Article

• The effectiveness of prayer
One of the things God frequently speaks about in the Bible is prayer. Thus, in I Thessalonians 5:17 we read:

I Thessalonians 5:17
"Pray without ceasing"

Moreover, Colossians 4:2 suggests:
"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving"

Also I Peter 4:7 tells us:
"be serious and watchful in your prayers"

and Romans 12:12 repeats:
«continuing steadfastly in prayer»

Apart from the above passages - there are many more in the Word\(^1\) - that tells us to pray and in fact to pray continuously, steadfastly and without ceasing, there are also other passages that make clear prayer's effectiveness via the examples of people that prayed. It is this latter kind of passages that will be examined in this article, starting from Acts 12.

**1. Acts 12:1-16**

Starting therefore from Acts 12:1-5a we read:

Acts 12:1-5a
"Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hands to harass some of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that

\(^1\) The words, «pray» and «to pray», occur 306 times in the KJV.
it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also (Then were the days of the unleavened bread). And when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him; intenting to bring him before the people after the Passover.»

(NKJV-KJV)

Regarding the Herod of our passage, he was the grandson of the Herod that persecuted Jesus when he was still an infant (Matthew 2) and «put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under» (Matthew 2:16). He was also a nephew of Herod «the tetrarch» who beheaded John the Baptist and «treated Jesus with contempt and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe [to mock him further]» (Luke 23:11) before his crucifixion. It would seem therefore that he had inherited all the evilness of his grandfather and his uncle as he killed James one of the twelve, and seeing that this pleased the Jews, he also arrested Peter, purposing to present him to the people and then obviously to kill him as well. However, Herod didn't calculate well for verse 5 tells us:

Acts 12:5
"Peter therefore was kept in prison: **BUT prayer was made without ceasing to God for him by the church**"

(NKJV-KJV)

The king appointed many armed men to guard Peter. He thought that by this he would make his deliverance impossible. Yet he didn't take into account the fact that though Peter was kept in prison, **THE CHURCH WAS PRAYING WITHOUT CHEASING TO GOD FOR HIM.** Herod could not stop this, and thus could not stop God from acting on those prayers. For see what then happened:

---

Acts 12:6
"And when Herod whould have brought him forth, that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the prison;"

Herod had taken enough measures to prevent Peter from any physical way of escape. Two guards were on his right and on his left hand side and he was bound to them with chains. Wherever he wanted to go they had to agree first! Moreover, as if this was not enough, two other guards were before the door! Yet, though Herod had disposed much military power to guard Peter, this was nothing in comparison to God and HIS power. For see what the Lord did:

Acts 12:7-11
«And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side, and raised him up saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell of from his hands. And the angel said to him. Gird yourself and tie on your sandals. And so he did. And he said to him, Put on your garment and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and did not know that what was done by the angel was true; but though he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city; which opened to them of its own accord: and they went out and went down one street; and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, Now I know for certainty, that the Lord has sent his angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.»

Many think that for all this to take place the guards had to be asleep. Well, where does the Bible says this? Nowhere! In contrast, what the Bible says is that PETER was the one that was sleeping - between two guards - and that other guards before the door «were KEEPING THE PRISON». Regarding the latter, do you think that the Word would say that they were keeping the prison if they were sleeping? I don't think so, for

---

3See James Freeman «Manners and Customs of the Bible», p. 442.
what kind of keeping that would be? In any case, I don't know how God did it but I do know that HE DID IT and rescued Peter «from the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the Jewish people». However, let's not forget what caused all this and which is given in verse 5:

Acts 12:5
"Peter was therefore kept in prison: **BUT prayer was made without ceasing to God for him by the church**»

See this «but» there. It tells us the weapon used against the fact that Peter was kept in prison. This weapon was prayer. The church prayed without ceasing and God answered bringing the impossible to pass, conquering Herod and his power, and delivering Peter from this affliction.

2. **II Kings 6:11-22**

The above example is not the only one where we see God greatly deliver His people in response to their prayers. Another similar example is in II Kings 6. There we find Elisha, a man of God, through whom God revealed the plans of the Syrians to the king of Israel. Because of this, the king of Syria was greatly troubled and made a council for this matter. Verses 11-12 tells us:

II Kings 6:11-12
«Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, «Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?» And one of his servants said, «None my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom»

Whatever, the king of Syria said and planned, God revealed it to Elisha, who then revealed it to the king of Israel. Then verses 13-15 tells us:
II Kings 6:13-14

«So he said, «Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him.» And it was told him, saying, «Surely he is in Dothan. Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city»

See the similar thought pattern of this king and Herod: both tried to capture and harm men of God using much military power. Thus the king of Syria sent «horses and chariots and a great army» against Elisha, while Herod delivered Peter to sixteen people to guard him. Both Herod and the king of Syria thought that they had taken all the physical measures that would ensure the success of their plans. Yet, both left God and HIS measures out of the equation and both failed blatantly. We saw it in the previous section for Herod and we will see it in this section for the king of Syria as well. Verses 15-16 tells us:

I Kings 4:15-16

«And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, «Alas, my master! What shall we do?» So he answered «Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.»

Elisha's reply to what his servant said shows that either this servant had a sight problem and couldn't see those that were with them, or otherwise Elisha was wrong. As we will see the former was the case. The reason is not because the servant had a problem with his physical sight, but because he used the physical sight ONLY. Yet, this is not the only sight that one can have. Really, apart from the physical picture of a situation there may also be a spiritual picture that if it is ignored then the subsequent conclusions will be unreliable. Evidently, this servant had ignored this picture and had now to take it into account. Verse 17 tells us how this was occurred:
II Kings 6:17
«And Elisha PRAYED, and said, «Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.» Then THE LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha»

Elisha PRAYED and THE LORD answered His prayer, doing what he asked and opening the eyes of this servant to have a spiritual view of the situation. However, something more had also to be done since those Syrians knew Elisha. We saw in the beginning of the passage how the king was told about him and where exactly he was. Therefore, the Syrian army knew exactly whom they were looking for. How did Elisha face this? Verses 18-20 tells us:

II Kings 6:18-20
«So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha PRAYED TO THE LORD, and said, «Strike this people, I pray with blindness.» And HE struck them with blindness ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF ELISHA. Now Elisha said to them, «This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.» But he led them to Samaria. So it was, when they had come to Samaria that ELISHA SAID, «Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.» And THE LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria!»»

As it seems the Lord not only opens the eyes to see the spiritual and physically unseen, but He also CLOSES the eyes not to see the physically seen! The Syrians knew exactly whom they were looking for. Yet, he was before their eyes and they couldn't see him!! And not only that but they ended up in Samaria, the capital of their enemy! How all this happened? Elisha PRAYED and the Lord struck the Syrians with BLINDNESS opening their eyes only when they had arrived in Samaria and only after Elisha prayed for it! Verses 21-23 tells us what happened after they fell into the hands of the king of Israel.
II Kings 6:21-24

«Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, «My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?» But he answered, «You shall not kill them; would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master.» Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrians raiders came no more into the land of Israel»

Summarizing therefore: a great army came against Elisha. In response, after he evaluated the situation spiritually, he prayed and the Lord struck them with blindness. Then, after he led them to Samaria, the capital of Israel, he again prayed and the Lord opened their eyes and they saw where they were. Who did all these great things? The Lord. By what was the Lord prompted? By Elisha's prayer. That's why the Word says: «Elisha PRAYED and THE LORD.....» acted accordingly.

3. More examples of answered prayers

The above cases are not the only ones of effective prayer.

3.1 Samuel and John the Baptist

Really, Samuel a great man of God was an answer to his mother's prayer. As, I Samuel 1:10-11 tells us

I Samuel 1:10-11

«And she [Hannah, Samuel's mother] was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, «O Lord of hosts if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but will give your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head»
Hannah was in affliction. What did she do? She prayed, which is also what James 5:13 suggests us for such cases. Really, there we read:

James 5:13
«Is any among you afflicted? LET HIM PRAY»

Hannah was afflicted, she prayed and we don't have but to go to as far as verse 20 of the same chapter to see what happened as a result. Thus, there we read:

I Samuel 1:20
«So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, «Because I have asked for him from the Lord.»

Samuel was asked from the Lord. His name itself declared that he was answer to a prayer. However he was not the only one that was answer to a prayer. The same happened for John the Baptist as well. Really, when the angel appeared to John's father, Zacharias, he told him:

Luke 1:13
«Do not be afraid Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John»

The birth of John the Baptist was answer to the prayer of his father, Zacharias - and of course fulfillment of the corresponding prophecies regarding his coming as forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ (Malachi 4:5-6, Luke 1:15-17) - exactly as Samuel's birth was answer to his mother's prayer.

4It means «Heard by God»
3.2 Cornelious' case

Moving further, we all probably know Cornelious, the Gentile centurion, at whose home it was first time confirmed that «God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life» (Acts 11:18). However, do you know how it came and Peter went to his home to speak the Word to him? Acts 10:3-6 tells us:

Acts 10:3-6

«About the ninth hour of the day he [Cornelious] saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, «Cornelious!» And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, «What is it, lord?» So he said to him, «YOUR PRAYERS AND YOUR ALMS HAVE COME UP FOR A MEMORIAL BEFORE GOD». Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.....»

Peter didn't go there accidentally. He had seen a vision about it (Acts 10:9-20), and replied positively to the centurion's invitation who was also told by God to invite him. However, see what the angel said to Cornelious when he appeared to him: «YOUR PRAYERS AND YOUR ALMS HAVE COME UP FOR A MEMORIAL BEFORE GOD». Cornelious' prayers were heard by God. As a result he was told to send for Peter who, as the angel said to him «will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved» (Acts 11:14). And really, while Peter was speaking to the «many who had come together» (Acts 10:27) at Cornelious' house «the holy spirit fell upon all those who heard the word,.....for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God». (Acts 10:44, 46). Cornelious prayed, the Lord answered and many were saved, manifesting the holy spirit too!

3.3 Acts 4:24-31

Staying in Acts, another example of prayer's power is in chapter 4 verses 24-31. Peter and John had just been released from prison where they had been  because they were teaching the resurrection (Acts 4:2), doing also great miracles in Jesus' name (Acts
3:1-7). After their release they went to the believers to whom they said what had happened. What did they do as a response? They prayed. Really verses 24, 29-30 tells us:

Acts 4:24, 29-30
«So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: «Lord, you are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.....Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word, by stretching out your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.»

They prayed to do exactly what bothered the authorities (Acts 4:18) i.e. to speak the Word boldly and to do signs and miracles in Jesus' name. What followed their prayer? Verse 31 tells us:

Acts 4:31
«AND WHEN THEY HAD PRAYED, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the holy spirit, AND THEY SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD WITH BOLDNESS»

They prayed to speak the Word of God with boldness and guess what: THEY SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD WITH BOLDNESS.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion therefore: in this article we examined prayer's effectiveness as it is shown through various records of the Scripture about people that prayed. In all cases we saw how powerfully God was moved, answering the prayers of His people and covering their needs whatever this might require. This of course is not something that used to happen only then. Really, God is moved in the same way today as well, covering with His own abundance and wisdom everything that we ask Him in prayer and which is in harmony with His will. As I John 5:14 tells us:
I John 5:14
«Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, HE HEARS US.»

God hears us when we pray to Him. As Proverbs 15:9 tells us, our prayer is «His delight». He waits for it desiring to get it and make it a reality if of course it is in agreement with His will. If this condition is fulfilled then nothing can stop Him to answer it whatever this may require.

Tassos Kioulachoglou