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WHEN PRAYER BECOMES OPERATIONAL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES
NUMBER 48
JAMES 5:17-18

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JAMES 5:17-18 "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

We have previously studied verse 17 when we saw how Elijah prayed that it would not rain and it didn't rain for 3½ years. We saw at the end of verse 16 that the prayer of a righteous man has much power when it is operational. James gave us several illustrations of this before stating this principle. In verse 13 we saw the power of prayer when a super grace believer prays for himself. Then we had the illustration of the restoration of a reversionist, when the pastor-teacher prayed for him. In verse 16 we saw how a man was restored after repentance. Now we are studying the national illustration. The whole nation had gone into reversionism and the nation was about to go into slavery. But Elijah will pray and the nation will be delivered.

A Word of Power

In verse 17 we saw the word proseuchomai which was translated "prayed earnestly." It is an ingressive aorist. It really means "he began to pray" that it might not rain. The prayer began in Ahab's palace and 3½ years later he will end the prayer on the summit of Mt. Carmel. Then at that time we will see the culminative aorist of this same word proseuchomai. Elijah's prayer was to the effect that God would knock on the door of the nation of Israel, and warn them of the coming disaster. Every time this word is used it is a word of real power. The word "earnestly" is not here and is mistranslated. What we do have here is the word proseuche and should be translated "praying by means of prayer" that it might not rain. "That it might not rain" is an aorist, active, infinitive of brecho plus the negative. So thus far in this verse we have these words---"By means of prayer he began to pray not to send rain." Then at the end of 3½ years we have the culminative aorist of the same word, to point out that at that time it rained again. This is a rather interesting prayer that he began and didn't finish until 3½ years later. The answer to his prayer is expressed in the word "And it rained not." This is an aorist, active, indicative of brecho and is a constantive aorist. It means that every day for 3½ years there was not a drop of rain. Day after day after day it did not rain, and this went on for 3½ years. Therefore, James is drawing a strong point here to show the power of prayer, and to prove the great importance of doctrine in the recovery from reversionism.

JAMES 5:18 "And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." "And he prayed" is an aorist, active, indicative of proseuchomai and the culminative aorist is in contrast to the irrelative aorist in verse 17. Three and one half years have elapsed in between the use of these two words. And to make it a little clearer we have the word palin meaning "again." The praying had been resumed after an elapse of 3½ years. During that 3½ year period, God's provision for Elijah had been fantastic. First, the buzzards had fed

Elijah beside the Brook Cherith. Then the flour and oil did not diminish in the house of the widow woman of Zarephath. (Really she was a woman who had a son and she had not been married and the words are "Ishah almanah" and it means an unmarried woman with a son.) God saw to it that Elijah survived for the 3½ years so God could bring him down to the wire and give him victory. "And the heavens gave rain" and to get a few more details turn to 1 Kings 18:40.

1 KINGS 18:40 "And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there." Here Elijah took charge. Please keep in mind that Elijah understood the principle of God's love for the human race. God loves the whole human race so much that at certain times men have to be eliminated so the human race can survive. When a mad dog gets loose, then he has to be killed to save the people. A mad dog was loose in the Northern Kingdom, and that mad dog was the worship of Baal.

The word here translated "take" is a kal perfect of taphas and it means to "seize violently," or to capture." These people of the Northern Kingdom who had repented of their sins were to take these prophets of Baal and they were to destroy them. "Let not one of them escape" is a niphal imperfect of malat and it means "let not one of them remain alive." "And they took them" and this is a kal imperfect of taphas and it means "they were seized violently and taken down to the Brook Kishon." The word for "slew" here is a kal imperfect of shachat and it means to cut the throat like you would slaughter an animal. This is exactly what happened here. Four hundred fifty prophets of Baal had their throats cut.

Love Everybody

There are those soft-hearted sentimentalists who believe in loving everyone. They believe that you are to love even the enemies of God. But look what Elijah is doing here in our Scripture. He was executing spiritual traitors. He was murdering prophets who were the enemies of God and he was doing it at the command of God. This is the same principle we saw demonstrated in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

1 KINGS 18:41 "And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain." "Get thee up" is a kal imperative of "alah" and it means "go up at once." Now Ahab never went anywhere without packing a picnic lunch. So Elijah here suggests to him that he should go up into the mountains and have a little picnic to celebrate the return of the rains. "Eat" is from akal and "drink" is from shathan and it means to drink something of an alcoholic content. In other words, he was suggesting to Ahab that he should celebrate with a real party. Now remember this--this is all Ahab was capable of doing. It doesn't take brains or ability to have a picnic like this. He was the leader of Israel and look at this picture. Here is an amazing picture of reversionism. The country is going to be saved by the grace of God and the only thing King Ahab could do was to go into the mountains and have a picnic and celebrate the return of the rain. Ahab's country will be saved, but Ahab had no part in the salvation of the nation. Then Elijah said, "For there is the sound of the abundance of rain." There is a principle right here. When God sends the rain, it always comes in sufficient quantity. When God blesses you, it is always the abundance of blessings.

1 KINGS 18:42 "So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees," So Ahab was obedient and went up to have his picnic and celebrate the return of the rain. And the word "but" introduces the contrast. But Elijah went to the top of Mt. Carmel. He went past the picnic grounds of Ahab and went to the summit to see the face of God. The words "cast himself down" is a kal imperfect of gahar and really means to crouch down. He actually sat down on his haunches and put his face down between his knees.

1 KINGS 18:43 "And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times." The word for "said" is a kal imperfect of amar and it means he just kept saying this. Now Elijah didn't have a servant, but the word is naar and it means "a young man." This is the son of that widow woman whom Elijah had raised from the dead and he had gone along with Elijah to serve and wait on Elijah. Seven times the young man came back and told Elijah that he saw nothing. Here is a boy running up and down the hill and each time he reported "nothing." How many times in our human service we run up and down our little hills and accomplish nothing. It is going to be the prayer of Elijah that will make the difference.

1 KINGS 18:44 "And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." The Hebrew says, "a little black cloud." The young man was told to go up and tell Ahab to finish his picnic and get out of there for the rain was on the way. All Ahab could do was go and report to Jezebel that the rain was coming.

1 KINGS 18:45 "And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel." This may be the Bible's most pathetic picture of a national leader. He was madly driving his chariot, trying to beat the rain so he could report to wicked Jezebel.

1 KINGS 18:46 "And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." This now takes us back to James 5:13.

"And he prayed" is an aorist, active, indicative of proseuchomai and is a culminative aorist. In other words, he finished the prayer that he began 3½ years ago. "The heavens gave" is an aorist, active, indicative of didomi and is the second culminative aorist we have here. Rain is the word 'huetos and please notice the result. "Brought forth" is the aorist, active, indicative of blastano and it means the seed germinated, sprouted and produced. The word for "fruit" is karpos.

So this verse says, "And he offered prayer again, and the heaven gave rain, and the land germinated, sprouted, and produced its production."

Summary

1. Here is an operational prayer offered by a super grace believer, eliciting a response from God.
2. This prayer fulfills the principle stated at the end of James 5:16. "The prayer of a righteous one (super grace type) has much power when it becomes operational."
3. A reversionist nation, on the verge of going under the 5th cycle of discipline from God, is spared for some time yet.
4. In place of the 5th cycle of discipline and slavery, God provided national prosperity. The people were given another opportunity to recover from reversionism and move back into super grace.
5. It was necessary for the reversionists to repent before the prayer could become operational.
Look at 1 Kings 18:39 as we close. "And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

Prayer redeems time. Prayer has fantastic power when it is linked with the will of God.