

The Prayer-Hearing, Prayer-Answering God

Does God really hear prayer? When we pray we don't see anybody. We usually close our eyes and either pray silently or aloud. We do not hear a voice in return. Sometimes when we ask God for something we receive it. At other times nothing seems to happen. What is going on here? If we go for a long time and do not see any tangible, verifiable answers to our prayers we tend to get discouraged. Satan whispers in our ears. He tells us that prayer is just a sham. He tells us that even if there is anything real about prayer, it does not affect us. He assures us that we are such great sinners that, while God may hear the prayers of others, He certainly will not hear ours.

What can we do to answer all these important questions? Where can we go for definitive answers? The only place we can go is to God's own Holy Word. We cannot trust our emotions and feelings. We cannot even trust our experiences. If we rely on these things we are sure to be deceived and to misinterpret things. If we have been born again there is something inside us that makes us intrinsically know that the Bible is real. In the new birth God wrote His word into our hearts. This corresponds with the written word that He has inspired and preserved to this very day. We may not have all the answers, but we know the Bible is true and that if we prayerfully seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit we will find the answers to the above very important questions.

We are going to look at many Scriptures and let the Bible plainly speak for itself!

He Really Does Hear!

One of the most precious passages of Scripture to the troubled and questioning child of God is found in 1 Peter 3:12, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." This is good news indeed. God is watching us. His eyes are over us. He knows our situation. He is intimately aware of our troubles and problems. He knows how we feel. Not only does He know all this; He cares! He is able to intimately care because the God/Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, assumed human nature and experienced troubles and trials Himself while He was here on earth. It is recorded in Hebrews 2:18, "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." The word translated "succour" means "to aid, relieve, help." Encouraging us to come to Him in prayer we read in Hebrews 4:15-16, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The throne of grace is the place of prayer. Our Lord is on that throne in the heavenlies and we have blessed access to Him there as we pray.

To further encourage us that He not only knows our situation but cares for us we read in 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

Some Scriptural Examples

Since we know that the Bible is the infallible word of God, we know that if we read there that God heard pray, that is certainly true. There are many, many instances in the Scriptures where we are explicitly told that God did hear and answer the prayers of His people.

Many years ago the children of Israel were suffering cruel bondage in Egypt. It would probably be very hard for us to imagine just how hard their lives were. They were slaves and had very cruel masters. They did not have the basic freedoms that we enjoy and take for granted every day. They also did not have the creature comforts that we have the benefit of. They actually groaned because things were so hard. They cried out to God in anguish. When He did not immediately relieve them from their distress, they must have thought that He did not hear them or did not care about them. However, this was not true. God heard their very first cry and set in motion the events that would eventually result in their deliverance. This deliverance when it did come made such a profound impression on them that they repeated over and over how their God had heard their cries and had delivered them. One of these places is Exodus 3:7, "And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows..." Another is found in Numbers 20:16, "And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border..."

Other places where this same truth is stated are Ex. 2: 24; 6: 5; Deut. 26: 7.

When God gave the law to His people He made it plain that His ears would be open to them. Speaking of widows and the fatherless He said in Exodus 22:23, "If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry..." If an Israelite had taken a man's covering as collateral for a loan and refused to return it the Lord said He would hear the cry of the man who had been wronged. This is found in Exodus 22:27, "For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious."

David was terribly harassed by Saul and by other deadly enemies. Sometimes he almost despaired of life itself. When God delivered him he proclaimed in 2 Samuel 22:7, "In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears." Then he described in graphic language how the Lord not only heard His prayer, but also answered it.

There were other times that David wrote of how God had heard his prayers and had answered them. One of these is in Psalms 28:6, "Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications."

When Solomon had finished building the temple he prayed God's blessings on it. The Lord answered him in 1 Kings 9:3, "And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually."

King Hezekiah was at the point of death. He wept and cried out to the Lord to spare him. The Lord spoke through His prophet and let the king know that He had heard and answered his prayer. This is recorded in 2 Kings 20:5, "Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD."

King Manasseh had sinned against the Lord and had become afflicted. He cried out to the Lord in repentance. The answer is in 2 Chronicles 33:13, "And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God."

Daniel prayed fervently to God and fasted for an extended period of time. He did not receive an immediate answer. However God eventually sent an angel to him to assure him that God had heard when Daniel first began to pray. He writes of this in Daniel 10:12, "Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words."

Jonah got into tremendous trouble because of his disobedience and rebellion against God. However, our gracious God heard him when he cried out. He tells us of this in Jonah 2:2, "And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice."

When God's people meet together for prayer and fellowship the Lord knows this. He looks on such events with approval and He hears their prayers and other acts of worship. He revealed this to us in Malachi 3:16, "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name."

New Testament Saints

We might think that this is all true and very good concerning God's special people, Israel, in Old Testament times. Does He still, even today, hear and answer our prayers. The answer is a resounding "yes!" He sometimes seems to take a long time before answering. Zacharias had prayed for his wife to have a child. They had grown to old age and he probably thought the Lord had forgotten about that prayer. Not so! God spoke to him in Luke 1:13, "But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for

thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

God had caused the gentile Centurion, Cornelius, to be born again. Cornelius thirsted after spiritual knowledge and prayed about it. The Lord informed him in Acts 10:31, "And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God."

Let Us Pray and Be Patient

Being encouraged by the many examples we have seen let us take heart and pray fervently to our prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God with renewed zeal. It would be so good to be able to say with David in Psalms 34:4, 6, "I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears... This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

We live in troubled times, but all is not lost. Let us do as the King of Nineveh exhorted his people to after the warning from Jonah. He said that they should "cry mightily unto God..."

We claim to be the people of God. If so there is a very encouraging word for us. This was given originally to the nation of Israel under the theocracy. However, who is to say that this same promise does not extend to the blood-bought people of God today? That word is found in 1 Chron. 7: 14, "If my people, which 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.

When we pray, especially when we are in deep distress, we may not receive the answer as soon as we would like. Then we must exercise believing patience. We must persevere in prayer and implicitly trust our perfect and compassionate God. We must do as David did in Psalms 40:1-3, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD."

God **heard** his prayer, and He **answered** it!