

Praying for Things that God Has Already Promised

When God's patience with the children of Israel ran out, He allowed the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem. The soldiers took many Israelite captives to Babylon. But God promised that the Persian Empire would soon come to power, and that in 70 years' time (Jer. 25:8-14), the children of Israel would be rescued from captivity and permitted to return to rebuild Jerusalem.

When Daniel chapter 7 opens, Daniel realizes that the seventy-year anniversary is nigh.

In the first year of Darius ... I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God... "We have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem... Listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications... O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action!" (Daniel 7:1-19).

Now, God had already promised that He would restore the remnant to Jerusalem after seventy years. But Daniel didn't sit on his hands waiting for God to keep His promise. Daniel raised his hands and began praying fervently for God to bring His promise to pass. He begged, "Lord ... take action!"

Maybe there is something here that we can learn about the intersection of God's will and our prayers.

Prayer Triggers God to Act on His Promises

As soon as Daniel finished his prayer, the angel Gabriel showed up at his elbow to inform him that, at the "beginning of your supplications," God issued a command to put into motion the events that not only would bring the remnant back to Jerusalem, but would set the stage for the coming of the Messiah centuries hence. Daniel's prayer came to God's heavenly throne, and God was moved immediately to act.

What if Daniel never read the prophet Jeremiah, or didn't bother to pray? Would God's promise have come to pass? I believe that it would have; after all, God's deliverance can always arise from "another place" (Esther 4:14). But I don't have to speculate. Daniel did read, Daniel did pray, and that prayer moved God to act.

We're Not Being Pushy When We Pray for God to Keep His Word

In none of these prayers are we accusing God of being slow or forgetful or impotent. We aren't wasting God's time to ask Him to do what He was planning to do anyway. When we pray for God to fulfill His promises, we show that we have read His word, that we are expectant and excited, and that we greatly desire for His will to be done. We signal our desire to be on the correct side of His will, and our readiness to participate in accomplishing His will. Our prayers

also help organize our own minds around God's priorities.

We Are Invited to Pray for God's Promises

There are many times where we might pray for God to keep His promises.

The Return of Jesus. Jesus promised to return and bring judgment upon the world (Acts 1:11, 1 Thess. 5:2). As for which day the last trumpet sounds, God will keep His own counsel and act according to His own plans. "Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the son, but the Father alone" (Matt. 24:36). Nevertheless, it would be entirely appropriate to pray for this event. In fact, 2 Peter 3:12 reminds us to be "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning." Will our prayers influence God's calendar? I'm not sure. Perhaps! Regardless, if we are ready for the day, we should pray earnestly for God to send it, for it heralds both the avenging of the saints, and the start of our eternal rest with Him in heaven.

The Success of His Word. God promised in both Micah 4:2 and Luke 24:47 that His word would radiate forth from Jerusalem to all nations. It has, and it continues to do so. God's word is like "the rain and the snow coming down from heaven" which never goes forth without accomplishing God's plans (Isa. 55:10-11). Still, we often find His workers praying "that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ ... that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak" (Col. 4:3-4). "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send our workers" (Matt. 9:37-38). God will see to it that His word gets into receptive hearts. But I want to be a conduit for those blessings; I want to be a part of that great work! Our prayers indicate our willingness to be involved in preaching the gospel. Our prayers focus our minds on taking advantage of the opportunities God provides.

The Strength of His Church. Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18 that the power of Satan would not overcome the church. It is a kingdom that "will never be destroyed" and will "endure forever" (Dan. 2:44), because it is the kingdom of King Jesus, and supersedes all borders. It will last until the very end. Nevertheless, we often find faithful Christians praying for it. "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father ... that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power..." (Eph. 3:14-16). "Epaphras, who is one of your number ... always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured of the word of God" (Col. 4:2). God doesn't need our help to accomplish His will and maintain His own body. But our prayers indicate that we don't want to get left out of the great plans that God has made.

The Hope of Salvation. I am convinced that we can know we are saved (1 John 5:13, John 5:24). Yet we pray fervently for salvation, for we constantly feel inadequate and are in danger of stumbling (Jude 24, 1 Cor. 9:24-27). God is the Savior; so let us never stop praying "Jesus, remember me!" (Luke 23:42) and "My God, save me!" (Psalm 109:26).

Our Daily Bread. God promises to supply us with our food and shelter (Matt. 6:25-33). Still, Jesus prayed for God to provide it (Matt. 6:11). It may not be that we go hungry if we fail to pray; but our prayers for God's provision may change the ways or means through which it comes, and makes us stand in greater appreciation when it comes.

Help in Temptation. One of God's most important promises is found in 1 Cor. 10:13, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able..." We admit this is true, and yet, if we do not pray for God to help us through temptation, we will find ourselves falling into sin over and over again. Jesus prayed, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). Maybe our prayers help us spot and use those "ways of escape" that God provides.

Wisdom and Guidance. Paul said of inspired Scripture, "when you read, you can understand" (Eph. 3:4). If I desire to know about God's nature, His will for me, and how to make good decisions, I simply need to open the Bible. James adds, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Spend time in the word, but pray that God will use that time to bless you with wisdom. —John Guzzetta