

Sunday School Lesson
James 5:13-18
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Solving Problems God's Way



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Quick Links to the Study

I. [Context](#)

- a. [Historical](#)
- b. [Literary](#)

II. [Message](#)

- a. [Situations needing prayer, vv. 13-14](#)
- b. [Prayer's power to meet these needs, vv. 15-16b](#)
- c. [An example of powerful praying, vv. 16c-18](#)

How do you solve your problems? Especially, health problems? This study in James addresses that issue in three problem areas: suffering ill fortune, cheerfulness, and illness. Illness receives the greatest attention by James, perhaps because it represented a major issue in the ancient world. For James, one solution stood as the key to solving life's problems: prayer

The dominant theme of these verses is prayer. In the passage James uses three different Greek word groups to refer to prayer: προσεύχομαι (vb. *proseuchomai*), προσευχή, ἡ (n. *proseuche*); εὐχή, ἡ (n., *euche*); εὐχομαι (vb., *euchomai*) and δέσις, ἡ (*deasis*). Logically, we ask, Why did James use three different words for prayer? The prayer vocabulary of James pretty much covers the gamut of NT Greek vocabulary on prayer. The prayer labeled with the noun δέσις, ἡ and from the verb form δέομαι underscores a request made to God out of an urgent sense of need. Thus James underscores with the assertion, "[The prayer \(δέσις\) of the righteous is powerful and effective](#)" (v. 16b), that such prayer originates out of realization of great need both in our lives and need of God's help. A sense of urgency permeates this idea of prayer. The other two sets of terms, προσευχή, ἡ (n), προσεύχομα (vb) and εὐχή, ἡ (n); εὐχομαι (vb) represent more generalized terms for prayer and praying. As Louw-Nida suggest (1:409), some greater focus on the person to whom the request is made possibly exists with προσεύχομα, but this cannot be determined with usage in the New Testament.



Additionally, allusions to prayer permeate the passage. For example, the singing of a hymn (ψάλλω) is referring to a prayer of praise to God offered musically. In sum, James covers the full range of prayer terms in this passage. As such it becomes a very helpful passage in the New Testament for studying the concept of prayer. No prayer itself is preserved, but this is not unusual, since the NT has far less tendency to preserve specific prayers than is true of the OT. The one point that James stresses above all: prayer is central and possesses tremendous potential for solving the problems that a believer faces in life.

Another important background issue to Jas. 5:13-18 is the history of interpretation concerns. In Roman Catholic tradition this passage has been viewed as a major scriptural basis for the sacrament of last rites. This has also been labeled Extreme Uncion, but since Vatican Council II is officially called the [Sacrament of Anointing the Sick](#). Traditionally, this sacrament would be administered to those in good standing with the Church when they were at the point of death. This because proper administering of the sacrament by an ordained priest was understood to bring forgiveness of sins -- something critically important for one facing imminent death as a Roman Catholic. This understanding of James 5:13-18 posed huge problems, along with that of James 2:14-26, for the Reformer Martin Luther in the 1500s. The entire [sacramental system](#) of Roman Catholicism was rejected by Luther, and subsequently by virtually all Protestant Christians. In spite of the expansion and updating of this sacrament by Pope Paul VI in 1975 at Vatican Council II, this interpretation lifts a scripture passage out of context and attempts to eisogete an established tradition down on to the scripture. This reverses the authentic role of scripture interpretation.



As a side note. Anyone interested in a deeper study of James should check out my studies of James, first developed in written form years ago at Southwestern Seminary for MDiv students at the Greek text and English Bible levels, and subsequently modified for lay students in the Center for Congregational Enrichment at Gardner-Webb University. It is located at <http://cranfordville.com/DSLIRJamesframe.htm>. An even more simplified approach is **The Study of James** used in winter Bible studies in several churches; it is located at <http://cranfordville.com/Cranfordville/JamesStudy.html>. These studies were developed from *A Study Manual on the Epistle of James: English Text*, published by Scripta Publishing in 1987, and then followed by *A Study Manual on the Epistle of James: Greek Text*, (Scripta Publishing, 1988, rev. ed. 1991). I have been at the business of teaching the book of James in churches and in seminary and university classes since 1968. Each time I open it up, something new and fresh jumps off its pages to enlighten and excite.

I Context

The relevant background material from [the previous study](#) of Jas. 2:14-16 will be utilized here.

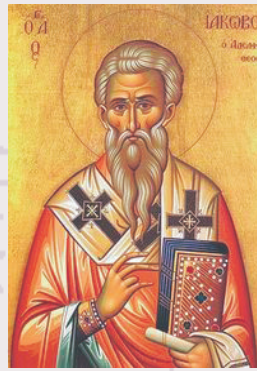
a. Historical

External History. The **external history** has to focus on the only clearly letter aspect of the entire book in 1:1 - "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: *Greetings.*"

The document identifies itself in the letter Praescriptio (1:1) as coming from James. He identifies himself as a servant of God and of Christ. Early church tradition identified this James as the brother of Jesus and of Jude. Several Christian leaders by the name of [James](#) surface in the New Testament. Among the Twelve apostles there was James the brother of John and their father was Zebedee. Also there was James, son of Alphaeus. There was a James whose mother was Mary; this could possibly

be Alphaeus' son but the text isn't clear (Mt. 27:56). According to Mk. 6:3, Jesus was "the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas [=Jude] and Simon," as well as some unnamed sisters. This James also became the leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem by the 50s of the first century. At the Jerusalem council meeting in AD 48 ([Acts 15](#)), James, the elder, stands as the spokesman for the various house church leaders in and around Jerusalem, while Peter spoke at that meeting representing the apostles. One of the literary links between the letter of James and the Act 15 James is the construction of the Praescriptio part of the two letters. In Acts 15:23-29 the letter composed by James to be

sent to the church at Antioch begins in the Praescriptio with “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, **greetings.**” The common link is the identical Salutatio (“greetings”) of both letters. The single Greek word *χαίρειν* (*chairein*) is the traditional Greek letter Salutatio, but is found only three times in the entire New Testament. Two of these connect the same James to the two letters.



the church father Origen in the early 200s. James, along with some other NT documents, were relegated to a secondary status and moved to an appendix position at the end of Luther’s translation. Luther’s idea of a “canon within the canon” is still debated in scholarly circles, although the revisions of Luther’s German translation removed the appendix status of James in the 1904 revision.

Early in the second century the title James the Just begins showing up (Gospel of Thomas log. 12; Gospel according to the Hebrews). This terminology became the standard way of referring to this James. At the beginning of the 200s, the Clementine [Recognitions \(1.43-72\)](#) contains one of the most detailed accounts of early church tradition about James the Just. The common tradition is that James was martyred by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem about AD 62 out of jealousy stemming from the intense piety of James that was attracting hundreds of Jews in Jerusalem to Christian faith (cf. Hegesippus, *Memoranda*, as quoted by Eusebius, *Church History*, 2.23.11). The Jewish historian Josephus records this account of the death of James: “Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananis II, the high priest] assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned...” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.200).

But this early church tradition about James did not guarantee a quick adoption of the book of James into the canon of the New Testament. Uncertainty over whether the James of Acts 15 was the same person mentioned in Jas. 1:1 persisted until the middle 300s when the link between the two prevailed and the book of James found a secure place in the canon of the NT at the head of the seven general letters section (Jas - Jude). This was more widely adopted in western (Roman Catholic) Christianity than in the eastern (Orthodox) branch of Christianity. Then with the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s questions about James arose again, in part driven by a view that 2:14-26 flatly contradicted the view of salvation advocated by Paul (salvation by grace through faith in Paul versus salvation by faith and works in James). Martin Luther resolved this issue by adopting the idea of the canon first found in

Assuming the accuracy of the church tradition that links the Acts 15 and Letter of James to the Lord’s brother, when was this material put together? And under what circumstances? Although various proposals can be found, I have been convinced for a long time that the material came together sometime from the end of the 50s to the middle 60s. As has been widely recognized for several centuries, the book of James has only an appearance of a letter. In fact, 1:1 (the Praescriptio) is the only identifiable letter aspect in the entire document. If not a letter, then what is it? It stands in the tradition of an ancient Jewish homily (see below under Literary Genre). As such, the material represents, most likely, segments of James’ preaching to the Christian community in Jerusalem that have been brought together in a single document. This was done by disciples of James either shortly before or soon after his martyrdom in AD 62 as a way of preserving the amazing ministry of this Christian leader. The document is then distributed as a tractate with an epistolary introduction (1:1). The material was collected into a single document by disciples of James and targeted primarily to Jewish Christians located in Christian communities scattered over the eastern Mediterranean world as the storm clouds of the Zealot revolt in Palestine in the 60s began casting uncertainty over the continued existence of the Jewish people in Palestine. About two decades before, Stephen’s martyrdom had brought about a scattering of the Christian community from Jerusalem from persecution (Acts 11:19-20) and then later Herod came close to killing Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 12:1-19). It didn’t take a rocket scientist’s intellect to figure out that when the explosion came between the Jews and the Romans, the Jewish Christians would be caught in the cross fire and would be the first casualties of that explosion.

One of the aims of this document is shared with the Gospel of Matthew: to set forth the legitimate claims of Christianity to Jewish Christians as a reli-

gious commitment blessed by God and standing in the great Jewish tradition of relationship with God being interconnected to relationships with others. Thus, many parallels between principles advocated in James and by Jesus in Matthew's gospel can be detected; more than with any of the other gospel accounts.

Internal History. Time and place markers inside 5:13-18 are generalized and not specific to any one historical situation. The role of prayer is set forth in timeless truth form that applies to any moment in the life of the community of faith. The two settings addressed in the passage are the local fellowship of believers and the historical situation of Elijah some 800 plus years earlier. For James, 'church' meant a group of believers who mostly met in someone's home. Elders then meant the spiritual leaders of each group, such as the lengthy list provided by Paul

in Romans 16. In an era before formal ordination to clerical ministry, James would have had in mind those called out and chosen by the group to function as leaders. And according to the pattern at Rome (cf. Rom. 16), this could be women or men, or husband - wife teams. Church for James meant small groups of people typically about two or three dozen family members. Great caution should be exercised to avoid assuming a modern ecclesiastical structure in James' references. Such just wasn't the case. For certain, no denominational structure was intended or assumed by James! Thus the interpretive process must remain exegetical, not isogetical. That is, the first century historical setting must frame the meaning of the passage. Then efforts at bridging the 2,000 year time distance between then and now shape the possible applications of the passage to our world.

b. Literary

Genre. The question of the **genre** of the book of James will impact the interpretive approach to its contents. As mentioned above, although James is traditionally classified as an ancient letter, it bears hardly any resemblance to an ancient letter past 1:1. The introductory epistolary Praescriptio (1:1) does have strong tones of an ancient Greek letter, but nothing else beyond that part. The dominating tone of the contents, that reflect high frequency of admonitions containing broad generalized demands, push the document toward a pattern found in the existing ancient Jewish homily type documents. At this point James shares in common the same essential literary form with Hebrews which identifies itself as a Jewish homily in 13:22 ("word of exhortation"; ὁ λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως). Both documents are targeting Jewish Christian readers as well.

Distinctive features of 5:13-18 include the use of a series of rhetorical questions, each followed by an admonition providing a solution to the concern raised in the question. James' use of Elijah as an OT example is typical of his style. He appealed to the prophets in general as well as to Job as examples of patience in 5:10-11. Abraham surfaces as a major OT example (cf. 2:20-23), along with Rahab (2:25), of saving faith. Basically, 5:13-18 reflects ancient paraenesis, very much along the lines of Jewish wisdom admonition to specific spiritual and moral behavior. But most all the content of James follows this pattern; each pericope both using and modifying ancient Jewish moral admonition.

Literary Setting. It is this literary genre that gives James a very distinctive literary structure. Modern western interpreters struggle over grasping the thought flow internally in the document, because it follows a pattern somewhat like Proverbs in the Old Testament. The Jewish wisdom literary tone of the contents structures the contents in a very loose, almost miscellaneous pattern of expression. Two or three themes repeatedly pop to the surface, like a dolphin swimming out to sea, as one moves through the contents. But these reoccurring topics are the nearest thing to a progressive thought flow that can be legitimately observed in the book. One of the easiest motifs to detect is "hearing and/or speaking" in 1:19-27; 2:3; 12, 16, 18; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:12. True wisdom is prominent in 1:5-8 and 3:13-18. Authentic religious commitment with an emphasis on concrete expression in actions surfaces several times (1:9-12, 22-27; 2:12, 14-26; 4:1-10, 13-17; 5:7-11). Because of this internal arrangement of materials, I proposed years ago in a publication [an outline](#) of James (see the outline at the end of this material) that attempts to address these distinctive arrangements of materials.)

In light of this, 5:13-18 comes at the end of the book, perhaps as part of a concluding segment. But this entirely depends upon interpreting a phrase Πρὸ πάντων ("above all things") in 5:12 as signaling a shift to the conclusion of the book. Most scholars don't see the meaning of the phrase as doing this. Much more likely the phrase simply emphasizes the top

priority of the admonition about oath making in 5:12.

Thus 5:13-18 follows as an emphasis on prayer, and is followed by the brief admonition in 5:19-20 in reclaiming a wayward Christian brother. Given the miscellaneous nature of paranesis one should be

extremely hesitant to assert connecting theme patterns in these final three pericopes of the book. Much more likely, these three passages represent a miscellaneous insertion of materials considered to be valuable in the preaching ministry of James.

II. Message

Literary Structure. The internal thought flow of the passage moves in a basic threefold pattern, as is reflected in detail by the [Semantic Diagram](#) and [Exegetical Outline](#) in the larger internet version of this study. **First** comes the threefold set of rhetorical questions with admonitional replies touching on misfortune, joy, and illness (vv. 13-14). **Next** is the powerful assertions regarding the potential of prayer which was the proposed response to the situations in the first section (vv. 15-16). **Finally**, the example of the OT prophet Elijah is provided as evidence of the potency of prayer (vv. 17-18). The nature of this idea structure can be compared to steps; each one builds and extends the idea of the previous one. This can be seen in greater detail in the [Block Diagram](#) of the Greek text at the end of the internet version of the lesson.

a. Situations needing prayer, vv. 13-14

Greek NT

<5:13> Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσευχέσθω· εὐθυμεῖ τις, ψαλλέτω· <5:14> ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας, καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου.

NASB

13 Is anyone among you suffering? 12 Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

NRSV

13 Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. 14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

NLT

13 Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord. 14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

Notes:

James identifies three situations that happened to believers in his day: misfortune, joy, and illness. Defining the precise boundaries of the three verbs is central to understanding the point of James.

James first asks, Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν? Literally, the compound verb *κακοπαθεῖ* (*kakopatheo*) means to “suffer bad things.” In Jas. 5:10, the experiencing of hardships from persecution (*κακοπαθεία*) by the OT prophets, coupled with their perseverance (*μακροθυμία*), is held up as exemplary for Christians. Paul describes his experience of hardship from persecution (*κακοπαθέω*) as reaching to the point of being chained in prison (2 Tim. 2:9). And in 2 Tim. 4:5 he admonished Timothy to be willing to suffer the same thing (*κακοπαθέω*). Thus, in James’ context with the three other instances of either the noun or verb form in the NT, he is raising the issue of believers’ suffering persecution. This is the central thrust of his question.

Suffering in general is defined by a series of other

nouns and verbs, which have only very limited connection to the verb used in 5:13. The Louw - Nida Greek lexicon lists a wide range of nouns and verbs under the English domain of “suffer / ing” (cf. vol. 2, page 324 for listing; particularly important are categories 24.77-94). For *κακοπαθέω* / *κακοπαθεία* (cf. 24.89) they list the broad meaning as “to suffer physical pain, hardship and distress—‘to suffer distress, to suffer pain, suffering hardship.’” While this defines the word group generally, the NT usage focuses on hardship derived from opposition to the religious stance that one has taken. Other terms designate suffering in more general categories.

Thus James is assuming that his readers are suffering various kinds of opposition because of their Christian faith. Allison Trites (“Persecution,” Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, Logos Systems) provides a helpful summation of persecution in the

biblical world:

Suffering imposed on persons or groups, a common theme throughout the Bible (e.g., Esth. 3:6). God's servants frequently faced opposition and hostility (1 Kgs. 18:13; Matt. 23:34–37; 1 Thess. 2:14–15). The psalmists struggled with hostile pursuers and sought divine deliverance (Ps. 7:1, 5 [MT 2, 6]; 31:15 [16]; 69:26–29 [27–30]). The prophets also wrestled with opposition (cf. Acts 7:52) and prayed for vindication (Jer. 15:15; 17:18).

The intertestamental period saw intense suffering inflicted by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The horrible Maccabean martyrdoms, vividly described in 2 Macc. 6–7, challenged Jews and Christians to be faithful.

The NT contains frequent references to persecution (Mark 10:30; Luke 11:49–51; Gal. 6:12). Jesus was persecuted (Luke 4:29; John 5:16) and suffered mocking, beating, and crucifixion. He told his followers to expect similar treatment (Matt. 10:23; 24:9; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12; John 15:20; 16:2). These occasions were not to be feared, for the Holy Spirit would give them courage (Luke 12:11–12; 21:15; Acts 1:8).

Persecution continued in the early Church (Acts 5:17–42; 8:1; 11:19; 13:50; 14:19; 16:19–24); note the militant pre-Christian activities of Saul of Tarsus (8:3; 9:1–13; 22:4–8; 26:9–15). Herod Agrippa I put James to death (Acts 12:2), Stephen was martyred (7:54–8:1a), and Christians were persecuted by the emperors Nero and Domitian. Nevertheless the Spirit would empower disciples to bear witness in such unpromising circumstances (Acts 2:4; 4:8–13; 6:10; 7:55).

Paul wrote of his shame for having persecuted disciples (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6; cf. 1 Tim. 1:13) and counseled Christians to bless those who persecute them (Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12–13). Paul declared that the resources he had discovered in Christ enabled believers to cope with any form of persecution (Rom. 8:31–39). He mentioned his own persecutions to encourage them in facing theirs (2 Cor. 1:5–7; 4:8–12; 12:10; cf. 2 Thess. 1:4; 2 Tim. 3:11–12).

1 Peter recalled the example of Christ's suffering to strengthen believers who faced persecution and social ostracism (1 Pet. 2:18–25; 3:13–18; 4:1–2, 12–19). Similarly, Hebrews reminded readers to take encouragement in facing persecution from the example of Jesus and other heroes of faith (Heb. 12:1–4; 11:4–40). John likewise called Christians to follow Jesus, "the faithful and true witness" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). Antipas had already suffered martyrdom (Rev. 2:13), and others might face similar persecution. However, they would overcome the demonic forces by using the same spiritual weapons which Christ had used (Rev. 12:11; 17:14; 21:7).

Persecution is taken seriously in the Bible, and

the righteous are told to expect it (2 Tim. 3:12). Despite its painfulness, persecution can become a means of blessing to those who handle it in the right manner (Matt. 5:10–12; 1 Pet. 4:12–14).

In framing the question with a present tense Greek verb, James assumes that this experience is ongoing, rather than an isolated occurrence. The "among you" assumes that the opposition is targeting individuals within the community of believers, rather than the community itself. The specific situations assumed by James are not spelled out. Thus we can't identify exactly what James had in mind beyond the generalized opposition to these believers.

Just as their suffering was ongoing, so also their need of ongoing prayer was the same -- as the present tense of the Greek verb admonishing them to pray reflects.

What were they to pray for during times of persecution? James doesn't spell this out, as his use of the Greek verb for generalized praying (προσευχέσθω) suggests. From his heavy dependence on the same oral Jesus tradition as used by Matthew, one could venture to suggest that part of the content of such praying would be the sixth petition of the Lord's prayer: "And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one" (Mt. 6:13, [NRSV](#)). Perhaps from the preceding context of some believers suffering abuse at the hands of the wealthy landowners ([5:1-11](#)), another part of that praying could be the request for patience and perseverance. The ability to walk the same path that Jesus did when appearing before Pilate in his trial, as 5:6 alludes to.

Secondly James asks, εὐθυμεῖ τις? The Greek



verb εὐθυμέω (*euthumeo*) is but one of many words in the NT referring to encouragement and joy. For a detailed listing see the Louw-Nida Greek lexicon categories 25.146 - 155. The verb εὐθυμέω, which is virtually synonymous with εὐψυχέω (*eupsuchoo*), underscores a good feeling. Etymologically εὐθυμέω refers to something that causes us to "be warmed well." Of the two NT instances of εὐθυμέω the other is found in Acts 27:22, where Paul was encouraging those on board the ship caught up in the storm: "I urge you now to **keep up your courage** (εὐθυμεῖν), for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship." The single use of εὐψυχέω (lit. "to have one's soul renewed") is in Phil. 2:19 where Paul says, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I **may be**

cheered (εὐψυχῶ) by news of you.” Thus, the point of James’ question is to ask whether something producing a really good feeling is happening to them.

The response to such situations is to praise God in song. The verb ψάλλω (*psallo*) is used five times in the NT with the meaning (L-N, 1:401):



“to sing songs of praise, with the possible implication of instrumental accompaniment (in the NT often related to the singing of OT psalms)—‘to sing, to sing a psalm, to sing a song of praise, to sing praises.’ τῷ ὀνόματί σου ψαλῶ ‘I will sing praises to your name’ or ‘I will sing praises to you’ Ro 15.9.

The emphasis of James is that in every instance, the good (here) and the bad (misfortune and illness on either side of the good), we are to reach out to God. Again, the present tense use of εὐθυμεῖ and ψαλλέτω assume the ongoing instances of good things happening.

Thirdly James asks, ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν? The meaning of the Greek verb used here, ἀσθενέω (*astheneo*), ranges from physical illness to weaknesses of various sorts, such as moral, physical, mental etc. The exegetical question here is whether James is referring just to physical illness or physical and/or emotional weakness. Mixed signals are given in the following elaboration in v. 15. The phrase σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος (*shall deliver the exhausted one and the Lord will lift him up*) could include both those who are sick and those feeling severe weakness, physically and/or emotionally. Very possibly, the terms James used are intentionally inclusive of both areas of difficulty. Life was hard and harsh in that world, and could weigh people down to immobility. Sickness was frightfully threatening since most people did not recover from severe diseases and illnesses. Of course, in that ancient world especially physical weakness and physical illness were very closely related concepts.

This time James admonishes the person experiencing this to involve the congregation more directly in seeking God’s help through prayer. The two verbs used here, προσκαλεσάσθω (*proskalesastho*) and προσευξάσθωσαν (*proseuxsasthosan*), shift tense from the present tense as in the above verbs to the Aorist tense in the Greek. The significance of this is to heighten the urgency of calling in the spiritual leaders for prayer. Who are the τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας? Literally, the term means the older ones of the congregation. The background of this term

reaches to the Jewish synagogue as its beginning model. This in turn had grown out of the system of leadership that evolved among the Jewish people from the time of Moses. Once in the promised land, each village developed a council of leaders comprised of the older men in the village. They ruled on matters related to administering the Law to various situations taking place in the village. When the synagogue surfaced in the intertestamental era this model was adapted to the community of Jewish people devoutly seeking to follow the Law of Moses. They served as the leaders of the synagogue. In early Christianity when most all Christians came out of a Jewish background, this synagogue model was simply applied to the house churches that developed from the preaching of the gospel. The major modification of the Jewish model was the relaxation of the age and gender patterns. One did not have to be above 50 years, the typical meaning of the comparative adjective πρεσβύτερος, and a male in order to serve as a spiritual leader of the community of believers. Spiritual maturity in Christian faith and commitment was the criteria, as is reflected in 1 Timothy and Titus. As is reflected in Acts, the leaders of the various house churches in a town or city served as a leadership group for Christians in that region. In Jerusalem, James himself functioned as a leader of these leaders, as is clearly reflected in Acts 15. The word ἐκκλησία (*church*) could then refer in this instance to individual house church groups in a region, or to all the groups collectively. More likely the former.



James urges the disabled person to quickly summon these leaders. First, they are to anoint the person with olive oil; then they are to pray over the individual in the name of the Lord. That is, they are to invoke the presence and power of God represented by His name in order to bring healing.

The use of olive oil here is not entirely clear. In biblical history, oil could symbolize the presence and blessing of God either in calling to ministry or for healing from illnesses. It was used as an act of hospitality for guests arriving at one’s home. It was understood to have medical value. King Herod periodically took baths in hot olive oil for his health. The passage mentioning olive oil in the NT that is closest in meaning to this one is Mk. 6:13 - “They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them” (NRSV). Clearly in Mark, olive oil

played both a symbolical role indicating God's presence and also a medical role, as the apostles spread out over Galilee preaching the gospel under the commissioning of Jesus. Very likely this same meaning is intended by James here.

What connection do these verses have to believers in our world? One central point is without dispute: God's presence and power should play a foundational role in both good times and bad times. The sandwiching of two instances of bad times around the good times of joy underscores the fullness of reaching out to God in every circumstance. We tend to want God's help in bad times, but want Him to leave us alone with things are going well. But that's to seek spiritual nourishment from two pieces of

bread while leaving out the meat between them. Not very nourishing!

Also, this passage underscores the community aspect of all these experiences. We share both the good and the bad with fellow believers in the community of faith. They comprise a network of people praying for us by invoking God's blessing upon our lives.

The prayers of the elders has little or nothing to do with Roman Catholic Extreme Uncion, nor with some Protestant Christians seeing these prayers as making medical treatment by doctors unnecessary. Both represent mistaken distortions of what James encouraged believers to do.

b. Prayer's power to meet these needs, vv. 15-16b

Greek NT

<5:15> καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· κἄν ἀμαρτίας ἢ πεποικώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ. <5:16> ἐξομολογεῖσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἀμαρτίας καὶ εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων ὅπως ἰαθῆτε.

NASB

15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

NRSV

15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

NLT

15 And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. 16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Notes:

The emphasis upon prayer in these two verses shifts to a depiction of its power to meet all needs that are present in the lives of believers. These verses divide naturally in the Greek text into two sections found in verse 15 and then verse 16. The connecting link between them is the inferential conjunction οὖν (*therefore*), which introduces verse 16. The admonitions to confess sins and pray for one another in verse 16 grow out of the principle of prayer's power set forth in verse 15: prayer has power, thus we need to use it in the context of spiritual health.

First, the power of prayer. What kind of prayer should be used? James calls it ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως. What does this imply? The NASB and NLT translate this Greek phrase as "*prayer offered in faith.*" But the NRSV simply renders it as "*the prayer of faith.*" Clearly in light of James' extensive use of the word for faith some 16 times with 16 of those in chapters one and two, faith is something far more profound than "believing that you'll get what you ask for." Faith means unconditional trust in and commitment to God, as

the first two chapters of James make abundantly clear.

In the context of this statement, James is primarily linking this prayer in faith to the elders who pray for the sick person. The NLT correctly render the Greek text "*their prayer in faith.*" In Greek this involves understanding τῆς πίστεως as the subjective Genitive case function with the noun of action ἡ εὐχὴ.

This kind of prayer accomplishes two things, or really one thing described two ways: σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος. It will deliver the worn out person from his problem. Put the second way with the same essential meaning: the Lord will raise up that person from his debilitating problem. The role of faith and the power of Jesus to lift people from their beds of affliction in [the healing miracles](#) described in the gospels comes to mind here. And most likely was what James had in the back of his mind as well.

Also, such faith has spiritual impact upon the sick person as well as the point of forgiveness of sins.

Just as Jesus' healing miracles often stressed faith and additionally God's forgiveness of sins, James asserts the same point here: "anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven."

Often we find difficulty with forgiveness of sin being linked so closely with healing from physical disease. Added to that, it seems as though it's the faith of someone else that brings divine forgiveness.

Probably our problem with this stems from separating physical illness and spiritual illness too much. In the ancient Judeo-Christian world these two were closely linked, although they were not synonymous. Sin and sickness had -- and have -- a profound, yet mysterious connection. Their connection is not necessarily causal; that is, one is not always caused by the other, although sometimes this is the case. I wish I understood this linkage better, but this I do know: it's there and so deep that it defies simple human understanding.

Thus when the kind of faith that James describes in his writing is brought to bear on one of these two issues, it also impacts the other in positive ways.

Next, the right way to use prayer. Growing out of this understanding of prayer comes two direct commands from James: confess sins to one another, and pray for one another. Both Greek verbs, *ἐξομολογεῖσθε* and *εὐχεσθε*, are couched in the Greek present tense imperative mood. The means that the two obligations are ongoing, continuous demands, not a one time responsibility. Confession and praying are to be done as an integral part of Christian living.

The shift to the second person plural verbs, 'ya'll be doing these things,' underscores the obligation of the entire community of faith, not just the leaders.

What is the intended impact? The purpose statement sums it up pointedly: "so that you may be healed." Spiritual and physical health in the individual lives of the members is linked to prayer, and powerful prayer



is linked to the spiritual health of the entire community of faith.

How can the believing community achieve the necessary spiritual health in order to be able to pray with this power? James points to two responsibilities. They must flush out sin in their lives through confession, yea, public confession. And second, they must be constantly lifting each other up to God in intercession for His blessing.

Praying for one another, we can understand, although I doubt that most church members do much of it. It's the other thing that is troublesome. Public confession of sin? That's not easy. Even though

movie stars, professional athletes, and politicians seem to be able to breeze through public confession quite easily in our day. But this kind of thing has nothing to do with what James is talking about. Confession as a reflection of being sorry you got caught and as a desperation effort to save one's career is not biblical confession in any sense of the word.

The parameters of James' admonition, *ἐξομολογεῖσθε ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἀμαρτίας*, are spelled out helpfully by I. Loh and H. Hatton ("James," *Translators Handbook to the New Testament*, Logos Systems):

It is not exactly clear what kind of sins are to be confessed. It is equally unclear who the confession of sin is to be made to. The end of the sentence, where the reference is to healing, makes it probable that the sins may be related to those that have caused the sickness. The phrase *to one another* certainly does not suggest that the confession is to be addressed to the elders, as the role of the elders is not mentioned in this verse. It may be a confession made to the person against whom sin has been committed. It is perhaps best understood as a confession addressed to God in the presence of other Christians in the Christian community, as this is a practice known to the early church (compare Mark 1.5; Matt 3.6; Acts 19.18). In any case it is unlikely to affect the translation in any significant way if we stay close to the literal rendering.

How does this relate to us? Several things come to mind immediately. First, prayer has unimaginable potential! Sometimes modern Christians



will say, “I’ll pray for you,” but only halfheartedly expect anything to happen. Not so for James and first century Christians. In part because they understood prayer as positioning the believer before God in dependence and submission. In such relationship with God, prayer is always answered by the larger concern of God’s desire and plan, not by limited human perspective. Our perspective is way too much treating prayer like coins put in a spiritual Coke machine so that the expected bottle always comes out just like *we* wanted.

Second, prayer reaches its potential only inside the community of believers, and only when that community is spiritually healthy. Our cultural individualism creates barriers for fully grasping this concept. But the NT is clear. Christianity, if it’s genuine, must be lived out in the context of community. A vital part of that is prayer. James makes it clear that spiritual

health is essential if prayer is to be offered in faith. The key to that spiritual health is dealing honestly and openly with sin through confession. Also, intercession for one another is vital. The goal of this is “so that you may be healed” (ὅπως ἰαθῆτε). The desired healing is both physical and spiritual.

That attention must be constantly given to this concern is reflected in the present tense forms of the two verbs admonishing confession and intercessory prayer. Spiritual health doesn’t come automatically. The congregation and its leaders must constantly give attention to this.

What would happen if our church began seriously measuring up to the standards put forth by James? We would become a vitally alive community of faith in which wonderful things became common place.

c. An Example of powerful praying, vv. 16c-18

Greek NT

πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη. <5:17> Ἠλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῆ προσήύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξαι, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ. <5:18> καὶ πάλιν προσήύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.

NASB

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

NRSV

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

NLT

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. 17 Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! 18 Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again.

Notes:

This section begins somewhat in the way the previous section began: with an assertion of the power of prayer. The “prayer offered in faith” now becomes “the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” Just as the first reference to prayer transitioned the first section, vv. 13-14, into the second section, vv. 15-16, this final assertion about prayer transitions the second section into the example of Elijah, vv. 17-18. The prayer of the elders offered in faith had profound possibilities. Now that prayer of a righteous man finds illustration in the OT example of Elijah. Thus the example of powerful praying moves from the elders in the community of faith to the OT prophet. In this context James’ statement about the prayer of a righteous man finds concrete definition in the person of Elijah.

The affirmation of James of the power of prayer

stands as the header and timeless principle that can reach across centuries from the first Christian century to several centuries back to the time of Elijah in the eighth century BCE.

Most of the statement is relatively easy to grasp: the prayer of a righteous person possesses much power (πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου). The different word for prayer, δέησις, stresses prayer as a request made to God. The part that is difficult to translate into English is the participle ἐνεργουμένη. Translators and commentators will differ in their understanding of this word that goes back to δέησις through an adverbial connection to the verb. The essential concept is that petition has much strength as it is being ἐνεργουμένη.

What does ἐνεργουμένη do that gives prayer

strength? The literal meaning of this present tense Greek participle is to infuse something with action, and is somewhat close to our English word 'energized.' Again Loh and Hatton (*Translator's Handbook*, Logos Systems) provides a helpful summation of the possible meanings:

The second is a participle that can be taken as passive or as middle voice. If it is passive we can translate the sentence as "the prayer is powerful when it is put into effect." Making it clear that God is the one who puts prayer into effect, TNT has rendered the sentence as "The good man's prayer is very powerful because God is at work in it." If the qualifier is a middle, the sentence is normally rendered as "the prayer is powerful when it is exercised" or "the prayer is powerful in its effect." More scholars and translations appear to favor the second possibility. Yet another possibility is to take the participle as an adjective modifying prayer, resulting in renderings like "Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer" (Phps) or "The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful" (NAB). On the whole it is probably best to follow the majority of scholars. The meaning of this sentence, then, may be most effectively brought out by rendering it as:

- The prayer of a good person is very [or, most] powerful and effective.
- The prayer of a good person has a [very] powerful effect (TEV).
- The prayer of an innocent person is powerful, and it can help a lot (CEV).

Although some uncertainty exists over the precise details of James' axiom, his interpretation of Elijah's experience at praying fleshes out the picture James had in mind.

What James does is very interesting. He collapses the experience of Elijah described in 1 Kings 17 and 18 into two basic points. Elijah prayed for the rain to stop, and it did. Later, Elijah prayed for the rain to begin again and it did. James contends these two prayers were offered at either end of a three and one-half year span.

Who was the prophet whose prayer had such power? James says that "Elijah was a human being like us." Thus we are encouraged to enter into similar kind of praying, since our example is not some perfect individual who is so far above us spiritually that we have no hope of being sufficiently spiritual in order to pray like he did.

James assumed that his initial readers were familiar with the Elijah story at this juncture in the Old Testament. His modern readers tend not to be as familiar. The drought that is central to the story happened during the reign of King Ahab in the northern kingdom of Israel. Ahab, according to 1 Kings 16:29-

30, walked in the evil steps of his father Omri being even more wicked. As divine judgment on the wickedness of Ahab God instructed Elijah to tell Ahab that a severe drought was coming on the northern kingdom (1 Kings 17:1). James interprets this as "he prayed fervently that it might not rain." The se-



vere famine that followed forced Elijah to leave the territory of the northern kingdom on the west side of the Jordan and travel back to the region of his home to the Brook of Cherith on the east side of the Jordan. At first the ravens provided food but that stopped and Elijah was told to go to a widow's home in Zarephath. She graciously shared what little food she had and miraculously that became a continuous supply of food for her, her son and the prophet for the next several years. When her son later died from an illness, the prophet miraculously brought him back to life. During the third year of the drought (1 Kings 18:1) God told Elijah to go back to Samaria and tell Ahab that the drought was going to end. Elijah encountered Obadiah, Ahab's palace administrator, to give him the message to deliver to Ahab. Subsequently Ahab met Elijah who issued a challenge to have the priests of Baal, the pagan religion of Queen Jezebel, meet on Mt. Carmel -- Baal's supposed home -- and see who could produce rain, Baal or God. When Elijah prayed to God for rain after Baal failed to produce it, Ahab was convinced who was the real God.

Thus Elijah's instructions about when to pray for what came from God and were a part of a larger story of the contest between the God of the Israelites and the pagan god, Baal, that Jezebel had introduced into the northern Kingdom.

From this James reminds us that powerful praying is done within God's will and under His leadership. Elijah, in spite of his weaknesses, inspires us to reach out to God for His help and blessing.

**STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT
of James¹**

HEADING:	STATEMENT:	REFERENCE:
PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
BODY	1-194	1.2-5.20
Facing Trials	1-15	1.2-12
God and Temptation	16-24	1.13-18
The Word and Piety	25-37	1.19-27
Faith and Partiality	38-55	2.1-13
Faith and Works	56-72	2.14-26
Controlling the Tongue	73-93	3.1-12
True and False Wisdom	94-102	3.13-18
Solving Divisions	103-133	4.1-10
Criticism	134-140	4.11-12
Leaving God Out	141-146	4.13-17
Danger in Wealth	147-161	5.1-6
Persevering under Trial	162-171	5.7-11
Swearing	172-174	5.12
Reaching Out to God	175-193	5.13-18
Reclaiming the Wayward	194	5.19-20

(Footnotes)

¹Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, [A Study Manual of James: Greek Text](#) (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285.

Statements indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual on James in either Greek or English text. The pericopes grouped together represent passages with closer thought links.

Greek NT

<5:13> Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσευχέσθω· εὐθυμεῖ τις, ψαλλέτω· <5:14> ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας, καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου. <5:15> καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· κἄν ἀμαρτίας ἢ πεπονηκώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ. <5:16> ἐξομολογεῖσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἀμαρτίας καὶ εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων ὅπως ἰαθῆτε. πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη. <5:17> Ἡλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῇ προσηύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξει, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ· <5:18> καὶ πάλιν προσηύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.

NASB

13 Is anyone among you suffering? 12 Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

NRSV

13 Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. 14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

NLT

13 Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord. 14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. 16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. 17 Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! 18 Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again.



Greek Text Diagrammed

Situations

175 ^{5:13} *Κακοπαθεῖ τις*
 ἐν ὑμῖν,
 176 προσευχέσθω·
 177 *εὐθυμεῖ τις,*
 178 *ψαλλέτω*·
 179 ^{5:14} *ἀσθενεῖ τις*
 ἐν ὑμῖν,
 180 *προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας,*
 καὶ
 181 προσευξάσθωσαν
 ἐπ' αὐτόν
 ἀλείψαντες αὐτόν
 ἐλαίῳ
 ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου.

^{5:15} καὶ

Prayer

182 ἡ εὐχή τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα
 καὶ
 183 *ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος*·
 184 *κὰν ἁμαρτίας ἢ πεπονηκῶς,*
ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.
^{5:16} οὖν
 185 *ἐξομολογεῖσθε ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας*
 καὶ
 186 εὐχεσθε
 ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων
 ὅπως ἰαθῆτε.

Example

187 *πολὴ ἰσχύει* δέσεις *δικαίου*
 ἐνεργουμένη.

188 ^{5:17} *Ἡλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν,*
 καὶ
 189 *προσευχῇ*
 ----- προσηύξατο
 τοῦ μὴ βρέξαι,
 καὶ
 190 *οὐκ ἔβρεξεν*
 ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
 ἑνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ·

^{5:18} καὶ
 πάλιν
 191 προσηύξατο,
 καὶ
 192 *ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν*
 καὶ
 193 *ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.*

Semantic Diagram

A--	1-----	175	Pres	Act	Ind?	3	S	τις
	2-----	176	Pres	Act	Imp+	3	S	τις
	1-----	177	Pres	Act	Ind?	3	S	τις
I--B--	2-----	178	Pres	Act	Imp+	3	S	τις
	1-----	179	Pres	Act	Ind?	3	S	τις
C--	a-----	180	Pres	Act	Imp+	3	S	τις
	2--	καὶ						
	b-----	181	Pres	Act	Imp+	3	P	πρεσβύτεροι
καὶ								
A--	a-----	182	Fut	Act	Ind	3	S	ἡ εὐχή
	1--	καὶ						
	b-----	183	Fut	Act	Ind	3	S	ὁ κύριος
II--	2-----	184	Fut	Pass	Ind	3	P	ἁμαρτία
	1-----	185	Pres	Mid	Imp+	2	P	(ὁμας)
B--	2--	καὶ						
	2-----	186	Pres	Dep	Imp+	2	P	(ὁμας)

A--	1-----	187	Pres	Act	Ind	3	S	δέησις
	2-----	188	Pres	---	Ind	3	S	Ἠλίας
	a-----	189	1 Aor	Dep	Ind	3	S	Ἠλίας
III	1--	καὶ						
	b-----	190	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	(ὁ κύριος)
B--	2--	καὶ						
	a-----	191	1 Aor	Dep	Ind	3	S	Ἠλίας
	2--	καὶ						
	i-----	192	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	ὁ οὐρανός
	b--	καὶ						
	ii-----	193	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	ἡ γῆ

Summation of Rhetorical Structure

The passage divides into three sections, although the division of the first two may be somewhat debated.

The **first section**, statements 175-181 (vv. 13-14), pose three specific situations calling for a response to God. General misfortune finds solution in prayer. Joyous circumstances call for hymns of praise to God. Illness calls for the church leaders to pray and anoint with oil. The rhetorical structure of these three situations is clear: a rhetorical question followed by an admonition. The rhetorical question addresses a very generalized τις. The prayers of the community of believers represented by its leadership, τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας, is admonished in the third situation of illness. Both their prayers and anointing with olive oil are instruments of healing in this instance.

The **second section**, statements 182-186 (vv. 15-16a), affirm in powerful language the potential of prayer, especially for the one who is sick, although the participle κάμνοντα can be sufficiently general to include the one suffering misfortune as well. The promise of prayer is twofold: (1) God will raise him up from his bed of affliction, and (2) sins will be forgiven. Growing out of these promises (οὖν) come two

admonitions, to confess sins to one another inside the community of believers, and to pray for one another for healing from both sickness and discouragement. The use of the second person plural you uniformly in statements 185-186 (v. 16a) emphasize the community aspect of spiritual and physical healing as a gift from God.

The **third section**, statements 187-193 (vv. 16b-18), provides illustration of the power of prayer with the example of the OT prophet Elijah. Taken from 1 Kings 17 and 18, the illustration summarizes Elijah's confrontation with king Ahab in the northern Kingdom. The prayer for no rain is described in 1 Kings 17:1 as

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" ([NRSV](#)).

The prayer for rain some 3 1/2 years later is described in 1 Kings 18:1 and 42-45 as

1 After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year of the drought, saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab; I will send rain on the earth." 2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. The famine was severe in Samaria ([NRSV](#)).

and

41 Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of rushing rain." 42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; there he bowed himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees. 43 He said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." He went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." Then he said, "Go again seven times." 44 At the seventh time he said, "Look, a little cloud no bigger than a person's hand is rising out of the sea." Then he said, "Go say to Ahab, 'Harness your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" 45 In a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind; there was a heavy rain. Ahab rode off and went to Jezreel. 46 But the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; he girded up his loins and ran in front of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. ([NRSV](#))

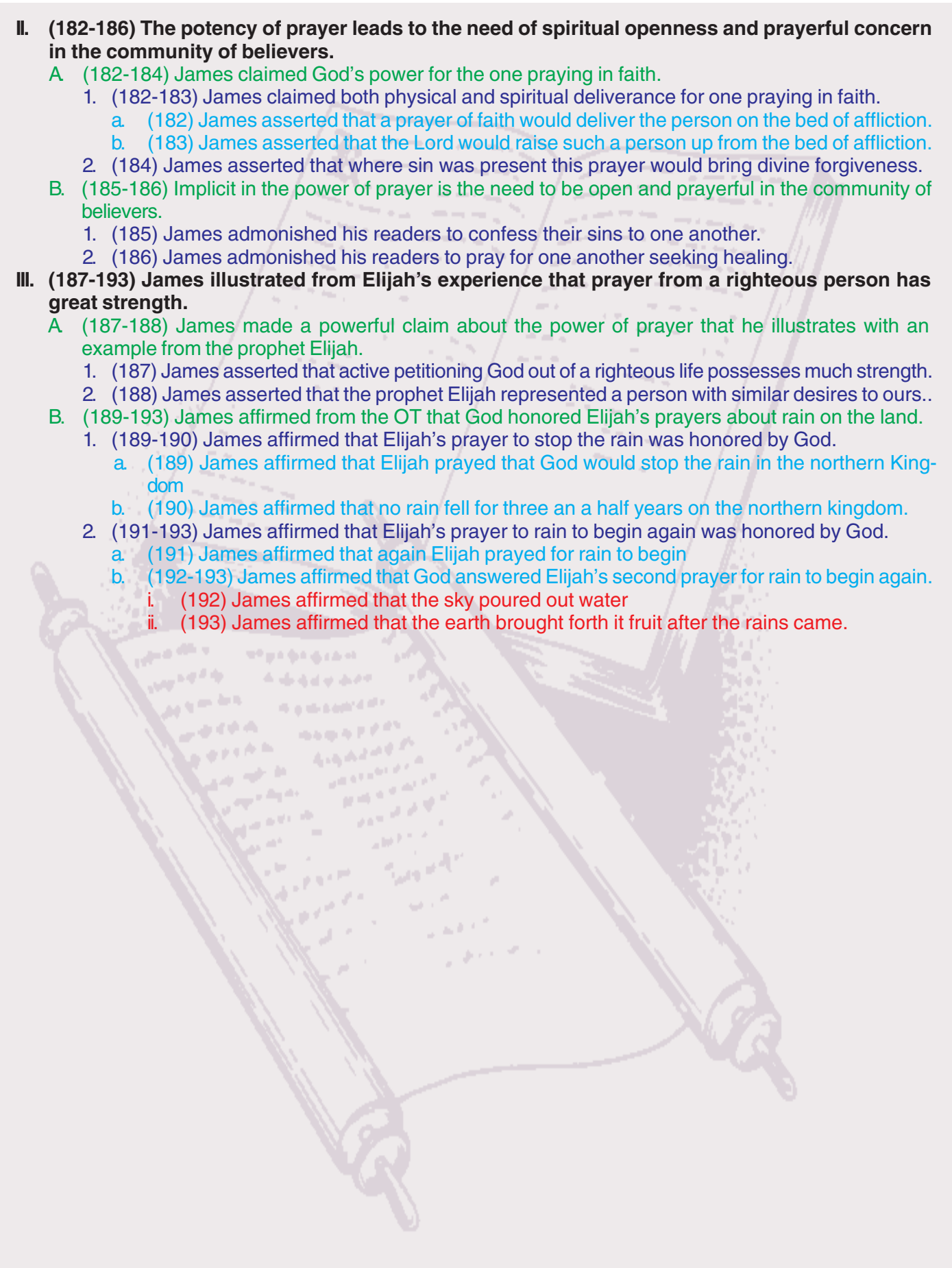
During these intervening years, Elijah moved to Zarephath to the east across the Jordan River where he befriended a widow with the miracle of continuous food and oil during the famine that followed the drought. Also he raised her son back to life when he died during this time. Upon returning he challenged the priests of Baal to a contest on Mt. Carmel in the southwest corner of the northern kingdom and the center of Baal worship.

Elijah had indicated that rain would come at the end of some time upon his request to God: "there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (17:1) and "After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year of the drought" (18:1). Only three years are indicated by the OT narrative. The six months reflects common Jewish interpretation during James' day.

What is missing from James' summary is that this entire episode came about under the direction of God. This wasn't something that Elijah just dreamed up and did. His prayers for no rain and then for rain were instructed by God. James assumed his readers knew the story of Elijah well and would understand this aspect of the prophet praying under God's leadership. No blank check for praying at will for whatever we desire is given here.

Exegetical Outline

- I (175-181) James asserted that reaching out to God was central to solving the problems posed with misfortune, joyous experiences, and illnesses.**
 - A (175-176) James asserted the misfortune should be turned over to God in prayer.**
 - 1. (175) James asked whether anyone in the believing community was experiencing misfortune.
 - 2. (176) James encouraged them to reach out to God in prayer.
 - B. (177-178) James asserted the joy should prompt musical praise to God.**
 - 1. (177) James asked whether anyone was experiencing joy.
 - 2. (178) James encouraged them to sing songs of praise to God for their joy.
 - C. (179-181) James claimed that illness could be cured through the prayers and anointing of the leaders of the church.**
 - 1. (179) James asked whether anyone in the believing community was experiencing illness
 - 2. (180-181) James encouraged the sick person to involve the church leaders in seeking a cure from illness.
 - a. (180) James encouraged them to summon the church leaders
 - b. (181) James encouraged the leaders to pray for the ill person after having anointed him with oil.

- 
- II. (182-186) The potency of prayer leads to the need of spiritual openness and prayerful concern in the community of believers.
 - A. (182-184) James claimed God's power for the one praying in faith.
 - 1. (182-183) James claimed both physical and spiritual deliverance for one praying in faith.
 - a. (182) James asserted that a prayer of faith would deliver the person on the bed of affliction.
 - b. (183) James asserted that the Lord would raise such a person up from the bed of affliction.
 - 2. (184) James asserted that where sin was present this prayer would bring divine forgiveness.
 - B. (185-186) Implicit in the power of prayer is the need to be open and prayerful in the community of believers.
 - 1. (185) James admonished his readers to confess their sins to one another.
 - 2. (186) James admonished his readers to pray for one another seeking healing.
 - III. (187-193) James illustrated from Elijah's experience that prayer from a righteous person has great strength.
 - A. (187-188) James made a powerful claim about the power of prayer that he illustrates with an example from the prophet Elijah.
 - 1. (187) James asserted that active petitioning God out of a righteous life possesses much strength.
 - 2. (188) James asserted that the prophet Elijah represented a person with similar desires to ours..
 - B. (189-193) James affirmed from the OT that God honored Elijah's prayers about rain on the land.
 - 1. (189-190) James affirmed that Elijah's prayer to stop the rain was honored by God.
 - a. (189) James affirmed that Elijah prayed that God would stop the rain in the northern Kingdom
 - b. (190) James affirmed that no rain fell for three and a half years on the northern kingdom.
 - 2. (191-193) James affirmed that Elijah's prayer to rain to begin again was honored by God.
 - a. (191) James affirmed that again Elijah prayed for rain to begin
 - b. (192-193) James affirmed that God answered Elijah's second prayer for rain to begin again.
 - i. (192) James affirmed that the sky poured out water
 - ii. (193) James affirmed that the earth brought forth its fruit after the rains came.

Greek Text Analyzed

<5:13>

Κακοπαθεῖ : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ind (Interrog) - 3 - S - κακοπαθέω - is anyone suffering misfortune?

τις : Indef. Pron - Nom (Subj) - M - S - τις, τι - anyone

ἐν ὑμῖν : Pers Pron - Loc (Place) - P - σύ - among you

προσευχέσθω : Pres (Desc) - Dep - Imper (Entreaty) - 3 - S - προσεύχομαι - let him make a habit of praying

εὐθυμεῖ : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ind (Interrog) - 3 - S - εὐθυμέω - is anyone experiencing joy?

τις : Indef. Pron - Nom (Subj) - M - S - τις, τι - anyone

ψαλλέτω : Pres (Desc) - Act - Imper (Entreaty) - 3 - S - ψάλλω - let him be singing with a harp

Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (Jas 5:13). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

5:13. Nonresistance did not mean pretending that things did not matter (as the Stoics did; see comment on Eph 5:20) or simply waiting unconsolated until the end time (as some Jewish apocalyptic writers may have done); it meant prayer.¹

(Footnotes)

Stoics, Stoicism.

The most popular form of Greek philosophy in Paul's day. Although most people were not Stoics, many Stoic ideas were widely disseminated. For more detail, see comment on Acts 17:18

*apocalyptic *Apocalypses, apocalyptic literature.*

The broadest use of the term today (usually followed in this commentary) refers to the thought world of literature dealing with the end time, often replete with symbols. The most precise sense of the term refers to a category of ancient Jewish literature growing out of Old Testament

prophecy

(especially Daniel and parts of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, etc.) in which visions or travels through the heavens reveal divine secrets, usually including many about the future. Nonfuturistic Jewish mysticism was probably a truncated apocalyptic with future expectations played down.

Loh, I., & Hatton, H. (1997). A handbook on the Letter from James. UBS handbook series (188). New York: United Bible Societies.

James concludes this section with a call for prayer. This is clearly the major theme of the paragraph in that it appears in every verse from 13 to 18. Prayer is necessary especially for those who are suffering and feeling depressed. James wants people to remember God in all circumstances, good as well as bad. When things are bad, they should pray; when good, they should sing praises.

Is any one among you suffering? The verb *is...suffering* is related to the noun "suffering" used in 5.10 and may be rendered simply as "in trouble" (TEV, NIV, REB) or "in distress" (Brc). The *suffering* may include distress caused by physical circumstances, such as the persecution suffered by the prophets, or exploitation of the poor by the rich. The phrase "in trouble" can also have a negative meaning in English; for example, "You are really in trouble" means "You have done something wrong, so you are going to receive..." Thus "having trouble" (CEV) is perhaps a better English model. Translators should try to find a term that covers a wide variety of troubles and difficulties, not just physical suffering.

The imperative *Let him pray* may be rendered more naturally as "He should pray" (NIV) or "He must pray" (Brc). We may wish to use the inclusive form by shifting the subject to the plural; for example, "Are any among you suffering? They should pray" (NRSV); "Are any among you suffering? You (plural) must pray." The one to whom the prayer is spoken is understood to be God.

These two sentences in the form of a rhetorical question and an answer may be rendered differently. Some scholars feel that the form should be a declarative sentence followed by an imperative, thus "Someone among you suffers. He must pray!" This may also be rendered inclusively, "Some among you suffer. They [or, You (plural)] must pray!" It is also possible to take the two sentences in the form of a conditional sentence followed by an imperative; for example, "If any one of you is in trouble, he should pray" (JB; similarly also Phps) or "If you are having trouble, you should pray" (CEV). This again can be rendered inclusively, "If some among you are suffering, they [or, you (plural)] must pray!" On the whole the structure of a rhetorical question and an answer appears to be more effective and is therefore the one adopted by most translations. Translators, however, will have to decide for themselves which style or form will be more effective in their own languages.

Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise: this is a parallel to the first part of the verse. The verb *is...cheerful* is used

in Acts 27.22, 25, where Paul encouraged his companions to “take heart” (RSV) when they were in immediate danger of shipwreck. It means cheerful courage in the face of danger and difficult circumstances. It is a serenity of the heart unaffected by any outward circumstances. The rhetorical question may be rendered “Is anyone in good spirits?” (similarly Gspd, NAB), “Is anyone feeling cheerful?” (TNT), “And if you are feeling good” (CEV), or simply “Are any among you happy?” (TEV). In happy circumstances people should *sing praise*. The Greek verb translated “to sing praise” is from the same root from which the word “psalm” is derived (compare KJV, “let him sing psalms”). In the Old Testament it referred originally to playing a stringed instrument (1 Sam 16.23), then to singing with string accompaniment (Psa 33.2, 3), and later generally to singing any song of praise (Psa 7.17; 9.2). The imperative here is best rendered as “They should sing praises” (TEV), “He must sing praises,” or “he must sing a hymn” (Brc). The object of *sing praise* is understood to be God. In some languages this will be expressed as “You should praise God by singing.”

Here again the two sentences are most often rendered in the form of a question and an answer. It is also possible to render them as a declarative sentence followed by an imperative; for example, “Someone among you is cheerful. He must [or, should] sing praises.” This may also be expressed inclusively, “Some among you are cheerful. They [or, You (plural)] must [or, should] sing praises.” Another possibility is to make the first clause a conditional clause and the second an imperative; for example, “If someone among you is cheerful, he must [or, should] sing praises”; or inclusively, “If some among you are cheerful, they [or, you (plural)] must [or, should] sing praises.”

5:14

ἀσθενεῖ : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ind (Interrog) - 3 - S - ἀσθενέω - is anyone sick?

τις : Indef. Pron - Nom (Subj) - M - S - τις, τι - anyone

ἐν ὑμῖν : Pers Pron - Loc (Place) - P - σύ - among you

προσκαλεσάσθω : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Imper (Entreaty) - 3 - S - προσκαλέω - let him summon

τοὺς πρεσβύτερους : Adj (Subst) - Acc (Dir. Obj) - M - P - πρεσβύτερος, -α, -ον - the elders (older men)

[comparative degree adjective of πρεσβύς meaning old men]

τῆς ἐκκλησίας : 1 - Gen (Ref) - F - S - ἐκκλησία, ἡ - connected to the congregation

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two Aorist verbs into a double admonition - and

προσευξάσθωσαν : 1 Aor (Const) - Dep - Imper (Entreaty) - 3 - P - προσεύχομαι - let them pray

ἐπ’ αὐτόν : Pers Pron - Acc (Ref) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - over him

ἀλείψαντες : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - M - S - ἀλείφω - after having anointed with olive oil

[αὐτόν] : Pers Pron - Acc (Dir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - him

ἐλαίῳ : 2 - Ins (Means) - N - S - ἔλαιον, τό - with [by means of] olive oil

Moo, D. J. (2000). *The letter of James. The Pillar New Testament commentary (238)*. Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

In addition to praying for the sick person, James also commands the elders to *anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord*. James might imply that the anointing is to precede the praying (since the participle *aleipsantes* is aorist),⁴⁶ but he probably intends them to be taking place at the same time (a contemporaneous aorist).⁴⁷ But more important than the timing of the act is its meaning: What does James think that the anointing will accomplish? The practice is mentioned only one other time in the NT: Mark says that the Twelve “drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (6:13). Unfortunately, Mark gives no more of an explanation for the anointing than does James. Theologians and scholars have debated the meaning of the practice for a long time. Interpretations can be divided into two main categories, with subdivisions in each.

1. A Practical Purpose

a. Medicinal

Oil was widely used in the ancient world both as a skin conditioner and as a medicine. ANT example is Luke 10:34, which describes the good Samaritan as coming to the aid of the man who had been beaten and robbed: “He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.” Ancient sources testify to the usefulness of oil in curing everything from toothache to paralysis (the famous second-century physician Galen recommended oil as “the best of all remedies for paralysis” [*De simplicitate medicamentum temperatum* 2]). Considering this background, we might suppose that James is urging the elders to come to the bedside of the sick armed with both

spiritual and natural resources — with prayer and with medicine.⁴⁸ Both are administered with the Lord's authority, and both together can be used by him in healing the sick.

b. Pastoral

As a different kind of practical purpose, others suggest that the anointing may have been intended as an outward, physical expression of concern and as a means to stimulate the faith of the sick person.⁴⁹ Jesus sometimes used physical props in his healings, apparently with just such a purpose.

2. A Religious Purpose

a. Sacramental

A sacramental understanding of this practice arose early in the history of the church. On the basis of this text the early Greek church practiced what they called the *Euchelaion* (a combination of the words *euch*´, “prayer,” and *elaion*, “oil,” both used in this text), which had the purpose of strengthening the body and soul of the sick. The Western church continued this practice for many centuries, as well as using oil for anointing on other occasions. Later, the Roman church gave to the priest the exclusive right to perform this ceremony and developed the sacrament of extreme unction (in A.D. 852).⁵⁰ This sacrament has the purpose of removing any remnant of sin and of strengthening the soul of the dying (healing is considered only a possibility). The Council of Trent (14.1) found this sacrament “insinuated” in Mark 6:13 and “promulgated” in Jas. 5:14. Since Vatican II, the rite has been called “the anointing of the sick.” Clearly this developed sacrament has little basis in James's text: he recommends anointing for any illness and associates it with healing rather than with preparation for death. Nevertheless, the oil could have a sacramental function in that it acted as a “vehicle of divine power.”⁵¹ Much as partaking of the Lord's Supper conveys to the believing participant a strengthening in grace, so anointing may be mandated by God as a physical element through which he works the grace of healing in the sick believer.

b. Symbolic

Anointing frequently symbolizes the consecration of persons or things for God's use and service in the OT. Typical is Exod. 28:41: “After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.” The same usage is continued and expanded in the NT, where anointing is often a metaphor for consecration to God's service (Luke 4:18 [= Isa. 61:1]; Acts 4:27; 10:38; 2 Cor. 1:21; Heb. 1:9 [= Ps. 45:7]). If James has this background in mind, then he would be recommending that the elders anoint the sick person in order vividly to show how that person is being set apart for God's special attention in prayer.⁵²

In order to reach a decision among these options, we need first to consider the force of the Greek word that James uses here. Scripture employs two Greek words that mean “anoint”: *chriM´* and *aleiphM´*. James's choice of the latter word in v. 14 may shed light on the significance he attributes to the action. *AleiphM´* is used only twenty times in the Septuagint. Of dubious relevance are the seven times where the word refers to rubbing white-wash on a wall (all in Ezekiel, translating Heb. *t ~ h*). But the word frequently refers to the rubbing of oil on the face or body with a beautifying or hygienic purpose (nine times, usually with Heb. *J´k*). And the verb has a ceremonial significance in four verses. The precise meaning of Gen. 31:13 is unclear, but in Exod. 40:15 (twice) and Num. 3:3 *aleiphM´* denotes the ceremonial anointing of the priests, whereby they were set apart for the service of God. This last usage is the regular significance of *chriM´* in the Septuagint. In most of its seventy-eight occurrences, it designates the consecration of priests, sanctuary furnishings, or the king of Israel. Only three times does it refer to a cosmetic treatment. Significantly, neither word is used with reference to medicinal purposes in the Septuagint. The NT usage of *chriM´* maintains this pattern and extends it. For the word never refers to a physical act but is always a metaphor for consecration (Luke 4:18 [= Isa. 61:1]; Acts 4:27; 10:38; 2 Cor. 1:21; Heb. 1:9 [= Ps. 45:7]). As in the Septuagint, *aleiphM´* most often designates a cosmetic or hygienic anointing (Matt. 6:17; Mark 16:1; Luke 7:38, 46 [twice]; John 11:2; 12:3). It is possible, however, that the word has some symbolic overtones in the account of Jesus' anointing (John 11:2; 12:3).

The significance of these data for Jas. 5:14 is not clear. One could argue that James would have used *chriM´* if he had intended the anointing to have symbolic significance, since this is the word that most often has this connotation in Scripture. On the other hand, considering NT usage, *aleiphM´* was the only word James could have chosen if he wanted to signify an actual physical act of anointing.⁵³ And neither word has medicinal significance in Scripture (leaving aside for the moment the verses at issue, Mark 6:13 and Jas. 5:14). (In Luke 10:34, where oil [*elaion*] clearly has a medicinal use, the verb *epicheM´*, “put on,” is used.)

Lexicography does not, then, definitely rule in or out any of the four main options. But other factors suggest that James probably views the anointing as a physical action symbolizing consecration. Positively, as we have seen, this is by far the most common symbolic significance of anointing in the Bible. Negatively, each of the other views

suffers from one or more serious difficulties. The medicinal view is problematic for two reasons. First, evidence that anointing with oil was used for *any* medical problem is not found — and why mention only one (albeit widespread) remedy when many different illnesses would be encountered? Second, why should the elders of the church do the anointing if its purpose were solely medical? Surely others would have done this already were it an appropriate remedy for the complaint.⁵⁴ The pastoral interpretation of the anointing has much to be said for it, and can be incorporated into the view we are arguing. But the value of the anointing does not lie in any physical connection between the action and the malady, as was the case with most of Jesus' healings (e.g., he rubs the eyes of a blind man [Mark 8:23–26] and places his fingers in the ear of a deaf person [Mark 7:33]). It lies, rather, in the symbolic connotations of the anointing. One's attitude toward the sacramental view will depend considerably on one's view of sacraments in general. But James's insistence in v. 15 that the sick person is healed through "the prayer of faith" suggests that the anointing itself does not convey the grace of healing power.

We conclude, therefore, that "anoint" in v. 14 refers to a physical action with symbolic significance. The verb *aleiphm'* can have this meaning, being used equivalently to *chrim'* in the Septuagint with reference to the consecrating of priests (Exod. 40:15; cf. *chrim'* in 40:13; Num. 3:3). (Josephus can also use *aleiphm'* with symbolic meaning, parallel to *chrim'*; compare *Antiquities* 6.165 with 6.157.) And while *chrim'* is usually used in these texts, James has probably chosen *aleiphm'* because he refers to a physical action that the elders are to carry out. As the elders pray, they are to anoint the sick person in order to symbolize that that person is being set apart for God's special attention and care. Calvin, Luther, and other expositors think that the practice of anointing, along with the power to heal, was confined to the apostolic age.⁵⁵ But such a temporal restriction cannot be established. James's recommendation that regular church officers carry out the practice would seem to imply its permanent validity in the church. On the other hand, the fact that anointing a sick person is mentioned only here in the NT epistles, and that many healings were accomplished without anointing, shows that the practice is not a necessary accompaniment to the prayer for healing.

ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι : 3 - Loc (Sphere) - N - S - ὄνομα, -ατος, τό - in the name
 τοῦ κυρίου : 2 - Gen (Poss) - M - S - κύριος, ὁ - of the Lord

Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (Jas 5:14). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

5:14. Wounds were anointed with oil to cleanse them (cf. Lk 10:34), and those with headaches and those wishing to avoid some diseases were anointed with olive oil for "medicinal" purposes (from the ancient perspective). Oil was also used to anoint priests or rulers, pouring oil over the head as a consecration to God. Christians may have combined a symbolic medicinal use with a symbol of handing one over to the power of God's Spirit (Mk 6:13). A general prayer for healing was one of the blessings regularly recited in synagogues; on "elders" see comment on Acts 14:23; on "church" in a Jewish context see the glossary. Visiting the sick was an act of piety in early Judaism that Christians probably continued (cf. Mt 25:36, 43, for ailing missionaries).

Loh, I., & Hatton, H. (1997). A handbook on the Letter from James. UBS handbook series (189). New York: United Bible Societies.

James 5.14.

James mentions a third circumstance needing prayer, namely sickness. The theme of sickness is most likely suggested by the theme of suffering in verse 13. The verb "to be sick" in Greek can include any kind of weakness (compare Rom 14.2; 2 Cor 12.10). However, the obvious contrast with "to be suffering," calling on the elders to pray and to anoint, and the verb "to save" in the sense of "to heal" (verse 15), all suggest that in this context "to be sick" is the intended meaning.

Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him: this is the proper response of the person who is sick. Here we can see glimpses of first-century congregational life and structure. The person who is sick is encouraged to *call for the elders of the church* to help. The verb *call for* means "to summon." The use of the term suggests that the sick person cannot go to the elders and therefore has to summon the elders to the bedside. Maybe for this reason some translations render the verb as "send for" (so TEV, REB). However, in certain languages the idea of "summon" or "send for" will seem impolite and thus inappropriate. In such cases we may say "ask the church leaders to come" (similarly CEV). The *elders* originally referred to people of advanced age. The word was sometimes used of older members of a Christian community and later came to be used for respected Christian leaders in a local congregation, and finally of church leaders holding official position in a local congregation. In this letter the usage apparently reflects the latest development, referring to the church officers or leaders exercising general oversight over church affairs.

The term *church* is often used of an assembly or a general meeting. In its Old Testament equivalent it was used for the gathering of the community of Israel (Deut 4.10). In the New Testament it is sometimes used to denote the universal church, the Body of Christ (compare Matt 16.18; Gal 1.13; Eph 1.22). It is also used of the local congregation in a particular place (Acts 5.11; Rom 16.5; Phil 4.15). In this context *the church* most likely refers to a local group and therefore is sometimes rendered as “congregation” (so Brc, NEB), or even “group of believers [or, Christians].”

Let them pray over him: the verb to *pray over* suggests that the elders are standing beside the bedside of the sick person. Some scholars note that this is the only place in the New Testament where the verb “to pray” is followed by the preposition meaning “over” or “upon,” suggesting that it may involve laying hands on the sick person (compare Matt 19.13). In the early church, in addition to special gifts of prophecy and teaching, the elders were to visit the sick, not only for providing spiritual comfort, but as possessing “gifts of healing” (1 Cor 12.9). It is obvious then that the purpose of the prayer here is for healing.

The prayer is accompanied by *anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord*. The phrase *anointing him with oil* may be understood in several ways. The aorist participle *anointing* is sometimes taken as referring to an earlier time; that is, anointing takes place before praying. This understanding is reflected in the NJB translation: “and they must anoint the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him.” It is also possible to take it as happening at the same time, that is anointing and praying take place at the same time. This understanding is seen in more literal translations that take “to pray” as the primary action and “the anointing” as the accompanying action; for example, “let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (RSV; similarly also Phps, NRSV). Still another possibility is to take the participle with an imperative force, to go with the imperative “must pray”; for example, “they must pray over him, and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord” (Brc; similarly also TEV, REB). This will in effect make “to pray” and “to anoint” two separate actions.

As to the function of *anointing*, it is well known that olive oil was often used in the ancient world for medical purposes; for example, in cleansing, soothing, and healing wounds (Isa 1.6; Mark 6.13; Luke 10.34). While not ruling out the possibility that the anointing here is for medical purposes, there are certainly other factors involved. Most probably it also has religious and symbolic purposes, reminding the sick person of God’s concern for his faithful people in time of distress, and stimulating as well as awakening faith. This is confirmed by the fact that the anointing is performed *in the name of the Lord*. In any case these interpretations will not in any way affect the outcome of translation. The *anointing* involves pouring or rubbing olive oil on the body of a person (compare TEV, “and rub olive oil on him”). In cultures where olive oil is unknown, it will be better to use a more general term for vegetable oil and translate in a way similar to *anointing him with oil* (RSV), or “put oil on you [or, him],” or even “rub oil on you [or, him].”

The phrase *in the name of the Lord* is somewhat ambiguous and may be understood in various ways. There are several problems. First, there is the problem of identity. Who is *the Lord* here? In verses 10 and 11, *the Lord* is clearly God. But here the title is used in the context of healing. And in the New Testament time, the practice of healing is most often done in the name of Jesus Christ (Mark 16.17; Luke 10.17; Acts 3.6, 16; 4.10, 18). Therefore it is natural and safe to assume that *the Lord* here refers to Jesus Christ as well, and in some languages this will be stated clearly.

The phrase *in the name of the Lord* has already been used in 5.10, where it means acting as the representative of and with the authority of God. Here, however, the meaning is not so clear. One possibility is to take it as calling out the name “Jesus,” as at the time of baptism (Acts 2.38; 8.16) or in the rite of exorcism (driving out evil spirits; see Mark 9.38; Acts 16.18). This is possible, but the phrase is perhaps best taken in the sense of “by the authority of the Lord” as someone commissioned by him. This is then similar to the use of the phrase in verse 10. The only difference is that in verse 10 the title *Lord* refers to God, but here it is Jesus Christ as the risen Lord. The phrase then is not meant to indicate the form of words to be used in the anointing, but to provide the grounds on which the healing is to be effected. Another way to express this is “using Jesus’ authority.” For the translation of *Lord* referring to Christ, see 1.1 and elsewhere.

An alternative translation model for this verse is:

- If one of you is sick, you should ask the church leaders to come and pray for you. Also ask them to rub [or, put] oil on you, using the authority of the Lord [or, Jesus].

<5:15>

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two sets of independent clauses together - and

ἡ εὐχὴ : 1 - Nom (Subj) - F - S - εὐχὴ, ἡ - the prayer

τῆς πίστεως : 3 - Gen (Desc) / Abl (Source) or Gen (Subj) - F - S - πίστεως, -έως, ἡ - the faithful prayer / the prayer made from faith

σώσει : Fut (Pred) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - σώζω - it will deliver, save

τὸν κάμνοντα : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adj. : Subst) - Nom (Dir. Obj) - M - S - κάμνω - him who is sick / discouraged

Moo, D. J. (2000). The letter of James. The Pillar New Testament commentary (243). Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

Several elements of the text require a reference to physical healing; everything in the text makes sense as a description of physical healing. The verb *sozo* often refers to physical healing in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 9:21, 22; Mark 3:4; 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 8:48, 50; 17:19; 18:42; John 11:12); and *kamno* (NIV *sick person*) refers to physical distress in four of its six LXX occurrences (4 Macc. 3:8; 7:13; Wis. 4:16; 15:9). Similarly, James's promise that the Lord *will raise up* (*egeiro*) the sick person reflects the language of NT healing stories (Matt. 9:6; Mark 1:31; Acts 3:7). Thus the picture is of the elders praying "over" the sick person in his bed and the Lord intervening to *raise him up* from that bed.

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.). New York: United Bible societies.

κάμνω

1. be sick: 23.142

Jas. 5:16

κάμνω

23.142 κάμνω: to be ill, with a possible implication of being worn-out or wasting away—'to be sick, to be very sick.' ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα 'prayer made in faith will make the sick man well' Jas 5.15.

As in the case of expressions for health and vigor, it may also be necessary in some languages to specify more precisely the nature of the illness, disease, or weakness. Often the context provides a clue, but in some instances this is not possible, in which case it is important to try to employ a term for sickness or illness which will be the most generalized. (1:269)

2. become discouraged 25.291

κάμνω τῆ ψυχῆ

Heb. 12:23

25.291 κάμνω τῆ ψυχῆ: (an idiom, literally 'to become tired in spirit') to gradually lose one's motivation to accomplish some goal—'to become discouraged, to become tired of.' μή κάμητε ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ἐκλύομενοι 'do not let yourselves become discouraged or give up' He 12.3. (1:319)

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two independent clauses together - and

ἐγερεῖ : Fut (Pred) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - ἐγείρω - he will raise (him) up

αὐτὸν : Pers Pron - Acc (Dir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - him

ὁ κύριος : 2 - Nom (Subj) - M - S - κύριος, ὁ - the Lord

κὰν : Elision of καί and ἐάν creating a combining of coordinate and subordinate conjunctions - and if

ἀμαρτίας : 1 - Acc (Dir Obj) - F - P - ἀμαρτία, ἡ - sins

ἦ : Pres (Desc) - Subj (Potential) - 3 - S - εἰμί - he may have, has

πεποηκώς : Perf (Inten) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Pred) - Nom - M - S - ποιέω - he has committed (is under the impact of having committed)

ἀφεθήσεται : Fut (Pred) - Pass (NAE) - Ind - 3 - S - ἀφίημι- it (they) will be released from, forgiven

αὐτῷ : Pers Pron - Dat (Dir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - him

Loh, I., & Hatton, H. (1997). A handbook on the Letter from James. UBS handbook series (191). New York: United Bible Societies.

James 5.15.

We note that James' main concern here is "prayer." This is seen in his statement that healing comes in response to *the prayer of faith*. The word *prayer* is not the usual word for "prayer" used in the New Testament. This prayer represents a fervent wish or strong petition. The genitive construction *the prayer of faith* here means "the prayer offered in faith" (NIV, REB) or "This prayer made in faith" (TEV). See the discussion in 1.3 and 6. *Faith* here means the faith of the elders, not of the person who is sick. Perhaps it is for this reason that the definite article *the* has been rendered as "this" (TEV) or "such" (Brc), referring back to the elders' prayer. Other ways to express this are "When the elders pray like this, believing in the power of God" or "If the church leaders believe strongly in the

power of God when they pray.” For the meaning of *faith* see the discussion in 1.6.

It will save the sick man: this is one of the results of the fervent prayer made in faith. The word *save*, as used elsewhere in the New Testament, often refers to deliverance from sin and spiritual death. For this reason some scholars feel that it is to be understood in the same sense even in this context. However, the word is sometimes used in the sense of the restoration of physical health (translated “made well” in Mark 6.56; Matt 9.21-22). In the present context it obviously refers to the physical healing. The phrase *will save the sick man* is therefore best rendered as “will heal the sick” (TEV), “will make the sick person well” (NIV), or “the sickness will leave his body” (CEV).

The Lord will raise him up is another result of the fervent prayer in faith. Here again we have a problem with the meaning of the verb *raise up*. It is sometimes used in connection with the resurrection of the dead; but this can not be the meaning intended here, for the elders are called to pray for someone who is in bed sick, still alive. Most likely, therefore, it is referring to raising the sick person up from the bed, that is, restoring that person to health. The *Lord* here obviously refers to God. It will be observed that the prayer for healing is made in the authority of the Lord Jesus, but the one who does the healing is the Lord God.

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven: James appears to accept that sometimes sin is a cause of sickness. This is a reflection of a concept found elsewhere in the New Testament (Mark 2.5; John 5.14; 1 Cor 11.30). What James is saying here, then, is that if the sickness is related to sin, asking for forgiveness will lead to healing. From the way this statement is phrased, using a particle combining “and if,” it can be seen that James is simply saying that there is a possible, but not inevitable, connection between sin and sickness. For this reason the conditional clause may be rendered as “if he should have committed sins” or “any sins he may have committed” (NEB). The clause *he will be forgiven* means that the healing the sick person can expect is total, including physical and spiritual. The subject of forgiving is God, and this may be brought out, thus “God will forgive him.”

An alternative translation model for this verse is:

· If the elders believe strongly in God as they pray, the sickness will leave the person’s body. The Lord God will make the person completely well, and if he has sinned God will forgive him.

<5:16>

ἐξομολογεῖσθε : Pres (Desc) - Mid (Inten) - Imper (Com) - 2 - P - ἐξομολογέω - make a habit of confessing

οὖν : Inferential coordinate conjunction - therefore (in light of the above)

ἀλλήλοις : Recip Pron - Dat (Indir Obj) - M - P - ἀλλήλων - to one another

τὰς ἀμαρτίας : 1 - Acc (Dir Obj) - F - P - ἀμαρτία, ἡ - sins

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two independent clauses together - and

εὐχεσθε : Pres (Desc) - Dep - Imp (Com) - 2 - P - εὐχομαι - make a habit of praying

ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων : Recip Pron - Gen (Advantage) - M - P - ἀλλήλων - for one another

ὅπως : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory adverbial purpose clause - so that, in order that

ἰαθῆτε : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Subjunctive (Potential) - 2 - P - ἰάομαι - you may be healed

πολὺ : Adj (Pred) - Acc (degree) - N - S - πολὺς, πολλή, πολὺ - muchly, greatly (cf. G-D, p, 689, sec. β. = πολὺ the acc. neuter as adv.)

ἰσχύει : Pres (Gnomic) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - ἰσχύω - it possesses strength, power

δέησις : 3 - Nom (Subj) - F - S - δέησις, -έως, ἡ - the prayer, petition, request

δικαίου : Adj (Subst) - Gen (Poss / Subj) - M - S - δίκαιος, -ία, -ον - righteous man’s / made by a righteous man

ἐνεργουμένη : Pres (Desc) - Pass (NAE) - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - F - S - ἐνεργέω - while being used, energized, activated

Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (Jas 5:15). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

5:15–16. The Old Testament prophets often used healing from sickness as an image for healing from sin, and Jewish literature often associated sin and sickness; for instance, the eighth blessing of a Jewish daily prayer, for healing (although the emphasis is not physical healing), followed petitions for forgiveness and redemption. James does not imply a direct causal relationship between *all* sickness and sin, any more than Paul or the Old Testament does (see comment on Phil 2:25–30).

Jewish wisdom also recognized that God would hear the sick (Ecclus 38:9) and connected this hearing with renouncing sin (38:10). But although only a very few pious Jewish teachers were normally thought able to produce such assured results in practice (cf. Jas 5:17–18), James applies this standard of faith to all believers.

Loh, I., & Hatton, H. (1997). A handbook on the Letter from James. UBS handbook series (192). New York: United Bible Societies.

James 5.16.

This verse continues the themes of prayer and healing. In verse 15 it is the elders who are to pray for the sick, and here in verse 16 it is the members of the community who are encouraged to pray for each other and confess to each other.

Therefore: the conjunction connects the thought of verse 16 with that of verse 15. It suggests that the discussion of the restoration of physical health and the forgiveness of sin that started in verse 15 is continued in verse 16. This particle may also be rendered “So then . . .” (TEV). Its function is to provide a formal link between what the author has said and what he is going to say. This link may also be rendered as “Consequently...” As far as the theme is concerned, the link is in the power of prayer. If we wish to express this link, we may render the conjunction as “Since prayer has such power . . .” or “Because God answers prayer....” Following an inferior text, KJV does not have this connective. The adopted text, which has the connective, makes better sense as it is drawing out an important consequence here.

Confess your sins to one another: the imperative *confess* is in the present tense, suggesting that continual or habitual practice may be meant. If so, it may be rendered “You should get into the habit of admitting your sins to each other” (Phps). It is not exactly clear what kind of sins are to be confessed. It is equally unclear who the confession of sin is to be made to. The end of the sentence, where the reference is to healing, makes it probable that the sins may be related to those that have caused the sickness. The phrase *to one another* certainly does not suggest that the confession is to be addressed to the elders, as the role of the elders is not mentioned in this verse. It may be a confession made to the person against whom sin has been committed. It is perhaps best understood as a confession addressed to God in the presence of other Christians in the Christian community, as this is a practice known to the early church (compare Mark 1.5; Matt 3.6; Acts 19.18). In any case it is unlikely to affect the translation in any significant way if we stay close to the literal rendering.

James also encourages his readers to *pray for one another*. We note again that the church members, not only the elders, are encouraged to take part in the ministry of intercession. The object of mutual confession and intercession is *that you may be healed*. The verb “to heal” is most often used in the sense of physical healing, and that may be understood to be the primary meaning intended here. Yet in the present context, where confession of sins is encouraged, the sense of restoring the spiritual health of the Christian community cannot be ruled out. The one who does the healing is God, and it may be desirable to make this clear in some languages; for example, “so that God may heal you.”

The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effect: James emphasizes the power of prayer. This sentence can be taken as a final comment on the prayer of intercession in the first part of this verse. In this case we may wish to link it to the previous statement; for example, “...and pray for one another to be cured; the heartfelt prayer of someone upright works very powerfully” (NJB). However, most other translations see this sentence as introducing a new line of thought about the power of prayer, as seen in the example of Elijah, and have therefore structured the relationship differently. They place a full stop at the end of the previous sentence, making a complete break. The new sentence then serves as a transition to what is to follow. The French Jerusalem Bible (*La Bible de Jérusalem*) and Phps have in fact chosen to make the new sentence the beginning of a new paragraph. In any case it is desirable to show a break between verse 16a and the new sentence.

In Greek the word for *prayer* used here is from a different root than that of the verb “to pray” used in the previous sentence, but it is difficult to see if any difference in meaning is intended. *A righteous man* is not to be understood as a special type of person whose prayer is more effective than others. Rather, this person is someone who is faithful to God and living in harmony with God’s will, and therefore his prayer is indeed effective. See the discussion in 5.6. In this context the phrase may simply be rendered as “an upright person” (similarly Gspd, NJB), “a good person” (TEV; similarly also Brc, REB), or “an innocent person” (CEV).

To underline the power of prayer, James uses two qualifiers to modify the verb *has...power*, which is literally “is strong” or “is powerful.” The first qualifier is “much” and the second “working” or “being effective.” The second is a participle that can be taken as passive or as middle voice. If it is passive we can translate the sentence as “the prayer is powerful when it is put into effect.” Making it clear that God is the one who puts prayer into effect, TNT has rendered the sentence as “The good man’s prayer is very powerful because God is at work in it.” If the qualifier is a middle, the sentence is normally rendered as “the prayer is powerful when it is exercised” or “the prayer is powerful in its effect.” More scholars and translations appear to favor the second possibility. Yet another possibility is to take the participle as an adjective modifying prayer, resulting in renderings like “Tremendous power is made available through a good man’s earnest prayer” (Phps) or “The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful” (NAB). On the whole it is probably best to follow the majority of scholars. The meaning of this sentence, then, may be most

effectively brought out by rendering it as:

- The prayer of a good person is very [or, most] powerful and effective.
The prayer of a good person has a [very] powerful effect (TEV).
- The prayer of an innocent person is powerful, and it can help a lot (CEV).

<5:17>

Ἠλίας : Proper Name (1st dec. m. noun) - Nom (Subj) - M - S - Ἠλίας, ó - Elijah
ἄνθρωπος : 2 - Nom (Pred) - M - S - ἄνθρωπος, ó - a man, person
ἦν : Imperf (Desc) - Ind - 3 - S - εἶ μί - he was
ὁμοιοπαθής : Adj (Attrib) - Nom - M - S - ὁμοιοπαθής, -ές - like passionate (man), with similiar passions
ἡμῖν : Pers Pron - Dat (Ref) - P - ἐγώ - to us, in reference to us
καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two independent clauses together - and
προσευχῇ : 1 - Ins (Means) / Loc (Sphere) - F - S - προσευχή, ἡ - in a prayer
προσηύξατο : 1 Aor (Const) - Dep - Ind - 3 - S - προσεύχομαι - he prayed
τοῦ μὴ βρέξει : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Infin (V: Purpose) - βρέχω - for it not to rain
καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two independent clauses together - and
οὐκ ἔβρεξεν : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - βρέχω - it did not rain
ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς : 1 - Gen (Place) - F - S - γῆ, ἡ - upon the earth
ἐνιαυτούς : 2 - Acc (Measure / Time) - M - P - ἐνιαυτός, ó - (three) years
τρεῖς : Adj (Attrib) - Acc - M - P - τρεῖς, τρία, τριῶν - three
καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two nouns together - and
μῆνας : 3 - Acc (Measure / Time) - M - P - μῆν, μηνός, ó - months
ἕξ : Adj (Attrib) - Acc - M - P - ἕξ - six

Loh, I., & Hatton, H. (1997). *A handbook on the Letter from James*. UBS handbook series (194). New York: United Bible Societies.

James 5.17.

Elijah was . . .: as an example of the effectiveness of fervent prayer, James singles out Elijah (see 1 Kgs 17.1; 18.1, 42-45). The first thing he mentions about Elijah is that he *was a man of like nature with ourselves*. The phrase *like nature with ourselves* is literally “like feelings with us” or “similar suffering with us,” in the sense that he shared the “same limitations as us.” The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Acts 14.15 in adjectival form. There Paul and Barnabas told the crowds at Lystra not to consider them as gods, but as fellow human beings like them. The phrase may be rendered, then, as “a man with human frailties like our own” (NEB), “a human being like us” (NRSV), “a man every bit as human as we are” (Brc), “was the same kind of person as we are” (TEV), and “was just as human as we are” (CEV); or we may translate “was just like we are; he was a human being.” James is here emphasizing the common nature and therefore the common bond between ordinary Christians and Elijah; Elijah was not superhuman but a man with limitations and weaknesses like all of us. The intended meaning is that any Christian can have the same power if he or she is that kind of “righteous person.”

He prayed fervently that it might not rain: this is what Elijah had done. The clause *he prayed fervently* is literally “in prayer he prayed.” This usage reflects the influence of the Hebrew idiom, and its function is to intensify the force of the statement. In addition to the RSV rendering, the force of the clause may be rendered “He prayed earnestly” (Gspd, TEV), “He prayed and prayed” (Laws), “he prayed constantly,” or “he prayed again and again.”

And for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth: God answered the fervent prayer of Elijah. The same length of time is mentioned in Luke 4.25, where the example of Elijah is cited. In 1 Kgs 18.1 it only says, “in the third year.” It is not known how this figure was calculated. It is quite possible that this is taken from a stock phrase that had symbolic associations with a period of judgment (Dan 7.25; 12.7; compare also Rev 11.2, 3). In any case the uncertainty of the origin and of the meaning of the phrase will not in any way affect the translation. The expression *on the earth* can mean “in the land of Israel.” But it does not seem necessary to give a location like this. It is quite possible that the expression is simply meant to fill up or to complete the idea of *did not rain*. If so, it is all right to leave the phrase *on the earth* untranslated in some languages, as it would sound awkward and redundant (so JFT, TCV). Even in English it is good style to omit it; CEV has “kept the rain from falling.”

Alternative translation models for this verse are:

- Elijah was just like we are; he was a human being. He prayed constantly that no rain would fall. And so for three years and six months no rain fell at all.
- . . . For three and a half years his constant praying kept the rain from falling.

<5:18>

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two sets of independent clauses together - and

πάλιν : Adverb of repetition

προσηύξατο : 1 Aor (Const) - Dep - Ind - 3 - S - προσεύχομαι - he prayed

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two independent clauses together - and

ὁ οὐρανός : 2 - Nom (Subj) - M - S - οὐρανός, ὁ - the sky, heaven

ὑετὸν : 2 - Acc (Dir. Obj) - M - S - ὑετός, ὁ - the rain, water

ἔδωκεν : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - δίδωμι - it gave

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking the two independent clauses together - and

ἡ γῆ : 1 - Nom (Subj) - F - S - γῆ, ἡ - the earth

ἐβλάστησεν : 1 Aor (Ingress) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - βλαστάνω - it began producing

τὸν καρπὸν : 2 - Acc (Dir Obj) - M - S - καρπός, ὁ - its fruit

αὐτῆς : Pers Pron - Gen (Poss) - F - S - αὐτός, -ή -ό - its

Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (Jas 5:17). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

5:17–18. Although all Palestinian Jews prayed for rain, few miracle workers were thought able to secure such answers to prayer (especially Josephus's Onias, called Honi the Circle-Drawer in the many rabbinic traditions about him; Hanina ben Dosa, in rabbinic texts; in later traditions about earlier pietists, occasional pious men like Honi's grandson Abba Hilkiyah or Hanan ha-Nehba, Johanan ben Zakkai, Nakdimon ben Gorion, Rabbi Jonah and occasionally an anonymous person). The miracle of securing rain eventually came to be viewed as equivalent to raising the dead. The piety of these miraculous rainmakers always set them apart from others in Jewish tradition, but here James affirms that Elijah, the greatest model for such miracle workers, was a person like his readers and is a model for all believers (1 Kings 17:1; 18:41–46; cf. 1 Sam 12:17–18; for Elijah's weakness cf. 1 Kings 19:4). The "three and a half years," not mentioned in 1 Kings 17, reflects later tradition (cf. Lk 4:25 and a rabbinic tradition of three years), perhaps through associations with ideas about famines in the end time, which were sometimes held to last for this period of time.

Loh, I., & Hatton, H. (1997). A handbook on the Letter from James. UBS handbook series (196). New York: United Bible Societies.

James 5:18.

Then he prayed again: the expression does not mean that Elijah did not pray for three and a half years. The rendering "when he prayed again" could also be so misunderstood. What it means is that Elijah did not pray *for rain* again during this time (compare CEV, "But when he did pray for rain . . .").

The heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit: we should notice the neat balance in the pair *heaven* and *earth* in this sentence. Some translations ruin this balance by dropping the word *heaven* (so LB, REB). It is certainly more natural in English to use the word "sky," for that is where the rain comes from. But in some languages "heaven" is where the rain comes from, not "sky"; and in this case "heaven" should be used. This should present no problem in languages where the same term is used for both "heaven" and "sky."

Some commentators understand *heaven* to be a reference to God. This is not impossible, but in the present context *heaven* is used in contrast to *earth*. The word *fruit* here means "crops" (TEV, NIV, REB), or more generally "vegetation" (Phps) or "harvest" (NRSV).

In languages that commonly use the pair "heaven [or, sky]...earth" it is desirable to keep the balance in translation by rendering the sentence as:

· The heaven poured down rain, and the earth brought forth vegetation.

Mays, J. L., Harper & Row, P. (1996, c1988). Harper's Bible commentary (Jas 5:12). San Francisco: Harper & Row. [Logos Systems] 5:12-20, Life in the Community.

The Letter concludes with a number of separate exhortations whose organizing principle is life together in the church, with a specific focus on the sort of speech that should obtain in the messianic community. James thereby provides the positive ideal of speech, which he regards as essential to authentic religion (1:26).

He insists in the first place on plain speech without the taking of oaths (5:12). Here is one of the clearest instances of a commandment deriving from the sayings of Jesus (cf. Matt. 5:33-37) as well as from Torah (cf. Lev.

19:12). The phrase “lest you fall under judgment” indicates as well that such speaking is in fulfillment of the law of liberty (cf. also 2:12-13; 4:11; 5:9) and also connects this command to the discussion of the Lord’s judgment in 5:7-11.

The messianic community is also one constituted by prayer. A paean to prayer in every circumstance, joyful or sorrowful, is found in 5:13-18. James’s readers are thereby reminded that their lives are bound by more than mutual affection, above all by their shared relationship with God. The community is therefore to respond to threats of sickness or sin by gathering in prayer.

When someone is physically ill, the elders of the church come together in prayer for the sick person. When James adds, “The prayer of faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up” (5:15), his language almost certainly recalls the healing stories of the synoptic tradition (cf., e.g., Mark 2:9; 3:3; 5:41). The community is threatened even more powerfully by the sins of its members. The confessing of sins, therefore, accompanied by prayers for each other, not only restores the deviant individual to spiritual health, but it also heals the community as such (5:16). To show the power of such prayer, James cites the last of his exemplars from Torah. The prophet Elijah, “though only a human being like us,” accomplished wonders by the “prayer of faith” (5:17-18; see 1 Kings 17:1; 18:42-45).

James’s final exhortation is not accidentally chosen. The community that lives by the word of truth (1:18) and has received with meekness the implanted word of God (1:21) must work together against individual and communal self-deception and deviation (5:19; cf. 1:13, 16, 23, 26; 2:20). Mutual correction and exhortation are therefore expressions of love for the neighbor (cf. Lev. 19:17). At the end, James exhorts all his readers to do for each other what he has been trying to do for them.

Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). Tyndale concise Bible commentary. Rev. ed. of: New Bible companion. 1990.; Includes index. The Tyndale reference library (684). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers. [Logos Systems]

5:13–18 Sharing in Prayer

Rather than swearing when in trouble, James urged believers to pray and give praise. Rather than complaining to each other or praising themselves, James commended believers for lifting their pain and praise to God. In sickness, the patient is to call for the elders. Anointing with oil was a common practice (Mark 6:13). Here it is done in the name of the Lord. It is debated whether this passage commends a healing ministry for the physically sick or a spiritual ministry to those who are emotionally distressed or spiritually exhausted. The word “sick” (5:14) is used both of spiritual weakness and physical weakness. The word “well” (5:15) can refer to a healing of the heart. The connection of 5:16–18 is to do the praying and sin-bearing before one gets sick as well as in times of crisis. The reference to the incident in the life of Elijah (5:17; cf. 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 42, 45) confirms the power of prayer. In addition, while it is not always God’s will for the sick to be healed (2 Cor. 12:8), it is always his will for the spiritually weak to be encouraged in their struggles against sin (5:15).