

### How Does God Answer Our Prayers?

- I. Reading: Psalm 4:2 “Answer when I call, my saving God. In my troubles, you cleared a way; show me favor; hear my prayer.”

Psalms are classified as hymn, lament, praise, or thanksgiving. This psalm is an example of a lament by an individual asking for an answer from God. It is most likely a prayerful response to personal misfortunes, like an illness or persecution. People who were suffering in those days usually went to the Temple or shrine, to make a formal request for help from God. Today, we usually go to church to ask for our petitions.

- II. What is prayer? Prayer is a conversation with God joining one's thoughts and love to God by acts of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, contrition, intercession on behalf of others, and petitions. We will be discussing prayers of petition and intercession, both of which we expect an answer from God.

- III. The Old Testament provided us with examples of prayers of petition to God:

- a. Solomon's Prayer in Wisdom 9:1-18. God of my fathers, Lord of mercy, you who have made all things by your word ... Give me Wisdom, the attendant at your throne ... Thus my deeds will be acceptable, and I shall judge your people justly and be worthy of my father's throne.” God granted Solomon's request and praised him for asking for wisdom to serve his people better, instead of asking for material things for himself.

Solomon's prayer is from the Book of Wisdom, which was written about a hundred years before the coming of Christ. The author has a chapter in the book praising the glories of wisdom. He felt that his reinterpretation of wisdom would be more meaningful and acceptable if he would claim Solomonic authority by writing Solomon's request for wisdom, characterizing himself as Solomon.

The Book of Wisdom is one of the seven books called deuterocanonical books that are not considered part of the Jewish and Protestant canon. For the Catholic Bible, the canon contains forty-six books, which includes the seven deuterocanonical books. The Jewish canon has thirty-nine books only.

- b. David prayed to God Most High to give “strength to his right arm to defeat the skilled warrior”, Goliath – Sirach 47:4-5. God helped David win the battle against Goliath. This was an immediate “yes” response from God.

Like the book of Wisdom, the book of Sirach is also one of the seven deuterocanonical books. It was originally written in Hebrew by Jesus Ben Sira during the first quarter of the second century (200-175 B.C.). Commentators believe that the book was composed in Jerusalem. The book acclaimed time-honored heroes of Israel like King David who in his youth, defeated Goliath after he prayed to God to give him strength.

Hellenization of the Near East had already taken place when this book was written. Ben Sira’s purpose in writing was to show the Jews of his day that real wisdom was in the ancient traditions of Israel and not in the godless philosophy of the Greeks in those days.

- c. In Job 1-2, Job, a wise man experienced trials and sufferings. In Job 29, Job felt that he had been faithful to God and therefore did not deserve the calamities that he suffered. In Job 30:20-21, Job cries out to God, but God did not answer him. He calls on God in Job 31:2-6, to give him justice or equal rights. Job asked God to appear to him. It took a while before God appeared to Job. God’s message in Chapter 40 is that Job has no right to question the divine plan (Job 38:2). God started his response to Job by describing all the things that He did from the time of creation, showing His might and power. Job learned a lesson in humility. He also recovered his trust in God as he was strengthened by his experience in suffering. In the end, God answered Job’s prayers and restored his prosperity by giving him twice what he had before.

The book of Job seems to have been given a preexilic dating (seventh century B.C. Job’s complaints are similar to the lamentations of Jeremiah and some consider the book as an outcry against the impending destruction of Jerusalem. But, similarities in theology and style of Deutero-Isaiah dates the book in the postexilic period (sixth to fifth century B.C.).

We learned from the story of Job that the theory of retribution (goodness should be rewarded and evil should be punished) cannot explain everything. Life is too complex to fit into one pattern. The lesson is that even the faithful could suffer to test the strength of their fidelity to God.

- d. In the Book of Exodus, the Israelites in Egypt waited a long time before God delivered them from bondage through Moses. And they also waited a long time in the desert before they were given the Ten Commandments and eventually the Promised Land.

- IV. What are our expectations when we pray to God for our petitions? We expect God to answer our prayers immediately. We expect the answer to be a “yes”. We expect the answer to be packaged the way we envisioned it in our mind.
- V. What have we learned from the example discussed above? Both King Solomon and David received their wishes immediately. In the case of Job, he did not receive God’s answer immediately. God taught him a lesson on humility and he had to pray for his friends first before God restored his prosperity. In Exodus, the Israelites waited a long time to be delivered from bondage and they waited again before they were given the Promised Land.
- VI. Conclusion: God answers our prayers as follows:
- a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) In God’s own time and way.

We also learned that God’s answer to our prayer might not be packaged the way we expected it to be. The “no” answer from God might really be a “yes” in God’s divine plan, but we considered it a “no” because we did not receive the answer the way we imagined it to be.

In a nutshell, God answers our prayers in a way that is best for us.

- VII. Final Reading: Psalm 25:1-2 “I wait for you, O Lord; I lift up my soul to my God. In you I trust; do not let me be disgraced.”