

Introduction: The New Testament highlights Elijah in several notable ways, including his presence on the Mount of Transfiguration and his ministry being repeated and fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist. But nowhere *do we find more personal comfort and encouragement* from the life of Elijah than in the testimony of James that “Elijah was a man just like us.” See James 5:16-18. May the LORD encourage us in this week’s Bible notes as we learn from Elijah some of the secrets of powerful and effective prayer.

Mon/Tues/Weds: read 1 Kings 18:36-38. Before studying the most famous of Elijah’s prayers and the dramatic answer to it in the mighty rains of 1 Kings 18:41-46, we must make sure we appreciate Elijah’s short but mighty prayer before the fire of Heaven fell down in 1 Kings 18:36-38. Here is one faithful translation of what Elijah says:

And when they should offer the *evening* sacrifice, Elijah the Prophet came and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art the God of Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy commandment.

Hear me, O Lord, hear me, and let this people know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart again at the last. (1599 Geneva Bible)

Here are some key lessons about this first prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:

- 1) It was thoroughly covenantal. In other words, Elijah appealed to the unchanging covenant of God’s grace as it was first ratified to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The stones of the re-built altar that Elijah used were in memory of God’s covenant people, the sons of Jacob.
- 2) It appealed to the LORD’s unchanging commitment to His people. Just as the LORD appeared to Jacob and his twelve sons in Genesis 35, reconsecrating them as His people through accepted sacrifices at Bethel, so Elijah’s altar and sacrifice are meant to be a reconsecration of Israel after years of idolatry.
- 3) Elijah’s prayer depended on God’s power to grant the grace of repentance to Israel. Look at the prophet’s words in 1 Kings 18:37 (KJV): “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.*” It is the LORD alone who turns our hearts back to Himself. He alone has the power to change the direction of our lives. Elijah accordingly prays that God’s people would with gratitude realize that God has sent repentance upon their hearts, changing the course of their lives and destinies by His grace.
- 4) Elijah’s prayer was answered with fire from Heaven. God showed His acceptance of Elijah’s burnt offering sacrificed for the sins of the nation by consuming it on the altar.
- 5) God’s people then fall down with what must have been holy fear mingled with joy in being taken back into the fold as God’s own. The first time fire appeared as a sign that Israel was accepted in their worship was that joyful time when Aaron’s priestly sacrifice was consumed and the glory of God descended on the Tabernacle in Leviticus 9:23-24! Now that joy returns once again.

Meditate and Pray: “LORD of fire, power and grace. Please accept us in our devotion and prayers to you, as we claim only the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God, consumed by your fire on the Cross for our sins. We give you our lives, service, future, plans, ambitions and longings. Please send your fire from Heaven again, that we

might rejoice at the power of answered prayer in our lives, as Jesus prays for us with even more power and effectiveness than Elijah. Amen.”

Thursday: read 1 Kings 18:41-46. Having seen God powerfully answer His pray for the repentance of the nation and the acceptance of their sacrificial worship via the fire from Heaven, Elijah turns to the much more difficult task of interceding for the rains to fall on the drought-stricken Land of Israel, which has been polluted by the sins of God’s people. As some old preachers used to put it, “It is much harder to bring rain to cleanse away sin than it is to bring fire from Heaven to judge it.” Elijah is an example of persevering prayer until God’s grace falls.

Meditate and Pray: In our day, we don’t often think that the sins of a nation and its individual citizens pollutes the land in which they dwell. But Scripture is clear. Though we do not live in the days of a theocracy, it is nevertheless still true that the Providence and Grace of God watch over a land in days of blessing (Deuteronomy 11:10-12), and it is God’s curse that rests on a land when it is being chastised for sin. (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)

No wonder, given the amount of bloody idolatry among God’s people, it took much prayer and lying prostrate before the LORD before the cloud of promised rain appeared. Sing about waiting for such days of revival, using this old hymn from *Songs of Zion* (1822) by James Montgomery:

*Almighty Spirit, now behold
A world by sin destroyed:
Creating Spirit, as of old,
Move on the formless void,
Move on the formless void.*

*If sang the morning stars for joy,
When nature rose to view,
What strains will angel harps employ,
When Thou shalt all renew,
When Thou shalt all renew!*

*Give Thou the Word: that healing sound
Shall quell the deadly strife;
And earth again, like Eden crowned,
Bring forth the tree of life,
Bring forth the tree of life.*

*And if the sons of God rejoice
To hear a Savior’s name,
How will the ransomed raise their voice
To whom that Savior came,
To whom that Savior came!*

Friday: read 1 Kings 18:41-46. The next fact to note about Elijah’s prayer for rain is that, in order to pray for the promised rains after three and a half years of drought, Elijah goes back up Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18:42. Moved by God’s grace, Elijah was willing to pray for this nation, though it had contemptuously rejected the ministry of the LORD’s prophets. Such is real prayer – an extension of mercy and grace towards people who don’t deserve it.

But that is not all. Notice in the third place that Elijah shows us what is always the *starting place* for effective prayer. It must begin as an expression of faith, and *normally not as a panicked plea for a sign in order to establish faith*. In other words, Elijah by faith heard the “abundance of rain” when the sky was blue. He believed God’s Word that rain would come, and from an experience of that reality, he prayed.

Meditate and Pray: Ask the LORD to increase your faith in His power to send showers of blessing, even in our parched day of sin and idolatry. Sing the following hymn:

*1 How sweet and awesome is the place
with Christ within the doors,
while everlasting love displays
the choicest of her stores.*

*2 While all our hearts and all our songs
join to admire the feast,
each of us cries, with thankful tongue,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"*

*3 "Why was I made to hear your voice,
and enter while there's room,
when thousands make a wretched choice,
and rather starve than come?"*

*4 'Twas the same love that spread the feast
that sweetly drew us in;
else we had still refused to taste,
and perished in our sin.*

*5 Pity the nations, O our God,
constrain the earth to come;
send your victorious Word abroad,
and bring the strangers home.*

*6 We long to see your churches full,
that all the chosen race
may, with one voice and heart and soul,
sing your redeeming grace.*