

How God Answers Prayer

*“After this manner
therefore pray ye:
Our Father which
art in heaven,
Hallowed be
thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
in earth, as it is
in heaven.”*
—Matthew 6:9,10

IN THIS SECOND PART OF

our consideration of this important subject, we will examine further many of the important details contained in The Lord’s Prayer. In particular, we will look at how this prayer will be answered in God’s coming kingdom on earth. The earthly kingdom of God, according to the Scriptures, will bless all people and provide answers to millions of heartfelt prayers which have been uttered down through the centuries.

“NO MORE DEATH”

Sickness and death have resulted from the sin of our first parents, and are among the evils which God has promised to destroy. Shall we, then, pray for health, and ask the Lord to save the lives of those near and dear to us who may have been stricken with serious illness? It is proper to humbly

petition God for such things, but it should always be with the understanding that we want the Lord's will to be done. It should also be with the knowledge that it may not be his will to grant health and life to all those for whom we pray.

These blessings, for which so many have prayed, will be made available for all during the period of Christ's kingdom. The Scriptures tell us that then all sicknesses and diseases will be cured. In that day, "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick," wrote Isaiah. (Isa. 33:24) Describing some of the blessings of the coming kingdom, Paul wrote that Christ will reign until all enemies are put under his feet, and that "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (I Cor. 15:25,26) When in vision the Apostle John saw the kingdom of God established on the earth, he discerned that as a result there would be "no more death, ... neither shall there be any more pain."—Rev. 21:4

When we pray for health and life, let us try to grasp the meaning of this much grander provision the Creator has made. It is his plan to grant these blessings, not merely to us and to our loved ones, but to all of mankind who will seek them through humility and obedience during the thousand years of Christ's reign. This is what is embodied in the prayer made by millions over the past two thousand years, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt. 6:10

"FROM THE DISTANT LAND OF THE ENEMY"

God's ways, and the provisions he has made for his creatures, are always much better than those conceived by human wisdom. We pray for health,

protection, and peace, but who has ever thought of praying that their beloved dead be restored to them? God, in his plan, has gone beyond what most have presumed to pray for. He has promised to bring back the dead and reunite them with their families, friends and loved ones!

Death, the great enemy of all mankind, has been especially on the minds and hearts of people in this country recently. No doubt every reader of this article is aware of, and has in his own way, mourned concerning the recent tragedy in Texas, in which at least 135 people, including more than 35 young children, were swept away and killed as a result of the floods that occurred on July 4th, with some people still missing. Such tragedies beg lots of questions, perhaps the most-repeated being, "Why did God permit this"?

Not only is there this recent calamitous event, but down through the ages, how many parents have been heartbroken over the loss of a precious little one. Just such a tragedy is referred to in the Bible by the Prophet Jeremiah. It involved a devoted mother named Rachel. Jeremiah wrote, "A cry is heard in Ramah—deep anguish and bitter weeping. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted—for her children are gone;" but the Lord then says, "Do not weep any longer, for I will reward you, ... Your children will come back to you from the distant land of the enemy."—Jer. 31:15,16, *New Living Translation*

These poetic words of the prophet paint two distinctly different pictures. First is portrayed the fact that death is mankind's greatest enemy, and beginning with Adam and every generation since,

all people have entered the “distant land” of death, that greatest of all enemies. The second picture painted by the prophet clearly shows what God intends to do for his beloved creation. It is his plan, assured and guaranteed by his Holy Word, to restore to life all who are in the “distant land” of death. This certain promise is implied in our petition, “Thy kingdom come,” for during Christ’s kingdom all who are in their graves, in the condition of death, shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth.—John 5:28,29

The raising of mankind back to life is described by the Apostle Peter as “restitution,” which means “restoration.” He tells us that following the Second Coming of Christ there shall be “times of restitution of all things,” promised by all God’s holy prophets since the world began.—Acts 3:20,21

UNDER VINE AND FIG TREE

Many pray for wealth, or at least for economic security. There is often a measure of fear and uncertainty on the part of nearly everyone as they face their later years. Will we be financially secure when we reach the age when it is no longer possible for us to earn a living? It is understandable that anyone who believes in God and thinks of him as one who loves and cares, should look to him in prayer respecting the need of financial security.

We know, of course, that there are millions of people in the world who are not financially secure. There are also millions who are literally starving and without proper food, clothing, and shelter. God loves all of his human creation, and while we would appreciate it if he blessed us and others with a

more favorable situation in life, is it not better to rejoice in the loving provision he has made to care for all the poor and needy in his own due time and way? This is what he has promised to do!

In God's promises the thought of economic security is symbolized by the idea of dwelling under one's own "vine" and "fig tree." The prophet declares that everyone shall thus be blessed, and God's provision will be so complete that in his kingdom fear will be removed because "none shall make them afraid."—Micah 4:4

In the prophecy of Isaiah, a similar assurance is given us concerning God's blessings for the world in the age to come. This prophet of God tells us that then they shall not build houses for others to inhabit, and they will not plant and another eat, but the people shall long enjoy the works of their hands. They will enjoy the fruit of their labor forever if they continue to obey the righteous laws of the kingdom, which then will be ruling the world.—Isa. 65:21-25

This chapter of Isaiah's prophecy indicates that the blessings of God in that kingdom age will be poured out upon the people in answer to their prayers. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (vs. 24) This has not been the experience of the vast majority so far, because God's due time has not yet come to extend the favors for which they have asked, and because he knows their experiences with adversity will help them to appreciate the blessings he will provide for them throughout the eternal years.

When God's kingdom is established, how different it will be. The blessings the dying race longs for

will then become available even before they think of praying for them. “Before they call, I will answer.” When they do learn to ask him for his bounties, the answers to their prayers will be so real and immediate that it will seem as though they came before the petitioner had finished his prayer. “While they are yet speaking, I will hear.”

“OUR DAILY BREAD”

The answer to the prayer, “Thy kingdom come,” includes many material blessings for which devout people of the world customarily pray, but so often fail to receive. We rejoice that the time is coming when these legitimate material blessings will begin to flow to “all the families of the earth,” as God promised Abraham. (Gen. 12:3) Meanwhile, it is well to consider how God answers the prayers of his consecrated people now, those who have the privilege of addressing him as “Our Father which art in heaven.”—Matt. 6:9

These, more earnestly than any others, have continued to pray for God’s kingdom to come. At the same time they have had the privilege of asking God for their own immediate daily needs, since Jesus taught them to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”—vs. 11

This is a very moderate request, and when made in the proper spirit, is acknowledgment that the Lord knows best what our daily needs may be, and that we will be satisfied with whatever provision he considers wise to make. Furthermore, for those who are walking in the sacrificial footsteps of Jesus, it is important to recognize that our spiritual needs are more important by far than the

material. Bread is used in the Scriptures to symbolize Truth—the Truth of the Gospel, of God’s Word, and of his wonderful plan. God has promised to feed us abundantly with this “bread of life.” (John 6:35) Thus we can pray with full assurance, knowing that our petitions are primarily for the spiritual food which he has promised, and therefore in harmony with his will.

“AS WE FORGIVE”

“Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.” (Matt. 6:12, *NLT*) This portion of The Lord’s Prayer can be uttered sincerely only by those whose hearts are filled with the same spirit of love which prompted our Heavenly Father to send his Son into the world to be the Redeemer and Savior of mankind. This love provides for the forgiveness of sinners, who have trespassed against God by disobeying his laws. He is willing to forgive us, but only on the condition that we have the proper heart attitude toward those who sin against us. Certainly this is a searching test of our sincerity.

God forgives his people because he considers that their Adamic imperfections are covered by the merit of the redeeming blood of Christ. (Isa. 61:10; Rom. 4:7,8) This means that the one who prays is a wholehearted believer in Christ, whose acceptance of their Redeemer is so unreserved that he has given up all else to follow his Master. Only such can go to God in prayer, asking forgiveness in Christ’s name.

“DELIVER US FROM EVIL”

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matt. 6:13) The first temptation mentioned in the Bible was that of mother Eve. She

was tempted by the fallen Lucifer, through the serpent, to disobey the law of God. The Scriptures designate the transgression of God's law as sin, and the word temptation is used to describe any effort, allurements, or enticement to sin. The Devil is the greatest of all tempters, and he uses many and various agencies by which to present his sinful appeals to those he endeavors to lure away from God and into the paths of unrighteousness.—I Pet. 5:8,9

In total contrast, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man," wrote James. (James 1:13) This means that we can depend upon God that he will never lead us into temptation to do evil. Thus in our prayers we can claim this assurance.

How hope-inspiring is the distinction to this: "Deliver us from evil." The Devil, the arch-deceiver, has throughout the centuries exerted his influence upon man, and especially upon the people of God, to alienate them from their Creator. The result has been tragic—a world largely controlled by sin and selfishness, "this present evil world." (Gal. 1:4) However, God has promised deliverance from "the snare of the fowler," and from the evil which the fowler has engendered in the world.—Ps. 91:3

God's promises of deliverance are of personal concern to all who are following in the footsteps of Jesus, for they assure such that Satan will not be able to ensnare nor entrap them. As individuals, God delivers us daily from Satan's pitfalls of error and sin. "The angel of the LORD," wrote the psalmist, "encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." (Ps. 34:7) What a reassuring promise, and how glad we are to claim it as our own when we pray, "Deliver us from evil."

There is a still larger deliverance for the people of God, for the entire church of Christ in the “first resurrection” is to reign with Christ. (Rev. 20:4,6) Jesus said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his true church. (Matt. 16:18) In fulfillment of this promise, the gates of hell—the death condition—will be opened wide, and all who have suffered and died with Christ will be released from death, and will be exalted to glory to reign with him throughout the thousand years of his kingdom.

The true disciples of Christ have known that this deliverance would not come until he returned. Paul understood this and wrote that a “crown of righteousness” had been laid up for him, and to all who love Christ’s appearing, to be received at “that day.” The Apostle John also wrote of those who would be “faithful unto death” and then receive a “crown of life.”—II Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10

In Jesus’ great prophecy concerning this end of the age, in which he identifies many of the conditions in the world today, he said to his disciples, “When ye see these things,” ... “then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption [Greek: deliverance] draweth nigh.” (Luke 21:31,28) The fact that “these things” foretold by the Master signaling the near approach of the church’s deliverance from this present evil world are now discernible in the daily parade of news, gives us confidence that very soon the last remaining ones of Christ’s true followers will be delivered, exalted to “glory and honour and immortality” with him.—Rom. 2:7

Then the blessings of God’s much prayed for kingdom will begin to flow out to a suffering and

dying humanity. Revelation 1:18 states that Christ has “the keys of hell and of death,” and he will use those keys to unlock the prison house of death in his Father’s kingdom.—Ps. 146:5-7; Isa. 42:6,7

Thus we pray, “Deliver us from evil,” not only because we are longing to be free from an evil world, but also because we know the answer to this petition will mean the answer to our other petition, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Even that part of Christians’ prayers which mean most to them is at the same time unselfish in outlook, since it also contemplates rich blessings for all mankind.

These are the prayers God is pleased with; that is, unselfish prayers. While God is pleased when his people seek individual guidance, forgiveness, and spiritual strength from him, he also wants them to be interested in all whom he loves, namely the entire world of mankind. We show our interest in his plan for blessing the people when we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” for it will be through that kingdom that he will provide a “feast of fat things” for all people. It will be in that kingdom also that death will be swallowed up in victory, and tears wiped from off all faces.—Isa. 25:6-8; Rev. 21:1-5

Above all, let us continuously thank God for his love that made provision for the eternal joy of all. Let us not only praise him individually in our prayers, but also tell the whole world about his love. Tell them that through Christ provision has been made for them to live, and that soon his kingdom will provide peace through “The Prince of Peace,” and health and life for all through the Redeemer and Savior of the world.—Isa. 9:6,7 ■