

## THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

### The Books Of Kings: The Kings Of Israel And Judah From Solomon To The Babylonian Captivity

#### II. The Divided Kingdom, 1 Kings 12:1-22:53

#### O. Elijah's Effective Prayer: Exempling God's Provision For The Powerless

#### (1 Kings 18:41-46; James 5:16b-18)

Introduction: (To show the need . . . )

Many people today feel vulnerable to harm and powerless to address it effectively:

(1) "The World Health Organization" claims that "1 in 5 people are clinically depressed, the biggest epidemic the world has ever known." (Alex S. Key, "Human needs . . . What Are They?"; 12/15/2008; psychologytoday.com)

(2) Related to this, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports "an uptick in suicide rates in nearly every state since 1999" with "(m)iddle-aged adults" having "the largest rate increase," and some of the major causes are "feeling hopeless, trapped, a burden to others or wanting to die" ("Midlife Suicides Up," Republican-American, June 9, 2018, p. 4A). The problem is greater than the suicide rates themselves reveal: last week, radio talk show host Brad Davis on "The Talk of Connecticut," added to this report that for every suicide, there are twenty-five attempts!

(3) This matter affects us locally: a young adult in our Church recently reported he knows a lot of children are being prescribed anti-depressants, and some young adults he knows are insecure and struggle with depression!

Need: So, we ask, "What does God direct for those who feel vulnerable to harm and powerless to address it?!"

#### I. After God's defeat of Baal at the Mount Carmel competition, the prophet Elijah sensed his need to give intense prayer for God's powerful provision, and he witnessed remarkable answers, 1 Kings 18:41-46:

- A. Elijah intensely prayed for a sudden rain to end Israel's prolonged, disastrous drought, 1 Kings 18:41-43:
  - 1. He told king Ahab that God had given him prophetic insight about a coming abundant rain, so Ahab was to celebrate the ending of the drought by eating and drinking, 1 Kings 18:41; Bib. Know. Com., O. T., p. 527.
  - 2. Elijah then climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, bowed himself to the ground and put his face between his knees to pray, indicating by this posture an expression of intense emotion in prayer, 1 Kings 18:42.
  - 3. Having prayed for rain, Elijah sent his servant to look out over the Mediterranean Sea from which storms usually came to see if a cloud was rising from the sea, 1 Kings 18:43a; *Ibid.* The servant reported he saw nothing, so Elijah prayed six more times and sent his servant out each time to view the sea, v. 43b.
- B. God then answered Elijah's prayer the seventh time, sending a sudden, great storm, 1 Kings 18:44-45:
  - 1. After the seventh prayer, the servant said he saw a cloud the size of a man's hand as one held up his hand at arm's length, a relatively small cloud, rising up out of the sea, 1 Kings 18:43b-44a.
  - 2. Elijah realized God was answering his prayer for a quick storm, so he told his servant to warn Ahab to get to his chariot at the level valley that ran along the north side of Mount Carmel for a quick trip 25 miles east to his winter capital in Jezreel lest the rain cause his chariot to get stuck in rain-caused mud, v. 44b. (*Ibid.*)
  - 3. As the servant left to give Ahab Elijah's message, the sky grew dark, the wind rose and there was a heavy downpour, so Ahab quickly got into his chariot and drove his horses hard toward Jezreel, 1 Kings 18:45.
- C. God's power then came upon Elijah: he tucked his cloak into his belt to enable him to run without tripping on his outer robe, and he outran Ahab's chariot all of the way back to Jezreel 25 miles away, 1 Kings 18:46; *Ibid.*

#### II. James 5:16b-18 comments on this event, teaching God's help for the vulnerable and powerless:

- A. Before alluding to Elijah's prayer about rain in James 5:17-18, James 5:16b in the KJV claims, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," seemingly teaching one must pray with *fervency* like **Elijah** did in bowing down low with his head between his knees for God to answer his prayer!
- B. Yet, the NIV and ESV rightly make the verse teach God has regard for the *righteousness* in him who prays:
  - 1. The words describing the prayer are the word *polu*, "great," acting as an adverb to modify the verb *ischuei*, "[it] is strong," the words together translating, "[it] is greatly strong," and the participle *energoumena*, "active," U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 789; W. D. Mounce, The Analy. Lex. to the Grk. N. T., 1993, p. 383, 132, 188; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. to the N. T., 1967, p. 694-696, 384, 264-265.
  - 2. The words for "prayer of a righteous man" follow *polu ischuei* but precede *energoumena* to make the verse read **literally**: "Greatly strong is the prayer of a righteous man; active" (*Ibid.*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T.).
  - 3. Thus, the lexical meanings of the words in the verse and their word order in the sentence do **NOT** tell us **HOW** a righteous man is to pray for effectiveness, but only of the great power of his **prayer ITSELF**.
  - 4. James 5:16b thus teaches just **one** qualification for effective prayer -- *righteousness* in him who prays!

- C. James 5:17-18 then illustrates this truth by referring to Elijah's emotionally charged prayers first that there be a severe drought and later for the coming of great, sudden rain. However, the passage adds that Elijah was a man "subject to like passions as we are" (KJV), and the operative Greek word in this phrase is *homoioopathes*, "like feeling" or "like suffering" to indicate in *either* case **human frailty**, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 835.
- D. Thus, Elijah emotionally poured out his heart to God, expressing himself in his human frailty, which human frailty is common to all of us, and God heard him *since* he was **righteous** REGARDLESS HOW he prayed!

### III. Other passages in Scripture detail the full-orbed qualifications for effective prayer (as follows):

- A. The Apostle John in 1 John 5:14-15 teaches one must pray **in alignment with God's will** for God to answer his prayer in a positive manner. Elijah already knew God wanted to send the rain, for the Lord had told him before the contest on Mount Carmel that He would send rain in 1 Kings 18:1 and God had given Elijah a prophetic vision of an abundance of rain to come in 1 Kings 18:41. Applied today, one must know God's will from His written Word in order to pray within the will of God for answers to prayer. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)
- B. Scripture also requires one who prays to **believe God** on the matter for answered prayer, James 1:5-7.
- C. As noted above, one must also be **righteous** (1 John 3:22), having confessed his sins, Psalm 66:18; 1 John 1:9.
- D. When one is thus (1) **righteous** and prays (2) in **faith** (3) in accord with **God's will**, he can ask what he wills and God will give him the help he needs regardless of his feelings of vulnerability to harm and powerlessness!

***Lesson:*** *Being subject to human frailties like us, Elijah passionately prayed for there to be a drought to lead the people away from faith in Baal and then for a great rain to end the suffering caused by the drought, and God heard him since he prayed (1) in God's will (2) as a righteous man and (3) in faith in God, believing His Word.*

***Application:*** *If feeling vulnerable to harm and powerless to address our need, (1) may we believe in Christ to be justified in Christ, Romans 3:23-27. (2) Then, may we pray (a) in alignment with God's will as revealed in His written Word (b) in practical righteousness and (c) in faith (3) to see God answer our prayer for His glory!*

**Conclusion:** (To illustrate the message . . . )

An illustration of God's answer to a prayer that affects us as a body has occurred, and we testify about it here: About four months ago, I was giving a prayer in my turn with the rest of the Church Board as we opened our board meeting with a round of prayer. In voicing that prayer, I asked God for wisdom "going forward" into the future, concerned over the issue of Christian counseling we were about to discuss and how it would affect our Church.

As the meeting progressed, I became very motivated from what I was hearing that, based on 2 Timothy 3:17 that asserts the full sufficiency of Scripture for all Christian ministry, I could no longer condone a Christian counselor speaking in our Church unless he used Scripture alone in his ministry. I then voiced this stand in the meeting!

Since then, the following events have occurred that give God's evaluation of that stand:

(1) Last week, a deacon e-mailed me a recent article by Greg Gifford, Professor of Biblical Counseling at The Master's University (begun by Dr. John MacArthur) that read (in part): "Why biblical counseling and not psychology? . . . (I)t is the superiority of Scripture over human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:20-21), ***the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:17)***, and the sufficiency we have in Christ that we are committed to at TMU (Col. 2:3)." (emphases ours)

(2) I recently reviewed John Armstrong, gen. ed., The Coming Evangelical Crisis, 1996, and on p. 18 was moved by this: "It is the central thesis of this volume that . . . ***the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:14-17)*** and the authoritative finality of Christ's gospel . . . (Rom. 1:16) are being undermined. What will we do?" (emphases ours)

(3) Another deacon at our last Board Meeting shared with us T. A. McMahon's article, "A Crucial Address to the Overseers - Part One" from the May, 2018 issue of The Berean Call newsletter, and I cite part of that newsletter here: "(S)criptures such as ***2 Timothy 3:16-17*** declare that, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ***That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works'*** . . . [but] ***sadly, more and more believers in Christ today are going elsewhere for 'things that pertain to life and godliness'*** . . . (M)any are being led . . . by their churches . . . to ***professionals for psychological counseling. If this is taking place in your fellowship -- whether they call themselves Christian psychologists or Marriage and Family counselors or whatever label they choose to give themselves -- I have two words for your fellowship: stop it!***" (emphases ours)

**God thus answered that prayer given in that Board meeting four months ago, directing that the stand be taken and recently asserting by multiple, credible believers His support of it.**

**May we trust in Christ to be saved. May we then pray as Scripture directs for God's answers to prayer!**