

Dear Friends,

In Scripture, God repeatedly represents Himself as a wise and caring Father. He never depicts Himself as a doting grandfather who would like to grant every request from a grandchild, even the foolish requests that spoil the child. In Scripture's balanced teaching of God answering the prayers of His people when they go to Him in faith, and in repentance, when appropriate, it is fitting that the Lord also teach us that continuing sin, our refusal to repent, may result in His refusing to answer our prayers. In fact, our study passage indicates that the Lord told Jeremiah not to pray for His people at this time, for He would not answer such a prayer.

Few Bible topics so thoroughly reject both errors of modern "Name it and claim it" Christians, as well as the occasional fatalistic ideas that God has pre-programmed every event, good, bad, and ugly, rendering any prayer for the Lord to do anything senseless and useless. And our study passage adds weight to this Biblical pattern. If God never responds to our prayers, why would God consider it necessary to tell Jeremiah, not to pray for Judah at that season, for He would not answer such a prayer? But, if the Lord frequently answered--and answers--the prayers of His people, God rightly put Jeremiah on notice that He would not answer the prophet's prayers for Judah at that time because of their idolatry.

In the New Testament James teaches the same truth that the Lord here taught Jeremiah.

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:3 KJV)

The Lord never promised to answer an unbelieving prayer. And the believer who starts from the errant notion that God has pre-programmed every thought, word, and deed, so there is not logical reason to pray at all, in fact starts his prayer, if you could even call it a real prayer, from the premise that he has no real reason to pray in the first place. And the Lord assures such a person that he is correct; He will not answer an unbelieving prayer.

How refreshing the Bible's teaching on prayer is to the pilgrim Christian! Scripture regularly reminds us that our Lord is a faithful companion on our pilgrim journey, and He often assures us of His companionship by answered prayers.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Please send all communications to me at holder.joe@gmail.com.

When God Refused to Hear

But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. (Jeremiah 7:12-16 KJV 1900)

When the Babylonians invaded Judah, they not only took a large segment of the population captive back to Babylon, but they also ravaged the land. Jerusalem was left in shambles. While Daniel and Ezekiel conducted their prophecy in Babylon, Jeremiah served in broken Judah. Wherever he looked, Jeremiah saw the scars of defeat and ruin. But Jeremiah understood what many of the people failed to grasp. There was good reason for the Lord's judgment against Judah. In our study passage and its context, the Lord reminds Judah to recall (Visit, either literally or in their minds) Shiloh, a seat of false worship in the northern kingdom of Israel. It was Israel's devotion to this kind of idolatry that caused the Lord to abandon them to their adversaries. In the end, Israel fell. It ceased to exist, consumed by the Assyrians around 720-730 BC. Our study passage begins with a solemn reminder from the Lord by Jeremiah's words to Judah, the southern kingdom.

But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.

When people decide to abandon God and His ways to pursue their sins, they knowingly ignore anything that warns them against their sin, including history. In this warning, God reminds Judah. Do you really want to continue in this way? Go to Shiloh, survey the northern kingdom that no longer exists. Is that what you want for your future? You are running headlong to that disaster.

And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

It is commonplace in our age for sinning believers to claim, "But I didn't know." God knew about that rationalization long before you raised it to Him. How does He respond to rebellious Judah? "I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking." The Lord doesn't wait till after we've sinned to show us our error. He "Rises up early" and speaks to our conscience. Many years ago I was talking with a man regarding a sinful path he had chosen. His parents had been members of a church with which I was familiar. He questioned, "Joe, why didn't you tell me this was wrong?" I replied, "Are you really telling me that you didn't know it was wrong?" He hung his head and confessed. Of course he knew what he was doing was wrong. The Lord spoke to sinning Judah before they could offer their

rationalization of ignorance. Our God is no different today. He has written His law in our hearts and minds. He has taught us by godly examples from childhood in most of our experiences. Our God “Rose up early” and taught us clearly of His ways.

...but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not. “*Heard not*” does not mean that God spoke out of their range of hearing, or that He spoke in a foreign language to them. It means they consciously chose not to pay attention to what He spoke. They refused to “Hear” in terms of obeying His words to them. The Lord repeats the point, “*I called you, but ye answered not.*” They heard His voice, calling them to righteous and faithful ways, but they deliberately ignored His call.

Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. What a frightening warning. Shiloh, the symbol of Israel’s idolatry, was now forsaken. If Judah continued in her sins, she was passing the same sentence on her future as the Lord’s righteous judgment passed upon Israel.

And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim. The Lord walks sinning Judah through the grave details of their judgment, a judgment which Judah is consciously bringing upon themselves. They had already brought the judgment of seventy years of captivity on them. Do they want to continue in their sins and bring their total destruction upon themselves?

Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. Yes, you read the verse correctly. The Lord told Jeremiah not to pray for these people. Why? If they know God’s way and consciously choose to ignore His way and walk the path of idolatry, there is no reason to pray for them. They have shut off repentance and the healing the Lord would have given, had they chosen to repent and return to Him.

...for I will not hear thee. In this context, to “Hear” means to respond, to take a specific action in reply to the “Hearing” of the ears. God puts Jeremiah on alert; because of Judah’s sins and their refusal to repent, don’t bother to pray for them, for He will not answer. We should be thankful for such men as Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and others. At the end of the seventy years, men such as Ezra and Nehemiah, and numerous people in captivity were tired of the judgment of sin and were ready for repentance and the Lord’s way. Then the Lord “Heard” their prayers and blessed them to return from their captivity and restore the nation and worship in Jerusalem once again. The Lord’s long-suffering toward His people, and His forgiveness is beyond our hopes or imaginations, when His people confess, repent, and seek His face.

This passage gives us insight into a much pondered verse in the New Testament.

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. (1 John 5:16 KJV)

So, given what we’ve learned from Jeremiah, what might be the “*sin unto death*” of which John wrote? Might it be the known sin that a believer falls prey to and refuses to consider repenting of? “Death” in this setting likely refers to a symbolic death to the blessings that the person involved in this sin might have enjoyed, had they chosen God’s path of repentance and reform. In effect, John affirms the same principle that God taught Jeremiah in our study passage.

In our study of Bible passages dealing with answered prayers, what is the value of a passage such as this that narrates an incident in which the Lord categorically tells His prophet not to pray for a

certain people, for He will not answer that prayer? Ah, in fact, the lesson powerfully affirms the point we've seen in every lesson we've studied. The Lord is so faithful to answer the prayers of His people that ***He must specifically warn His prophet of an occasion when He will not answer a prayer.*** And He must explain to His prophet why He declares in advance that He will not answer such a prayer. The problem has to do with entrenched and unrepentant sin, not with God's reluctance to answer the prayers of His people.

Any study of Biblical prayer needs to keep a balanced and Biblical perspective. No, the Lord is not a doting grandfather, eager to give us what we want, need it or not. Nor is He a stingy hermit, refusing to budge in response to the most legitimate prayers sent to Him. He always teaches us in Scripture that, as a wise, caring, and giving Father, He carefully and wisely gives us what we need, not what we request.

But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him. (Job 23:13-14 KJV)

It is no surprise that so many believers are confused regarding Biblical teaching on both subjects, the manner of God's rule and the theme of prayer, specifically answered prayer. A fatalistic leaning person will quote Verse 13 from this passage and make a false argument that God is as rigid as granite in His rule, that He never changes or responds in any way to the prayers of His people, wholly ignoring both the many passages dealing with His dynamic and "Moral Government" rule and the many lessons dealing with answered prayer. God has declared His all-the-time-no-exceptions righteous character. He declares that this character of His is "immutable," unchangeable. So, if God hears your prayer and answers with a gracious loving—and wholly righteous—gift, as you requested, these people honestly believe that, because God responded—righteously responded in perfect harmony with His righteous nature, the very fact that He responded means He is not immutable. Did His nature change because He responded to your prayer? Is He somehow more or less righteous because He responded? Or didn't respond? No, so long as God responds to our prayers ***in keeping with His nature, and not contradicting it***, He remains exactly the same all-the-time-no-exception righteous God He has ever been. He merely acted in harmony with His nature. I suggest that "*According to His will*" in Scripture refers to this very feature of His response to our prayers. He will never contradict His righteous nature to answer a prayer, but He may grant many requests that agree with His righteous nature, all in keeping with that righteous nature.

Notice the precise wording in Job 23:14. ...***many such things are with him.*** Job did not write, "No such things are with him." Nor did he write, "All such things are with Him." The first response would falsely describe God as never involved at all in our lives, false according to Scripture. The second response would describe fatalism, also false according to Scripture in its claim that everything that happens in our lives is caused by God. Job was inspired to know and to write the precise truth. Many times in our lives, our loving God involves Himself in our lives and "***Performs***" things which He has "Appointed" for us, always righteous things, never anything that contradicts His nature.

Elder Joe Holder