



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 17
James 5:13-18
“Approaching Life”

Study By
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Greek NT

13 Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσευχέσθω· εὐθυμεῖ τις, ψαλλέτω· 14 ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, π ρ ο σ κ α λ ε σ ἄ σ θ ω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου. 15 καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· κὰν ἁμαρτίας ἢ πεπιοικῶς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.

16 ἔξομολογεῖσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ εὔχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων ὅπως ἰαθῆτε. Πολυῖσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη. 17 Ἡλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῆ προσηύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξαι, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἑνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ. 18 καὶ πάλιν προσηύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

13 ¿Sufre alguno entre vosotros? Que haga oración. ¿Está alguno alegre? Que cante alabanzas. 14 ¿Está alguno entre vosotros enfermo? Que llame a los ancianos de la iglesia y que ellos oren por él, ungiéndole con aceite en el nombre del Señor; 15 y la oración de fe restaurará al enfermo, y el Señor lo levantará, y si ha cometido pecados le serán perdonados.

16 Por tanto, confesaos vuestros pecados unos a otros, y orad unos por otros para que seáis sanados. La oración eficaz del justo puede lograr mucho. 17 Elías era un hombre de pasiones semejantes a las nuestras, y oró fervientemente para que no lloviera, y no llovió sobre la tierra por tres años y seis meses. 18 Y otra vez oró, y el cielo dio lluvia y la tierra produjo su fruto.

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.

The Study of the Text:¹

As the book of James begins coming to the end some of the themes become more general and inclusive. Such is the case with 5:13-17, which addresses the more general issues of believers coping with life in

¹With each study we will ask two basic questions. First, what was the most likely meaning that the first readers of this text understood? This is called the ‘historical meaning’ of the text. That must be determined, because it becomes the foundation for the second question, “What does the text mean to us today?” For any applicational meaning of the text for modern life to be valid it must grow out of the historical meaning of the text. Otherwise, the perceived meaning becomes false and easily leads to wrong belief.

both its ups and downs. James does this in a highly creative way that is very important to the understanding of the passage. He begins with the individual believer in the Christian community (vv. 13-15) and then speaks to the congregation as a collective unit (vv. 16-18). What he does here challenges the excessive individualism of much of western society today. He pointedly reminds his readers that the spiritual health of the individual is vitally connected to the spiritual health of the believing community the individual belongs to. That is, the individual believer cannot be spiritually healthy outside the community, and also, that he or she will not rise above the spiritual health of that community as well. In order to be spiritually healthy individual believers, we must belong to a spiritually healthy congregation. That is a powerfully important message in our world today.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Background:

Again background understandings play an important role in correct understanding of this passage, and thus need careful attention before detailed examination of the passage itself.

Historical Setting.

External History. In the centuries long process of hand copying this passage only one place of variation of wording surfaces that the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) considered important enough to potentially impact the translation of this passage. This is found in verse fourteen: ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου, **in the name of the Lord**. The question to many of the copyists was whether the Lord referred to God or to Christ.² Most of the variations are efforts to clarify the reference to refer to Christ.³ Contextually this is the most likely intended designation of τοῦ κυρίου, but the overwhelming evidence both internally and externally favor the adopted text reading.



Ten additional places of variations show up in the passage across the spectrum of the several thousand copies of this text in ancient manuscripts. These variations are reflected in the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.).⁴ Careful study of each of these places reveals

²14 {A} τοῦ κυρίου κ 33 322 323 436 945 1175 1241 124 1292 1409 1505 1611 1735 1739 1852 2138 2298 2344 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect it^{ar}, ff, s, t vg syr^p, h slav Origen^{lat} Hesychius: or omit τοῦ geo (eth) Chrysostom Cyril John-Damascus I/2 // κυρίου A Ψ 81 1067 ¹ 751 ¹ 921 arm John-Damascus^{1/2} // τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ I 1356 // Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 6 // omit B

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

³“The reading τοῦ κυρίου is supported by the broadest range of manuscripts. The omission of the article τοῦ in some witnesses and the omission of τοῦ κυρίου in manuscript B probably arose through an error in copying. The readings Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (of Jesus Christ) and τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (of the Lord Jesus) are changes made by copyists in order to identify ‘the Lord.’ In translating the text, the name ‘Jesus’ or ‘Jesus Christ’ may be added for the sake of clarity.”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 479.]

⁴Jakobus 5,14

* † B P 1243 pc ff vg^{ms} sa^{mss} (the personal pronoun αὐτόν, **him**, is omitted in some manuscripts)

| txt κ A Ψ 048^{vid}. 1739 M

* 2 A Ψ 81 al (τοῦ κυρίου is either omitted or replaced by Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)

| – B

| Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 6 pc

Jakobus 5,15

* προσευχη P 81. 322. 323. 945. 1739 pc (εὐχή is replaced by προσευχή)

* –ονται P 69. 945. 1241. 1505. 1739. 1852. 2298 al lat; Chr (ἀφεθήσεται is replaced by ἀφεθήσονται)

Jakobus 5,16

* Ψ 049 m ff vg^{mss} (the conjunction οὐν is omitted by some manuscripts)

| txt κ A B K P 048^{vid}. 81. 614. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739 al vg sy^h co

* τα παραπτώματα 049 M (τὰς ἀμαρτίας is replaced by τὰ παραπτώματα)

| txt κ A B P Ψ 048^{vid}. 33. 81. 614. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739 al

* υμων L 614. 630. 945. 1241. 1505. 1739. 2298 al (either υμῶν or ἐαυτῶν is inserted after ἀμαρτίας)

| εαυτων 623. 2464 pc

* †προσευχ– A B 048^{vid} pc (εὐχεσθε is replaced by προσεύχεσθε)

| txt κ P Ψ (049). 33. 1739 M

that these efforts are overwhelmingly stylistic in nature and have no material impact on the meaning of the text whatsoever.

Consequently we can analyze the adopted reading of the original language text of 5:13-18 in full confidence that it represents the original wording composed in the mid first century.

Internal History. One very vital background perspective assumed by James is that every person belongs to a larger social group, and individual identity grows out of that group connection. Western society contends -- contrary to biblical perspectives -- that individual identity comes from intrinsic values within the person. This way of thinking has only existed since the Enlightenment and some developments of individualism advocated by philosophers such as Emmanuel Kant and other a few centuries ago. The Jewish world of James was collectivistic, as well as the Greco-Roman ancient world in general.

Although readers of this study with African and Asian backgrounds easily grasp the differences, I have discovered over the years that those of us coming out of western, individualistic oriented societies struggle hard to gain even a basic understanding of the different dynamics of these two approaches to life. With the limited but growing insights that I have gained with much struggle over the past half century, I want to explore some the characteristics of these two approaches to life. Without some grasping of this, we Westerners will never grasp what James is talking about in vv. 16-18 especially.

To begin with, some understanding of what we are talking about is necessary. Definitions are in order:

Collectivism is any philosophic, political, religious, economic, or social outlook that emphasizes the interdependence of every human being. Collectivism is a basic cultural element that exists as the reverse of individualism in human nature (in the same way high context culture exists as the reverse of low context culture), and stresses the priority of group goals over individual goals and the importance of cohesion within social groups (such as an "in-group", in what specific context it is defined). Collectivists usually focus on community, society, or nation. It is used and has been used as an element in many different and diverse types of government and political, economic and educational philosophies throughout history.⁵

Individualism is the moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that stresses "the moral worth of the individual".¹ Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires and so value independence and self-reliance while opposing external interference upon one's own interests by society or institutions such as the government.⁶

To be clear these definitions reflect contemporary western perspectives on these two social approaches to life. They possess some value, but very limited value, for understanding the way society functioned in the first century Roman and Jewish worlds. My interest is not to argue the merits of either approach.⁷ But instead, to put the reality of the first century world on the table so we can better understand the thinking of Christian writers such as James who functioned out of a collectivistic mind set. Whatever our view of the value of either approach to society, it is absolutely essential to be aware that if your culture centers in one of these approaches and the text you are trying to understand centers in the other approach, you must understand the

* γαρ 61 pc lat sy^{p,h**} bo^{pt} (γαρ is inserted before Πολὺ)

Jakobus 5,17

* τ. μη βρ. υετον 323. 945. 1241. 1739 al (τοῦ μη βρέξαι is replaced by one of the alternative infinitive phrases)
| ινα μη βρεξη 1505 pc
| του μη βρεχειν Ψ

Jakobus 5,18

* 2 1 (κ) A Ψ 33. 623. 945. 1241. 1739. 2298. 2464 al latt (the sequence of υετον εδωκεν is reversed)
| txt B P 048vid. 049 M

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 597.]

⁵"Collectivism," wikipedia.org.

⁶"Individualism," wikipedia.org.

⁷The modern expressions of both collectivism and individualism are complex and don't necessarily follow popular lines of reasoning. For example, many try to identify Marxism with collectivism and democracy with individualism. This is blatantly false. Marxism is both individualistic and collectivistic, and democracy, at least the American capitalistic version of it, is both individualistic and collectivistic. Note the following very accurate statement: "Liberalism, existentialism and anarchism are examples of movements that take the human individual as a central unit of analysis." ["Individualism," wikipedia.org] Corporate America is extremely collectivistic with the supposed good of the corporation having higher value than the worth of any single employee in the company.

other approach if you hope to make correct sense out of the text from that alternative.

In assuming that most of those reading this lesson live in an individualistic western society, I will concentrate our study on the collectivistic side, which is where the first century world existed. For those readers coming out of a collectivistic oriented heritage, the challenge is to note the variations of collectivism in your heritage from those in the ancient world. This will sharpen your understanding substantially.

What are some of the signals of collectivism inside the New Testament?

One of the clearest and yet most puzzling signals comes in the Book of Acts where the head of the household converts and then the entire household automatically converts to Christianity.

The Roman centurion Cornelius “feared God with all his household,” φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν σὺν παντὶ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ, (10:2). Later, Peter in recounting Cornelius’ words indicated that the angel had told Cornelius to send for Peter at Joppa because “he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved,” ὅς λαλήσει ῥήματα πρὸς σὲ ἐν οἷς σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ οἶκός σου (11:14).

The business woman Lydia at Philippi heard Paul preach the Gospel, and “The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul,” ἦς ὁ κύριος διήνοιξεν τὴν καρδίαν προσέχειν τοῖς λαλουμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου (16:14). But then Luke says next: “When she and her household were baptized,” ὡς δὲ ἐβαπτίσθη καὶ ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς (16:15). Nothing whatsoever is said about Paul witnessing individually to the members of her household, who were not present at the meeting by the river. When Lydia converted, the rest of her household, meaning mostly if not exclusively the slaves in the family, converted.

While in Philippi, when the earthquake rocked the jail where Paul and Silas were, the jailor’s plea to them was answered by Paul as: “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household,” πίστευσον ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου (16:31). Very quickly afterwards Luke says that the jailor “took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay,” ἔλουσεν ἀπὸ τῶν πληγῶν, καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ αὐτοῦ πάντες παραχρῆμα (16:33). Quite fascinatingly Luke goes on to say, “he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God,” καὶ ἠγαλλιάσατο πανοικεῖ πεπιστευκῶς τῷ θεῷ, (16:34). All the household had been baptized, but it was the faith commitment of the head of the household that was celebrated.

When Paul was in Corinth on the second missionary journey, Crispus the leader of the local Jewish synagogue “became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household,” Κρίσπος δὲ ὁ ἀρχισυνάγωγος ἐπίστευσεν τῷ κυρίῳ σὺν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ (18:8). When this prominent Jewish leader in the city converted to Christianity the members of his household followed his example in conversion as well.

What these narratives point toward is that the role of the head of the household in that world was a powerful influence and established the framework for decisions for everyone in his household. This is clearly consistent with the long standing Roman heritage of the *pater familias*, also known as *patria potestas*.⁸ The father, i.e., head of the household including all the slaves as well as wife and children, was the absolute authority and the identity and worth even of every member of the household revolved solely around him and his image in society. He set the example that the rest of the household was expected to follow automatically. Although Jewish tradition did not formalize the role of the head of the household quite the same way, his essential role and expectation upon household members was very similar to that of the Romans. We Westerners struggle with someone beside ourselves making decisions for us and making decisions that we are expected to comply with without questioning. But in that world this was considered normal and natural, as well as the norm for society.

And then there is the rather strange statement of Paul when encouraging Christians contemplating divorcing their spouse in 1 Cor. 7:16: “Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife,” τί γὰρ οἶδας, γύναι, εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις; ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ, εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις; The standard western interpretation assumes Paul is talking about continued witness and thus eventual influence on the spouse to commit to Christ. In a collectivistic society, like the one in which this statement is made, Paul is talking about something far deeper and more profound. This is clearly reflected in his earlier statement in v. 14: For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ἡγιάσται γὰρ ὁ ἀπίστος ἐν τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἡγιάσται ἡ γυνὴ ἢ ἀπίστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ· ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἁγία ἐστιν. The automatic influence of spouses upon spouses in that kind of world is at a level we Westerners

⁸For more details see “Pater familias,” wikipedia.org.

seldom understand or experience.

Quite a large number of additional signals surface in the New Testament,⁹ but my hope is to push you as a western reader into a different kind of consideration of how the dynamics of social interaction in a collectivistic society work much differently than in an individualistic one. Outside of deep personal experience in such a collectivistic society, I am not convinced that any of us Westerners can really grasp how people relate to one another within that orientation. I have tried to understand it from the attempted explanations of many, many Asian and African friends over the years, but usually in vain. We can grasp some of it purely intellectually, but it takes being a part of such a society to truly understand it.

What James does in 5:16-18 is to peg the health -- both physical and spiritual -- of the individual member of the church on to the spiritual health of the church. In a collectivistic society this would have seemed entirely normal and natural. To one in an individualistic society it seems highly unnatural and even bizarre.

Literary:

Genre: The literary forms present in 5:13-18 fall under the general paraenesis category. The style is something distinctive in presentation of ideas, but does not follow a repetitive pattern found elsewhere in ancient literature so that a distinct genre form emerges. James does turn to the Old Testament example of Elijah as a heroic figure for Christians, δίκαιου, to imitate. This we have seen him do early with Job, Rahab, and Abraham. Perhaps it would be important for some readers to call attention to the role of heroic figures in the ancient Jewish world and typically in modern western societies. Today heroic figures can be heroic when the positive traits so outweigh any negative qualities that the negative qualities tend to be forgotten or denied altogether. Our heroes can't have clay feet. In the ancient world the dark side of the heroic figures was readily acknowledged while the focus of attention was on the positive traits worth being imitated. Heroes were expected to have clay feet, but we aren't focused on their clay feet for the heroic qualities.

All three of these OT heroic figures clearly had clay feet, and especially the two men. This did not disqualify them from being heroic figures however. The biblical writers look to the positive traits as what are to be imitated from these individuals.

Context: This passage stands as an independent pericope in the same pattern as the vast majority of pericopes throughout the document have stood. It is coming near the end of the document, but there is no clear signaling by the writer that he is approaching that finish point. Certainly, as was pointed out in the preceding study, there is nothing remotely resembling an ancient epistolary *Conclusio* to this document, in spite of the scholars who refuse to take off their Pauline glasses when reading James.

Even a cursory comparison to the other sermon structured document in the letter section of the NT, the book of Hebrews, dramatically highlights this. In Heb. 13:18, the writer begins signaling clearly that he is moving into an epistolary *Conclusio*, which is the only epistolary element in the entire document. Everything else is, as he specifies in 13:22, τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως, [a message of encouragement](#). Had James given some such signal in his writing, mountains of paper would have been saved in reduced commentary discussion over the centuries. Evidently James assumed his targeted readers were smart enough to figure out what he was doing without him needing to point it out to them. Beyond those initial readers, the rest of us have struggled over the centuries trying to understand whether he was writing us a letter or preaching a sermon to us.

⁹One of those that would take up far too much space to treat adequately is the clear teaching of the New Testament that genuine individual Christian experience cannot happen outside a community of believers. To be authentically saved one must be a participant in the life of a church. Western theology by imposing individualism over the pages of the NT has tended to screw up this clear NT emphasis royally. The church saves you, say some; you have to go to church to keep saved, say others. None of these concepts gets even close to the NT perspective. Even worse is, "I don't have to belong to a church to be saved." Only out of a collectivistic mind-set is it possible to begin to grasp the marvelous role of the spiritual community in the individual life of its members. The image of the church as a family must be grasped in the same way if we are to understand what is being put on the table by the NT writers.

Of course, I haven't even alluded to the collectivism that permeates the Old Testament scriptures. It is massive and profound. And the very distinctive collectivism of the ancient near eastern Semitic cultures are critical to understanding the Israelite version in the OT.

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT

Of James¹⁰

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

Structure:

The block diagram of the scripture text below in English represents a very literalistic English expression of the original language Greek text in order to preserve as far a possible the grammar structure of the Greek expression, rather than the grammar of the English translation which will always differ from the Greek at certain points.

175 ^{5.13} **Is anyone among you suffering misfortune?**

176 **Let him pray.**

177 **Is anyone cheerful?**

178 **Let him sing praises.**

179 ^{5.14} **Is anyone among you sick?**

180 **Let him call for the elders of the church,**
and

181 **let them pray over him,**
having anointed him
with olive oil
in the name of the Lord.

^{5.15} Now

¹⁰Taken 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 and also at the James Study internet site.

society this was seen as normal and essential.

Exegesis of the Text.

How to best divide out the segments for exegesis is not as simple as it might seem. At a sub-surface cognitive level, the passage revolves around an individual (vv. 13-15), and the believing community he belongs to (vv. 16-18). At the surface level of the grammar, the passage is structured around the three rhetorical questions, vv. 13-14 with vv. 15-18 tacked on to the third question as two expansion elements, v. 15 and vv. 16-18. The resulting cognitive dissonance is what creates a magnetic pull of the reader into the passage.

For the sake of logical clarity we will adopt the first option as the basis for exegeting the passage. But will attempt to highlight the clear grammar structuring of ideas as well. Hopefully this will enable us to get into the thought patterns of the text correctly and not lead to distortion of them.

a) A believer's response to living, vv. 13-15.

13 Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσευχέσθω· εὐθυμεῖ τις, ψαλλέτω· 14 ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου. 15 καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· κὰν ἁμαρτίας ἢ πεποικώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.

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.

Without any kind of advanced signal the text jumps to a series of three rhetorical questions covering three basic areas of life experience: general hardship, positive good, and illness. The creative structuring of these concerns is a rhetorical question followed by an admonition.¹¹

The beginning question raises the issue of hardship in life: Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσευχέσθω, **Is any among you suffering difficulty? Let him pray.** The subject τις ἐν ὑμῖν, **anyone among you**, stresses individual members of the community of believers. Even in the first section on individual emphasis, the assumption is belonging to the believing community. James is not alluding to an individual believer living in isolation from a

¹¹Some uncertainty is present here because of the use of τις, an indefinite pronoun, rather than τις, the interrogative pronoun. But stylistically it is more effective to say “Is anyone suffering hardship? rather than “Who is suffering hardship?” The objection to the rhetorical question structure based on the use of the pronoun misses the grammar point here. Either pronoun is commonly used in interrogative expressions. The cognitive difference in meaning is the point of which pronoun is chosen, not the qualitative nature of the pronoun.

“Some interpreters take v 13a to be a declarative statement followed by an imperative: ‘Someone among you suffers. Let him pray!’ (so Dibelius, 252; Mussner, 217). The consensus, however, is that v 13a is in the interrogative followed by an imperative (see Ropes, 303; JB makes the first part a condition). Yet both constructions have the same ‘rhetorical force’ (Davids, 191). The question-imperative pattern in v 13a finds support in the parallel structure of 1 Cor 7:18, which also includes the interrogative (cf. Cantinat, 245).”

[Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 205].

Clearly 1 Cor. 7:18 does have a similar structuring of ideas: περιτεμμένος τις ἐκλήθη, μὴ ἐπιπάσθω· ἐν ἄκροβυστίᾳ κέκληταί τις, μὴ περιτεμνέσθω. **Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.** But the rhetorical structure is the only point of connection to Jas. 5:13-14. In reality from a grammar perspective, Paul’s expression proves nothing one way or the other regarding how to treat James. Both expressions in James and Paul can be taken just as easily to prove the opposite point from what Martin contends.

With each of the two segments -- e.g., Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, and προσευχέσθω -- contained in one statement in the Greek, the dilemma on how to understand their syntactical nature is actually more a translation issue. This because most western languages have to break each segment down into a separate sentence. **Is someone suffering hardship among you? Or, Someone is suffering hardship among you.** This is then followed by the admonition: **Let him be praying.** The two segments can only be translated as a single sentence if the first one is taken as a conditional statement without a stated if-conditional conjunction. Although some modern western languages such as German can structure an idea this way naturally, the majority cannot, and thus have to be translated: **if someone is suffering hardship among you, let him be praying.** The reason most take the first segment as interrogative is because the more natural Koine Greek expression for the conditional idea would be to either insert the appropriate conditional conjunction of εἰ or else to have used the Greek conditional participle κακοπαθῶν rather than the finite verb κακοπαθεῖ. This is what is meant by some commentators with the technical term “rhetorical asyndeton.”

Christian community and encountering these varied experiences in life apart from the believing community. Such a scenario is understood as an impossibility in genuine Christian commitment. To disconnect oneself from a Christian community is to signal non-genuine Christian commitment from conversion on, according to 1 John 2:18-19.¹²

What is being experience that should prompt prayer? James specifies it as *Κακοπαθεῖ* from the root verb *κακοπαθέω*, which itself is a compound verb from *κακο* (evil, bad) and *παθέω* (to experience, to suffer). Used only three times, once here and twice in Second Timothy, the verb specifies to experience usually with a sense of endurance bad things in one's life. In 2 Tim. 2:9, Paul speaks of having endured, *κακοπαθέω*, hardship because of the Gospel and names one of those hardships on the extreme side as being "even to the point of being chained like a criminal" *μέχρι δεσμών ὡς κακοῦργος*. To Timothy, the apostle admonishes in 4:5, *κακοπάθησον*, *endure suffering*. It would be a mistaken and baseless limitation of this term to only include religious persecution, for the verb is much broader in its specification than just persecution. But hardships coming out of religious opposition are certainly an important aspect, since the noun form of this verb, *κακοπαθία*, is used in verse ten in regard to the example of the prophets. Clearly the nature of James' use of the term in verse 13 is primarily at the broad, inclusive definition of meaning that includes evil of every kind that is thrust upon the believer in day to day living. James well understood that daily living could be and often was packed full of difficulties that intended to make life hard to cope with, and even destroy us if possible.

When such hardships hit the believer, what is he or she to do in response? Human nature pushes us to lash out in anger or frustration against the hardship and especially any individuals perceived to be responsible for them. But believers do not -- and must not -- live under the dictates of their depraved human nature. For the children of God only one option is available: talk to your Heavenly Father about the problems coming your way. He is the Father of all fathers and has compassion and concern for His children much deeper than that of any human father. The admonition *προσευχέσθω* is structure in the present tense imperative of Koine Greek. The clear signal of this form is that prayer should be ongoing and continuous, not a random once in a while action. The Heavenly Father loves long conversations with His children and is most anxious to discuss our issues at length with us. To be sure, as Jesus clearly stated it in the Sermon on the Mount, He is not interested in a one-way monologue which turns into a gripe fest on our part.¹³ True prayer is a dialogue where we are privileged to lay out our concerns to our God and then attentively listen to His solution to those concerns. Sometimes that response comes back to us in the form of developing convictions, sometimes in conjunction with reading scripture. Always we know that God will respond to our prayers in His way and will.¹⁴

Does prayer preclude all other actions? Certainly not. Instead, turning our problems over to God give us insight in God's prescribed actions for us in order to address the problems as His children rather than as

¹²**1 John 2:18-19.** 18 Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us.

18 Παιδιά, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, καὶ καθὼς ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν, ὅθεν γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν. 19 ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν ἀλλ' οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν· εἰ γὰρ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἦσαν, μεμενήκεισαν ἂν μεθ' ἡμῶν· ἀλλ' ἵνα φανερωθῶσιν ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν.

Critical to the point here is *οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν* with the preposition phrase *ἐξ ἡμῶν*. The clear sense here is these who detached themselves from the believing community proved that they do not have the same source, that is, the same spiritual progenitor. They have never been 'born from God!' God is not their Father, the Devil is. By detaching themselves, this has been proven.

¹³**Matt. 6:7-8.** 7 When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

7 Προσευχόμενοι δὲ μὴ βατταλογήσητε ὡσπερ οἱ ἐθνικοί, δοκοῦσιν γὰρ ὅτι ἐν τῇ πολυλογίᾳ αὐτῶν εἰσακουσθήσονται. 8 μὴ οὖν ὁμοιωθῆτε αὐτοῖς· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὧν χρειαὶ ἔχετε πρὸ τοῦ ὑμᾶς αἰτῆσαι αὐτόν.

¹⁴**Matt. 7:7-11.** 7 Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

7 Αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν, ζητεῖτε καὶ εὑρήσετε, κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν· 8 πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὑρίσκει καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται. 9 ἢ τίς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἄνθρωπος, ὃν αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ἄρτον, μὴ λίθον ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 10 ἢ καὶ ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ, μὴ ὄφιν ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 11 εἰ οὖν ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὄντες οἴδατε δόματα ἀγαθὰ διδόναι τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν, πόσῳ μᾶλλον ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς δώσει ἀγαθὰ τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν αὐτόν.

sinful humans. What ever actions to be taken by us must always emerge off the foundation of our being God's children and our acting in accordance with our Heavenly Father's will. Only in this can lasting and genuine solutions be found to the hardships we face.

The second question picks up on the reverse side of our lives from hardships: εὐθυμεῖ τις, ψαλλέτω, Is anyone cheerful? Let him praise God in song. What does εὐθυμεῖ mean? Just like the previous verb, εὐθυμέω is only found three times in the New Testament, here and twice in Luke's description of Paul's shipwreck on the way to Rome in Acts twenty-seven.

When the ship carrying the prisoner Paul to Rome ran into a fierce storm after passing the island of Crete, for a while the situation appeared hopeless that the ship and the people on it would survive the storm. In verse 20 Luke says hope of survival had virtually disappeared. But God had appeared to Paul in a dream with reassurance that things would work out okay, and so in the sight of the passengers and crew Paul offered these words to everyone: **I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship**, καὶ τὰ νῦν παραινῶ ὑμᾶς **εὐθυμεῖν**: ἀποβολὴ γὰρ ψυχῆς οὐδεμία ἔσται ἐξ ὑμῶν πλὴν τοῦ πλοίου (27:22). He also repeated the admonition at the end of his speech: **So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told, διὸ εὐθυμεῖτε**, ἄνδρες· πιστεύω γὰρ τῷ θεῷ ὅτι οὕτως ἔσται καθ' ὃν τρόπον λελάληταί μοι (27:25). Paul encouraged these people to be optimistic and cheerful about the future. This was not a blind optimism but a cheerfulness based on what God had indicated through the apostle that He was going to do. In 27:36, Luke in using the adjective form, εὐθυμος, ον, indicates: **Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves, εὐθυμοὶ** δὲ γενόμενοι πάντες καὶ αὐτοὶ προσελάβοντο τροφῆς. The single of the derived adverbial form εὐθύμως in 24:10 throws a little more light on the idea: **I cheerfully make my defense**, knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, ἐκ πολλῶν ἐτῶν ὄντα σε κριτὴν τῷ ἔθνει τούτῳ ἐπιστάμενος **εὐθύμως** τὰ περὶ ἑμαυτοῦ ἀπολογοῦμαι. The setting is the beginning of Paul's defense speech before the Roman governor Felix. Paul's cheerfulness was based on speaking before a non-Jewish authority who understood the ways of the Jews.

Interestingly the etymological background of εὐθυμέω offers some insight in the core idea of the verb. It also is a compound verb made up of two parts, εὐ, **good**, and θυμέω, **I fire up**. The core idea is reasonably close to the English idiom to get fired up in excitement. In ancient usage the thrust of meaning points more in the direction of confidence. A ancient farmer expressed apprehension about whether his barley had sold for a decent price at market and was told, περὶ τῆς κρειθ(ῆς) τῆς ἐνθάλλου εὐθύμει, πέπρακα γάρ, **“don't be anxious about the young barley, for I have sold it.”**¹⁵

From the usage inside the NT as well as from the secular usage and etymological background the picture emerges of being confident in life because of something God is doing for us. We can face hardships confidently knowing that God will see us through them successfully. The word James uses has no connection to a blind optimism about life often advocated in modern society. The so-called excitement experienced by people apart of God has completely different tones and foundations. The biblical perspective is that those outside the Kingdom of God have little to get excited about, and clearly this worldly excitement is something completely different than what James is talking about here.

In the εὐθύμια, **cheerfulness**, James specifies the natural response to clearly become: ψαλλέτω. Literally, the admonition means 'play a psalm on the harp.'¹⁶ The vocal expression of praise became the primary

¹⁵P Amh II. 133⁴ (early ii/A.D.) περὶ τῆς κρειθ(ῆς) τῆς ἐνθάλλου **εὐθύμει**, πέπρακα γάρ, **“don't be anxious** about the young barley, for I have sold it” (Edd.), P Iand 13¹⁸ (iv/A.D.) ἵνα μετὰ χαρᾶς σε ἀπολάβωμεν καὶ εὐθυμῆσ[αι δυνώμεθά] σε. The verb is common with ὑγιαίνω as an epistolary phrase, e.g. P Lips I. 1115 (iv/A.D.) πρὸ μὲν [πά]ντων εὐχομαι τῷ ὑψίστῳ Θεῷ[ῶ] περὶ τῆς σῆς ὑγίας καὶ ὀλοκληρίας, ἵνα ὑγιένοντά σε καὶ εὐθυμοῦντα ἀπολάβῃ τὰ παρ' ἐμοῦ γραμματί[δ]ια: cf. P Lond 12447 (iv/A.D.) (= III. p. 244) παρακαλῶν τὸν θεὸν ἵνα σαι ἀπολάβω εὐθυμοῦντα καὶ εὐπυγ'μοῦντα καὶ ὀλοκληροῦντα, P Oxy XII. 15932 (iv/A.D.) εὐθυμοῦντί σαι (I. σοι) καὶ εὐδαιμονοῦντι.

[James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 261.]

¹⁶ψάλλω fut. ψαλλῶ (Aeschyl.+; ins, LXX; TestAbr A 20 p. 103, 26f [Stone p. 54]; TestJob 14:2, 4; Jos., Ant. 11, 67; 12, 349; Just.; Mel., P. 80, 588; Did.) in our lit., in accordance w. OT usage, **to sing songs of praise, with or without instrumental accompaniment, sing, sing praise** w. dat. of the one for whom the praise is intended τῷ ὀνόματί σου ψαλλῶ **Ro 15:9** (Ps 17:50). ψαλλῶ σοι B 6:16 (Ps 107:4). τῷ κυρίῳ **Eph 5:19**: in this pass. a second dat. is added τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν in or with your hearts; here ψ. is found with ᾄδω (as Ps 26:6; 32:3; 56:8), and the question arises whether a contrast betw. the two words is intended. The original mng. of ψ. was 'pluck', 'play' (a stringed instrument); this persisted at least to the time of Lucian (cp. Par. 17). In the LXX ψ. freq. means

meaning of the word by the beginning of the Christian era. With the background of the psalms (ψαλμοί) strongly in the NT use of the term out of the LXX usage, the admonition is to verbally express a word of praise to God in a musical manner rather than just in normal speech patterns.¹⁷

One needs to remember that in the first century the Friday evening sabbath meeting of the Jews strictly forbid music completely during the meeting. This came about through fierce opposition to music having any role in the sabbath meaning, since it was not to be considered a time of worship, but solely a time for studying the Torah and for praying. Jews were to worship appropriately in their homes and at the temple but not at the synagogue. To put it in modern terms, it was not church (for worship); but rather school (for training). It wasn't until long after the end of the second-temple period in 70 AD that the synagogue sabbath meeting shifted to incorporate elements of worship rather than just prayer and study of the Torah. From all indication early Christian meetings did not begin incorporating musical elements in their gatherings until the Pauline mission in the mid-first century brought about the dramatic cultural shift of Christianity away from Judaism through growing Gentile domination of the movement. From the scant available evidence music did play some role in the worship shrines and temples of the various pagan religions of that time. And especially among the mystery cults where highly loud, fast beat music using cymbals etc. served to whip up the emotions of the participants into a frenzied state where they could more easily communicate with the pagan deities through the supposed heavenly languages of the gods. Music was gradually seen to have a legitimate role in Christian meetings, although in very subdued and moderate usage largely based on the OT psalms. I strongly suspect the early Christian leaders would be shocked and most likely dismayed at the role music is given in contemporary patterns of Christian worship. It would appear closer to the pagan temple pattern than to what they practiced.

What James does advocate, which is within the framework of the other very limited references to music in early Christianity (Rom. 15:9; Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Col. 3:16), is a joyous expression of thanksgiving and praise centered on what God is doing as the basis for the εὐθύμια, [cheerfulness](#), being experienced. Again the present imperative ψαλλέτω signals ongoing responsibility for expressing such praise.

The third question somewhat returns to the first one, but with a distinctively different thrust: ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου. [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.](#) Whereas the κακοπαθία of the first question specifies misfortune and hardship of a general nature and normally due to external forces, the ἀσθένεια of the third question centers on sickness impacting the body internally.¹⁸ In the first century world

'sing', whether to the accompaniment of an instrument (Ps 32:2, 97:5 al.) or not, as is usually the case (Ps 7:18; 9:12; 107:4 al.). This focus on singing continued until ψ. in Mod. Gk. means 'sing' exclusively; cp. ψάλτης=singer, chanter, w. no ref. to instrumental accompaniment. Although the NT does not voice opposition to instrumental music, in view of Christian resistance to mystery cults, as well as Pharisaic aversion to musical instruments in worship (s. EWerner, art. 'Music', IDB 3, 466–69), it is likely that some such sense as make melody is best understood in this Eph pass. Those who favor 'play' (e.g. L-S-JM; ASouter, Pocket Lexicon, 1920; JMoffatt, transl. 1913) may be relying too much on the earliest mng. of ψάλλω. ψ. τῷ πνεύματι and in contrast to that ψ. τῷ νοῦ sing praise in spiritual ecstasy and in full possession of one's mental faculties **1 Cor 14:15**. Abs. sing praise **Js 5:13**. WSmith, Musical Aspects of the NT, '62; HSeidel, TRE XXIII 441–46.—DELG. M-M. EDNT. TW. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1096.]

¹⁷One very intriguing but as of yet unanswered question is just how much difference was there in ancient Greek between speaking a word of praise to God and singing a word of praise. That line of demarcation between speaking and singing was severely blurred with ancient Koine Greek because of the well documented heavily rhythmical, quasi musical manner in which the language was spoken normally. Only in very recent times has modern research began to seriously probe these kinds of issues with ancient languages. Much of the research is very preliminary at this point. Some of the motivation for this is a spin off of the modern confusion about what constitutes music with the introducing of rap and other fringe elements claiming to be authentic music.

¹⁸The Greek vocabulary for illness inside the New Testament is extensive, as is reflected in topics 23.142-23.184, "I Sickness, Disease, Weakness," of the Louw-Nida Greek lexicon. This listing only includes the negative side, and doesn't mention the positive side of physical health (topics 23.129-23.141, **Health, Vigor, Strength**).

23.142 κάμνω: to be ill, with a possible implication of being worn-out or wasting away; **23.143 ἀσθένεια**^b, ας f: the state of being ill and thus incapacitated in some manner; **23.144 ἀσθενέω**^b: to be sick and, as a result, in a state of weakness and incapacity; **23.145 ἀσθενής**^c, ἑς: pertaining to being ill and, as a result, weak and incapacitated; **23.146 διαφθείρω**^c: to become gradually incapacitated; **23.147 ἄρρωστος**, ον: to be sick or ill, as a state of powerlessness; **23.148 κακῶς ἔχω**: (an idiom, literally 'to have

to become sick posed enormous threats to one's life and created great apprehension. Medical practices and the availability of medical treatment across the Roman empire varied enormously.¹⁹ The most advanced medicine was among the Egyptians, followed by that of the Romans, who had borrowed from the Greeks but made substantial advances beyond Greek medicine.²⁰ In the ancient near east medicine was the poorest of that found in the Roman empire. But one must never overlook the availability of medical treatment, for it plays a huge role in the assessment as well. Generally across the empire medical treatment was overwhelmingly available to the wealthy and the powerful. Slaves tended to fall into the next category, simply because a healthy slave was a producing slave. Among the Romans, the military received about as many medical services as did the aristocratic segment on the Italian peninsula. The social group with the least access to medical care was the peasant class. They had to pay fees, sometimes outrageously high, for even the basic treatment.

Among the Jewish people in Palestine, the Roman based medical care was available only to the aristocratic segment of Jewish life. Since slavery was a much less percentage of the population in Palestine than elsewhere, their participation in medical care through the generosity of their owners had less impact on the over all picture. The huge segment of Jewish peasantry had very little access to medical treatment of the

badly' or 'to fare badly') to be in a bad state, to be ill; **23.149** *πονηρός^d, ἄ, ὄν*: (a figurative extension of meaning of *πονηρός* 'evil,' 88.110) a state of being sickly or diseased (in the NT with special reference to the eyes); **23.150** *εἰς τὸ χεῖρον ἔρχομαι*: (an idiom, literally 'to come to the worse') to become increasingly more sick; **23.151** *ἐσχάτως ἔχω*: (an idiom, literally 'to be at an extreme') to be very sick, with the implication of imminent death; **23.152** *βάλλω εἰς κλίνην*: (an idiom, literally 'to throw on a bed') to cause someone to become very ill; **23.153** *μύστιξ^b, ἰγος f*: a state of disease, often implying divine punishment; **23.154** *μαλακία, ας f*: a state of weakness resulting from disease; **23.155** *νόσος, ου f; νόσημα, τος n*: the state of being diseased; **23.156** *δεσμός^c, οὔ m*: (a figurative extension of meaning of *δεσμός^a* 'bond,' 6.14) a state of physical incapacity or illness, usually as the result of some controlling supernatural force (in Lk 13:16, the result of the activity of Satan); **23.157** *δέω^f*: to cause physical incapacity for someone; **23.158** *λοιμός^a, οὔ m; πληγή^c, ἥς f; θάνατος^b, ου m*: a widespread contagious disease, often associated with divine retribution; **23.159** *πυρέσσω; πυρετός, οὔ m; πίμπραμαι^a*: to be sick with a fever; **23.160** *δυσεντέριον, ου n*: an infectious disease of the intestinal tract, usually involving severe pain and diarrhea; **23.161** *λέπρα, ας f*: a dreaded condition of the skin, including what is now regarded as leprosy, as well as certain other types of infectious skin diseases, resulting in a person's being regarded as ceremonially unclean and thus excluded from normal relations with other people; **23.162** *λεπρός, οὔ m*: (derivative of *λέπρα* 'dread skin disease,' 23.161) a person suffering from a dread skin disease; **23.163** *πίμπραμαι^b*—'to swell up.' *οἱ δὲ προσεδάκων αὐτὸν μέλλειν πίμπρασθαι* 'they waited for him to swell up' Ac 28:6. It is also possible to understand *πίμπραμαι* in Ac 28:6 as being sick with a fever (see 23.159); **23.164** *ὕδρωπικός, ἡ, ὄν*: pertaining to swelling resulting from the accumulation of lymph in the body tissues; **23.165** *γάγγραινα, ἡς f*: a disease involving severe inflammation and possibly a cancerous spread of ulcers which eat away the flesh and bones; **23.166** *σκοληκόβρωτος, ον*: pertaining to being eaten by worms (a reference to the occurrence of worms in ulcerous tissue); **23.167** *σπαράσσω; συσπαράσσω*: to cause a person to shake violently in convulsions; **23.168** *ρήγνυμι^d ἢ ῥήσσω*: to cause to fall to the ground in convulsions; **23.169** *σεληνιαζομαι*: to suffer epileptic seizures (associated in ancient times with the supernatural power of the moon); **23.170** *παραλύομαι*: to suffer paralysis in one or more limbs, especially in the leg or foot; **23.171** *παραλυτικός, ἡ, ὄν*: pertaining to being lame and/or paralyzed; **23.172** *ξηραίνομαι*: (a figurative extension of meaning of *ξηραίνομαι* 'to dry up,' 79.81) to become stiff to the point of not being able to move; **23.173** *ξηρός^b, ἄ, ὄν*: (a figurative extension of meaning of *ξηρός* 'dry, withered,' 79.80) pertaining to a shrunken, withered, and hence immobile part of the body; **23.174** *παρίεμαι*: to suffer weakness or disability in some part of the body; **23.175** *χολός, ἡ, ὄν*: pertaining to a disability that involves the imperfect function of the lower limbs; **23.176** *κυλλός, ἡ, ὄν*: pertaining to a disability in one or more limbs, especially the leg or foot, often as the result of some deformity; **23.177** *ἀνάπειρος, ον*: pertaining to a state of being maimed or mutilated, resulting in a crippling condition; **23.178** *ἐκτρέπω*: to wrench or sprain the ligaments of a joint, especially in the legs and feet; **23.179** *ἔλκος, ους n*: a painful, ulcerated sore resulting from infection; **23.180** *ἐλκόομαι*: (derivative of *ἔλκος* 'sore, ulcer,' 23.179) to have sores on the body; **23.181** *αἰμορροέω*: to experience or suffer a loss of blood; **23.182** *πηγή αἵματος* (an idiom, literally 'a fountain of blood'); *ῥύσις αἵματος* (a set phrase, literally 'flow of blood'): the loss of blood through menstrual bleeding; **23.183** *αἱματεκχυσία, ας f*: the process of causing blood to flow out; **23.184** *ἀποψύχωα*: to lose one's consciousness temporarily.

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 269-273.]

¹⁹For an assessment of how medical procedures were used by the Romans, see "Medicine in ancient Rome," wikipedia.org. Also helpful assessment of Roman medical practice and notable doctors and medical schools is Plinio Prioreschi, *A History of Medicine: Roman Medicine* (Omaha, NE: Horatius Press, 1996).

²⁰"The Greek Galen [AD 129- c. 200] was one of the greatest surgeons of the ancient world and performed many audacious operations — including brain and eye surgeries — that were not tried again for almost two millennia. Later, in medieval Europe, Galen's writings on anatomy became the mainstay of the medieval physician's university curriculum along; but they suffered greatly from stasis and intellectual stagnation." ["History of medicine," wikipedia.org]

more advanced nature developed by the Romans.

In addition the concept of illness tended to be different among the Jewish people, than often found elsewhere. Often in the first century world illness was linked to the hugely ominous spirit world where supernatural powers resided. Thus superstition and illness typically were viewed as being interconnected. But the Jewish people considered illness connected to sinful action and healing from illness lay solely in the hands of God.²¹ By the end of the intertestamental era, disease and illness was closely linked to ritual impurity due to disobeying the Torah in some way.²² Physicians were typically considered to be charlatans working outside God's Law and thus in opposition to Him.²³

In Hellenistic Judaism of the late intertestamental era and into the beginning of the Christian era a different viewpoint began to emerge from that typically found in the Old Testament. It signals the influence of Greek ideas of medicine and illness impacting Jewish thinking. Physicians and their prescriptions for curing diseases can function under the control of God.²⁴ Also emerging is a growing belief that the source of illness

²¹“Throughout the biblical tradition, healing is perceived as the work of Yahweh and his divinely empowered agents. In the Hellenistic period, these agents include physicians, although for the most part the biblical writers are hostile toward medicine, or they simply ignore it as having a potential for healing. How sickness is viewed, and therefore how healing is accomplished, are variously understood in the biblical writings. It is evident that changes in these perceptions correspond with changes in the cultural setting of the various biblical writers.” [Howard Clark Kee, “Medicine and Healing” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 659.]

²²“For members of the people, Israel, there is a direct link between sickness and ritual impurity, as is spelled out in great detail with respect to leprosy (Leviticus 13–14). That healing has taken place is to be confirmed by the priest (Lev 13:16; 18:3–7; 14:3), and atoning sacrifices are to be offered with the aim of attaining a cure of the disease (Lev 14:19–21, 29). Miriam is stricken with leprosy for her audacity in claiming a role equal with that of Moses as God's instrument (Numbers 12). Moses appeals to God for her healing, which takes place shortly (Num 12:13–15). Similarly, the bitter complaints of the people about the food supplied by God for them during the wilderness journey result in God's sending deadly serpents among them; when they become penitent, God provides through Moses a remedy from the deadly bite of the serpents (Num 21:4–9). When the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant and took it to their territory, the plague of tumors that broke out led their leaders to send the ark back to the land of Israel (1 Sam 4:10–6:18). Those who looked into the sacred ark out of curiosity (1 Sam 6:19) and even one who reached out to steady it as it was being transported on a wobbly cart (2 Sam 6:6–7) were struck dead for having violated the instrument of Yahweh's presence among his people. Similarly, Jeroboam's initial resistance to the unnamed “man of God” results in his arm's drying up, while the latter's failure to obey the word of Yahweh is punished by his being eaten by a lion (1 Kgs 13:1–25). On the other hand, Hezekiah's petition to Yahweh concerning his seemingly fatal illness is answered by the king's being restored to health. The assurance that this will take place is given by the backward movement of the sun on the sun dial (2 Kgs 20:1–11).” [Howard Clark Kee, “Medicine and Healing” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 660.]

²³“The relatively rare passages in the Hebrew Bible which mention physicians associate them with embalming or with unreliable claimants to healing powers. Joseph arranges with Egyptian “physicians” to prepare his father's body for transport to Israel and burial there (Gen 50:1–14). Asa, the king of Israel, is condemned because he did not seek healing from God for his lingering illness but turned instead to the physicians (2 Chr 16:12). The worthlessness of physicians is implied by Job in his rebuke of those who offer him useless advice (Job 13:4), as it is by Jeremiah's rhetorical question about the lack of a healing agent for God's people (Jer 8:22–9:6) and his sarcastic counsel to Egypt and Babylon to turn to physicians for help to escape the impending judgment of God (Jer 46:11; 51:8).” [Howard Clark Kee, “Medicine and Healing” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 660.]

²⁴“In the midst of advice about seeking the way of truth from the Most High and living according to wisdom (Wisdom of Sirach 37), the author advises his reader to show due honor to the physician, whose ability to heal comes from God (38:1). The writer goes on to explain that it is God who created medicines out of the earth (38:4) and has granted human beings knowledge of these natural means of curing human ills. The druggist prepares the medicines, and the physician administers them. Both the patient and the physician are to pray to God for healing, but it is through the efficacy of these natural medicines that healing will take place, and God will give to the medical doctors the insights for effecting cures and restoring the ill to health (38:12–14). It is implied that sickness is the result of human sin, so that one is to pray that the sinner will fall into the hand of a physician—not because he is a charlatan, as implied in the older biblical sources, but because God has given him knowledge of the natural resources to bring about cures (38:15). It is noteworthy that this advice appears in a document written in the early 2d century B.C.E., which shows the influence of Greek culture at many points. With regard to medicine, it reflects the Stoic notion of natural law, which the physician can draw upon for effecting healing. It was in this period, and especially in Alexandria (where Sirach in its Greek version may well have originated), that the medical tradition linked with the 5th-century-B.C.E. figure of Hippocrates was flourishing, with its emphasis on the inherent healing capabilities of natural substances and the task of the physician to recognize and utilize these inherent powers. Sirach has taken over these basic insights and has adapted them within the framework of belief that the God of Israel is the ultimate power and wisdom guiding the universe and the affairs of the human race. Physicians are the divinely instructed instruments through

is to be seen largely in the demonic.²⁵ Thus God becomes the only hope of deliverance and healing takes on

which these powers which God has built into the created order may become available for human well-being. These insights and healing capabilities are not inherent in humanity, as might be the case with the Stoic view of natural law permeating the universe. Rather, they are part of the wisdom which God communicates for the welfare of earthly creatures.

“Although Josephus credits some of human illness to the demons, as we shall note below, he shares with Sirach the belief that the inherent qualities of natural substances are potentially important for curing human ailments. Thus in his description of the Esenes (JW 2.136) he notes that they study ancient books and writings, especially those that seek to benefit the human body and soul through the cure of diseases, which are effected by medicinal roots and the properties of certain stones. Josephus also traces this kind of knowledge of natural healing substances back to Solomon (Ant 8:44–45), who studied all natural forms and substances and who knew their basic properties for effecting cures. On the other hand, Philo of Alexandria, in his treatise *On the Contemplative Life*, describes the Therapeutae as performing therapy in two ways: (1) The cures which they perform are superior to those performed by medical means, since the latter cure only the bodies, while the Therapeutae treat the human soul. Though the soul may be oppressed with seemingly incurable diseases, these are in fact caused by wicked pleasures; by desires, fears, and griefs; by covetous, foolish, and unjust acts; and by the forces of human passion and vice. (2) Through worship (which is a second meaning of therapeuein, from which the name of the group derives), the members of this sect are attuned to nature and its sacred laws, in accord with which they honor and obey the one true God. Like Stoic-oriented Greek medicine, Philo thought that the path to health—physical and psychic—lies through obedience to the God, whose laws are immanent in the created order of the world.”

[Howard Clark Kee, “Medicine and Healing” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 660-61.]

²⁵“Written about the same time in the early 2d century B.C.E. as the Wisdom of Sirach is the book of Tobit, in which sickness is seen as the result of the work of demons in human life. When Tobit was blinded by sparrow droppings which fell in his eyes, physicians were unable to cure him (Tob 2:10). The entrails of a fish were the remedy to restore his sight (11:8) and at the same time were effective in expelling demons (Tob 6:7; 8:1–3). It is appropriate that the angel who assists in transmitting the information to make possible these cures and exorcisms is named Raphael: “God heals.” But in the postexilic life of Israel, God works healing through intermediate agents, rather than directly as in the older layers of the biblical tradition. A similar role in the causing of human ailments is attributed in 1 Enoch 6–11 to the fallen angels. They have disclosed to human beings the charms and enchantments and heavenly secrets (1 En. 7:1; 8:3; 9:6). It is Raphael once more who announces the doom of the fallen angels and the subsequent healing of the earth (10:4–14).

“The book of Jubilees combines features of both Sirach and Enoch, in that the cures for human ailments are to be found among medicinal herbs, as well as through the direct action of the angelic powers in their cosmic struggle with the demons. The herbal remedies are ingredient in the creation; knowledge of their use has been granted to certain select ones among God’s people (Jub. 10:10–14). Although God is ultimately in control over the fallen angels and the demons, he allows some of them to continue to exercise their malevolent power on earth as a part of the divine judgment of disobedient humanity (Jub. 10:7–8). The remedies for the evils that the demonic leader, Mastema, and the Egyptians work on earth are not given to them, however, but are vouchsafed to chosen human beings (Jub. 48:10). God permits human sickness and other disasters to occur, but in the end these powers will be overcome, and God’s work of renewing the creation will be complete.

“In his description of Solomon in *Ant* 8:44–46, Josephus portrays this archetypal wise man as possessing complete knowledge of the natural world, not merely for identification of all the birds and trees and animals, but also for the philosophical principles which underlie their existence. This, too, sounds like Stoic natural law; but Josephus then goes on to claim that Solomon was granted by God knowledge of the means for safeguarding humans from the power of the demons, so that the healing benefits might come to them. He composed the incantations for the relief of illnesses and passed on exorcistic formulas so that demons might be permanently expelled. Josephus attests that he has seen firsthand the efficacy of these exorcistic formulas attributed to Solomon, which had been invoked by one of his fellow Jews during the reign of the emperor Vespasian.

““Direct evidence of the attribution of human ailments to demonic powers is available in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1QapGen 20:12–29) there is a report of Abraham’s healing action in behalf of the pharaoh. When Abraham lays his hands on the Egyptian monarch, the plague is expelled in the form of the demon that has been causing it. (The technical term *g’r* is used here, conveying the sense that a hostile power has been brought under control, as does the Gk term *epitimaō*, which in the gospels is often translated inadequately as “rebuke” [cf. Mark 1:25; 4:39; Luke 4:35; 8:24; Matt 8:18]). Because of pharaoh’s unwitting violation of the law of Yahweh by taking Sarah as his wife, he has come under demonic control, from which he is released in response to his request to Abraham and that patriarch’s action in expelling the demon. Similarly, in the *Prayer of Nabonidus* (4QPrNab) there is a report that the king has been struck by a severe sickness, just as in Daniel 4 Nebuchadnezzar had lost his mind and wandered like a wild animal. The term used in Nabonidus’ prayer for deliverance is from the root *g’r*, which appears also in Dan 5:7, 11, and is to be linked with *g’r*, and translated as ‘exorcist’ rather than ‘astrologer.’ In all these cases what is at issue is the cure of an ailment and the pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins of a pagan ruler. Here again there is evidence that sickness is linked with subjection to demonic powers; and conversely, healing is achieved through exorcism of the hostile force. God is the ultimate source of healing in these documents, but the therapeutic power is administered through the medium of exorcism of the demonic agents.

a lot of the tones of an exorcism. Inside the New Testament, one finds a couple of patterns. The existence and the medical practice of physicians is assumed, but they generally show up in a negative light as incompetent to effect healing successfully.²⁶

Although Luke is identified as a doctor (cf. Col. 4:14), nothing is mentioned about his practice of medicine. Paul, who identifies him as such, probably is doing so because -- at least in early church tradition -- Luke was a slave on loan to Paul to attend to Paul's ongoing health issues alluded to in some of his letters, i.e., Galatians and Second Corinthians. This may very well suggest that Paul as a Hellenistic Jew had a more positive view of medicine and curative practices of physicians coming out of the Greek influence on Diaspora Judaism.

The gospels devote much attention to the so-called healing miracles of Jesus that cast Him in the role of a healer of diseases within the framework of the Old Testament role of the prophet Elijah who performed healing miracles.²⁷ The many exorcisms that Jesus did reflect the later Jewish tendency to attribute disease to the demonic.²⁸ The central belief of the Old Testament that God alone is the source of all healing remains clearly in place.²⁹ Little, however, is said about illness and healing in the remainder of the New Testament.

[Howard Clark Kee, "Medicine and Healing" In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 661-62.]

²⁶"In some strands of the tradition there are references to physicians as a given factor in the culture of the time, as when Jesus offers justification for his associations with tax collectors and sinners by a proverb-like utterance, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick' (Matt 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31). At the same time there is a direct challenge to the adequacy of their methods of therapy, as when Mark 5:26 and Luke 8:43 report the inadequacy of the medical agents to cure the woman who in vain had spent all her wealth to procure their services. Luke also reports another proverbial saying of Jesus in response to his detractors who want evidence in Nazareth of his healing capabilities as reported to have occurred in Capernaum (Luke 4:23). The statement would seem to fit the context better if his detractors had said, 'Physician, heal!', since what they are calling for is concrete local evidence of his reported healing activities elsewhere. It is the more striking, therefore, that one of the early Christian leaders, with whom the third gospel and Acts came to be associated in the traditions of the Church, was 'Luke, the beloved physician' (Col 4:14)." [Howard Clark Kee, "Medicine and Healing" In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 662.]

²⁷"Elijah, who took up residence at the home of a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon (1 Kgs 17:8-16), restores to life her son who was stricken with a fatal illness (17:17-23). This leads the widow to recognize the prophet as a man of God in whose mouth the word of Yahweh dwells (17:24). Similarly, the Syrian army commander, Naaman, seeks and receives a cure for his leprosy through Elisha, the prophet of Yahweh, who instructs him to bathe in the river Jordan, which he does and is cured (2 Kgs 5:1-14). This experience of a cure through obedience to the word of the man of God leads Naaman to declare that there is no God in all the earth except Yahweh, the God of Israel (5:15)." [Howard Clark Kee, "Medicine and Healing" In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 660.]

²⁸"In the gospel tradition three verbs are used to describe the healings performed by Jesus: (1) *hiaoimai*, 'cure,' 'deliver from illness'; (2) *therapeuo*, 'wait upon,' 'care for,' 'heal'; (3) *sothesomai*, 'make whole,' 'restore.' Throughout the Synoptics there are summary statements about the healing activity of Jesus: examples may be found in Mark 1:32-34; 1:19; 6:56; Matt 4:23; 8:16; 14:15; 15:30; 21:14; Luke 6:5, 17; 7:20. The two features which appear in these are an emphasis on his role as healer, and the widespread interest that this activity evokes from his contemporaries." [Howard Clark Kee, "Medicine and Healing" In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 662.]

²⁹In Acts, some instances of either Peter or Paul performing healing miracles surface. E.g., Peter heals Aeneas of his "palsy" at Lydda (9:32-35). He then raises Tabitha at Joppa from the dead (9:36-42). Peter healed a lame man at the temple gate in Jerusalem (3:1-16). Paul heals a lame man at Lystra (14:7-9). He also brought the young man Eutychus back to life at Troas (20:9-12). Additionally he did an exorcism on the young slave girl at Philippi (16:16-18), and healed Publius' father of dysentery at Malta (28:7-8).

Ananias and Saphira are struck dead at Peter's feet in Jerusalem (5:5-11) and the Jewish magician Elymas is temporarily blinded by Paul at Salamis on Crete (13:9-12). Also Paul is struck blind temporarily on the road to Damascus (9:8-9); Herod is suddenly slain by an angel from God (12:23).

What Luke seeks to establish is that the displays of God's extraordinary power through Paul and Peter is intended to provide validation that their preaching of the Gospel was in the tradition of Jesus, and God approved this message from all three individuals. In the report of their missionary activity to the church and the Christian leaders at Jerusalem in the late 40s, they stressed the bottom line issue that divine approval of their message of salvation by faith apart from works of Law was dramatically given by God in *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα*: "The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of *all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles*" (15:12).

For a somewhat helpful discussion see Fr. John A. Hardon, "The Miracle Narratives in the Acts of the Apostles," the realpresence.org. The presentation suffers from a woefully inadequate understanding of the biblical view of miracles, but does provide organized listing of the miracles in Acts.

But the rare allusions remain consistent with the perspective found in the gospels.³⁰

What is clearly present in James' words in verse fourteen is the clearly defined Jewish perspective that the healing of illness can only come from God. No mention is made, nor is any attitude toward physicians either negative or positive implicit here. Rather James encourages his readers to turn to their spiritual community for assistance in times of sickness and disease. James does not allude to the source of illness coming either from the demonic (more popular Jewish view in his world) nor from Torah disobedience (more the OT view). What he does reflect clearly is the linking of physical illness and spiritual concerns. Thus forgiveness of sins naturally follow the physical healing. But this naturally comes out of seeing God as the ultimate source of healing, which includes both the physical and the spiritual. The unique aspect of this passage is the role of the spiritual leaders, τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας, in the believing community in the healing process. No where else in the New Testament do we find a similar emphasis.

ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, *Are any among you sick?* The use of ἀσθενέω to refer to illness is a standard term in the New Testament to refer to illness. Note that James makes no allusion to how or why the member of the believing community became ill. Neither does he make any kind of judgment value on the existence of illness in the believer's life. This follows the perspective of Jesus as reflected in the narrative of the lame man at the Sheep Gate in the temple (cf. John 4:2-18). Also, Jesus bluntly rejected the value judgement of his disciples regarding the origin of the man who had been born blind (John 9:1-12). Their assumption, in traditional Jewish fashion, was that his blindness was a punishment of God for sin, either his or that of his parents. Jesus would tolerate none of this kind of thinking among his disciples. Under severe interrogation by the Pharisees, the healed man reflects clearly the central Jewish view that all healing comes from God (9:30-34).

Again as in the first question, the τις ἐν ὑμῖν, *anyone among you*, reflects the assumed Christian setting for the illness with the individual functioning inside the community of believers.

προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου. *Let him call the elders of the church and let them pray over him after having anointed him with olive oil in the name of the Lord.* The admonition here is more involved than in the two previous instances. Several unique aspects in the document surface here. This is the second time that leaders in the local communities of believers have been referenced. In 3:1 they were listed as διδάσκαλοι, *teachers*. But here the standard reference found in Acts by Luke for local leaders is used πρεσβυτέρους, *elders*.³¹ This is the same group but viewed from two ministry responsibilities, giving teaching and providing leadership.

What is their leadership responsibility to sick members? Must these leaders be miraculous healers of diseases as a part of their duties as church leaders? A few commentators will seek to link Paul's χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων, *gifts of healing* (1 Cor. 12:9) to here with the assumption that such gifts are required by local church leaders. But James does not suggest here that the local leaders do the healing of the sick member! To the contrary, just the opposite: God alone heals the sick person, and forgives his sins (v. 15). Additionally the role of the entire community in this healing is enormous (v. 16). The role of the local leaders is to facilitate God's

³⁰“In 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul is describing the charismatic gifts which the Spirit of God produces, he mentions the gifts of healing and the working of miracles (12:9–10, 29–30). He does not describe their occurring, nor does he indicate whether or not he shared in these gifts. They are, however, ranked by him in fourth place, after the roles of apostle, prophet, and teacher. Near the end of his hortatory treatise, the author of James asks his readers to confess their sins to one another and to pray for one another so ‘that you may be healed.’ Implicit in this exhortation is that sickness is related to sin, just as healing is linked with forgiveness, which as noted is also the case in the gospel tradition. What is wholly clear from this non-narrative NT evidence is that healing continues to have a significant role in the lives of those who see themselves as the people of God” [Howard Clark Kee, “Medicine and Healing” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 663.]

³¹“When the office was established is hard to determine, for while there were Jewish antecedents (Ex. 3:16; 24:1, 9; Numbers 11; Dt. 5:23; 19:12; Ezr. 10:14; Sus. 5, 29, 34; Mt. 26:3), as one would expect in a patriarchal society, the term is never used of a Christian office in the gospels, but it suddenly appears in the early narratives of Acts (11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 20:17) and the epistles (1 Tim. 3; 5:17; Tit. 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Jn. 1:1; cf. Phil. 1:1). There is never any discussion of the propriety of the office, so it is reasonable to conclude that it was absorbed from the synagogue, although given a distinctly Christian character (G. Bornkamm, TDNT VI, 651–683; cf. the literature cited by Mussner, 219, and L. Coenen, DNTT I, 192–201). One notices that in James it is not just any older person who is called, but officials, the elders of the church, which in this case is surely the local congregation (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 4:17; 11:16; 1 Thes. 2:14; although in the cases of Rome and Corinth the church in the locality surely included more than one congregation; cf. Stuhlmacher, 70–75). The call is a general call; whether one or many or all the elders respond is not mentioned, although the plural verb indicates James expects several to come.” [[Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 192-93.]

healing of the individual by actions that point the member's focus on God as the source of his healing.

Both the content and the symbolism of their actions is critical. They are to be summoned to the bedside of the sick member (προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας). Just within itself, this action points toward God as the Healer, rather than a physician or some prescribed remedy for curing the illness. I strongly suspect that, given James' frequently demonstrated dependency on Sirach all through this document, he most likely would have taken the stance clearly expressed in Sirach 38.³² The use of a doctor in times of illness was considered entirely appropriate for one who looks to God for healing. The physician functions as one of the vehicles of divine healing. Unquestionably, the framework of healing advocated by Sirach, a century or so before James, and that of James is completely compatible and complementary to one another. The uncertainty given limited availability of doctors both in Palestine and to some extent outside in Diaspora Judaism makes the summoning of a doctor additionally as a possible non option in some instances for Jewish Christian church members. But within this approach to healing, such does not pose a problem. God as the ultimate Healer can use whatever means He chooses to produce healing.

Once the local leaders have arrived by the bedside of the sick member, what are they to do? James prescribes prayer for them to offer up: προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου. They are to pray over the sick person (ἐπ' αὐτὸν). He says nothing about posture, encircling the patient etc. He does indicate πρεσβυτέρους, plural noun rather than singular. That is, the local communities will ordinarily have a plurality of leadership, rather than a single leader. They are to gather as a group by the side of the ill member.

Their central responsibility is to προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν, **let them pray over him**. The aorist imperative verb form specifies a specific prayer offered in behalf of the sick member. But one action is to take place prior to the offering of the prayer: ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου, **after having anointed him with olive oil in the name of the Lord**. In Jewish tradition the use of olive oil³³ in healing from disease was **substantial and normal**,³⁴ given the role of the olive and olive oil in that heritage.³⁵ But here for James the

³²**Ben Sirach 38:1-15.** 1 Honor physicians for their services, for the Lord created them; 2 for their gift of healing comes from the Most High, and they are rewarded by the king. 3 The skill of physicians makes them distinguished, and in the presence of the great they are admired. 4 The Lord created medicines out of the earth, and the sensible will not despise them. 5 Was not water made sweet with a tree in order that its power might be known? 6 And he gave skill to human beings that he might be glorified in his marvelous works. 7 By them the physician heals and takes away pain; 8 the pharmacist makes a mixture from them. God's works will never be finished; and from him health spreads over all the earth. 9 My child, when you are ill, do not delay, but pray to the Lord, and he will heal you. 10 Give up your faults and direct your hands rightly, and cleanse your heart from all sin. 11 Offer a sweet-smelling sacrifice, and a memorial portion of choice flour, and pour oil on your offering, as much as you can afford. 12 Then give the physician his place, for the Lord created him; do not let him leave you, for you need him. 13 There may come a time when recovery lies in the hands of physicians, 14 for they too pray to the Lord that he grant them success in diagnosis and in healing, for the sake of preserving life. 15 He who sins against his Maker, will be defiant toward the physician.

³³Greek terms in the NT: ἐλαία, olive tree or an olive; ἔλαιον, olive oil (produced from olives); ἐλαιών, olive grove or olive orchard.

³⁴"The use of oil in healing was not uncommon in the ancient world (Is. 1:6; Je. 8:22; Mk. 6:13; Lk. 10:34; Jos. Ant. 17:172; War 1:657; Life Adam 36; Apoc. Mos. 9:3; Sl. Enoch 22:8-9; 8:35; Philo Som. 2.58; Plato Menex. 238; Pliny Nat. Hist. 23.39-40; Galen 2.10; cf. H. Schlier, TDNT I, 230-232)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 193.]

³⁵"**olive, olive tree.** A Mediterranean evergreen tree (*Olea europaea*); its fruit is an important FOOD and source of OIL. Either the tree or the olive berry can be referred to by the Hebrew word *zayit* H2339 and by the Greek word *elaia* G1777 (note also the compounds *kallielaios* G2814, "beautiful [i.e., cultivated] olive tree," and *agrielaios* G66, "wild olive tree," Rom. 11:17, 24).

"The first mention is in Gen. 8:11, which states that the dove NOAH sent out brought back an olive leaf in its beak. The olive was one of the 'blessings' of the Promised Land. The trees there grow on the mountain side where there is not much soil. Heavy crops are produced, and the oil from the fruits is used in cooking. The ripe fruits are, of course, eaten as a relish before or with a meal, while pickles often are made. It was olive oil that was used to anoint kings (2 Ki. 9:6) and it was probably the fuel used for lamps (Num. 4:16).

"The timber of the trees is finely grained and has a rich amber color. This may be the reason why this pleasant colored wood was chosen to make the doors and posts of the TEMPLE as well as for the carving of the CHERUBIM. There is nothing particularly beautiful about an olive tree, yet Hos. 14:6 (NRSV) says, "his beauty [NIV, splendor] shall be like the olive tree." The beauty does not lie in the gray-twisting trunk, or in the small dark green leaves with white undersides, or even in the fruits. However, to the person who is going to pick a heavy crop and so get an abundance of oil, the tree is indeed beautiful.

"The olive tree is found all over Palestine, and particularly so around BETHLEHEM and HEBRON. The oil used by the apos-

more important role for the olive oil is its symbolism of invoking the presence of God upon the individual, in the same manner as described in Mark 6:13, καὶ δαιμόνια πολλὰ ἐξέβαλλον, καὶ ἠλειφον ἐλαίῳ πολλοὺς ἀρρώστους καὶ ἐθεράπευον, *They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

The climatic signal of the purpose of the prayer along with the anointing is that this was to be done ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου, *in the name of the Lord.*³⁶ God as the Healer would have to use His power to expel the disease or illness from the church member's body. These actions of prayer, anointing, and invoking God's name do not make this a ritual as a standard to be imitated, nor do they define the healing as an exorcism, as some would contend. Instead, they express in first century Jewish Christian patterns actions intended to call upon God to heal the individual as He chooses. Neither the leaders nor these actions effect the healing. It is completely in God's control.

As a motivation to the sick church member -- and perhaps also to the church leaders who gather by the side of the sick member -- James makes an axiomatic statement regarding the central role of prayer and faith in the healing process. This is completely in line with the strong emphasis upon faith and healing found in the miracles of Jesus in the gospels.

καὶ ἡ εὐχή τῆς πίστεως, *and the prayer of faith.* This is the key point of reference.³⁷ The leaders of the church have been encouraged to pray over the sick one. His action of summoning them to his bedside reflects a confidence in God to meet his needs as a reaching out to God in faith. Thus the εὐχή being offered to God represents the common affirmation of faith in God shared by the sick and the community of believers he belongs to. Such prayers must flow out of unconditional faith commitment to God and His will. James has made this clear already in 1:5-8, and this stands consistent with the same emphasis by Jesus (Mk. 2:5; 5:34; 10:52; 6:6) and Paul (Acts 14:9). The prayer for healing then rises out of deep faith commitment to God by those connected to this situation. One should note that contra the heretical twisting by modern day charlat-

les in Mk. 6:13 was undoubtedly olive oil, and the instructions given in Jas. 5:14 about anointing the sick surely refer to olive oil also. This oil was used to treat wounds, and the Good Samaritan used it effectively (Lk. 10:34). The olive grows well by the seaside, and it is said to like the salty air and mists. The Bible suggests that olive trees should be planted around the coasts (cf. Deut. 28:40).

“The golden oil produced from the olive (Zech. 4:12) is full of goodness. Thus the tree and its fruit can be used in a figurative sense, ‘The LORD called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form’ (Jer. 11:16; cf. Rom. 11:17). David uses the same idea when he refers to himself as ‘an olive tree flourishing in the house of God’ (Ps. 52:8). Westerners cannot see the olive as beautiful, but in the E, where it is difficult to grow evergreens, the olive-gray of the foliage is attractive.

“An olive will grow where no other trees can. Further, the olive will yield heavily with the minimum of care and culture. It is possible to produce twenty gallons of oil from one olive tree. When harvesting, the branches are shaken or beaten. The farmers were told to leave a few olives on the topmost boughs for the fatherless, widows, and strangers (Deut. 24:20; Isa. 17:6). Only one olive flower in every hundred produces fruit. It looks like a snowstorm when the petals fall. This is referred to in Job 15:33, where thousands of petals are thrown off as useless by the olive tree. (See further FFB, 156–57.)

“The Israelites were pictured as olive trees, for they were to yield ‘fruits’ where other trees could not grow. They were to have a spiritual role in a world that was merely crying out for kings and pomp (Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6). See also FLORA (under Oleaceae); OIL TREE.”

[Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney, *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 4, M-P, Revised, Full-Color Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 2009), 594-95.]

³⁶“The calling out of Christ's name in baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5 Mt. 28:19, two of which use ἐν; cf. Jas. 2:7) and in the rites of healing and exorcism was normal in the early church (Mk. 9:38; Lk. 10:17; Acts 3:6, 16; Acts 4:7, 10; Acts 9:34); this practice indicates that in calling out the name the baptizer/healer/exorcist was acting as the representative of God calling upon the power of God (cf. H. Bietenhard, TDNT V, 277, who also gives background). It is God's power (i.e. ὁ κύριος in 5:15) which will heal the person. Thus one finds three actions in the healing rite: prayer, anointing, and the calling out of the name of Jesus. This is not a magical rite, nor an exorcism (cf. Dibelius, 252), but an opening to the power of God for him to intervene whether or not the demonic is involved.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 193-94.]

³⁷“The noun *euchē* can, in certain contexts, mean ‘oath/vow’ (see, e.g., Xenophon, Memorabilia 2, 2, 10), and this is the dominant usage in the LXX (e.g., Gen 28:20; 31:13; Num 6:2; Deut 12:6; Ps 49:14; compare Acts 18:18; 21:23). Given James' prohibition of oaths in 5:12, such a meaning here is impossible, and *euchē* should be taken in its meaning of ‘prayer’ (as in Xenophon, Symposium 8:15; Dio, Or 36:36), as is made clear immediately by the use of *euchesthai* in 5:16. The genitive *tes pisteos* is qualitative: the prayer spoken in faith or the prayer that is spoken out of faith. Compare ‘ask in faith’ in 1:6, and contrast ‘ask wickedly’ in 4:3” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 332.]

tans the faith here is not believing that you are going to get what you want. Such thinking is pagan egotism forced down onto scripture.

What is the potential of such a prayer arising out of such complete surrender to the will of God? James stresses two points. First, it σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερῆ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος, *will deliver the one who is ill and the Lord will raise him up*. The sick church member has the potential to be delivered from his illness. The use of τὸν κάμνοντα from κάμνω rather than ἀσθενής, ἕς as a noun from the original question is interesting. Both ἀσθενέω and κάμνω define illness from the viewpoint to loss of strength that becomes life threatening. And κάμνω can also emphasize the emotional weariness connected to disease that saps strength from the body. The promise of healing given here is complete deliverance (σώσει) from this. In the second strophe in parallel to the first, ἐγερῆ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος, Jesus stands as the Healer who will take the hand of the sick person to enable him to get up off his bed of sickness in complete restoration.³⁸ The elders didn't heal the person, and not even their prayer! Instead God did the healing. The faith commitment based prayer freed up God do take action in the life of the sick person.



Second, the prayer of faith impacts the spiritual condition of the church member: κὰν ἀμαρτίας ἦ πεποιηκώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ, *and should he have committed sin, it will be forgiven him*. The Greek conditional sentence structure as a third class conditional sentence only suggests the possibility of sin being present in the life of the sick church member. No accusation of its presence, nor any charge that some sin has caused the illness is made at all. James, although following some aspects of traditional Jewish view of illness and healing, does not inject here the old Jewish 'tit-for-tat' idea that particular sins cause particular illnesses. Nor even the often expressed idea that illness is a product of sinful action.³⁹ Jesus had clearly rejected such thinking as is made clear in the gospels. Rather, James wisely senses that any prayer request for healing from illness coming out of complete surrender to God cannot but help impact the spiritual condition of the sick person in forgiveness of sin. What is described here is seen in the linking of physical healing to spiritual for-

³⁸“James’ language here again has a rich allusiveness. On one side, the use of *egeirein* (‘to raise up’) establishes a connection to the gospel accounts of Jesus’ healings, a remarkable number of which involve this term: the paralytic (Matt 9:5–7; Mark 2:9; Luke 5:23–24; John 5:8); the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:3); the synagogue official’s daughter (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54); the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:14); blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:49); and Lazarus (John 11:29). On the other side, such language cannot but also recall the resurrection, whether of Jesus or the sick person. The connection is made explicitly in Luke’s account of the healing of the lame man in Acts 3:1–10. Peter tells him, “ ‘In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, walk,’ and he took him by the right hand and raised him up” (3:7–8). Later, Peter declares that the resurrection of Jesus had effected the healing: ‘by faith in his name, has made this man strong, and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all’ (3:16). And, before the Sanhedrin, Peter once more declares: ‘By the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well . . . there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (4:10–12). James’ language shares this polyvalence, so that his reassurance can be read at two levels simultaneously: the Lord is able to ‘raise him up’ from sickness, and thus ‘save him’ by physical healing, and is able to ‘raise him up by resurrection’ even if he should die and ‘save his life/soul’ in the resurrection life (see James 1:18; 5:20).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 333.]

³⁹As a general rule such thinking is rejected in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles. But, it is recognized that God can and does on some occasions use illness as a temporal judgment for sinful actions.

“It was certainly part of the Deuteronomic tradition to understand God’s blessings and curses in this-worldly terms and connected to human behavior (Deut 28:1–68; 30:1–19). In this view, sickness and distress are the direct result of sin (Deut 28:58–62). The prophet Ezekiel individualized the pattern but did not challenge its applicability (Ezek 18:1–29). Precisely such a link between sin and human distress is assumed by conventional Hebrew wisdom (Prov 3:28–35; 11:19; 13:13–23; 19:15–16; 23:19–21; Sir 1:12–13; 3:26–27; 11:14–20) and is placed in the mouths of Job’s challengers (Job 8:1–22; 11:6; 22:1–30). Similar links between sin and sickness can be found in the rabbinic tradition (m.Shab. 2:6; b.Shab. 32a–33b; b.Ned. 41a; b.Ber. 5a). The equation is challenged in various ways by Qoheleth (3:16–22; 5:12–17; 6:1–9; 7:15; 9:11) and Job (9:13–21; 13:18–14:22; 21:4–26; 29:1–30:31). John’s Gospel suggests a denial of the connection (John 9:1–3), but it is still found in 1 Cor 11:29–30, where Paul states: ‘For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself; that is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.’ James, in contrast, does not directly attribute sickness to sin, for he uses a conditional: ‘and if this person has committed sin. . . .’ Nevertheless, sin also is recognized here as a factor in illness, inasmuch as it involves a process of alienation that also requires ‘healing’ as much as the body does.” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 333–34.]

givenness coming out of faith commitment in many of the healing miracles of Jesus (Matt 9:2–6; 12:31; Mark 2:5–11; 3:28; Luke 5:20–24; 7:47–48; 12:10). God’s deliverance is real deliverance, not partial or skimpy!

b) The role of the community to the believer, vv. 16-18.

16 ἐξομολογεῖσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων ὅπως ἰαθῆτε. Πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη. 17 Ἠλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῆ προσηύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξει, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἑνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ· 18 καὶ πάλιν προσηύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.

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.

The connection of verse sixteen to a western reader seems at first strange and out of place. But to one reading this text from a collectivistic culture rather than an individualistic one the significance of this statement in verse sixteen is not only clear but to be expected.⁴⁰ With James’ use of the specifically medical oriented ἰαθῆτε, *you may be healed*, the point shines out like a bright light. The ability of God to effect healing -- both physical and spiritual -- is conditioned upon the spiritual health of the entire community, not just on the sick member and the church leaders. The inferential connector οὖν overtly signals what would have been clearly understood by the first readers.⁴¹ That is, vv. 13-15 contain by implication vv. 16-18, which the writer now plainly states.

For the individual member to be healed, and for the leaders to be effective facilitators of that healing by God, the entire community must not be harboring sinful conduct. If so, then open confession is essential to the cleansing necessary for healing to take place. A fractured community cannot minister to the needs of its members, either physically or spiritually.

James demands of the community two things: ἐξομολογεῖσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων, *therefore be confessing your sins to one another and be praying for one another*. The implication of the plural form of these verbs is enormous. Both individuals and the community collectively must engage in open confession of sin. The Hebrew heritage for this in the Old Testament is massive.⁴² Ancient Israel was

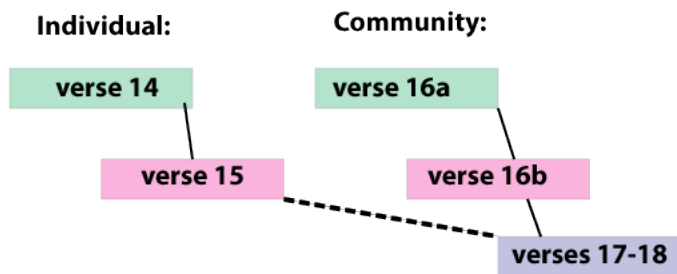
⁴⁰Although Davids doesn’t stumble as bad here as most others, he still fails completely to grasp the implications of the very different cultural setting James works from over against that of David’s own modern culture. As such he exemplifies the extreme difficulty of a individualistically oriented western mind-set to grasp the collectivistically oriented ancient mind-set.

“Since healing is connected with the forgiveness of sin, one is not surprised to see the author discuss that topic next. After all, the book is moving in that direction, for 5:19–20 will continue the topic. Thus 5:16–18 are in fact a transitional section. Yet this transitional character makes 5:16 problematic, for its first segment appears to be a saying unrelated to the previous verse, yet joined to it by the οὖν (omitted in the Byzantine text) and the ἰαθῆτε. Here Cantinat, 254, and Mussner, 227, are incorrect in referring to Is. 6:10 LXX and its citations in the NT, and to Dt. 30:3; Ps. 30:2–3 [29:3–4]; 1 Pet. 2:24 (Is. 53:6); and other texts in the LXX where healing is spiritual; rather, Dibelius, 255, is surely correct when he notes that in the context the redactor must be thinking of the physical healing of 5:14–15, for except in quotations ἰάομαι always refers to physical healing in the NT. The solution to the problem appears to be that James, perhaps using a familiar saying, does move toward 5:19–20, but at the same time he consciously generalizes, making the specific case of 5:14–15 into a general principle of preventive medicine; thus the healing is general rather than referring to the specific case or, as Mussner, 227, argues, an epidemic. This interpretation avoids the problem of having to find parts for the sick person and the elders in the verse (as Ropes, 309) and takes the plurals seriously (ἐξομολογεῖσθε), while it accepts a real connection with the context as indicated by the vocabulary and grammar (cf. Laws, 232).” [[Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 195.]

⁴¹This clearly understood connection is behind some manuscript copyists completely omitting the conjunction οὖν: Ψ 049 M ff vg^{miss}.

⁴²“The act of confession was important in Hebrew religion for individuals (Lv. 5:5; Nu. 5:7; Pss. 32:5; 38:3–4; 40:12; 51:3–5; Pr. 20:9; 28:13; Jb. 33:26–28; Pss. Sol. 9:6; 1QS 1:23–2:1; CD 20:28) as well as for the community (Lv. 16:21; 26:40; Dn. 9:4–10;

**James 5:13-18
Healing - Faith - Prayer**



required by God to both individually and collectively acknowledge its sin to God. Most of the admonitions to do so are also connected to healing from diseases or calamities that have impacted either individuals or the nation generally. But beyond James' Jewish heritage comes both the teachings of Jesus and the general practice of early Christianity.⁴³ The role of open confession of sin was seen as essential to the spiritual health of the community.⁴⁴ Functioning within the mind-set of a collectivistic society, such perspectives are natural and to be expected. It is the western individualistic mind-set that produces a sense of offense and resistance to this demand of scripture. And we pay the price for that resistance with a perpetually anemic and sick Christianity spiritually.

But not only is there to be continuing confession of sin in the community, continuing intercessory prayer for members of the community must prevail: εὔχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων. The present tense imperative verb here, as well as with ἐξομολογεῖσθε, stress ongoing responsibility. As a spiritual family believers are bonded together deeply. The content of the intercession is not specified by James directly, but contextually it is clear that the healing of members from diseases would constitute a major aspect of the responsibility here.

The goal of both the confessing and praying is stated as ὅπως ἰαθῆτε, *so that you may be healed*. The overwhelming use of ἰάομαι for healing from illness and disease in the New Testament unquestionably links the healing in mind here back to the ἀσθενεῖ, illness, in verse 14. The danger posed by physical illness, especially when viewed as always having some kind of deeper spiritual issue attached, motivates the community to pray for the physical health of its members in correlation to their spiritual health. When the community seriously engages in dealing with its sin problems and makes a practice of lifting up its members to God for healing, God has a free hand to bring profound health to such a community.

Just as James turned to a foundation maxim in verse 15 to encourage the calling of the local leaders to the bedside of the sick member, he again follows the same pattern in v. 16b to encourage the community to engage in confession and intercessory prayer: Πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη. Here he stresses δέησις δικαίου, *the intercession of a righteous man*, rather than ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως, *the prayer of faith*. This shift is entirely appropriate with its connection to a confessing and praying community in v. 16a. When the community reaches out to God and to one another as James admonishes, there will be a level of righteousness present in the community opening up the presence and power of God in marvelous fashion. The intercession, δέησις, of such righteous people, James says, Πολὺ ἰσχύει, *possesses much strength*. This is not the often seen repeating of empty ritualistic phrases on Sunday morning. Nor is this the 'power prayer' that slaps the sick person on the stage with assistants standing close by to catch the victim who has been carefully pre-coached on how to react to the slap on the forehead. Instead, this is the kind of praying that everyone senses is communing with God in deep, profound expression of intercession. The other quality that James attaches, which causes translation problems to some, is that such intercession is ἐνεργουμένη. Actually the idea of James is quite simple: This kind of intercession must be prayed if it is to express the strength it possess. The participle ἐνεργουμένη simply means *being energized*, that is, being implemented. In no way is James talking about we have to work ourselves into some kind of frenzy when praying. Jesus specifically called such as *praying like pagans and thus condemned it in Matt. 6:7-8*. Nor is James alluding to some kind of quasi magi-Ezk. 10:1; Bar. 1:15–2:10; Jud. 9:1–14; Tob. 3:1–6; 3 Macc. 2:2–20; 6:2–15). Most of these passages are connected with healing from illness or salvation from some other distress which God has brought upon the community or person.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 195.]

⁴³Likewise the NT (Mk. 1:5; Mt. 3:6; Acts 19:18; 1 Jn. 1:9) and the early church knew of confession of sin (1 Clem. 51:3; 52:1; Did. 4:14; 14:1; Barn. 19:12; Hermas Vis. 1.1.3; 3.1.5–6; Sim. 9.23.4). In all of these cases (with the possible exception of 1:9) there is an open and public acknowledgment of guilt, usually in the church (or community gathering in Judaism; cf. O Michel, TDNT V, 202–220). The Psalms were at times a public announcement of a pre-healing private confession, while many of the passages cited picture an action which normally took place openly in preparation for healing (even John the Baptist looks to national healing) or prayer (Hermas). James, then, is speaking of confession in the community meetings (although he certainly does not exclude more detailed and private confession to another person), to one another (ἀλλήλοις). The role of the elders is not mentioned (although in 5:15 they surely listen to a confession); one can assume that they guide the process.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 195-96.]

⁴⁴Sidenote: The later development of the Roman Catholic confessional is a gross distortion and perversion of what James is talking about here. The public acknowledgement of sin is the point. Confession is made directly to God before the gathered church. Not privately to a church leader claiming ability to declare forgiveness -- something only God can do.

cal wording that has to be spoken for the prayer to work. Rather, he indicates that we must pray, if our prayers are to express the strength they have potentially. Prayer is something we do, not something we think about.

In climatic fashion James turns to the example of the prophet Elijah. Interestingly, Elijah was one of the few Israelite prophets who also performed healing miracles, and this may be one motivation for turning to him as an example.⁴⁵ The biblical story of this prophet is found in 1 Kings 17:1 to 2 Kings 2:12.⁴⁶ James points out three or four aspects that help us understand how he wants to use Elijah as an example (vv. 17-18).

First, Ἡλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν, *Elijah was a man of passions similar to us*. Unlike the numerous legends about Elijah in circulation by James' day, James intends to talk about the real human being prophet, not the imaginary legendary prophet.⁴⁷ His legendary image as a man of prayer James will argue has basis in the biblical account of the real man. The ultimate point of James is that this prophet was ordinary (ὁμοιοπαθῆς⁴⁸) and thus we mortals can identify with him.

Second, καὶ προσευχῆ προσήυξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξαι, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ, *and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth*. Here James refers to 1 Kings 17:1, "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.'" The biblical narrative only indicates that Elijah spoke the word of the Lord to Ahab about a coming drought as divine punishment on the northern kingdom ruler. Although this text says nothing about the duration of the predicted drought, the marker signaling the terminus of the drought in 1 Kings 18:1 suggests it lasted a little over three years: "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.'" Again nothing is mentioned in the biblical text about Elijah praying.

So then where did the idea of Elijah praying before and at the end of the drought originate? Where does the precise number 3 1/2 come from? This precise number also was used by Luke in Luke 4:25 in the teaching of Jesus.⁴⁹ Where do the six months come from?⁵⁰ Very likely the precise number comes out of the

⁴⁵"No biblical figure so exercised the religious thinking of post-biblical Judaism as that of the prophet Elijah who in the reign of Ahab (1st half of the 9th cent. B.C.) saved Yahweh religion from destruction by the cult of Baal (1 K. 17:1–2 K. 2:12)." [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 2:928.]

⁴⁶"After Moses (80 times), Abraham (73) and David (59), Elijah is the most frequently mentioned OT figure in the NT (29 + vl. Lk. 9:54)." [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 2:934.]

⁴⁷"Elijah was simply another human being like all those in the congregation reading the epistle (ὁμοιοπαθῆς, as in Acts 14:15; cf. Wis. 7:3; 4 Macc. 12:13), not a heavenly being or a specially perfect person, despite the many legends circulating about him and the story of his ascension into heaven (cf. J. Jeremias, TDNT II, 929–930; Str-B IV, 769; Schechter, 52–53; Molin; Mussner, 229). The example was probably selected because Elijah in legend (not in the OT) was a well-known personage with a reputation for prayer. 1 Ki. 17:1 and 18:42 never mention prayer, nor does Sir. 48:3, although 1 Ki. 17:20–22 does, so his reputation does not come from the OT. But in later tradition, e.g. 2 Esd. 7:109, he is very powerful in prayer (cf. m. Taan. 2:4; b. Sanh. 113a; j. Sanh. 10, 28b; j. Ber. 5, 9b; j. Taan. 1, 63d: the talmudic passages are elaborations of popular traditions of an earlier period; cf. Davids, "Tradition," 119–121). He was also seen as a helper of the oppressed (b. Kidd. 40a; b. Ned. 50a; b. Sanh. 109a; cf. Mk. 15:34–36)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 197.]

⁴⁸ὁμοιοπαθῆς, ἕξ (ὄμοιος, πάσχω; Pla., Rep. 3, 409b, Tim. 45c; Theophr., HP 5, 7, 2; Wsd 7:3; 4 Macc 12:13; Philo, Conf. Lingu. 7; Just.; Tat. 35, 2) **pert. to experiencing similarity in feelings or circumstances, with the same nature** τινί as someone **Ac 14:15; Js 5:17**.—DELG s.v. ὄμοιο. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 706.]

⁴⁹**Luke 4:24-25**. 24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up *three years and six months*, and there was a severe famine over all the land;

24 εἶπεν δέ· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς προφήτης δεκτός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ. 25 ἐπ' ἀληθείας δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, πολλαὶ χῆραι ἦσαν ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡλίου ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ, ὅτε ἐκλείσθη ὁ οὐρανὸς ἐπὶ *ἔτη τρία καὶ μῆνας ἕξ*, ὡς ἐγένετο λιμὸς μέγας ἐπὶ πάσαν τὴν γῆν,

⁵⁰"The number given by James appears to be deduced from one statement and two implications. The statement is in 1 Kgs 18:1, that "the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, 'Go, show yourself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.'" Thus, the three years. Where do the six months come from? Possibly from the phrase, 'after many days' in 18:1, which forms 'after many days in the third year.' Also, some time goes by before the word of the Lord is fulfilled and the rain actually comes

1 Kings 18:1 reference combined with the symbolism of divine judgment lasting seven years in order to be a fully implemented judgment.⁵¹ The emphasis upon Elijah praying to God in regard to the drought most likely originates from the legendary materials, e.g., 2 Esdras 7:106-111.⁵² These materials worked off the premise that the prophets received instructions from God through prayer and God responding to it. In this case, when Elijah called out to God in prayer regarding the death of the widow of Zarephath who took care of the prophet during part of the famine that came out of the drought (1 Kings 17:20-22), it would be a rather easy matter to also connect up the beginning and ending of the drought to Elijah calling out to God for instructions.

James concludes with the second prayer of Elijah regarding the drought: καὶ πάλιν προσηύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς, *Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.* 1 Kings 18 fleshes out the details of this part with the encounter of Elijah first with Obadiah who was convinced he would be killed if he told Ahab to go meet Elijah. But the encounter of Elijah with King Ahab set up the contest on Mount Carmel between the prophet and the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah. Mount Carmel was the center of worship for the rain god Baal, so the prophet set up the contest in Baal's 'back yard.' The recorded prayer of Elijah in the biblical narrative wasn't for rain to fall, but for fire to come down and consume the offering on the altar.⁵³ Once these pagan prophets had been executed Elijah told Ahab that rain was coming, which it did in huge portions (1 Kings 18:41-45).

What must not be overlooked in James' use of Elijah is that Elijah did not bring this drought upon the northern kingdom himself. He sought out God's will and then in true prophetic fashion spoke to Ahab exactly what God told him to say. The power of prayer by the prophet came out of his strict obedience to the instructions of God. The Old Testament narrative makes this absolutely clear with the phrase "*The word of the Lord came to him.*" The power of prayer is found solely in the obedience of the one praying to God's will and instructions. The one praying has no authority whatsoever to arbitrarily 'bring down God's power' on to any situation. God never grants to any mortal such authority! We are channels of ministry for God's power; never containers of God's power for our own use. Most TV preachers have rejected this biblical understanding completely.

What about James drawing upon some of the Jewish legendary material in circulation in his day? Careful understanding of how James uses it reveals that he rejects the purely fictitious aspects but feels free to use some of the reasonable assumptions drawn from the biblical text of First Kings by this material. Its wide circulation in his time created an interpretive understanding among his Jewish Christian readers that he could use to good advantage. This he did.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

The connection of 5:13-18 to us today is substantial. But the many distortions of this passage need to be dispelled first. It does not connect up to us today in at least the following ways.

First, the Roman Catholic -- and with modification the eastern Orthodox traditions -- of last rites or (1 Kgs 18:45). In any case, the 'three years and six months' tradition is found also in Luke 4:25: 'There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there was a great famine over the land.' See also Sir 48:3: 'By the word of the Lord he shut up the heavens,' as well as 4 Ezra 7:39: 'How then do we find that first Abraham prayed for the people ... and Elijah for those who received the rain?' [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 336-37.]

⁵¹"The length of time itself comes from legend (as in Lk. 4:25) and is probably a symbolic round figure, half of 7, for a period of judgment (Dn. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 11:2; 12:14; cf. Dibelius, 256-257, Mussner, 229)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 197.]

⁵²**2 Esdras 7:106-111.** 106 I answered and said, "How then do we find that first Abraham prayed for the people of Sodom, and Moses for our ancestors who sinned in the desert, 107 and Joshua after him for Israel in the days of Achan, 108 and Samuel in the days of Saul, and David for the plague, and Solomon for those at the dedication, 109 *and Elijah for those who received the rain, and for the one who was dead, that he might live*, 110 and Hezekiah for the people in the days of Sennacherib, and many others prayed for many? 111 So if now, when corruption has increased and unrighteousness has multiplied, the righteous have prayed for the ungodly, why will it not be so then as well?"

⁵³**1 Kings 18:36-38.** 36 At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding. 37 Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench.

“Extreme Unction” cannot be legitimately based on this passage, although this is the official stance of the Church.⁵⁴ The doctrine is loosely built off the anointing with olive oil and the sickness of the church member. Take these two elements from the text along with the forgiveness of sins point and severely re-contextualize them to a church member close to death from illness. The anointing with prayer is now done by the spiritual leader termed a priest rather than elders and is designed to effect the necessary ‘healing’ for the individual to step into eternity ready to meet God. This is extreme proof texting of the passage!

Second, this passage does not connect up legitimately to the teaching of ‘faith healers’ in some Protestant denominations, and especially to the belief that I don’t need medical services when sick. In no way does James intend a wedge to be drawn here between medicine and God’s healing action. The Jewish background of Ben Sira that James often draws upon throughout his writing unquestionably sees the physician as a potential channel of divine healing of a sick person. James must be interpreted within this framework, if he is to be correctly understood. Further, the spiritual leaders called upon to pray over the sick are not ‘faith healers.’ Rather, they represent in person the entire community of believers who are fervently praying for the healing of the sick member of their group. It is out of that collective praying that the leaders vocalize in the presence of the sick member so that God can work to bring about His desired healing. The anointing symbolically affirms visually to everyone present the core conviction that all healing comes from God. It has no ritual or certainly no magical curative impact on the sick person. It symbolically invokes God’s blessing on the sick.

What then does this passage say to believers today? First, and most importantly, it reminds each one of us that every experience in daily living -- whether hardship, good fortune, or illness -- is tied to our commitment to God and should motivate us to reach out to our God in the most appropriate manner of prayer and praise. Our entire existence as believers is grounded in the will and leadership of our God.

Second, we belong to a community of believers. And thus our experiences individually are vitally linked to our community. Although difficult for us in individualistic western society to fully grasp, a bond of profound connectedness between the individual and his or her spiritual community not only exists, but opens up a vast reservoir of spiritual help and guidance. The term Christian family takes on a level of meaning in the collectivistic oriented society of James’ day that I’m not sure we in the western world can ever fully grasp -- and experience. Perhaps, this is part of the reason for the spiritual anemia of most of western Christianity today, while in the modern collectivistic societies of Africa and Asia Christianity is exploding in unparalleled growth. I strongly suspect this is part of the reason that modern church life seldom ever approaches the spiritual life and dynamism of early Christianity. May God help us discover the secret to their amazing spiritual life!

Third, coming out of the close connectedness of church and members is the clear teaching of James that the ministry of the congregation is shaped deeply by the level of its own spiritual health. A spiritually healthy praying church is necessary for the physical and spiritual well being of its members. And for the effectiveness of the representative ministry of its leaders to individual members. Each of us bears responsibility for the congregation before our God.

1. When sick, where do you turn first?
2. When both good and bad happen in your life, do you instinctively reach out to God?
3. Can your spiritual leaders effectively pray for you in times of illness?
4. How responsible do you feel for the spiritual health of your church?

⁵⁴For the Roman Catholic view that rejects the criticism of this idea by the Reformers see “Extreme Unction,” The Catholic Encyclopedia online.