



WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

We find the following two parallel passages in the Gospels:

And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."
Matthew 21:22

Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.
Mark 11:24

Both are quite accurate translations of the Greek so I will not comment on the Greek at this point. The question I ask is, "Are these passages true." Of course they are true - they are in the Bible!

OK, have you ever prayed for something, believing you would receive it, and then were disappointed because you did not? Paul did - three times!

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. II Corinthians 12:8
God didn't cause the thorn (his mother-in-law?) to depart. Instead, God said, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."*
II Corinthians 12:9A

What about that unsaved friend you prayed for for years to no avail? Doesn't the Bible tell us *The Lord is not . . . willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*
II Peter 3:9

Well, I will attempt to answer these questions, but since I am not omniscient, I will only be able to answer them in part. First, you must recognize two types of prayer. "Personal prayer" (in which we ask for things for ourselves) and "Intercessory Prayer" (in which we ask for things for others. These two passages deal with Personal Prayer (you will have them), not Intercessory Prayer (for the salvation of others).

Next, we need to consider the verb used here, "believing." The passage does not read, *whatever things you ask when you pray, hope that you will*

receive them, and you will have them. There is a difference in hoping for something and believing. While it is perfectly correct to pray for things we hope to receive, they do not fit into the promise in these passages.

The verb "I believe" is a translation of the Greek verb πιστεύω (pisteuo). The noun form of this word is πίστις (pistis) which is usually translated "faith." In other words, to "believe" in something is to "have faith" in it. We might paraphrase Mark as *whatever things you ask when you pray, have faith that you receive them, and you will have them.*

This is surely not the same as "hoping." The author of Hebrews wrote, *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

Hebrews 11:1 NIV

Let's put these together! *whatever things you ask when you pray, be sure of what you hope to receive, and you will have them.* That's pretty clear and to the point.

I would have no problem of praying that the sun would come up tomorrow morning at being sure (having faith) that it would happen. The sun will come up tomorrow morning whether I pray for it or not. There isn't much point in praying for "surefire" things. Paul assured the Christians in Philippi, *my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*
Philippians 4:19

We really don't need to pray for our "needs," God will supply them (Paul did not need the thorn removed from his side) The real problem is in praying for things we are not sure about. Can I really have faith (believe) that God will answer this prayer? Certainly, it has to be something that is not contrary to the Bible and God's teaching and not something for our own pleasures (James 4:3). But aside from this, how do we know?

My answer is that either you will know or you will not. If you pray for something and cannot leave it with God - you still worry about it, you do not have the required faith. If you pray for something and, having done so, you feel God's assurance, you do!

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