

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 325 – November 21st – James 5:1-20

Works frequently referenced in these notes on James

Johnstone, Robert	<i>Lectures on the Epistle of James</i> , Banner of Truth (Reprint of 1871 ed.), Edinburgh, 1977
Martin, R. P.	<i>Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 48: James</i> , Dallas, 1988
Metzger, Bruce M	<i>A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament</i> (Companion Volume to 3 rd Ed. UBS Greek New Testament), United Bible Societies, 1971
Moo, Douglas J	<i>The Letter of James</i> , The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Apollos, Leicester, 2000
Motyer, J Alec	<i>Studies in the Epistle of James</i> , MWE, Croydon, 1968

James 5:1-6

5:1-6 is closely related to 4:13-17 in both style and content. "Both paragraphs begin with the stock formula of address *ἄγε νῦν*, 'come now' (NIV 'now listen'). And both paragraphs condemn a pursuit of wealth that fails to take into account the reality of God and his will for humanity." (Moo). However, there are also significant differences. The tone of 5:1-6 suggests that James is no longer addressing those within the Christian community.

"James's style is that of the prophets pronouncing doom on pagan nations. He unrelievedly attacks these people, with no hint of exhortation.

"The 'rich' whom James attacks in the paragraph are wealthy landowners, as v.4 reveals. This was a class of people frequently criticised in the OT, Jewish literature, and the wider Greco-Roman world for their greedy acquisition of land and their exploitation of those forced to work on the land for them. The socioeconomic conflict between these two classes was acute in the first-century world, and James accurately reflects the situation...

What can be said about the 'rich' in this passage, however, is that they are condemned not simply for their wealth; they are condemned for their sinful use of wealth. Applying the text to all wealthy people, then, would be a misreading of the passage. On the other hand, we cannot avoid the serious reminder about money and possessions that we confront in this text. One of the sins for which God condemns these people is their selfish accumulation of money and things (vv. 2-3).

In the Western world, where amassing material wealth is not only condoned but admired, we Christians need to come to grips with this point in James and ask ourselves seriously: When do we have too much?" Moo.

Verse 1

Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι, κλαύσατε ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς τάλαιπωρίαῖς ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις.
πλουσιος, α, ον rich, well-to-do

James' primary concern is not with quantity of money or possessions but with the attitude of the heart. His concern is with the sin of covetousness.

κλαύσατε Verb, aor act imperat, 2 pl *κλαιω*
weep, cry

ὀλολύζω *wail, mourn*

An onomatopoeic word, occurring frequently in the prophets and always in the context of judgment (Isa 10:10; 13:6; 14:31; 15:2-3; 16:7; 23:1, 6, 14; 24:11; 52:5; 65:14; Jer 2:23; 31:20, 31; Lam 1:1-2; Ezek 21:17; Hos 7:14; Amos 8:3; Zech 11:2). "This background makes it clear that *the misery that is coming upon* the rich refers not to earthly, temporal suffering, but to the condemnation and punishment that God will mete out to them on the day of judgment." Moo.

τάλαιπωρια, ας f *misery, trouble*

A prophetic term found elsewhere in the NT only in Rom 3:16.

ἐπερχομαι *come, come upon*

Martin comments, "The idea behind *ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις* ('coming upon you') is eschatological in nature, although James is not clear here as to whether he understood such punishment of the godless to be a possibility in this life or to be postponed to the day of judgment."

Verse 2

ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν, καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν,

πλουτος, ου m & n *riches, wealth*

σέσηπεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s σηπω rot, decay

Think particularly of harvests stored away. Martin, following Moo, comments, "The rich hoard their wealth, and rather than help the needy they allow such goods to rot."

ἱματιον, ου n garment, clothing, robe
σητοβρωτος, ον motheaten

Cf. Matt 6:19, also Job 13:28.

γέγονεν Verb, perf act indic, 3s γινομαι

Verse 3

ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατιώται, καὶ ὁ ἰδὸς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῶν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν· ὡς πῦρ ἐθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις.

χρυσος, ου m gold, gold coin
ἀργυρος, ου m silver, silver coin, money
κατιώται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s κατιομαι
rust, decay

Cf. Ezek 24:6, 11, 12. "This tells us that he speaks not literally but metaphorically. He is speaking of resources that are left lying fallow and are not put to any purpose, of wealth taken and just hidden away, hoarded." Motyer. Their hoarded wealth will rot and become useless.

ἰος, ου m poison, rust
μαρτυριον, ου n witness, evidence
ἔσται Verb, fut indic, 2 s ειμι
φάγεται Verb, fut midd dep indic, 3 s ἐσθω
and ἐσθω eat, consume
σαρξ, σαρκος f flesh, physical body
πυρ, ος n fire

Martin comments, "This terrible picture conveys the image of the last judgment as (ὡς; a simile...) fire (πῦρ) consumes the flesh (σάρξ, i.e., the person; so Davids, 176–77; see Judg 16:17). In short, the wealth of the ungodly rich stands as a witness to accuse them (ὑμῶν is to be classed as *dat. incommodi*, i.e. of disadvantage!). As a result they will receive punishment in the fires of judgment (Matt 25:41; 2 Pet 3:7; Jude 23; Rev 11:5; 20:9), akin to Gehenna (3:6)." Cf. Ezek 7:19.

θησαυρίζω store up, save, put aside
ἐσχατος, η, ον adj last, final

The Christian is to remember that he or she lives in the last days. The REB translates, 'You have piled up wealth in an age that is near its close.' Our attitude towards our possessions is to be moulded by the fact that we look for and long for Christ's return. "Is the Lord Jesus to come back and find that we have hoarded and hidden our resources instead of putting them to earn interest in the work of His kingdom (see Matt 25:25; Lk 19:20)?" Motyer. See also Lk 12:33. "People who hoard wealth are not only demonstrating utterly false priorities; they are also depriving others of their very life." Moo. Martin suggests that James may here be using irony: "The treasure in mind is not their vaunted riches but the misery that awaits them."

Verse 4

ἰδοὺ ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀφυστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν κρᾶζει, καὶ αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὄτα Κυρίου Σαβαὼθ ἱεῖσεληλύθασιν·

μισθος, ου m pay, wages
ἐργατης, ου m labourer, workman
ἀμησάντων Verb, aor act ptc, gen pl ἀμω
mow, reap
χώρα, ας f country, land, field
ἀφυστερημένος Verb, perf pass ptc, m nom s
ἀθυστερεω withhold
ἀπεστερημένος Verb, perf pass ptc, m nom s
ἀποστερεω defraud, rob, steal

κ and B* alone read ἀφυστερημενος from ἀθυστερεω meaning 'withhold.' This verb occurs nowhere else in the NT. The UBS committee, given the isolated attestation, considered it "an Alexandrian refinement." Nevertheless, Martin prefers the Alexandrian reading.

Cf. Mal 3:5, also Lev 19:13. Covetousness becomes theft when it leads to withholding what rightfully belongs to another.

κραζω cry out, call out

A dramatic picture – their withheld wages cry out. Injustice cries out to God for vindication. Cf. Gen 4:1-10.

βοη, ης f shout, cry, outcry
θερισάντων Verb, aor act ptc, gen pl θερίζω
reap, harvest
οὖς, ὠτος n ear, hearing
Σαβαωθ (a descriptive name of God in Hebrew, lit. of the armies) κυριος Σ.
Lord Almighty

Cf. Isa 5:9. "The words 'of hosts' mean in fact that the Lord is He who possesses every imaginable wealth, resource and potency. Now ask the question: how did, and how does God use this immense wealth? The reply of the Bible is that He poured it out for our benefit in such a way that finally He did not even spare His own Son but freely gave Him up on our behalf. Even then He did not stop, for with that only Son He plans also freely to give us all things (Rom 8:32)... Out of the wealth of His resources, God has paid debts which were no concern of His... How can we then, if we are His children, keep back through sheer meanness, the debts which are honourably ours? ... Dishonesty in payment is discordant with the claim to be in fellowship with such a generous God." Motyer.

εἰσεληλύθασιν Verb, perf act indic, 3 pl
εἰσερχομαι enter, go in, come in

Verse 5

ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε,
ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς.

τρυφῶ live in luxury or self indulgence

Does not always have a negative connotation, cf. Neh 9:25. "But the cognate to this verb has a negative connotation in the NT (Luke 7:25; 2 Pet 2:13), and James clearly uses it here to depict a sinful, self-indulgent lifestyle. The second verb is more exclusively negative." Moo. See also Lk 16:19.

γη, γῆς f earth, land
σπαταλαῶ live in self-indulgence, live in luxury
ἐθρέψατε Verb, aor act indic, 2 pl τρεφῶ
feed, provide with food, sustain
σφαγῆ, ἡς f slaughter

They have fattened themselves up, but only for the day of slaughter.
"Oh to be a thin cow when the butcher comes! ... He is telling us that it may imperil our welcome before the Judgement Seat of Christ, if He finds that we have fattened ourselves, been self-indulgent, and put self first. We live in a day of slaughter." Motyer.
Telling words for a Western world dying of over-indulgence!

Verse 6

κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον. οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν;

καταδικάζω condemn
φονεῶ murder, put to death
δίκαιος, α, ον righteous
ἀντιτασσομαι oppose, resist

"As does the NIV, virtually all modern translations (NASB; NRSV; REB; NJB; TEV; NLT) take the last clause of the paragraph as a statement: *who were not opposing you*. The NIV rendering suggests that the lack of opposition to the wicked rich came before the persecution; that the rich 'went after' people who had done nothing wrong. But the verb is a present indicative, better translated, as in the NASB, 'he does not resist you.' The focus would then be on the non-resistance of the poor, afflicted righteous (cf. Matt 5:39; Rom 12:14), who refuse, or are unable, to oppose the power and influence of the rich." Moo.

Verse 7-11

Many consider that James has concluded his teaching and now returns to the theme with which he began the letter, the need for patience and prayer in the face of the trials of life (cf. 1:2-18). Moo, however, prefers to see this paragraph as the flip side of the condemnation of the rich we find in 5:1-6 (the two paragraphs being linked through the conjunction οὖν, 'then,' 'therefore'). He compares the structure here with Psalm 37.

Verse 7

Μακροθυμήσατε οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἕως τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου. ἰδοὺ ὁ γεωργὸς ἐκδέχεται τὸν τίμιον καρπὸν τῆς γῆς, μακροθυμῶν ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἕως λάβῃ πρότιμον καὶ ὄψιμον.

μακροθυμεῶ be patient, wait patiently

ἀδελφοί shifts the focus firmly back onto the congregation, chiefly consisting of those who were economically as well as religiously poor.

ἕως conj until

Suggests a goal as well as a time period.

παρουσία, ας f coming, arrival, presence

Martin writes, "The Christian here is to wait for the time when Jesus will come to set the oppressed free (which, in terms of the overall plan of God for the end of history, includes the judgment of evildoers)."

γεωργός, ου m farmer, vinedresser

Cf. 1 Cor 9:7,10; 2 Tim 2:6.

ἐκδέχομαι wait for, look forward to
τιμιος, α, ον precious, valuable
καρπός, ου m fruit, grain, harvest
γη, γῆς f earth, land
πρότιμος, ου m early rain (of rain that comes early in the season), autumn rain

The rain that prepares the soil for the seed and the seed for germination.

ὄψιμος, ου m late rain (of rain that comes late in the season), spring rain

The rain that produces the crop.

Most miniscules add ὑετόν ('rain').
"Behind this metaphor lies the same teaching which was given at the beginning of the epistle, namely that it is as faith meets and passes the tests of life that it grows, by patience, into full maturity of character."
Motyer.

Martin thinks that some Zealot minded members of the church might have been tempted to hasten the coming of the kingdom of God by slaying the rich (cf. 4:2). Against this background they are urged to patience.

Verse 8

μακροθυμήσατε καὶ ὑμεῖς, στηρίζατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν, ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν.

στηρίζω strengthen, establish, set firm

Cf. 1 Thess 3:13. Not double-minded, shaken or moved from the constancy of faith and hope.

ἤγγικεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s ἐγγίζω approach, draw near

"The return of the Lord was then at hand: the return of the Lord is now at hand. We live in the last days, the days of imminent return... The pressure upon us of that return is not to promote curiosity as to time and mode, but to promote the life of holiness and of fruitfulness, so that we may be ready to meet the Lord."
Motyer.

Verse 9

μὴ στεναζέετε, ἀδελφοί, κατ' ἀλλήλων, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε· ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτὴς πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἔστηκεν.

στεναζέω sigh, groan, grumble

An echo of one of the most persistent motifs of the letter: the problem of sinful speech, cf. 1:27; 3:1-12 and esp. 4:11-12.
"James clearly uses the verb to describe groaning or complaining against (κατὰ) fellow community members. But the broader biblical use of the word [cf. Ex 2:23] again adds a nuance to the word, implying that the groans are the result of oppression." Moo.

ἀλλήλων, οἰς, οὐς one another

"Grumbling against those who are close to us is particularly likely to occur when we are under pressure or facing difficult circumstances. We vent the pressure from a stressful work environment or from ill health on our close friends and family. So it would be quite natural if James's readers, under the pressure of poverty and persecution (cf. 5:1-6), would turn their frustrations on one another. Moreover, the exhortation to be patient with the circumstances of suffering that the readers face could easily evoke the need for patience with fellow community members as well."
Moo.

κριθῆτε Verb, aor pass subj, 2 pl κρινῶ judge, pass judgement on, condemn
κριτής, ου m judge
θυρα, ας f door, gate
ἔστηκεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s ἵστημι pf stand

"If we destroy peace by our tongue, we mar the crop, and enter the presence of that returning Lord, not with joy, but with fearful trembling before 'the Judge' who 'stands at the doors'."
Motyer.

"The nearness of the eschatological day is not just an impetus to look forward to the judgment of 'sinners' ..., but it is also a warning to examine one's behaviour so that when one whose footsteps are nearing finally knocks on the door, one may be prepared to open... The coming Lord is also the judge of the Christian." Davids.

Verse 10

ὑπόδειγμα λάβετε, ἀδελφοί, τῆς κακοπαθίας καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας τοὺς προφήτας, οἱ ἐλάλησαν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου.

ὑπόδειγμα, τος n example
λάβετε Verb, aor act imperat, 2 pl λαμβανῶ
κακοπαθεια, ας f suffering, endurance
μακροθυμα, ας f longsuffering, patience
προφητης, ου m prophet
λαλεῶ speak, talk
ὄνομα, τος n name, authority

The trials they had to endure were "not a sign of divine disapproval; it was a mark of God's approval upon them that He trusted them to suffer for His name's sake." Motyer.

Verse 11

ἰδοὺ μακαρίζομεν τοὺς ὑπομείναντας τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰῶβ ἠκούσατε, καὶ τὸ τέλος κυρίου εἶδετε, ὅτι πολὺσπλαγχνός ἐστιν ὁ κύριος καὶ οἰκτίρμων.

μακαρίζω consider blessed

The only occurrence of this verbal form in the NT. The adjective μακαριος and the noun μακαρισμος are, however, common.

ὑπομενω endure

Cf. Matt 5:11-12. Martin comments, "Jesus' words were that those who are persecuted for his name's sake are blessed (see Matt 5:10-12; 23:29-36; and in particular the sapiential word of Luke 11:49) and those who endure to the end will be saved (Matt 10:22; 24:13; Luke 21:19)."

ὑπομονη, ης f patience, endurance

"Job's is no grovelling, passive, unquestioning submission; Job struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart." Barclay.

τελος, ους n end, conclusion

τελος κυριου 'the end of the Lord,' either:

- i) The goal or purpose the Lord had in mind (and accomplished) for Job; or,
- ii) The 'end' of the Lord's life – the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The former seems to fit the context better, pointing to the restoration of Job recorded at the end of the book, a demonstration that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. The goal God has in mind for those to whom James writes is growth to maturity through trial.

ειδετε Verb, aor act indic, 2 pl ὁραω see

Implying a familiarity with the story.

πολυπλαγχνος, ον very compassionate
οικτιρων, ον merciful, compassionate

Cf. Job 42:5.

Verses 12-20

"The phrase *above all* in v.12 marks the beginning of the epistolatory conclusion. James wraps up his letter by touching on three issues that he considers critical for the community. And each of them involves speech. First, in the last reprise of a key motif of the letter, James prohibits the wrong kind of speech – in this case, the taking of frivolous vows (v. 12). Second, James encourages mutual prayer for both physical and spiritual needs (vv. 13-18). And, finally, he exhorts his readers to take the teaching of the letter and apply it to those of their number who might be sinning in any of the matters that he has touched on (vv. 19-20)." Moo.

Verse 12

Πρὸ πάντων δέ, ἀδελφοί μου, μὴ ὀμνύετε, μήτε τὸν οὐρανὸν μήτε τὴν γῆν μήτε ἄλλον τινὰ ὄρκον· ἦτω δὲ ὑμῶν τὸ Ναὶ ναὶ καὶ τὸ Οὐ οὐ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπὸ κρίσιν πέσητε.

Moo considers that πρὸ πάντων has a purely, or at least primarily, literary function similar to Paul's [το] λοιπον (2 Cor 13:11; Phil 3:1; 4:8; 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:1; 1 Tim 4:8). It does not mean that this matter is more important than everything else, though it does underline the following prohibition.

ὀμνυω and ὀμνυμι swear, vow, make an oath

Swearing involves invoking the name of God to certify the truthfulness of what is said. Martin comments, "Both the Synoptic record (Matt 26:63) and the teaching of Paul (Rom 1:9; Gal 1:20; 2 Cor 1:23; 11:1; 1 Thess 2:5, 10; Phil 1:8) are familiar with the practice of oaths. But Jesus was critical of the misuse of oaths (i.e., implying the misuse of the tongue), and the attempt by some to circumvent the obligation to fulfill an oath (Matt 23:16-22; Mark 7:9-13) is condemned. The teaching of James seems to be an independent variant of the logion of Jesus as recorded in Matt 5:33-37."

μητε and not; μητε ... μητε neither ... nor
οὐρανός, ους m heaven

ἄλλος, η, ο another, other

τις, τι acc τινά, τι gen τινός dat τινί anyone,
anything, a certain

ὄρκος, ους m oath, vow

ἦτω Verb, pres imperat, 3 s ειμι

ναὶ yes, yes indeed, certainly

Dauids comments, "James ... prohibits ... the use of oaths in everyday discourse to prove integrity."

"Become known as a people of straightforward, irreproachable truthfulness of speech, for otherwise you may fall under judgement for a sin of speech." Motyer .

"Our mere word should be as utterly trustworthy as a signed document, legally correct and complete." Mitton.

κρισις, εως f judgement, condemnation
πέσητε Verb, aor act subj, 2 pl πιπτω fall

Martin comments, "The idea of condemnation (κρίσις) comes into operation when oaths are offered as a means of signaling the truthfulness of human intention. To conclude one's remarks with an oath – which usually involved invoking God's name – placed the speaker under even greater obligation to fulfill declared promises, and this in turn placed the oath-taker in greater danger of condemnation by God."

Verse 13

Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν; προσευχέσθω· εὐθυμεῖ τις; ψαλλέτω.

κακοπαθεω suffer, undergo hardship

Cf. v.10. Not necessarily illness.

προσευχομαι pray

"Perhaps James would include petition to God to remove the trial. But James's concern when he deals with trials elsewhere (1:2-4, 12; 5:7-11) is to encourage believers to endure the suffering with the right spirit and with a divine perspective on history. Presumably, then, the prayer that he encourages here is for the spiritual strength to endure the trial with a godly spirit." Moo.

εὐθυμεω take courage, be happy

ψαλλω sing, sing a hymn, sing praises

Our faith is to pervade and colour every part of our life. Martin comments, "It may also be that James is reminding his readers that they must not forget God in the good times (a lapse exemplified in the merchant traders, 4:13-16)."

Verse 14

ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν; προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας, καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες αὐτὸν ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου·

ἀσθενεω be sick, be ill, be weak

Some have suggested that James is here referring to one who is *spiritually* weak. Moo outlines this view: "What James is describing, these scholars contend, is a person who is spiritually weak. The spiritual leaders of the church need to pray for this person so that his or her fervour for the Lord might be restored. An exhortation to pray for such a situation would fit very well at the end of a letter that has regularly chastised its readers for just such spiritual lassitude." But Moo concludes that it is "overwhelmingly likely" that James is here speaking of physical illness (so also Davids, Martin).

προσκαλεσάσθω Verb, aor midd dep imperat, 3 s προσκαλεομαι call to oneself, summon, invite

πρεσβυτερος, α, ον elder

On 'elders' Martin comments, "The term is never used of a Christian office in the Gospels, where it refers to Jewish elders in the synagogue, but appears as such in Acts (11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 16:4; 20:17; 21:28: the last reference is noteworthy, since it shows a scene where 'elders' gather around James, who is the head of a collegium) and the epistles (1 Tim 5:17-19; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 5:1; 2 John 1; cf. Phil 1:1). It may very well be that the office of elder was taken over from the synagogue (drawn from the 'elders of Israel' in Exod 3:16; 24:1, 9; Deut 5:23; 19:12; Ezra 10:14; Matt 26:3; J. L. McKenzie, 'The Elders,' 522-40) and given a Christian character (Bornkamm, *TDNT* 6:651-83; cf. Mussner, 219). Other terms that appear to be synonymous for elder are 'overseer' (Acts 20:28, RSV) and 'bishop' (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3). From Acts (20:17, 28) it is evident that the elders' duties included 'overseeing' or 'pastoring' the flock. Since 'pastors' are never mentioned together in the NT with 'elders,' it may be that the latter carried out responsibilities which were similar to those of the present day pastor or 'minister' (Moo, 176). If so, it is quite natural for sick members to entreat the elders to come and minister to them. Also, the term 'elder' should not be construed simply to mean a person of senior age (as perhaps in 1 John 2:13, 14 addressed to 'fathers'). Though some elders would likely be of mature age, the main qualification was spiritual competence (1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:5; cf. 1 Pet 5:1-3)."

ἐκκλησια, ας f congregation, church
προσευξάσθωσαν Verb, aor midd dep
imperat, 3 pl προσευχομαι

"The leaders of the local Christian community have a special ministry of prayer given them by God." Motyer.

ἀλείψαντες Verb, aor act ptc, m nom pl
ἀλειψω anoint

A contemporaneous aorist.

ἐλαιον, ου n olive oil, oil

Cf. Mk 6:13. Moo suggests that "As the elders pray, they are to anoint the sick person in order to symbolise that the person is being set apart for God's special attention and care." Martin similarly writes, "oil is mentioned to certify the interest of God in human need and to suggest a mood of 'joy' in the midst of trial and divine purpose in suffering – a common Jacobean trait (1:2–3, 12; 2:13; 5:11, 13) – is to be preferred. The idea of oil-anointing as a mark of honor and joy derived from God's electing mercy is well attested in the Jewish and NT literature (Deut 28:40; Isa 25:6–7 LXX; 61:3; Amos 6:6; Mic 6:15; Pss 23:5; 45:8; 92:11; 133:2; Prov 27:9; Eccl 9:8; Matt 6:17; 26:6–13 par.; Luke 7:36–50). This would fit James' overall tenor admirably: the elders bring and apply to the afflicted one the outward tangible sign of God's covenant faithfulness in regard to human distress, and the pledge that, in adversity as in happiness, God's plan does not miscarry."

ὄνομα, τοῦς n see v.10

"... giving him in symbolic fashion an assurance that the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, is active and operative in his cause." Motyer. Cf. Ps 23:5.

Verse 15

καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα, καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· κἂν ἁμαρτίας ἦ πεποικώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.

εὐχη, ης prayer, request, wish
πιστις, εως f faith, trust, belief

This is not primarily a ministry of anointing but of prayer. "Anointing with oil, because its significance is so unclear, attracts a lot of attention in this passage. But anointing, whatever it signifies, is clearly subordinate to James's concern in these verses: prayer." Moo.

σῶζω save, rescue, heal

κάμνω be sick

ἐγερεῖ Verb, fut act indic, 3 s ἐγειρω raise

Reflects the language of NT healing stories (Matt 9:6; Mk 1:31; Acts 3:7).

This should not be taken as a universal promise of healing if only the procedure is right or faith sufficiently strong.

καὶ (καὶ ἔαν) even if, and if, even

ἁμαρτία, ας f sin

"Sin and sickness were often closely associated in the ancient world. Certainly the book of Job, as well as Jesus (cf. John 9:2-3), makes it clear that drawing a direct relationship between illness and sin is impossible to do. But the NT continues to recognise that some illnesses are, in fact, the product of sin (Mark 2:1-12; 1 Cor 5:5 [?]; 11:27-30). Recognising this possible connection, James encourages the sick person to deal with any potential spiritual causes of the illness that he is experiencing. The 'if' (καὶ) is therefore doubly important: it shows that James by no means assumes that sickness is caused by sin; and it makes a spiritual interpretation of the passage difficult, since it is difficult to imagine a condition of spiritual 'weakness' that would not be a product of sin." Moo.

ἦ Verb, pres subj, 3s εἶμι

πεποικώς Verb, perf act ptc, m nom s ποιεω

ἀφεθήσεται Verb, fut pass indic, 3 s ἀφίημι
cancel, forgive

Stephen Timmis suggests that the situation addressed may be that of sickness related to sins committed against the fellowship (cf. 1 Cor 11:30). That is why the role of the elders is important here.

Verse 16

ἐξομολογεῖσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων, ὅπως ἰαθῆτε. πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη.

ἐξομολογεω agree; midd confess, admit,
acknowledge

ἀλλήλων, οἱς, οὐς see v.9

εὐχομαι pray, wish, long

The ministry of prayer is not confined to the elders.

ὅπως (οἱ ὅπως ἂν) that, in order that

ἰαθῆτε Verb, aor pass subj, 2 pl ἰαομαι
heal, cure, restore

Moo considers that, as with the previous verse, James is talking about healing of physical ailments rather than spiritual healing. "As David's says, James 'consciously generalises, making the specific case of 5:14-15 into a general principle of preventative medicine...'. His focus is no longer on the specific case that he mentioned in v. 14 (*is any one of you sick?* ...) but on the general need of the community to be involved regularly (the present tense of the imperative suggests this) in mutual confession and prayer as a way of treating cases of sickness that might arise. At the same time, James's shift from elders to believers in general reminds us again that the power to heal is invested in prayer, not the elder. And while it is appropriate that those charged with the spiritual oversight of the community should be called to intercede for those seriously ill, James makes it clear that *all* believers have the privilege and responsibility to pray for healing."

James may, however, have in mind the confession of sins and hurts done to others; i.e. confession to those one has wronged leading to prayer together and restoration of a damaged relationship. But see also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, chapter 5.

πολυ adv much, greatly
ισχυω be strong, be able, be sufficient

"Prayer, James wants to make clear, is a powerful weapon in the hands even of the humblest believer; it does not require a 'super saint' to wield it effectively." Moo.

δεησις, εως f prayer, plea
δικαιος, α, ον righteous

There is a moral foundation to prayer.

ἐνεργεω work, be at work (in)

"The form of the participle (ἐνεργουμένη) is ambiguous. It could be passive, in which case we could translate 'prayer is very powerful when it is energised (by God or the Spirit).' On this view, James would subtly introduce a qualification to the effectiveness of prayer: only when God 'energises' the prayer as it is offered in accordance with his will will it be effective. However, as theologically attractive as this interpretation might be, it probably reads too much into the text. The participle is probably a middle, with the sense 'as it powerfully works' (as most English translations interpret)." Moo.

Verse 17

Ἠλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῇ προσηύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξαι, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἑνιαυτοῦς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ·

Ἠλιας, ου m Elijah
ὁμοιοπαθης, ες like in every way

Cf. Acts 14:15. Elijah is a fitting example because he was not sinless but was like us in every way. "As in v. 16b, James emphasises that every believer has access to the kind of effectiveness in prayer that he is illustrating here." Moo.

προσευχη, ης f prayer

προσευχῇ προσηύξατο 'Prayed earnestly' is a good translation of this Semitic cognate intensive construction.

βρέξαι Verb, aor act infin βρεχω rain
ἑνιαυτος, ου m year
τρεῖς, τρια gen τριων dat τρισιν three
μην, μηνος m month
ἕξ six

Cf. 1 Kings 17-18. "Prayer ... brings two things together, a human agent and a supernatural result. By means of prayer a mere human can move God." Motyer.

Verse 18

καὶ πάλιν προσηύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑέτον ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.

παλιν again, once more
οὐρανος, ου m heaven
ὑετος, ου m rain
ἔδωκεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s διδομι
ἐβλάστησεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s
βλαστανω and βλασταω intrans sprout;
trans. yield, produce
καρπος, ου m fruit, grain, harvest

Verse 19

Ἀδελφοί μου, εἴαν τις ἐν ὑμῖν πλανηθῆ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ ἐπιστρέψῃ τις αὐτόν,

εἴαν if
πλανηθῆ Verb, aor pass subj, 3 s πλαναω
lead astray, mislead, deceive

Martin argues that the wandering spoken of here is not unconscious error but apostasy. He continues, "It can be said that actions leading to apostasy are thought of as under Satanic influence (see Braun, *TNDT* 6:233–53). This attribution is borne out in much of the NT literature (see Matt 12:22–37; 24:4–5, 11; Mark 12:24, 27; 13:5–6; Rom 1:27; Eph 4:14; 2 Thess 2:11; 2 Tim 3:13; Titus 3:3; 1 Pet 2:25; 2 Pet 2:15, 18; 1 John 2:26; 4:6; Rev 2:20). James has already given attention to the warning that certain misbehavior is the work of the devil (3:15; 4:7; cf. 2:19). Thus, a person who deliberately forsakes the 'way of righteousness' is under the control of the devil and in need of a radical conversion. Otherwise, this person faces the risk of condemnation by God."

ἀληθεια, ας f truth, reality

"*The truth* does not refer here to Christian doctrine in the narrow sense, but more broadly to all that is involved in the gospel. This truth is something that is to be done as well as believed (cf. Ps 51:6; Gal 5:7; 1 John 1:6)." Moo.

ἐπιστρεφω turn back, turn round, turn

Verse 20

γινωσκέτω ὅτι ὁ ἐπιστρέψας ἀμαρτωλὸν ἐκ πλάνης ὁδοῦ αὐτοῦ σώσει ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκ θανάτου καὶ καλύψει πλῆθος ἀμαρτιῶν.

ἐπιστρέψας Verb, aor act ptc, m nom s

ἐπιστρεφω

ἀμαρτωλος, ον sinful, sinner

πλανη, ης f error, deceit, deception

ὁδος, ου f way, path, road

σωζω save, rescue, heal

ψυχη, ης f self, inmost being, life, 'soul'

θανατος, ου m death

καλυπτω cover, hide

πληθος, ους n crowd, multitude

ἀμαρτια, ας f sin

Cf. Prov 10:12, also 1 Pet 4:8.

Postscript

"If James is indeed something of a sermon in epistolary form, these last two verses are an appropriate conclusion. Not only should the readers of James 'do' the words he has written; they should be deeply concerned to see that others 'do' them also. It is by sharing with James the conviction that there is indeed an eternal death, to which the way of sin leads, that we shall be motivated to deal with sin in our lives and in the lives of others." Moo.

Martin similarly comments, "Thus, James abruptly concludes his 'sermon in epistolary form' by reminding his readers of his 'apostolic goal' (Davids, 201), namely, that all should seek to walk with God in wisdom. The final contrast is one that has pervaded the tract: wisdom versus folly. The 'wise' person will already be practicing obedience and will be motivated to act so as to ensure that the 'foolish' person will turn back to the right way (Prov 2:20; 4:5; 5:22–23; 7:24–25; 8:4–5). Sin, which is attacked so directly in James' letter, is both a personal and a community problem. His desire is that all his readers deal with its threat to 'eschatological perfection' (1:4), both on an individual level and in the lives of others."