

WHEN GOD SAYS NO! (Deut. 3:18-29) Part I

One of the most difficult issues to approach with someone is the problem of unanswered prayer. “Why does God not answer my prayers?” What can I hope for **when God says No!**!

At the very outset, we must begin with the fact that our God is not like the genie popping out of Aladdin’s lantern, eager to do our every bidding. Neither is He in the business of answering our prayers in the way we would always want Him too. ... *What is the point in praying then?* Yes, that is a question some people ask.

We have been studying these opening chapters of Deuteronomy in which Moses has been reminding the people of the past. He brought them back thirty-eight years earlier to the period in their wilderness wanderings where they *almost*, - after those initial two years, - ... they *almost* made it into the promised land of Canaan.

In these next two Sunday mornings we shall be focussing our attention on issues we meet in Deut. 3:23-29. Here was a 120-year-old man who had given the Lord eighty years of faithful service, and yet ... the Lord would not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land. I think most of us would have been inclined to have dealt much easier with Moses than the Lord did. You can hear this old man crying out to the Lord, Dt. 3:25 *I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.* You can almost see his face, and the tears in his eyes as he tells you, v.23 *And I besought the LORD at that time.* James 5:16 teaches us, *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much ...* but on this occasion Moses had previously ‘crossed the line’ and was barred from entering Canaan.

We tell people, “God hears the prayers of His faithful people” ... Well, here was a sincere prayer of a truly faithful servant! ... Someone wrote a poem that is particularly fitting to our study,

Teach me to feel that Thou art always nigh;
Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear;
To check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer;

It is truly an experience to learn of someone who is pouring their heart out to God and yet it seems He is not answering. They keep on praying, but with no apparent results.

We find this when Abraham was desperately looking for a son, and his patience was reaching the point of desperation, and the only person he thought could possibly fill the void was the son he had by maidservant Hagar, he prayed to God, *O that Ishmael might live before thee!* (Gen. 17:18) ... *O that Ishmael might be the answer to our prayers and become the son I can base my future upon.* ... Abraham thought that, - in some way, - God needed *his* help to fulfil the divine purpose!

... But we know the Lord had better plans for Abraham through the special son He would give him, Isaac, Gen. 17:19 *God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac.*

... Paul also often prayed to the Lord regarding that which was constantly troubling him, II Cor. 12:7 *there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

We often refer to Moses as a great leader, lawgiver, and prophet. He proved himself before the Lord and before the people time and time again. However, the secret that lay at the foundation of Moses' greatness was the fact *he was a true prayer warrior* ... on behalf of his people and for victory over the elements and over the enemies.

For example, there was the occasion at Rephidim, where the Hebrews had recently left the bondage of Egypt and had stopped on their way to Canaan just prior to reaching Sinai (Ex. 17). There the people complained of thirst, and Moses *cried unto the Lord* (v.4) and the Lord commanded Moses to strike the rock once, and water would flow out of it.

On another occasion the Canaanite king Arad fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners (Num. 21:1). Immediately, v.5 the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. 6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. 7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. **And Moses prayed for the people.**

Another example is during the family dispute that took place in Moses' household. Miriam and Aaron did not like the Ethiopian woman Moses had married (Num. 12:1), and it was also an opportunity to raise other issues that aggrieved them ... , and they showed themselves up to be proud and vain, v.2 they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it. ... And the Holy Spirit records for our benefit, v.3 the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth, - Moses did not want an argument with his family, ... he did not need it, ... he had enough with the rest of the children of Israel! But the problem had to be sorted, and the Lord commanded the three of them, - Moses, Miriam and Aaron to appear before Him in the tabernacle ... and He particularly called forward Miriam and Aaron, - Miriam being the eldest in the family. Indeed, the Lord was angry with them (v.9), - He expected more of them, and He works on the principle, Lk. 12:48 unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required, - and consequently, in Num. 12:10, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous. I'm sure Aaron was afraid he would become leprous too and the leprosy would make him an outcast. He realised he and his sister were wrong to speak against their brother Moses, - the Lord's servant, - in such a manner, and he pleaded, v.11 Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. 12 Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb. 13 **And Moses cried unto the LORD**, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.

Yes, Moses was a great intercessor, ... and all the people knew it. Indeed, if it had not been for his mighty prayers ... where would Israel have ended up?!

However, not all of Moses' prayers were answered, as indeed we find here in Deut. 3:25. ... Here is an old man who had travelled in obedience to the Lord across an inhospitable wilderness with a constantly complaining people, and surrounded by enemies. He had led them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, along to Sinai and on to Kadeshbarnea ... and he is standing now on the eastern side of the River Jordan. He is standing on Pisgah ... on Mount Nebo ... and he is looking westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward (v.27).

He can see across the Jordan valley, and over on the other side of the river was the Promised Land of Canaan ... but Mount Nebo was as far as the Lord would permit him to go. Imagine the old man, - just him and the Lord, - in his final moments on earth ... Deut. 34:1 And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, 2 And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, 3 And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. 4 And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. 5 So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. 6 And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. 7 And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

Such special moments for this 120-year-old on Mount Nebo ... He could almost *smell* Canaan. He could almost *touch* it ... but the Lord had decreed that neither he nor his brother Aaron would enter the land. ... But please Lord! v.25 I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan ... 26 But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. ... *That's enough! ... No entry, Moses!!*

It is difficult to face when God says No, Dt. 34:4 Thou shalt not go over ... Dt. 3:25 I pray thee, let me go over ... v.26 Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. ... v.27 thou shalt not go over this Jordan. ... And there, somewhere on the mountain Moses died, and God buried him in an unmarked grave. Only the Lord knows where He was buried for only the Lord was at his funeral service (34:5,6). ... *When God says No ...*

THE DIVINE RESPONSE

* God has the right to say No. He has the right to answer our prayers in whatever manner He chooses for the way He chooses is ultimately always the best.

* ... Hannah prayed for a son, and the Lord eventually gave her Samuel.

* ... Instead of choosing riches or a long life, Solomon prayed for wisdom, ... and the Lord answered his prayer beyond anything he could ever have imagined.

* ... Elijah faced Ahab and Jezebel, all the false prophets and the people of Israel ... and he stood on his own on Mount Carmel and the Lord answered his mighty prayer, *I Kings 18:37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God ... 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell.*

* ... And even in the belly of the great fish, *Jonah 2:1 Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God ... 10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.*

* God hears and answers prayer, even in the most unlikely of places.

* He heard Hannah's prayer in the humble home, He heard Solomon in his royal palace, He heard Elijah on the mountain top, and He heard Jonah in the depths of the sea. There is no obstacle to God hearing the sincere prayers of His people.

* Then why does He not answer my prayer ... the prayer I have been praying for many years?

* ... Sometimes God has something better for us that we cannot see at the time. It is like how the little child might come to you in the kitchen as you are making dinner. They want a bar of chocolate, ... but you would not give them a bar of chocolate because it would ruin their appetite for the meal which would be far better for them. ... *Sometimes God has something for us that is far better than what we might want right now.*

* By refusing the child, does it mean you love them less, or you don't love them at all? Does it mean you don't care? Of course not! You would give them your very life to save them, but by withholding from them the chocolate you are preparing them for a meal that is much better for them.

* There is a little children's hymn ...

Jesus hears me when I pray,
He will never turn away;
He will listen to my call,
For He loves the children all.

He will keep me everywhere,
 I am safe within His care;
 Satan's power I need not fear,
 While my Saviour is so near.

* When Amy Carmichael was a little girl of three years old, she noticed one day her eyes were brown ... and she wanted blue eyes. That night she prayed to the Lord that she would awaken in the morning and her eyes would be blue ... and she believed the Lord would answer her prayer.

* She went to bed, - this little three year old girl, - and got up the next morning, went across to the mirror, and looked to see the colour of her eyes ... and what colour were they? Blue? ... No, they were still brown!

* She *really* wanted to have blue eyes, and she could not understand why the Lord would not make her brown eyes blue.

* Some years later when she grew up the Lord called her to become a missionary in India (in the late 1890's). Gradually He developed her evangelistic ministry into caring for the little girls the Indian parents abandoned to the Hindu temples to become nothing more than prostitutes.

* First, there was one child brought to her, and then another ... overall, she saved countless thousands from out of such evilness.

* Often she went 'undercover' to find details of these children, - she would stain her arms with coffee, and wear the Indian dress so that she would pass for an Indian woman and move freely in Indian society. This she could never have done *if she had blue eyes!* Her eyes would have given her away immediately.

* She could never have known, - as a little girl of three, - how God was going to use the brown eyes He had given her for His glory. Here is a little poem she wrote later in her life ...

“Just a tiny little child
 Three years old,
 And a mother with a heart
 All of gold.
 Often did that mother say,
 Jesus hears us when we pray,
 For He's never far away
 And He always answers.

Now, that little tiny child
 had brown eyes,
 but she wanted blue instead

Like blue skies.
 For her mother's eyes were blue
 Like forget-me-nots. She knew
 All her mother said was true,
 Jesus always answered.

So she prayed for two blue eyes,
 Said "Good night",
 Went to sleep in deep content
 And delight.
 Woke up early, climbed a chair
 By a mirror. Where, O where
 Could the blue eyes be? Not there;
 Jesus hadn't answered.

Hadn't answered her at all;
 Never more
 Could she pray; her eyes were brown
 as before.
 Did a little soft wind blow?
 Came a whisper soft and low,
 "Jesus answered. He said, No;
 Isn't No an answer?"

* Sometimes the Lord answers No ... and sometimes He also might answer, "Wait ..." - the request could be right but the timing wrong.

* When Mary and Martha made their heartbroken plea to the Lord to come to the bedside of their gravely ill brother, Lazarus ... [Jn. 11:6 he abode two days still in the same place where he was ...](#) He did not 'drop everything' and run; it was not until a few days later he went, and by then it was too late, Lazarus was dead (v.14).

* When He arrived at the home Martha wept to Him, [v.21 Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.](#)

* And yet, we know that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Her prayer was answered ... but not in her time. ... The timing was only right when it became God's purpose to fulfil her prayer.

* If you want to learn about practical praying, one of the best writers I can commend is George Mueller. George Mueller was a great friend of Hudson Taylor of China and C.H. Spurgeon and the three often met together in Spurgeon's home for rehabilitation in Menton, on the south coast of France.

* Mueller wrote, “The great point is to never give up until the answer comes. I have been praying every day for fifty-two years for two men, sons of a friend of my youth. They are not converted yet, but they will be! How can it be otherwise? There is the unchanging promise of Jehovah, and on that I rest. The great fault of the children of God is that they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere. If they desire anything of God’s glory, they should pray until they get it.”

* Sometimes the Lord answers your prayer by saying, No. Sometimes He answers your prayer by saying, Wait. And then also, sometimes He answers your prayer by saying, Yes, ... but even when He answers Yes, He might answer the prayer in a way you never considered.

* You are praying for a dear loved one who is seriously ill. There is no conceivable way they will be healed from their illness. How do you pray?

* I have often prayed at the bedside of believers whose time on earth was soon coming to an end ... How do you pray? Surely the Lord answers your prayer when you arrive at the place where He puts it within your heart to pray even that he would take your loved one unto Himself.

* There is no greater victory than the believer’s assurance.

* It is a joy and a privilege to sit at the bedside of a believer taking those last few steps on earth into Glory. On occasions I have heard them sing the Gospel hymns, I have heard them recite to me verses from the Bible, and I have seen the smile on their face.

* Unless Jesus comes back before it, every one of us must pass through the valley of the shadow of death, - we must all die, - but as you pass through that valley are you sure you have the Saviour holding tightly your hand?

* At this present moment my wife’s family are waiting for a loved one to die. Jim is in the final stages of senile dementia, Alzheimers disease.

* Before leaving Northern Ireland to return to Scotland in April Pearl and I went to see him with Daphne his wife. He did not know who we were. He could not speak to us. He had no expression.

* I read to him from Ps. 23 ... and we could see his lips move and try to speak the words of the first verse with me, - he remembered those words. ... And then as I prayed with him, he closed his eyes. Hardly no response anywhere else ... but he responded then.

* Yes, God answers our prayers because a few years ago, - when Jim was in control of his thoughts and senses, - he came to the Lord.

* The family had been praying for his salvation for many years ... and the Lord chose to answer their prayers ... almost at the very last moment.

- * God answers our prayers, - sometimes He says, No; sometimes He says, Wait; and sometimes He says, Yes.
 - * He is sovereign and He has the right to respond to our prayers the best way He deems fit in accordance with His will and for His glory ... and I can therefore be assured it will always be to my eternal benefit. ...
- The Divine Response ...**

CONCLUSION

- * There is nothing God brings your way that is outside of His will. He will never take you along a road He has not prepared for you to walk. He will never take you to the edge of a deep abyss without having provided a bridge for you to cross over. ... *And you need to trust Him!*
 - * My Lord knows the way through the wilderness,
All I have to do is follow,
Strength for today is mine all the way
And all that I need for tomorrow.
- * In Him, you have the confidence, ... the Psalmist said, [Ps. 63:8 My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.](#)
- * Is God your confidence? Is He the One in whom you depend for everything?
- * Next Lord's Day morning we shall look more closely at the passage and at its backgrounds ... for the Lord has lessons for His people in this place to learn ... for our edifying, and for His glory. Amen.