistine military encampments had pagan counterparts to things like prophets and Urim with which they consulted when deciding questions of military actions. Moreover, the peculiar and suspicious nature of Jonathan’s arrival would easily have constituted cause for divining military insight. This, in turn, would have been a textbook opportunity for God to influence the Philistines’ choice of action by means of sending a misleading angelic messenger of sorts, just as seen elsewhere during this period of biblical history.

In summary, there are limited occasions in the Bible in which God either directly or indirectly gives words for men to say. Moreover, whether involving God himself or an intermediary such as an angel, the process is depicted as voluntary on the part of the human participants very similar to one man telling another man what to speak. (It should also be noted that the fact that other spirits at times provide words to men indicates that God’s means and capacity is similar to created beings, such as men or angels, who do so at other times.) There is no internal, involuntary or unwitting compulsion implied.

In conclusion, while Jonathan certainly expects God to intervene and influence the way the Philistines respond, the text does not in any way warrant the conclusion that Jonathan believed God would control the Philistines' mental processes to involuntarily cause them to speak. That kind of process remains purely an assumption that is simply not described in this passage. On the other hand, it is better for us to rely upon precedent than to invent a new mechanism that is not actually described in this passage. The Israelites often had priests and items like the Urim present in military encampments for frequently consulting God about strategy. Persons with familiar spirits as well as priests and prophets for foreign gods were also present among the pagan cultures at this time. It is likely that the Philistine garrison would have at least briefly discussed what to do about Jonathan's suspicious arrival and would have had a comparable prophet or priest-like figure whom they consulted about military strategies. It would be perfectly conforming to established scriptural patterns to conclude that the Philistines gave this specific reply as a result of angelic interaction with such divining practices among the Philistine garrison. (Or, perhaps God simply controlled the outcome of a physical practice such as casting some sort of pagan divining lots comparable to the Urim.) All of these elements are readily testified to in the book of 1 Samuel itself and would have been right at home in 1 Samuel 14. Furthermore, in this way we are filling in undisclosed information in 1 Samuel 14 with disclosed information in other passages. Ultimately, given this context, there isn't anything in 1 Samuel 14 that would demand the conclusion that Jonathan expected God would control human decision-making or action in response to his prayer.

Note 4 – 1 Kings 19:18

1 Kings 19:18 Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

It must be stated upfront that strictly speaking, this verse is not part of Elijah's prayer but part of God's response. As such, it does not exhibit human expectations regarding God in prayer. However, since the context is a prayerful one, it is worth noting the potential Calvinist claims concerning this verse. Here, the key phrase seems to be God's assertion that he has "left seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." Perhaps one might argue from a Calvinist perspective that this verse attests (in the immediate context of Elijah's prayer) that God caused 7,000 men to remain faithful. However, the immediate context also records Elijah's assertion in verses 10 and 14 that the children of Israel had killed all other faithful men of God except for Elijah himself. Consequently, in context, the phrase "I have left me seven thousand in Israel" most naturally refers to God's protection to keep men who were already faithful from harm rather than God causing them to be faithful. Therefore, there is nothing in this exchange that suggests Calvinistic expectations in prayer.

Of course, Paul cites this passage from 1 Kings in Romans 11:1-5. Here the question is whether Paul provides additional insight into the nuances of the passage from 1 Kings. Again, a Calvinist assumption might be that in Romans 11 the phrase “cast away” along with God’s preservation of a faithful remnant implies God causes men to remain faithful and prevented them from falling away into unfaithfulness. However, evidence against such assumptions arises from the historical context for 1 Kings itself, which includes the earlier books of the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:28-30, Numbers 15:30-31, Deuteronomy 28:15, 36, 45, 49-51, 29:18-28, 1 Chronicles 28:9). In that context as well as in 1 Kings itself, the idea of God “casting away” his people has a natural association with the Old Testament language of being “cut off” from the land. Such Old Testament language is both a euphemism for being condemned to death as well as a reference to the condemnation of Israel to national expulsion in the sense of exile. In either case, it conveys that God’s conditional rejection of his people for unfaithfulness and subsequent condemnation of the unfaithful for either death or expulsion (which are ultimately integrally related in Old Testament terms, particularly starting in Genesis 3).

Does Paul’s invocation of 1 Kings in Romans 11 require anything more than this Old Testament historical meaning? The answer here is no. Everything in Romans 11 is perfectly compatible with the idea of “casting away” as a reference to God marking his people for expulsion and death. Likewise, everything in Romans 11 is equally compatible with the idea of a “remnant” as those whom God has counted worthy of preservation despite the condemnation upon the nation. We must keep in mind that faithful Jewish men like the apostles and many early Christians in the region of Judea were well aware of Jesus’ prediction that Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. Peter expresses this warning to his audience in Acts 2:40 where he warns his fellow Jews to “save themselves from this untoward generation” by repenting and believing in Jesus. Along with the destruction of the Temple began a historic displacement of the Jews from the region, another great expulsion similar to the exile of the Old Testament period. This provides the looming contemporary context for Paul to discuss whether God counted all Jews worthy of being “cast away” in the sense of being either cut off from the land of the living or expelled from the region of Judea.

The situation in Paul’s day was very much parallel to Elijah’s day when the majority the people and their rulers had rejected God and only a few remained faithful. Elijah perceived that the wicked had killed all other faithful Israelites except for himself and, having just been threatened by Queen Jezebel, Elijah expresses lament that he, too, will die. Likewise, in Romans 11, Paul addresses whether God had counted all of Israel (verses 1, 25-26) as worthy of expulsion and death. His answer is that, like Elijah and the 7,000 faithful men of Elijah’s day, God had counted certain individual Israelites like Paul and others as faithful and had not condemned or rejected them along with the rest of the nation and its rulers.

Once again, these considerations reveal that there remains simply no basis for lifting 1 Kings 19 out of its historical, contextual meaning and invest it with Calvinist implications.