

**THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION**  
**James: A Sermonic Call Unto Practical Godliness**  
**Part IX: Godliness In Our Prayer Lives, James 5:13-20**  
**C. Godliness Relative To Praying Effectively For Spiritually Weaker Believers**  
**(James 5:16-20)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. We Christians live in a world of great spiritual darkness where we must cleave closely to Scripture truth or be misled into living eventually very troubled lives (Isaiah 8:19-22 with Psalm 119:105).
- B. However, many believers are spiritually immature, unaware of this grave danger, so they are easily duped by errant influences, leading to a lot of trouble, 1 John 2:12 with Hebrews 5:11-14 and 1 John 2:14b.
- C. Accordingly, the more mature believer can achieve much good for the weaker believer through effective intercessory prayer in his behalf, a program described in James 5:16-20 (as follows):

**II. Godliness Relative To Praying Effectively For Spiritually Weaker Believers, James 5:16-20.**

- A. James 5:16a sums up the discussion about the elders who pray for spiritually oppressed believers in James 5:14-15 (see our last lesson in this series), and it directs weak Christians to confess their sins to fellow believers and to pray for one another that they might be spiritually restored.
- B. In line with this spiritual renewal, the word for "healed" (NIV, ESV and KJV) in James 5:16a is from the Greek New Testament word, *iathete*, referring here not to physical healing, but the figurative restoration of the inner man (Matt hew 13:15; Hebrews 12:13; 1 Peter 2:24), Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 835.
- C. Encouragement thus to pray for the spiritually weaker believer is the James 5:16b NIV revelation that "(t)he prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." [This concept of effective prayer due to personal experiential righteousness is supported by other passages like 1 John 3:22.]
- D. James then illustrated his claim by events in the life of the Old Testament prophet Elijah (James 5:17-18):
  - 1. Though subject to our same human nature's frailties as evidenced in his later faithless flight from Jezebel's death threat (James 5:17a with 1 Kings 19:1-9), Elijah nevertheless prayed earnestly first that there would be no rain, and it did not rain for 3 years, and he prayed again for the heavens to give rain and it rained abundantly for the earth to produce its crops, James 5:17b-18 with 1 Kings 18:42-46.
  - 2. Consequently, God enabled Elijah to outrun Ahab's horse chariot from Mount Carmel to Jezreel, a distance of about 17 miles! (1 Kings 18:45-46; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to 1 Kings 18:45-46)
  - 3. This is an excellent Scripture illustration for James to use in this context of praying for weak believers, for Elijah's prayers first to have the rain withheld and then to have it rain were made to help convince a spiritually weak nation of Israel to cease wavering between worshipping Baal and the true God of Israel:
    - a. When Elijah addressed the gathered nation of Israel on Mount Carmel, he met at the place that the Phoenicians like Ahab's wife, Jezebel held was "the sacred dwelling place of Baal" in a competition with Baal priests to test whether Israel's God or Baal was the greater deity by which deity would ignite a sacrifice with a bolt from the sky like Baal was believed by the pagans to produce (1 Kings 18:19-24; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 526; Zond. Pict. Ency. of the Bible, vol. One, p. 432).
    - b. In this context, Elijah then asked the people of Israel: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." (1 Kings 18:21 NIV)
    - c. To this the people said nothing, showing embarrassment at their spiritual weakness, 1 Kings 18:21.
    - d. Thus, Elijah's prayer life for converting a spiritually weak Israel to God from Israel's mixed loyalty between God and Baal was an excellent illustration for James to use in this James 5:16-20 passage!
- E. James then claimed that if the spiritually weak believer wandered (*planethe*) from Scripture truth, the stronger believer was to restore him by means of intercessory prayer and ministry to save his soul from God's eventual discipline of physical death (1 John 5:16), and thus to "cover" [a figure for forgiveness, cf. Psalm 32:1] a multitude of sins, James 5:19-20 NIV; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 835.

***Lesson:*** *If we who are spiritually strong in relying more on Scripture than the weaker believer see him drift from the truth, we should earnestly pray that he return to the truth to avoid God's discipline.*

***Application:*** *May we who are stronger in godly love intercede this way for the weaker believer.*