

# The Prayer of Faith – Part 3

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – James urges believers to seek God in prayer to strengthen faith in every circumstance
2. aim – to cause us to earnestly seek the Lord in prayer as a means of strengthening our faith
3. passage – James 5:13-20

### b. outline

1. The Prayer of Faith (James 5:13-15)
2. The Prayer of Confession (James 5:16-18)
3. The Prayer of Restoration (James 5:19-20)

### c. opening

1. the **intention** of the epilogue of the letter
  - a. **question**: how can one live in a civilization, culture, society, nation, etc. that has come under the judgment of God in which he gives it over to its **worst impulses**? (not individually, corporately)
    1. specifically, how can a *lover of God* live in a time of great judgment without he, himself, falling prey to those impulses and (thus) fall away from his commitment to *that God*?
  - b. the answer to this question is *fundamentally* the point of the letter: the Christian is called to live by faith, a trust in God, *which transforms him* over against the world all around him
  - c. so, the **epilogue** (James 5:13-20) is a *practical* set of instructions on going about that task within the reality of a world filled with sin **and its effect upon us as we live in it**
2. the **nature** of the epilogue of the letter
  - a. a final set of verses designed to give some *practical* advice on how to implement the main point
  - b. a summary of **vv. 13-15**: regardless of circumstances (suffering, sickness, cheerfulness), the man of faith is to seek the *ordinary means of grace* [through the elders] for *spiritual* healing
    1. **IOW**: in whatever life brings, the Christian is to *submit himself* to the means that God has provided to *increase faith* and to be *transformed even more in it* – **the prayer of faith**
  - c. a summary of **v. 16**: the Christian is to *confess his sin* of faithlessness or doubt or confusion or infidelity in and to the promises of God
    1. **IOW**: the prayer of faith is to be **a prayer of confession** – the *means* God has ordained by which his will is done in the life of the believer – namely, the *purpose of God* to transform his own into fully devoted followers of Christ, holy and blameless in his sight, conformed to the image of his Son *through the “asking” of it by his people seeking his will for them*
    2. **IOW**: the prayer of faith is “effective” because it is what God has purposed to accomplish
  - d. **(now)** the biblical example that James will use to make his point ...
    1. **IMHO**: **the best possible example James could use here to demonstrate this truth**

## II. The Prayer of Confession (James 5:16-18)

### Content

#### c. the example of this prayer (vv. 17-18)

1. the history of Elijah
  - a. the kingdom of Israel divides between the N (Israel) and the S (Judah) c. 931BC
    1. ruled by David and Solomon as a united kingdom from 1010-930BC
    2. split by the decision of Rehoboam to continue his father’s unpopular taxation policy
  - b. the 10 N tribes secede from Solomonic rule, establishing a capital at Samaria under Jeroboam
    1. Jeroboam puts two “golden calves” at Dan and Bethel to prevent worship in Jerusalem
    2. the N was then ruled by a succession of evil kings, with Ahab coming to power 874-853BC
    3. **read 1 Kings 16:30-33** – Ahab was the most evil king of the N kingdom in its history
      - a. married a foreign pagan (Jezebel), and established (her) Baal worship *officially* in Israel
      - b. at this point, the worship of Yahweh has all but disappeared under Baal worship in the N
  - c. **read 1 Kings 17:1** – Elijah appears before Ahab c. 864BC (**see below**)
2. the place of Elijah (in the minds of the readers)
  - a. the *supernatural* ending of Elijah’s life (*i.e.* being taken to heaven in a whirlwind; **2 Kings 2**) had led to a kind of **mythology** growing up around him by the First Century (**27x in the Gospels**)

1. some perceived that Elijah *himself* would return as the Messiah (**Matthew 11:14; 16:14**)
2. more popularly, Elijah was believed to return as a *forerunner* of the Christ (**Matthew 17:10**)
  - a. many (like Jesus, **Matthew 17:12**) saw the “power” of Elijah in John the Baptist
  - b. or, as someone who would support the work of Messiah supernaturally (**Matthew 27:47**)
- b. this “mythology” of Elijah would be replaced in the mind of Christians as *representative* of the roles of Christ *himself* (e.g. the transfiguration of Jesus in **Matthew 17** [with Moses representing the law and Elijah representing the prophets; i.e. the entire history of Israel in Scripture] demonstrated his unique role of fulfilling *both* of roles in his Messiahship) – Christ was the *ultimate* Moses and Elijah
  1. thus, the example of Elijah in the early church was as a “pointer” to the *true Elijah*, one who’s nature and power was *without flaw of character*, revealing God *perfectly* (**see below**)
3. the events of Elijah (as used in the example)
  - a. **1 Kings 17:1** – Elijah announces before Ahab a 3½ year drought, producing a devastating famine
    1. **question:** is the declaration the *idea of Elijah*, or is it a pronouncement of God’s anger against Israel (and Ahab) for abandoning *him* as Lord, *or is it both*?
      - a. **note:** the “sense” in James’ rendition “seems to suggest” that Elijah desired this of the Lord, asked for it to happen, and God “granted” the request (i.e. as the *fervent* prayer)
      - b. **but:** it is much more likely that God had *purposed* to bring judgment upon Israel (because he was provoked to anger) and *compelled* Elijah to act *as his intermediary* by which that judgment would fall – i.e. it would be at Elijah’s word, but that word was *ordained* by God
        1. i.e. there is no mention of Elijah *praying* in the beginning of **1 Kings 17**
    2. the “prayer” of Elijah is him asking God *to do what God had already willed* – Elijah’s “prayer” (and subsequent “word”) become the *means* by which God’s will is done over Ahab
      - a. **note:** the synergist struggles here because his assumption is that God is *fundamentally passive* in his interactions with the world – i.e. God *acquiesces* to the choices of men, thus he *cannot* bring “judgment” upon people whom he is “forced” to love
      - b. **principle: God does bring judgment upon wayward people – he gives them what they want – they are granted the “freedom” to give in to their worst impulses**
    3. so, Elijah’s “prayer” is not to do what *he wants*, but to do *what God has already ordained*
      - a. the **prayer of faith** is just that: a *means* by which God’s will is done over us – we ask for him to strengthen us in our weaknesses *and he uses our request to do what he has already ordained to happen in us, fulfilling his purposes for us*
  - b. **1 Kings 18:41-44a** – Elijah announces the end of the drought and prays for the rain to come
    1. **question:** Elijah knows it is time for the rain to come (i.e. he says it directly to Ahab), yet *he is forced to pray seven (7) times before it rains* – why? – why does God “delay” the rain that is *promised* to come *by the word of Elijah* through seven (7) rounds of prayer?
    2. **answer:** does this not *force* Elijah into a sense of utter dependence upon God, to recognize that what is happening *through him* is *only* the will of God, *not his own*?
      - a. i.e. the need for Elijah to pray seven times to get *what was already promised* pushes out of Elijah any sense of pride in thinking that his “word” was the true source of power
      - b. i.e. in having his success over the prophets of Baal, Elijah may have been tempted to think of *himself* more highly than he ought, and God uses this **desperation** to drive that out
    3. **principle: the prayer of confession (and the effectual prayer of the righteous man) can never be based on our desires, but only upon the will of God over us**
      - a. the **prayer of faith** is to seek God’s will, *and to accept what that means over us*
4. the nature of Elijah (that makes the larger point)
  - a. **note:** the phrase in **James 5:17**: “a man with a nature like ours”
    1. **question:** given the success *proving* that Baal was a fiction, destroying the prophets of Baal, and causing the people to declare Yahweh to be Lord (**1 Kings 18:1-40**), along with the other miracles that had around him during the drought, **what was the true nature of Elijah’s faith**?
    2. James (**here**) appeals to the need **of seeing Elijah honestly (see above)** – a man who came with power, but was *human* (with human weakness) and subject to God’s *larger* will
  - b. **1 Kings 19:1-3; 14, 18** – Elijah runs from the threat of Jezebel and encounters God
    1. Elijah’s *true nature* “shines forth” – he is subject, **like all of us**, to moments of doubt, of hesitancy, of confusion, of worry, of danger in thinking that the promises of God are inadequate
      - a. **the “culture” attacked** – Jezebel (the high priestess of Baal worship) had threatened him, and he had run thinking that God would not protect him, or that he was the “only one” who truly knew Yahweh and that it was over for Israel and he should just die

2. **question:** how do we live in a culture that has given itself over to its worst impulses – do we just “give in” or live in fear of what “they” might do to us – do we just *assume* that there’s no way to live godly lives in such a place, and run and hide in a cave, cowering for our lives?
3. **answer:** the **prayer of confession** is to admit our weakness, but it is also to be reminded that God has a remnant of those *he is holding fast to himself*
  - a. the remnant was a people that God *himself* preserved from falling to the enemy
  - b. Christ has promised that he will lose “nothing” of all God has given him (**John 6:39**)
  - c. therefore, Elijah becomes **an example to us in our moments of weakness**
5. the application of Elijah (that connects him to the context)
  - a. Elijah was **the perfect example** for James to use in this context:
    1. he was a man who struggled with his faith in God
    2. but, he was also a man held fast by God through the means God had provided
  - b. **principle: what the doubting believer needs is a word of revelation, of illumination, of exhortation within his or her circumstances that leads to greater faith through them**
    1. **the power of the Spirit through the ordinary means of teaching, praying, and confessing**  
“[The father of the convulsive child said,] ‘But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.’<sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’”  
**(Mark 9:22b-24)**