

Unanswered Prayers

Introduction

Recently, I was in a conversation with someone who had walked away from the faith because they believed God had not answered their prayers. Sadly, many Christians wrestle with the same question. When our prayers seem to go unanswered, we naturally ask:

Why doesn't God answer our prayers?

1. Acts 12:1–17 — Historical Context

Historical Setting

The early church is growing rapidly despite increasing opposition. After the gospel begins spreading to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11), a new wave of persecution arises under **Herod Agrippa I** around **AD 44**.

Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of **Herod the Great** (who attempted to kill the infant Jesus in Matthew 2) and the nephew of **Herod Antipas** (who executed John the Baptist and mocked Jesus before His crucifixion). Ruling Judea under Roman authority, Agrippa sought to strengthen his popularity with the Jewish religious leaders by persecuting the rapidly growing Christian movement. To gain their approval, he targeted the church's most prominent leaders—first executing James and then imprisoning Peter.

Notice how the Herodian dynasty repeatedly opposes God's kingdom throughout the New Testament:

- **Herod the Great** — attempted to kill the infant Jesus (Matthew 2).
- **Herod Antipas** — executed John the Baptist and participated in Jesus' trial (Mark 6; Luke 23).
- **Herod Agrippa I** — executed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12).
- **Herod Agrippa II** — later heard Paul's defense of the gospel (Acts 25–26).

Luke's point is clear: despite repeated opposition from earthly rulers, **God's kingdom continues to advance**.

2. James Is Put to Death, Peter Is Delivered

Acts 12:1-17

Why was James killed while Peter was delivered?

The honest answer is:

We don't know.

James and Peter were remarkably similar.

- Both were apostles.
- Both were part of Jesus' inner circle.
- Both were deeply loved by Christ.
- Both faithfully served Him.

Yet God allowed one to die and miraculously rescued the other.

Some argue Peter was delivered because the church had greater faith while praying for him. But the text itself undermines that idea.

When Peter arrived at the house, the believers didn't expect to see him. They thought Rhoda was mistaken, and when she insisted, they concluded it must be Peter's angel. Even while praying, they were astonished when God answered.

The miracle was not produced by extraordinary faith.

What do we know

Jesus had already foretold both outcomes.

To James and John He said:

"You will drink the cup I drink." (Mark 10:39)

James became the first apostle to be martyred.

To Peter Jesus later said:

"When you are old... you will stretch out your hands..." (John 21:18–19)

God already knew the course of each man's life and fulfilled His purposes through both.

James was delivered **through death** into Christ's presence.

Peter was delivered **from death** for further ministry.

Neither outcome meant God loved one more than the other.

3. God's Nature Over Our Experience

One of our greatest temptations is to build our understanding of God upon our experiences.

The problem is that our experiences rise and fall like a roller coaster.

Sometimes prayers are answered exactly as we hoped.

Sometimes they are not.

When we read Scripture, we discover that this has always been true.

The patriarchs experienced seasons of waiting.

The prophets suffered rejection.

The kings endured hardship.

The apostles faced imprisonment, persecution, and even martyrdom.

I cannot point to a single person in the Bible whose life consisted of uninterrupted miracles, constant deliverance, and every prayer being answered exactly as desired.

What I do find is something far greater.

In every generation, God's people learned to trust **His character** even when they could not understand **His Plan**.