

When God Refuses to Hear Prayers

International Bible Lesson

Jeremiah 33:1-11

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“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” (Jeremiah 33:3—KJV).

“Call upon me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known” (Jeremiah 33:3—NRSV).

After political and religious leaders falsely accused Jeremiah of treason, God promised to hear Jeremiah's prayers for himself as he languished in prison. Jeremiah needed the reassurance of God's steadfast loving presence before Jerusalem fell as Jeremiah had warned when he called the Judeans to turn from their evil ways. God still promises to hear the prayers of His faithful followers. However, God refused to answer Jeremiah's prayers for Jerusalem and told him not to pray for those who would soon die or be led captive into Babylonian exile. God warned Jeremiah, “As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble” (Jeremiah 11:14). God gave Jeremiah this reason: “I have hidden my face from this city because of all their wickedness” (Jeremiah 33:5). During Jeremiah's 40 years of ministry, God gave the people a clear choice: listen to the Word of God, repent and obey God, or listen to the promises of false prophets and priests and follow your evil political leaders instead of God. Even though God spoke through Jeremiah and warned them for decades, the people chose to ignore God; therefore, God chose to ignore them when finally He had to punish them for their wickedness. God saved Jeremiah from prison when the city was conquered, and the king of Babylon freed him to go wherever he wanted. However, the wicked political and religious leaders who survived mistreated Jeremiah, enslaved him, and forced him to flee to Egypt with them.

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Thinking Further

1. While Jeremiah remained in prison, how did God continue to encourage him?
2. How does God encourage you when you face troubles and you do not know the future?
3. Why did God hide His face from the people in Jerusalem? Do you think He will do the same thing today in cities around the world for the same reason?
4. In spite of their wickedness, what did God say He would do with the people?
5. Read Jeremiah 33:11 again. The New Testament teaches that the Church is the Bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7, Revelation 21:9, and Revelation 22:17). Compare what you have read to Christian worship today. What parts of Jeremiah 33:11 do you enjoy in a service of worship? What parts would you like to do more when you worship God? What does Jeremiah 33:11 teach you about how you can worship God every day even by yourself? What promise did God give Jeremiah for the people and how does it compare to some of the promises of Jesus to you?