

## Answering Prayer

Over the past ten or twelve decades, there have been several occasions that have caused people of the world to turn to prayer, looking for answers to problems that seem to be overwhelming. There have been epidemics and natural disasters of drought, flood, tornados, hurricanes, blizzards, earthquakes, and volcanic activity. When things are good, people play and deny God. But when times change and difficulties in health and wealth arise, when all else fails to comfort, they turn to God.

We might ask, "Does praying help when the damage has been done?" And "Who will answer prayer?" The answers are "Yes" and "The One God who Lives." But many people seem to think that God made the change due to their prayer and that's all there is to it. In this they fail to see that God uses others to bring about His desired results. People do not physically see God curing disease, rebuilding homes, and recovering the economy. They see other people that have a part to play in answering prayer.

With the first verse of the Bible, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1), God declared that He is the first and only cause for everything that exists in the universe. God created, shaped, and continues to control it. Therefore, when we pray today, we expect God to do as we ask while we sit back and do nothing. In scripture, we see the healing of the sick, injured, handicapped from birth, and expect Him to heal today. But is that how it works?

God in His infinite wisdom has put people, laws of nature, and circumstances together in such a way that they work towards His desired results. There are some indications that God's people acted to answer prayer at His direction, either directly or through faith in His word. Through the days of the Judges, God did not just end the oppression of His people but sent someone to do the work. Some of the time, God helped the Judges do the work. Gideon was encouraged. Sampson was given super-human strength. Deborah was given Barak and a woman with a tent peg and hammer. In each case, the Judge was the leader on the ground.

Notice Peter's comment, *"If you address as Father (If you pray to) the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct (take action) yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth"* (1 Peter 1:17). Peter begins this paragraph with the statement, *"prepare your minds for action"* (1 Peter 1:13). In the middle of this are the words *"like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior"* (1 Peter 1:15). The message coming to us seems like, "Do what the Father would do. Don't set back but act." That is the message the Judges heard as they responded with action.

Sometimes people pray for knowledge. You can almost hear God say, "You have the gospel! Go read it, study it, and apply it." The King James Translation declares, *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15). In John 8:28 Jesus told the people that He heard from the Father the message He spoke to them. Romans 1:16-17 states that the gospel tells about the righteousness of God and the power of God to save. Why did Paul say, *"So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome"* (Romans 1:15)? God was, is, and always will be, the source of true knowledge, John 17:17. But preachers and teachers are another source of learning, to help people understand.

The Ethiopian Eunuch read the scriptures, the primary source of knowledge, Acts 8:28-40. But Philip, as a preacher, provided a knowledge that was not available in writing at that time, to complete the eunuch's understanding. Could the man have understood from just reading? Yes, but it would have taken much longer. Paul prayed for the brethren in Thessalonica. *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Paul already decided to do his part in fulfilling that prayer. Look at his previous prayer, *"Night and day we keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you"* (1 Thessalonians 3:10-11).

We pray for our brethren, for health and safety, which God can freely supply in abundance. Do we pray enough for the people that work to provide for our health and safety? For the police, fire, and EMT men and women who are the first to come into harm's way? For the hospital workers from the cleaning crew to the doctors and nurses? For the researchers who look for prevention and cures? And do we give thanks to God for the minds, talents, and abilities He has given to people that can also be an answer to our prayers?

We have much to thank God for, much to eagerly look forward to, and very much to do.