

## **DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYER?**

THE confidence that prayers, which are in accord with the will of God, are answered is an essential ingredient of faith in the Christian Religion. It is a person who lacks such confidence that sees nothing good in praying to the Almighty God.

Prayer is a solemn petition or request or giving of thanks to God. It is an act of worship that pre-supposes the insufficiency of the person saying it, and his dependence on God.

Instances of prayers that were answered by God abound in the Holy Bible. When the Israelites were suffering under the bondage of the Egyptians during their sojourn in Egypt, they cried to God. "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob..." (Exodus 2: 23-25) As a result of this, God, through His angel, chose Moses and sent him to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel from servitude. To Moses He said: "Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt." (Exodus 3: 9, 10). The success that crowned the mission of Moses is a well known fact of Bible history.

Hannah was one of the two wives of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham. The other woman, Peninnah, had children but, Hannah whom their husband loved more was barren. She was made an object of reproach by her enemies because she had no child. However, she believed that God Almighty could give her the desire of her heart. She went into the temple and, in the bitterness of her soul, earnestly prayed to the Lord. In her prayer she vowed and said: O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine hand- maid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life..." – 1 Samuel 1:9-11.

As Hannah prayed silently, Eli the priest, who sat beside the door-post of the temple, observed that her lips moved but her voice was not heard. He thought that she was drunk and went on to scold her. "How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee", chided the priest. But Hannah promptly answered: "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto."- 1 Samuel 1: 12-16.

As soon as Eli heard her reply, he blessed her to go in peace, and added: "And the God of Israel grant thee thy petition..."

God's due time came that Hannah's prayer was answered. She conceived and gave birth to a male child whom she called Samuel meaning asked of God. (1 Samuel 1: 17- 20) When she brought the child to the temple for presentation according to Jewish custom, she reminded the priest, Eli, that she was the woman who stood by him in the temple praying to the Lord. She then said: "For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." (1 Samuel 1: 24-28) This is another good example to show that God answers prayers.

### **Divine Force**

Let us go a step further under the reign of King Hezekiah the cities of Judah were invaded by Assyria – a very hostile enemy to them in those days. The King of Assyria, Sennacherib, boasted of his might and blasphemed the God of Israel. He issued threats and warned Hezekiah and his people not to put their trust in the Lord their God nor think that they could

be delivered from his hand. He then sent a letter, in which he reproached the Most High, to Hezekiah.

On receipt of the letter, Hezekiah went into the house of God and prayed. Among other things he said: "Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God...Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only." – Isaiah 37: 14-20.

In answer to the prayer of Hezekiah, God defended Jerusalem, and His angel went out and killed 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp. Thus the king of Assyria, despite his boasts, threats and blasphemies, found his army woefully defeated and was compelled by divine force to retreat to Nineveh where he lived. There, again, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his god, his own sons fell upon him and killed him with their swords. That was the ignominious end of that godless man. Read Isaiah chapters 36 and 37 for the details of this interesting account.

Indeed, Jehovah, the Almighty God, is reputed for His wonderful acts which He did among His people in the days of old in answer to their prayers. David the king and prophet, who also derived great benefits from prayers, exclaimed in his song: "Praise waiteth for Thee, O God, in Sion...O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come." – Psalm 65:1,2. Prayer is a very good thing. It is forceful; it gives comfort and hope, and strengthens our will and faith. Through prayers, the ancient worthies – holy men and women of old – did and achieved great things. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much", said James the apostle. He then went on to show how the prophet Elijah "prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit". – James 5: 16-18.

Whatever is our need, let us take it to the Lord in prayer; and provided it is not tainted with sin, He will grant us the desire of our hearts. We as Christians are admonished never to be anxious for anything, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God". – Philippians 4: 6.

### **God's Time**

When some people pray and they do not get what they ask for within a month, six months, a year or two, they grow impatient and become lukewarm in their religious devotions. They, having developed a feeling of hopelessness, and lost faith in the Almighty God, turn to seek aid from idols, witch-doctors and so forth. This is very bad of those professing to be Christians. We must know that whatever we pray for will be granted us not according to our will but God's will, and in His own due time. We are therefore required to wait on the Lord (Psalm 27: 13, 14), and it is commonly said that "God's time is the best".

For the faithful worshipper, God's denial of his request is no cause for despair or unhappiness because he trusts that whatever the all-wise God does is the best. It was this understanding that made Jesus Christ say in his prayer to the Heavenly Father, "not my will, but thine, be done". What we may consider to be good for us may turn out to work against our well-being. We should therefore leave things to God and accept His decision always. Furthermore, we should learn to be patient. Take for example the case of Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth. It is on record that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless", but they had no child, even though they prayed for it, until they were well stricken in years. (Luke 1: 5-7) When it was God's time, as Zacharias officiated as a priest in the temple, an angel of the Lord appeared to him

and said: "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" – Luke 1: 8-14.

True to the word of the angel, Elisabeth became pregnant and in her old age she brought forth a man child who grew and became the famous fore-runner of Christ our Saviour. We can see how it is rewarding to be patient in waiting on the Lord while continuing to practise righteousness.

### **Obstacle**

Sin is an obstacle to prayers. Many prayers are not answered due to sin, or because the people "ask amiss" (i.e. in the wrong way) for their selfish ends. As it is written: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." – Isaiah 59: 1, 2; see also James 4: 3.

It is true, God does not hear sinners but if any sinner repents and worships Him in truth, his prayers will be answered. "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth." (John 9: 31) And John the apostle stated: "And whatsoever 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.

If a wicked man prays, as some often do, and his desire is accomplished, we should know that it is not God that answers his prayer but the mimic god, Satan the devil, who is the author of evil. A thief can pray so that he may succeed to break into people's houses and make away with their goods, and he may really be successful in his operation. It is not God that helps him but the arch-enemy of God and man, Satan. How can God help, him when he is acting contrary to God's law which says, "Thou shalt not steal"? All things or wealth acquired by evil means are under curse. God will surely punish the evildoer. (Job 20: 4-8; Proverbs 11:21; 13: 11; Isaiah 3:11) The Bible says that God does not help an evildoer. (Job 8: 20) And it is also written: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law (of God), even his prayer shall be abomination." – Proverbs 28: 9; see also Psalm 66: 18; Proverbs 15: 29.

### **Prayer of Faith**

Unless we pray in line with the will of God, we should not expect our prayers to be answered. Saint John stated: "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." – 1 John 5: 14, 15.

All prayers must be directed to God ONLY through His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He made the mediator between Himself and men. This is important. Prayers through any other medium are not answered by God. – John 14: 13, 14; 15: 16; Ephesians 5: 20; 1 Timothy 2: 5, 6.

It is also a matter of must that FAITH must underlie our prayers if they are meant to serve any useful purpose. Jesus said: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, BELIEVING, ye shall receive." (Matthew 21: 22) Saint James enjoined that whoever lacks wisdom should ask of God who gives to all men liberally and he added: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that (FAITHLESS) man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." (James 1: 5-7) It was the same apostle who said: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. ...Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray

over him and the PRAYER OF FAITH shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” – James 5: 13-15.

Jesus Christ warned that we should not behave like hypocrites who “love to pray standing in: the synagogues and in the Corner of the streets, that they may be seen of men”. Rather we should say our prayers in private’, “and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly”. The habit of shouting, “Jesu, Jesu” (as if Jesus is deaf) – and repeating words over and over again, .as some do, is unchristian. Jesus Christ said that’ when ye pray, use not vain repetitions” – Matthew 6: 5-8.

Now that it has been established beyond all doubt that God answers prayers, we must form the habit of praying always, particularly in this sin-ridden and dangerous age in which we are living. (Luke 21:25-28, 33-36; 1 Timothy 2:1-4) Jesus Christ in a parable taught “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”. (Luke 18:1-8) And St. Paul exhorted: “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) This does not mean that we should lose all sense of moderation, and pray frantically and fanatically. There is time for everything. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8) Except one is suddenly face with danger, which could make one pray or call on God excitedly for help, one should always be cool and sober when praying.

In conclusion, let us remember at all times the admonition of Saint Peter: “But the end of all things is at hand: BE YE THEREFORE SOBER, AND WATCH UNTO PRAYER” – 1 Peter 4:5