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A PRAYER FOR NATIONAL REPENTANCE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES
NUMBER 47
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."

In the study of these important verses in James 5 we have gone back to 1 Kings to pick up the details of the prayers of Elijah for the nation of Israel.

1 KINGS 18:1 "And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." This is quite a contrast to 1 Kings 17. There Elijah was told by the Lord "to hide." Here he is told to "show thyself." Elijah was a super grace believer and he knew how to adapt to these various commands from the Lord. This is an important lesson for every believer to learn. It is important that we learn to be flexible, to be able to go in one direction and then at the command of The Lord to turn and move in another direction. The ingressive aorist of James 5:17 ties in with the first command "to hide." Then the culminative aorist ties in with the second command in verse 18 to "show thyself." Three and one half years will elapse between these two prayers. This is why we have digressed from James and have gone back into Kings to pick up the details of the story. Elijah had passed the tests that God gave him at the brook Cherith and also in the house of the widow woman at Zarephath. The reality of doctrine in his mind saw him through. Please keep in mind that at this time there was a price on the head of Elijah. In spite of this The Lord said to him "show thyself to Ahab." "I will send" is a kal imperfect of "Nathan" and it means "I will give rain upon the earth."

1 KINGS 18:2 "And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria." Samaria is the capitol of the Northern Kingdom and they had been without rain for three and one half years.

1 KINGS 18:3 "And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly:" Now we go from a super grace believer, Elijah, to a reversionist, Ahab. We meet Obadiah, and this is not the Obadiah who wrote the prophecy. This is the governor of the palace of Ahab. He was a believer. We have the word "jaree" and it means to trust. Obadiah trusted in The Lord. Meod is the adverb and it means he was a well known believer.

1 KINGS 18:4 "For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)" This is a proof of his maturity. He saved the lives of one hundred prophets, which is a picture of his compassion.

1 KINGS 18:5 "And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts."

But now we have a picture of his reversionism. He is no longer interested in saving preachers. He is very much occupied with horses and mules who were in danger of dying from the drought. Ahab is a believer, but is in reversionism. "Save alive" is the kal imperfect of "chajah" and means that the horses and mules might keep on living. The idea behind it is that he didn't care too much about the people dying from thirst, but he sure didn't want to lose his horses and mules. This is quite often true when people go into reversionism. They lose their perspective.

1 KINGS 18:6 "So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself." Here we have two reversionistic believers going through the land, trying to find food and water for horses and mules so they won't die. You might ask yourself this question--"What constitutes your horses and mules that takes you away from Bible doctrine? What is it that upsets you and gets you out of fellowship?"

God's Purpose Behind This

What is the purpose in all this? Ahab is married to Jezebel, and she was both beautiful and smart. She used her ability to scheme and run things. Ahab had married her, and from that day forward, he was in reversionism and now we see him more interested in horses and mules than he is in people. Why? Because in reversionism he had learned that people are inconsistent, people are unstable. He had learned how stupid people can really be, especially when they move in groups. Ahab had a very fine man named Obadiah, and he had once been on the right road. But he too had slipped and both Ahab and Obadiah were in reversionism. They had lost interest in trying to save their people. In other words, they were doing nothing of real significance, while their people were void of spiritual leadership. The only cure for superficiality like this is Bible doctrine. Here we have two reversionistic believers, having an affair with themselves. Nothing else mattered but their own ambitions. God will use this to show a nation just how unstable reversionism can be. This is a picture of man at his worst. Their eyes were on horses and mules instead of on people.

1 KINGS 18:7 "And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?" This did not happen by accident. This is the principle of Romans 8:28 at work long before Romans 8:28 had ever been written down. We read that Obadiah "knew him" and this is a hiphil imperfect of "nahar" and it means "was caused to recognize him." Elijah didn't recognize who Obadiah was. Of course, Obadiah thought that he was so important surely Elijah would recognize him. Later on he is going to say to Elijah, "Remember me, I'm the one who saved those hundred preachers?" Therefore we have before us a reversionist who is all up tight about who he is and about how important he is. In contrast to him here is Elijah, relaxed and completely at peace with himself because he was doing the will of God.

1 KINGS 18:8 "And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." He said "Behold Elijah!" In other words, "Obadiah, I'm back!"

1 KINGS 18:9 "And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?"

This bird Obadiah is worried about his reputation. A reversionist is always worried about what other people think of him. He's concerned about his record. A reversionist always gets things twisted. Here he calls himself "Elijah's servant," when in reality, he is the servant of Ahab. Now we have an incorrect translation. We have "to slay me" which is a hiphil infinitive of "muth." "Harag" is the word for slay. This word is "cause me to die."

1 KINGS 18:10 "As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not." This is simply an explanation of the reward posters they have up in all the post offices of Israel for the capture of Elijah.

1 KINGS 18:11 "And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." Obadiah suggests that he may be dumb, but he isn't dumb enough to walk into a trap like this.

1 KINGS 18:12 "And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." A reversionist always imagines the worst. A reversionist always dies many times and imagines all kind of bad things are going to happen. Someone has said, "Cowards die many times but a brave man dies only once." Here Obadiah is rationalizing. He knows doctrine and here he refers to the work of The Holy Spirit. Now he uses the word "harag" and this is the word meaning "to slay me." He uses the word "jaree" and it means "I have trusted in the Lord from my youth." As we would say today, "I've been saved since I was in a Baptist Sunday School as a small boy." But a reversionist never knows where to put the emphasis. The trouble was that he had been saved but had slipped into reversionism and was off the path of the will of God for him.

1 KINGS 18:13 "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?" I call this "The bragomony of Obadiah." Elijah doesn't want to kill him, all he wants him to do is to go and take a message to Ahab. But Obadiah is making a big deal out of it. Reversionists are always so full of themselves that they can't keep from telling you about it. In other words, he is saying to Elijah, "If I go and take this message to Ahab I want you to know that the greatest Christian in the nation is going, and if I die, just be sure to tell everyone how great I was."

1 KINGS 18:14 "And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me." "He shall slay me" here is from "harag" in the perfect tense and it really means, "I am already as good as dead." So far as he is concerned, he is dead. In his mind it is already an accomplished fact.

1 KINGS 18:15 "And Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him today." Here Elijah pumps him up a little and says to him, "As the Lord of the armies liveth before whom I stand." That word "stand" is from "amadh" and means that Elijah had a personal relationship with The Lord. So it is summed up in the idea, "All I want you to do is to tell Ahab that I'm here." Obadiah had his eyes on what he had done in the past and was blinded to what he should now be doing.

1 KINGS 18:16 "So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah." There is a truth here. When we tell the truth, when we stick to the facts, things always work out right for us.

1 KINGS 18:17 "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Now we have the confrontation with Ahab. We have now met a master politician. Just as Obadiah revealed what he was like, here we see Ahab reveals the quality of his character. It is Ahab that is troubling Israel, but here Ahab tries to lay the trouble on Elijah. The word is "akar" and this is a kal, active, participle. It means that Ahab is accusing Elijah of being responsible for the sum total of the trouble in the Northern Kingdom. The principle is this. A reversionist has a blind side and can't actually see the facts. Ahab actually thinks that Elijah is his trouble. Yet in reality Ahab and the Northern Kingdom had brought all this trouble on themselves.

1 KINGS 18:18 "And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." Elijah now explains the source of the real problem, "You have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed Baal." It is a kal, infinitive of "azabah" and it means to desert something of which you were once a part. Ahab had gone negative toward doctrine. This was the source of Ahab's sin and the sin of the Northern Kingdom. This is the force that is leading them down and in 721 B.C. they will fall under the fifth cycle of discipline and go into captivity. They will not be restored until Christ does it at the time of his second coming. "Followed" is from the kal imperfect of "yalak" and means to "walk after something." In other words, they had gone after Baal and it was a decision of their own volition, and this is revealed in this word "walking after Baal."

1 KINGS 18:19-20 "Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel." This is to be a real contest between the forces of evil and the forces of the true God.

1 KINGS 18:21 "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." The national issue is reversionism. The word for "halt" is a kal, active, participle of "pashach" and it means "to limp." Limping is a picture of national reversionism. We see a very similar picture of the people limping in our own nation today. When we limp between two opinions, we soon sprain our spiritual ankles. The truth spoken by Elijah silenced them. Reversionism always is silent in front of truth.

1 KINGS 18:22 "Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men." Elijah is the only prophet left so it is one against 450.

1 KINGS 18:23 "Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under:" This is the contest. The word translated "dress" here is from "asah" and it means "to prepare it for the sacrifice."

1 KINGS 18:24-25 "And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under." They agree to the idea of "fire" because they were accustomed to fire in the worship of Baal and they think they couldn't miss with a proposition like this.

1 KINGS 18:26 "And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made." The words are not "O Baal, hear us," but rather "O Baal, answer us."

1 KINGS 18:27 "and it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." The word for "mocked" here is a hiphil imperfect of "talal" and it means "He causes to ridicule them." He actually said, "Shout with a louder voice." Then Elijah suggests the things that their God might be doing. "He is talking" and this is a kal, perfect of "siach" and it means "He is complaining." "He is pursuing" is the noun "siag" and it means "He is chasing." He is on a journey, far away. "He is sleeping" and the word means he is asleep from a drunken hangover. This is a verse of sarcasm and ridicule, but they took it deadly serious.

1 KINGS 18:28 "And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them." "Gadadh" is in the hithpael and it is reflexive and it means they did this to themselves. They cut themselves. This is a beautiful picture of sincerity. No wonder they are limping. They are limping in their souls. They think self-denial will get God on their side.

1 KINGS 18:29 "And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. Here is a very interesting verse. The word "naba" in the hithpael means they were mumbling to themselves. They were actually speaking in tongues. They were babbling to themselves in senseless words. Reversionism is always impressed with speaking in tongues. So at the end of the verse, no wonder we read, "No one paid any attention."

1 KINGS 18:30 "And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down." Elijah will now have his inning.

1 KINGS 18:31 "And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name." He took twelve stones for the twelve tribes of Israel, even though at that time they were divided with two tribes in the Southern Kingdom and ten tribes in the Northern Kingdom.

1 KINGS 18:32-33 "And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrells with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood." The reason he used water is to call attention to the scarcity of water. It hadn't rained for three and a half years. He uses the water to say to them, "Don't worry. The rain is coming soon."

1 KINGS 18:34-35 "And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." The reason he did this over and over again is this-He wanted to create a hopeless situation to prove that God is able to handle a hopeless situation.

1 KINGS 18:36 "And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word." The Lord God here is Jesus Christ. The reason he mentions "Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" is that he is standing on the covenants God made to Israel. This verse lets us know that we now have another prayer, we might call it a prayer within a prayer. He had prayed at the beginning of the three and one half years. He will pray again at the end. But here he prays that God will vindicate him by sending the fire down upon the altar.

1 KINGS 18:37 "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." The word is not "hear me" but rather "Answer me." The purpose is that the people will turn from their reversionism. This is what we have been studying in James, the return from reversionism. The word for "turn" is a hiphil perfect of "sababh" and it means to turn around in their minds. Before a prayer can be operational there must be repentance. When the people of the Northern Kingdom repent, then Elijah can go back to God and complete his prayer and rain will come again.

1 KINGS 18:38 "Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." Why did Elijah begin this prayer three and one half years ago? The reason is this. He wanted them to hear God's knocking at the door so they would return from reversionism. He cannot pray until there is repentance. This is not just a Bible story to amuse somebody. This is for the teaching of a very important principle--"The prayer of a righteous man has much power when it is operational."

1 KINGS 18:39 "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" This is a genuine confession and the nation will be saved because they have repented.