

THEISM

God Answers Prayer

God cares about humanity. He cared enough that He made mankind in his own image. He gave them a place to live and provided food for their sustenance. He delegated authority to them to rule over the earth. When Adam and Eve were estranged from God because of their sin, He initiated a gradually unfolding plan of redemption for humanity. On many occasions, God injected himself into human history to call people to Himself. During a span covering thousands of years He injected Himself into the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, John the Baptist, and many others. God's activity included bringing his people out of Egyptian slavery, giving them a special covenant at Mt. Sinai, guiding their conquest of Canaan, and directing their lives through priests, judges, kings and prophets. God sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross as an atonement for the sins of humanity. Through the apostles, He fully revealed His plan of redemption, and then gave His written word to humanity. A God who has done all this surely cares enough for His people to answer their prayers. The Psalmist said, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open to their cry. The righteous cry, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles" (Psalms 34:15, 17).

That God does indeed answer prayer is demonstrated many times in Scripture. Moses pleaded with God to spare the Israelites after they had rejected God by sacrificing to a molten calf. Moses reminded God of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Then, "the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Exodus 32:14). Hannah prayed to God for a son. When the son was born, she said, "the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him" (1 Samuel 1:27). Samuel cried to God that the Israelites might be delivered from the Philistines, "and the LORD answered him" by confusing the Philistines with thunder which enabled the Israelites to drive them back (1 Samuel 7:9-11). When Solomon became king, he asked God for "an understanding heart" to enable him to render righteous judgment over the people. God then told Solomon that he would not only give him "a wise and understanding heart," but also riches and honor" (1 Kings 3:5-14). After Solomon had erected a temple and prayed to God, "the LORD said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication . . . and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice" (1 Kings 9:3; 2 Chronicles 7:12). At Mt. Carmel, Elijah prayed to God "that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." God answered Elijah's prayer by sending down fire to consume Elijah's sacrificial offering (1 Kings 18:36-38). When King Hezekiah was besieged at Jerusalem by the Assyrians, Hezekiah prayed to God to be saved from their enemy, "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God" (2 Kings 19:19). Through the prophet Isaiah, God answered, "concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it" (2 Kings 19:32). On another occasion, when Isaiah told King Hezekiah to set his house in order because he would die, Hezekiah prayed to the LORD. Then the LORD told Isaiah to tell Hezekiah, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you" (2 Kings 20:1-5; see also Isaiah 38:5). Zacharias was told by an angel, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son" (Luke 1:13). Cornelius told the Apostle Peter that a man in bright clothing had stood before him "and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God'" (Acts 10:31).

Scripture indicates that people should pray with the expectation that God will answer their prayers. Jesus told a parable “that men always ought to pray and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1-8). James wrote, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray” (James 5:13). The Apostle Peter told Simon to “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22-24). The Apostle Paul wrote that God is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). The Apostle John wrote, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14).

God wants his people to call on him in prayer. He told Solomon, “If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). When the kingdom of Judah was in destitute condition, God spoke through Jeremiah saying, “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things.” (Jeremiah 33:1, 3). Jesus taught his disciples to pray (Matthew 6:5-13; Luke 11:1-13).

Whether or not God answers a prayer favorably may depend upon the character quality of the one praying. A blind man observed that “God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him” (John 9:31). In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Jesus taught that an humble sinner who sought God’s mercy went home justified, whereas the prayer of a person who trusted in himself was rejected (Luke 18:9-14). James wrote that one who asks God for wisdom should “ask in faith, with no doubting.” Let not him who doubts “suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5-8). Paul desired that “men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8). James wrote, “you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:2-3). Whoever would have his prayer answered by God cannot not be at enmity with God, but must be a friend of God (James 4:4). The Apostle John wrote, “And whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22). Jesus warned his disciples not to be like hypocrites when they pray. That is, do not pray to be seen by others. Pray in secret, “and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” (Matthew 6:5-8). Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God’s “will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2; 22:42).

Through prayer, righteous people have the power of God at their disposal. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:17-18). Christians ought therefore to “pray for one another” (James 5:16), to “pray for those who spitefully use you” (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28) and to “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Luke 10:2). “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 22:40). Paul exhorted “that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Therefore, “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

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