

Article

Prophetic Endurance and Eschatological Restoration: Exhortation and Conclusion in the Epistle of James

Sherri Brown

Creighton University

The Expository Times
2019, Vol. 130(12) 530–540
© The Author(s) 2019
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0014524619846399
journals.sagepub.com/home/ext

**Abstract**

The epistle of James provides a window into a messianic movement that is beginning to develop into a community of faithful amidst a larger Hellenistic socio-cultural environment. It presents a series of exhortations crossing the spectrum of life situations audiences encounter as they settle into community together. Throughout the instruction, a foundational moral code is presupposed through which the author constructs the requisite worldview. Further, James speaks to this community through the full authority of 'the name of the Lord' and understands himself as both servant and teacher in this new life in light of the coming of that Lord (1:1; 3:1; 5:7–9). The last fourteen verses of the epistle offer a final essay on the need to stand fast through perseverance and prayer, as well as a summary statement of the goal of the entire effort. The formation of the community engenders a new action arising from the 'implanted word' that will produce a 'kind of first fruits' of God's creatures who lead the way of salvation (1:18, 21; 5:19–20). The concluding injunction indicates that this *way* is tantamount to eschatological restoration.

Keywords

Epistle of James, Paranaesis, Eschatology, Ethical Exhortation

Introduction

The epistle of James provides a window into a messianic movement that is beginning to develop into a community of faithful amidst a larger Hellenistic socio-cultural environment. By addressing his epistle to 'the twelve tribes of the dispersion' (1:1) the author acknowledges the larger Hellenistic environment and situates his community 'in' though not 'of' it. The eschatological nature of his community's cultural trajectory over against this environment

is implicit, made explicit through the text's content. The body of the letter presents a series of exhortations crossing the spectrum of life situations audiences encounter as they settle into community together. Throughout the instruction, a foundational moral code is presupposed through which the author constructs

Corresponding author:

Sherri Brown

Email: SherriBrown@creighton.edu

the requisite worldview. Further, James speaks to this community through the full authority of 'the name of the Lord' and understands himself as both servant and teacher in this new life in light of the coming of that Lord (1:1; 3:1; 5:7–9).¹

Although scholars have struggled with the genre and structure of James's text, the last fourteen verses of the epistle offer a final essay on the need to stand fast through perseverance and prayer, as well as a summary statement of the goal of the entire effort. The formation of the community engenders a new action arising from the 'implanted word' that will produce a 'kind of first fruits' of God's creatures who lead the way of salvation (1:18, 21; 5:19–20). The concluding injunction indicates that this *way* is tantamount to eschatological restoration. This is the way of salvation and how James can exhort Christians across the ages.

Genre and Structure of the Epistle of James

Understanding the genre and structure of James has captivated and frustrated scholars for centuries. For years a particularly deconstructionist version of form critical analysis held sway through the work of Martin Dibelius whereby the correspondence of James was understood as strict paraenesis in the sense of only loosely related aphorisms put forth as moral exhortation without particular context or motivation.²

¹ The question of authorship is beyond the scope of the present work, though composition in the second half of the first century CE is warranted by letter's content and theology. The name 'James' will be used to designate the author.

² Martin Dibelius, *James*, (Hermeneia, PA: Fortress, 1976), 3–11. He argues the basic characteristics of paraenesis are 1) 'a pervasive *eclecticism*', 2) '*lack of continuity*,' 3) '*the repetition of identical motifs in different places*', 4) '*the inability to construct a single frame into which they [moral exhortations] will all fit*' (emphasis his). It is instructive to note that since his writing, the parameters of what constitutes paraenesis have expanded considerably, rendering his fourth point largely non-binding. James is certainly paraenetic in terms of passionate moral exhortation, but it does have a framing structure.

Herein, the work is not understood as a 'letter' at all, but as a group of sermons or sayings collected for circulation. More recent scholarship, however, has explored the work as a literary whole with an intricate form and structure.³ Through his opening address, James puts forth a tract intended for general publication and wide circulation. Peter Davids demonstrates the characteristics of such literary epistles in the Hellenistic milieu:

- Both literary epistles and actual letters often contain a doubled opening formula.
- The opening formulae often contain a blessing and/or thanksgiving.
- The opening formulae often contain cognate words as a link to the greeting.
- Themes in the opening often recur in the body and may actually structure it.
- Closing paragraphs tend to begin with an eschatological injunction.
- Closing paragraphs often include a thematic reprise of some sort.
- *Πρὸ πάντων* ('above all') plus a health wish or oath formula frequently mark the close.
- Christian correspondence (e.g. Paul) often closes with a word about prayer.⁴

Placing James within the genre of the literary epistle therefore allows for a holistic approach

³ For an overview of the discussion, see Mark E. Taylor, 'Recent Scholarship on the Structure of James', *CBR* 3 (2004): 86–115; Mark E. Taylor and George H. Guthrie, 'The Structure of James', *CBQ* 68 (2006): 681–705. For an update and his own presentation, see Matt A. Jackson-McCabe, 'Enduring Temptation: The Structure and Coherence of the Letter of James', *JSNT* (2014): 161–84.

⁴ Peter H. Davids *The Epistle of James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982) 24–26. Davids follows the work of Frederick O. Francis, 'The Form and Function of the Opening and Closing Paragraphs of James and 1 John', *ZNW* 61 (1970): 110–26. For a more recent survey of these tenets, see Andrew M. Bowden, 'Sincerely James: Reconsidering Frederick Francis's Proposed Health Wish Formula', *JSNT* 38 (2015): 241–57. James B. Adamson *The Epistle of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976) 116–8, concurs, going on to suggest that James is a sort of proto-Papal Encyclical.

to its structure and content, with chapter 1 serving as an *epitome* that provides the unifying theme and guiding theological principles that unfold across the remaining four chapters of the epistle.⁵

Adapting the work of Peter Davids and Luke Timothy Johnson, a chiasmic structure can be demonstrated.⁶ As a structuring technique, a chiasm is a placing crosswise of words, phrases, and/or concepts that may comprise whole passages as well as single sentences. This structure is called a *chiasm* because when the passage is diagrammed, the resulting graphic looks like the left side of the Greek letter *chi*, which resembles the English letter X. These words and phrases that are placed in corresponding positions could be synonyms or they could share themes. Often there are inversions of similar ideas rather than identical terms. Authors might use a chiasm in a story, letter, or speech in order to introduce the main point generally, and then give more and more information as they move toward their climax. Instead of concluding at that point, however, these authors will revisit the initial information in reverse order to show how it has been affected by that climax. This means that the structure and content of a passage move from general to more and more specific claims that typically turn on a central assertion. In the ancient literature, in addition to chiasmic structures in which there is no middle term (that could be structured as, e.g., ABB'A') there are chiasms at whose center is a single, central segment (that could be structured as, e.g., ABCB'A'). In this second type of chiasm, this central segment becomes the 'pivot' of the passage ('C' in our example). This pivot is the climax of the passage's thematic presentation.

After an epistolary address (1:1), the *epitome* or, in Davids's terminology, the 'doubled opening statement' (1:2–26) presents the five primary ethical and theological concerns that

will be taken up in the body around a unifying theme, while the *conclusio* brings this same unifying theme to the fore through a paradigmatic model (5:18–20).⁷ The ensuing blocks of material take up the *epitome's* themes in reverse order (2:1–26; 3:1–12; 3:13–4:10; 4:11–5:6; 5:7–18).⁸ This structuring theory further suggests that the pivot of the text is found in 3:13–4:10. Therefore, the entire epistle turns on James's opposition of friendship with God versus friendship with the world. Herein lies the crux of his ethical exhortation to the community: 'Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you' (3:13; 4:10). An outline of the epistle of James would follow as such:

- 1:1 Greeting
- 1:2–27 *Epitome*: Presentation of the themes to be taken up in the body of the epistle
 - 2:1–26 Faith and works: Acting out of religious conviction
 - 3:1–12 The work of the community and proper speech
 - 3:13–4:10 Friendship with the world versus friendship with God
 - 4:11–5:6 Improper speech and the work of the rich
 - 5:7–18 Steadfastness in trial and prayer: Standing fast in religious conviction
- 5:19–20 *Conclusio*: Summary of practical/theological consequences of living the epistle

In this structure, 5:7–20 forms the last thematic block (vv. 7–18) as well as the *conclusio*

⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 14–15, 173–216.

⁶ Davids, *James*, 22–28; Johnson, *James*, 11–15.

⁷ Johnson, *James*, 15, 325–47.

⁸ This technique gives an additional layer of chiasmic affect, presenting themes as: steadfastness in trial and prayer (vv. 2–8), reversal of the situation of the rich and the poor (vv. 9–11), friendship with the world versus friendship with God (vv. 12–18), the use of the tongue (vv. 19–21), and the need to act out of religious conviction (vv. 22–27).

that draws the epistle back to its beginnings (vv. 19–20). These passages, however, provide no neat wrap-up. There are no fond farewells, and vv. 12 and 19–20, in particular, have confounded many a scholar. What we see is a final focus on standing fast in religious conviction through patience, perseverance, and prayer, followed by a conclusion that epitomizes the practical and theological consequences of living the tenets of the epistle. James 5:7–20 can thus be outlined:

- 5:7–18 Steadfastness in trial and prayer:
Standing fast in religious conviction
- 5:7–11 Eschatological injunction for steadfastness in community through trials
- vv. 7–9 Patience and perseverance in light of the *parousia*
- vv. 10–11 Biblical models for such patience and perseverance
- 5:12 Closing marker and oath formula
- 5:13–18 Health wish to live in community through prayer
- vv. 13–16 Prayer as the foundation of life in light of the *parousia*
- vv. 17–18 Biblical model for such prayer
- 5:19–20 *Conclusio*: Summary of practical/theological consequences of living the epistle

These final passages thus draw together the four preceding thematic blocks by putting forth steadfastness as a community in friendship with God in the face of temptations and trials through prayer and mutual accountability. Further study must follow this roadmap.

James 5:7–18: The Need to Stand Fast in Religious Conviction through Prayer

The hallmark of this passage is the use of the imperative to drive home the final exhortations. Fourteen imperatives and all the essential elements of moral instruction are included:

• μακροθυμήσατε	‘be patient’	5:7, 8
(twice)		
• στηρίξατε	‘establish/strengthen’	5:8
• μὴ στενάζετε	‘do not grumble’	5:9
• λάβετε	‘take/receive’	5:10
• μὴ ὀμνύετε	‘do not swear’	5:12
• ἦτω	‘must be’	5:12
• προσευχέσθω	‘must pray’	5:13
• ψαλλέτω	‘must sing praise’	5:13
• προσκαλεσάσθω	‘must summon’	5:14
• προσευξάσθωσαν	‘must pray’	5:14
• ἐξομολογείσθε	‘confess’	5:16
• εὐχεσθε	‘pray’	5:16
• γινωσκέτω	‘must know’	5:20

James builds momentum through the alliteration and cognitive assonance of the accompanying illustrations. This *gradatio* culminates in vv. 19–20 where all the themes of the letter are captured in the single image of the power of one person to reclaim a community member to the way of truth, the way of God, and therein finding salvation.⁹

Eschatological Injunction for Steadfastness in Community through Trials (5:7–11)

James addresses his audiences as ἀδελφοί (brothers and sisters) fifteen times in this epistle—a full third of these occur in these concluding verses, beginning in v. 7.¹⁰ He uses the summons syntactically to mark the community of Christians, those in friendship with God over against the διψυχος (the doubled-minded one; 1:8, 4:8) or οἱ πλούσιοι (the rich; 2:6, 5:1) or anyone else who is primarily determined by their friendship with the world. He also employs the familial language rhetorically to

⁹ For detail on this language and style, especially *sorites* and *gradatio*, see Johnson, *James*, 7–10; George A. Kennedy *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1984), 3–38.

¹⁰ 1:2, 1:16, 1:19, 2:1, 2:5, 2:14, 3:1, 3:10, 3:12, 4:11, 5:7, 5:9, 5:10, 5:12, 5:19.

draw his brothers and sisters down the path of his exhortations. Every bridge of moral imperative is crossed together: James becomes at once their leader *and* a member of the community, living in communion with them. The paraenetic force of this rhetoric is undeniable.

Patience and Perseverance in Light of the Parousia (vv. 7–9). James opens with the first imperative: μακροθυμήσατε, exhorting his community to ‘be patient,’ in the sense of bearing provocation without complaint, or remaining at peace while waiting.¹¹ A distinct inaction is being summoned, possibly in response to tension, or *impatience*, rumbling through the community, maybe due to experiences of oppression by the rich (so 5:1–6), or to a delay in the παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου (‘[second] coming of the Lord,’ v. 7).¹² James attends to both, beginning with this call for patience. He addresses the ‘coming of the Lord,’ which is the goal, the *telos*, of their patient waiting in community.¹³ However, he is never clear about to whom he is referring when he speaks of ‘the Lord.’ Does κύριος refer to God as vv. 10–11 suggest or is James here in line with other early Christian writers in understanding ‘the coming of the Lord’ as the return of Christ as judge and savior?¹⁴ A clear distinction is not provided by the text. Indeed, even as he exhorts proper behavior for the newly realized messianic community, James holds their foundation in Torah in tension. As he

internalizes the paradigm shift in his own worldview, he uses the developing diction of the new community and fills his existing first-century Jewish vocabulary with new content in light of servitude in Christ. His point is to enjoin communities to live in the presence of the *parousia* even as they struggle to redefine their worldview.

James then provides a model from daily life to punctuate the theme: the farmer who cultivates the land and keeps watch for the seasonal rains, in contrast to the ἐργατής, the hired laborer (5:4).¹⁵ The agricultural image harks back to creation and looks forward to the constancy and cyclical provision of that creation. The farmer carefully saves seeds and awaits the expected event, knowing the fruit of the earth will be his family’s after due diligence and patience.¹⁶ Repeating the imperative summoning the community’s first call to action, στηρίξατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν, James insists that those in friendship with God must likewise be patient, and further ‘establish’ or ‘strengthen their hearts, for their expected *parousia* has drawn near’ (v. 8). Then, a second charge to *inaction* is given, a prohibition to μὴ στενάζετε. The ἀδελφοί (‘brothers and sisters’) are not to grumble or complain about one another. Although they may unite to withstand oppression of the πλούσιοι (‘the rich’), they may yet struggle in their dealings with each other on a daily basis. The force of the prohibition and the crucial role this communion holds are reflected in the correlative clause: The Lord who is to come, comes to judge and to save, and he is standing before the very gates of the promise (v. 9).

These first three verses provide a bridge from the previous thematic unit into this final pericope and the conclusion of the epistle. They form an *inclusio* of sorts to 4:11–12 with the return to direct address of the ἀδελφοί, and the resumption of moral exhortation to the brethren

¹¹ BDAG, 612. See Job 5:7, Sir 2:4, Bar 4:25, *TestJob* 22:5, Prov 19:11.

¹² Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC 48 (Waco, TX: World Books, 1988), 187–8; For an interesting discussion of the early verses of James 5, see Todd A. Scacewater ‘The Dynamic and Righteous use of Wealth in James 5:1–6’, *Journal of Markets & Morality*, 20 (2017): 227–42.

¹³ Is 2:2–4; Zech 9:9–10; Micah 4:1–3; Jer 31:31–34; Joel 2:1–11; Matt 24:37, 39; 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 221.

¹⁴ Martin, *James*, 190; Sophie Laws, *The Epistle of James*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1980), 208.

¹⁵ Davids, *James*, 183.

¹⁶ Deut 11:14, Je5:24; Joel 2:23, Zech 10:1; James H. Ropes *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1916), 295–6.

in light of impending judgment. These verses, however, cannot be wholly disjoined from those that follow. They form the basis for James' final eschatological injunction to his people. Their communities and every aspect of their being must be centered on the moral and spiritual call of life in the fulfillment of the scriptures, with an eye ever on the impending *parousia*. But how? What does this patient strength of heart look like? Can it even be done in the reality of this world? James foresees their concerns and, ever the paraenetic brother, gives them their model.

Biblical Models for this Patience and Perseverance (vv. 10–11). James commands the community to look to the prophets for their model of suffering and patience. Again, he employs his developing art of at once harking back to their scriptural foundations while simultaneously reframing this worldview through the burgeoning Jesus tradition. The term *ὑπόδειγμα*, 'model,' captures the three-dimensional aspect of the moral character James is exhorting (see Sir 44:16; 2 Macc 6:28; John 3:15).¹⁷ Coupled with the imperative *λάβετε* whereby James commands his brothers and sisters to 'receive' this model for consideration and imitation, he continues his paraenetic practice of presenting a series of moral exemplars for reflection and emulation (1:22–25, 2:20–25).¹⁸

The brethren are to replicate the heart and behavior of the prophets who spoke 'in the name of the Lord' (2 Kgs 2:24, 5:11, 18:32; 1 Chr 21:19; Ezek 5:1; Jer 44:17; Dan 9:6) and stand fast in the face of opposition. James thus puts forth a more active model of suffering that one *endures*, a strenuous effort or 'steadfastness' that one practices.¹⁹ He again echoes the Jesus tradition, specifically the moral and spiritual code of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 5–7), through the symbol and idiom

of Hebrew scriptures. Matthew 5:12 recounts Jesus' exhortation for the faithful to 'rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.'²⁰ The faithful James is addressing are to do likewise. Further, we see a movement here in the call to action: from patience, to strengthening or establishing the heart, to the endurance of suffering. He then takes a step further in v. 11 with the macarism to the *ὑπομείναντας*. James now holds up a singular model. He once again simultaneously resonates both a well-known Jewish saying such as Daniel 12:12 and a newly developing moral code reflected in the beatitudes of the Jesus sayings (Matt 5:3–11). The noun *ὑπομονή* and its participial cognate connote endurance, fortitude, or perseverance in the face of difficulty.²¹ Thus, 'steadfastness' encapsulates the praiseworthy active inaction that James has in mind. The moral exemplar for this steadfastness is Job.

Scholars have had difficulty with Job in this role, trying to fit him into the line of prophets in v. 10, or questioning exactly how patient he really was.²² This, however, misses James' point. The *τέλος κυρίου*, the 'goal of the Lord,' is revealed in its time. The call of the community is to stand fast and live in the constant hope of this *telos* as did Job. 'And the one who stands fast to the end, this one will be saved' (Matt 24:13).²³ Indeed, Matthew 24 reverberates across these verses (see 24:4–6, 10–14, 24–25).²⁴ James closes this injunction with words of reassuring comfort that round out the *paranaesis* and bring audiences back to the hope for the *parousia* with which he began. As with Job and the farmer who faithfully tends the earth, so

¹⁷ BDAG, 1037. See 2 Pet 2:6; 4 Macc 17:23; Josephus, *JW*, 6:103; Philo, *Who is the Heir*, 256.

¹⁸ Johnson, *James*, 318.

¹⁹ BDAG, 500–1. See 2 Macc. 2:26. The prophets do not represent a model of passivity or inaction.

²⁰ Patrick J. Hartin, 'Call to be Perfect through Suffering (James 1,2–4): The Concept of Perfection in the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount', *Bib* 77 (1996): 477–92.

²¹ BDAG, 1039.

²² Moo, *James*, 228; Martin, *James*, 94; Laws, *James*, 215; Johnson, *James*, 319; Dibelius, *James*, 246–7.

²³ ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται (Matt 24:13).

²⁴ It is reclaimed in the exhortation to reclaim those who led astray (5:19–20; Matt 24:4–5, 11, 24).

with the ἀδελφοί who remain patient, strengthen their hearts, stick together, and stand fast. The Lord is compassionate and merciful. James then takes the next step in closing his epistle.

5:12 Closing Marker and Oath Formula

As noted above, Πρὸ πάντων ('above all') plus a health wish or oath formula frequently mark the closing notes of literary epistles. The postpositive δέ coupled with James' typical introductory formula to ἀδελφοί μου ('my brothers and sisters') shows a transition in thought here. By precluding oaths, James recaptures his earlier exhortations on the use and abuse of the tongue (3:1–12) and reaffirms the absolute for simple, direct speech. Notably, James echoes Jesus' own prohibition in the Sermon on the Mount. Martin Dibelius compares the two as diagrammed below.²⁵

Again, the moral code that James both presupposes and reinforces seems to be the received tradition of Jesus' sayings encapsulated in the Sermon on the Mount and eschatological speech of Matthew 5–7 and 24. Their yes must be not only sufficient, but binding, and likewise their no. Otherwise they are left with the threat of falling under judgment—reflecting the

discussion of judgment in 4:11–12 and further elaborating the behavior, and ultimate end, of the διψυχος ('double-minded one') introduced in 1:8. As their servant and teacher, however, James cannot leave them with the negative. He goes on to give them their alternative to oaths and other worldly responses: they must pray.

5:13–18 Health Wish to Live in Community through Prayer

This section opens with three exhortations that first suggest an ordinary feature of daily life, positive or negative, then offers the response demanded by them in its various facets: prayer.²⁶

Prayer as the foundation of life in light of the Parousia (vv. 13–16). James reconnects the community members to the long line of prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord before them: 'is any among you suffering?' (v. 13). They should do as the prophets did: they must pray (προσευχέσθω; v.13). James then turns to what could be understood as this suffering's opposite: being joyful or cheerful.²⁷ Once again, however, the response must be the appropriate form of prayer. They must 'sing praise' (ψαλλέτω; v. 13) in accordance with the Psalms

James 5:12

Prohibition: all oaths
 Examples: Heaven
 Earth
 Or any other oath
 Exposition: to swear by any of these
 Injunction: an absolute truthfulness
 which makes swearing
 superfluous
 Threat: judgment against
 untruthfulness

Matthew 5:34–37

Prohibition: all oaths
 Examples: Heaven
 Earth
 Jerusalem; Head
 is to swear by God
 Recommendation: affirmation formula
 to be used in place of an oath
 Condemnation: anything beyond this

²⁵ Dibelius, *James*, 250; Laws, *James*, 223, though she concedes the link as only possible. Although Israel was limited in the swearing of oaths (Exod 20:7; Lev 19:12; Num 30:3), such practice does occur in the NT (Matt 26:63; Rom 1:9; Gal 1:20; 2 Cor 1:23; 1 Thess 2:5; Phil 1:8).

²⁶ For a recent survey of critical understandings of this pericope, see Andrew M. Bowden, 'An Overview of the Interpretive Approaches to James 5:13–18', *CBR* 13 (2014): 67–81.

²⁷ BDAG, 406.

(7:18; 9:12; 17:50; 26:6; 32:3; 56:8; 107:4).²⁸ Significantly, James moves from the individual life situation and response to the more communal. If they are suffering or joyful, they may react in an individual manner, but the call is also for a collective response. Thereafter, the confrontation of illness (ἀσθενέω) is chiefly a communal vocation. When anyone among them becomes ill, they ‘must summon (προσκαλεσάσθω) the elders of the church and they must pray (προσευξάσθωσαν) over him’ (v. 14). Here again the call, even in this more communal sense, is to prayer. In the case of illness, however, James gives additional instruction to anoint the afflicted person ‘with oil in the name of the Lord.’²⁹ The invocation of the name of the Lord both preserves the scriptural foundation of the practice and continues to maintain the community in the line of the prophets who lived and spoke through the same invocation (v. 10).

In v. 15, James explains the power of prayer in the face of life’s difficulties. He specifies the instrumental nature of ἡ εὐχή τῆς πίστεως in this salvific role. He looks back to the invocation of the name of the Lord, while foreshadowing his closing exhortation in vv. 19–20. The ‘faithful prayer will save the one who despairs.’³⁰ Translating the participial form of κάμνω as ‘the one who despairs’ captures both the spectrum of difficulties one might face and the verge of hopelessness across situations that turns one from the face of God and the way of truth. The saving action of the Lord is one of raising, ἐγερεῖ.³¹ Further, ‘if one has committed

sins it shall be forgiven him.’ The function of this clause is twofold: to bridge to the next thought and to present a sweeping statement of the saving action of the Lord and the hope of forgiveness.

How is it, then, that they are to make this hope an integral aspect of their lives? James explains in v. 16: they must ‘confess their sins to one another and pray on behalf of one another.’³² He continues to hold the tradition of his culture in delicate balance with the reality of the *parousia* in order to exhort behavior nuanced by the eschatological injunction of the previous verses. In this double command he offers a progression of thought that is connected to the eschatological exhortation by the inferential particle οὖν. The emphatic ἀλλήλοις ... ἀλλήλων (‘one another ... one another’) furthers his turn to the actions of the community as a whole. Moreover, the acts of ἐξομολογεῖσθε ... ἀλλήλοις and εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων are set as the direct alternative to the prohibition of μὴ στενάζετε in v. 9. Confession of sins and mutual prayer is the means by which the eschatological community living ‘in the name of the Lord’ actualizes its faith, and literally gets through the day.

James then rounds off this catalogue of exhortation to prayer with a compelling summary statement that encapsulates the complex result of approaching the world through faithful prayer. ‘Supplication of a righteous person is powerful, effecting much.’ The noun δέησις denotes prayer generally, but also the additional aspect of a request to God to meet a need, thus more specifically, ‘entreaty’ or ‘supplication’.³³ The dual force of strength and efficacy allows James to turn from healing to the powerful

²⁸ BDAG, 1096; this carries forward into the NT (Rom 15:9; 1 Cor 14:15).

²⁹ Adamson, *James*, 197. For a detailed discussion of this passage as an ecclesial summons, see “‘Are Any Among You Sick?’: The Church’s Healing Mandate (James 5:13–20)”, *Word & World* 35 (2015): 241–50.

³⁰ To ‘be weary’ or ‘fatigued’ but also connotes illness, even unto death; BDAG, 506–7.

³¹ This is a multi-faceted term that crosses the range of ‘awakening from sleep’ to ‘restoring to a prior state’ to ‘causing to return to life’, BDAG, 271–2.

³² Regarding the sacrament of confession, see note 40. In the second part of this phrase, εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων, the verb εὐχόμεαι occurs in the NT 6 times, while its counterpart προσεύχομαι appears 85 times and gains strength as the particularly Christian manner of the act of prayer. Though James seems to prefer the latter term, the appearance of εὐχεσθε across the spectrum of witnesses lends credence to his use of the root without its prefix here.

³³ BDAG, 213.

effect of prayer across the spectrum of nature in the model that follows.³⁴ The crux of the rhetoric is the boundless power of faithful prayer in creation.

Biblical Model of such Prayer (vv. 17–18). That James intends once again to situate his recipients in the line of the prophets is evident: Elijah, the paradigmatic prophet, coupled with the qualification that ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν (human like us; v. 17) illustrates his understanding of their role in the world.³⁵ The image is particularly salient given the tendency to elevate the status of Elijah (Mal 3:22–23; Sir 48:1–14; Mark 9:2–8; Matt 17:1–8; Luke 9:28–36) whose reputation for prayer was well known (Sir 48:1–11; 2 Esd 7:109; *m. Taan.* 2:4; *b. Sanh.* 113a; *Esther Rabbah VII*, 13). To emphasize this latter point, James uses the Semitic cognate construction προσευχῆ προσήύξατο, indicating that he ‘prayed fervently.’³⁶ The illustration from Elijah’s career recounts the Lord ceasing the rain in the time of King Ahab and not opening heaven again until ‘after many days of the third year’ (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:1–45).³⁷ As the result of prayer, ‘the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its fruit’ (so I Kgs 18:42). The narration of the end of the drought is scriptural, the generativity of heaven and the regenerative image of the fruitful earth is all James. He reiterates God as the giver of gifts (1:5, 17; 4:6) and harks back to the image ‘precious fruit of the earth’ through the fulfilled

³⁴ BDAG, 484. The difficulty arises in the placement of the participle ἐνεργουμένη and the amplifier πολύ. Translators differ in how these attributes are related, but the nominative feminine participle ‘effecting’ must somehow modify δέησις. Another option might be ‘The effective supplication of a righteous person is very powerful.’

³⁵ Johnson, *James*, 336. The term literally denotes ‘to be of like feeling/passion’ (see Plato, *Republic* 409B; *Timaeus* 45C; Wis 7:3; 4 Macc 12:13; Philo, *Confusion of Tongues*).

³⁶ Laws, *James*, 235; Johnson, *James*, 336.

³⁷ Symbolically, ‘three and a half’ is half of seven, indicating a period of judgment/deprivation associated with the trials of earlier verses; Davids, *James*, 197; Dibelius, *James*, 256–7. See Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 11:2; 12:14.

hope of ‘early and late rains’ with which he began this final segment (5:7).

In this final thematic unit, James moves from the individual to the communal in his exhortation while continuing to place the work of the community squarely in the line of the prophets that have stood fast in the name of the Lord for centuries. He holds this salvation history in eschatological tension with the burgeoning gospel tradition. This series of prayer exhortations resonates the Jesus tradition presented in Matthew 6 (esp. 6:5–7, 9–15, 17–18). The faithful life lived in this light is sustained in all facets by prayer. This is their speech, their eschatological tool, for living in community. In short, the faithful prayer *is* effective. And this effect is powerful in its capacity to engender forgiveness and save the very soul.

5:19–20 Final Eschatological Exhortation and Conclusion

Again, vv. 19–20 is distinct from preceding segments, though not wholly disjointed. Rather, these verses conclude the entire epistle. James addresses his epistle to ‘the twelve tribes in the diaspora’ (1:1), making an eschatological designation for the true Israel that has been dispersed among the nations.³⁸ The final verses likewise bring audiences back to the harsh reality of dispersion and conclude with the response demanded of the community living in this reality.

James closes with the call to action within the community. The by now characteristic ἀδελφοί μου (‘my brothers and sisters’) sets these final verses off with full paranaetic intent. The designation ἐν ὑμῖν (‘among you’) resonates the initial call to prayer and keeps the instruction within the community of believers (see also 1:5; 2:16; 3:13; 4:1), indicating that what follows refers to the reclamation from apostasy—or

³⁸ TDNT, 156–7; BDAG, 236. Deut 28:25, 30:34; Jer 41:17. See 1 Pet 1:1 for a similar greeting. For a discussion of the religious and ethnic indications of this address, see ‘The Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora’ (James 1:1), *NTS* 60 (2014): 433–47.

dispersion.³⁹ The verb *πλανάω* is taken as 'wandering astray' which can be literal (Gen 37:15) or, as here, figurative.⁴⁰ The way of *ἀληθεία* ('truth') that is at stake refers to 'the word of truth' (1:18) that leads to the single-minded, intentional pursuit of friendship with God over against the path of the 'double-minded one' who is unstable in all his ways (1:8). The action of *επιστρέψῃ*, however, is concrete and active. James once again uses the language and behavior of the prophets who continually called for 'turning back' to the Lord.⁴¹ They are models for this saving action, an action fleshed out in the Jesus tradition through the parable of the lost sheep, and the discussion of community accountability and responsibility that follows (Matt 18:12–18). '[A]nyone...led astray from the truth and someone turns him back...' is cast in a future conditional sense, with both subjects in the protasis the indefinite pronoun *τις* and both verbs in the aorist subjunctive. An eschatological bent is thus lent to this practical moral imperative. Unlike vv. 13–14, the action of the individual is not an imperative in an apodosis; rather, the condition at hand is generalized.⁴² The exhortation is not for turning back itself, but for understanding the absolute power of this communal action for forgiveness and salvation.

James therefore opens the final verse with an exhortative imperative: *γινωσκέτω*, emphasizing the role that proper understanding plays in the epistle as a whole.⁴³ The sinner is reclaimed 'from his way of wandering' (v. 20). This is

³⁹ By apostasy, read the rejection, whether through ignorance or defiance, of the revealed will of God; i.e., sin (5:20); Davids, *James*, 198; Martin, *James*, 218.

⁴⁰ BDAG, 821–22; In 1:16 *πλανάω* is used in the sense of 'to be deceived' as James warns the community *μὴ πλανᾶσθε*. The nuance is distinct in the present verse as 'to be deceived from truth' would be redundant.

⁴¹ Hos 6:1; Amos 4:16; Joel 2:12; Hag 2:17; Zech 1:3; Mal 2:6; Isa 6:10; 46:8; 55:7; Jer 3:12; Ezek 18:30–32; Johnson, *James*, 338; Matt 13:15; Lk 1:16–17; 22:32; Acts 3:19; 9:35; 11:21; 1 Cor 3:16; 1 Thess 1:9.

⁴² Johnson, *James*, 336.

⁴³ Johnson, *James*, 338.

only the second occurrence of *ἀμαρτωλός* in the epistle, but the reality of sin and its destruction of authentic personhood and community has been a motif throughout the epistle (1:15; 2:9; 4:17; 5:15–16). The one who steps up and reclaims a community member who has been led astray 'will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins' (v. 20).⁴⁴ The tone does not connote physical death, or at least is not limited to it. The saving action affects the whole person, the very soul. Parallel to eschatological salvation is the notion of 'cover[ing] a multitude of sins'. This phrase is biblical idiom for forgiveness (Pss 32:1–3; 85:2; Dan 4:24; Sir 5:6; Tob 4:10; Rom 4:7) and reinforces not the state of the sinner, but the magnitude of that forgiveness (Ps 5:10; Ezek 28:17).⁴⁵

The ambiguity arises in ascribing a referent to the possessive pronoun *αὐτοῦ* and discerning whose soul is saved and whose sins are covered.⁴⁶ James does, however, seem perfectly capable of expressing 'parallel ideas in parallel phrases' if that is his intent.⁴⁷ In addition, he has shown a proclivity for double meanings and ambiguous diction in order to capture the spectrum of possibilities that could be confronted. Further, the movement from the individual to the communal in these verses (5:7–18) carries into this concluding exhortation. Since the

⁴⁴ This clause initially picks up the idea that sin brings forth death from 1:15, but the connection between sin and death was widespread, both in the sense of eschatological judgment and physical death (Deut 30:49; Job 8:13; Pss 1:6; 2:12; Prov 2:18; Jer 23:12; 1 Cor 15:30; Rom 5:12; Jude 23; 2 Esd 7:48).

⁴⁵ Laws, *James*, 238; Davids, *James*, 200. The same expression is found in 1 Pet 4:8 and quoted as a Jesus saying in 1 Clement 49:5 and 2 Clement 16:4. These latter texts indicate the phrase may have taken on a proverbial meaning in the Gospel tradition to indicate general, though absolute, forgiveness.

⁴⁶ See Laws, Ropes, Dibelius for the former; Martin, Davids, Moo, Johnson for the latter. Luke T. Johnson further asserts that the sins covered do not refer to past iniquities, but to future sins that the reclaimed community member will now never commit (Johnson, *James*, 339).

⁴⁷ Davids, *James*, 201; see 4:7–9.

perpetuation of sin is left fruitless, the community as a whole will benefit through forgiveness in both a practical and a profoundly eschatological way. In effect, the dispersion is rendered null and true eschatological restoration of communion is made possible.⁴⁸ It certainly would not be the first time this community has heard of the saving action of the One bringing far-reaching and life-giving consequences to the many.

Conclusion: Prophetic Endurance and Eschatological Restoration

Through his closing exhortations to his beloved brethren 'in the dispersion', James pulls together the thematic units of his entire epistle and sets the face of the community intimately and intentionally toward the eschatological *telos* wherein they will find salvation. The final essay of 5:7–18 commands absolute steadfastness in their religious conviction through any trial, whether life-threatening or perfectly mundane, by way of prayer. This unit offers a correlative to the earlier thematic unit where James addressed the integration of faith and works and thereby the need to act out of this same religious conviction (2:1–26). It also serves to flesh out one of the author's primary intentions indicated in the *epitome*, as these verses give teeth to the initial exhortations of 1:2–8, with 5:7–11 directly linking to the steadfastness mandated in 1:2–4, and 5:12–18 giving

specific teaching in the way of prayer the single-minded person is called to travel in 1:5–8. On the larger scale, the final verses of the epistle (5:19–20) offer both a summary statement in the form of the paradigmatic exhortation that coalesces every instruction initiated in the introduction (1:2–27), and a closing frame to the eschatological greeting of 1:1. These verses thus present the goal of the entire epistle: a fundamental call to action in communion that is both engendered by, and absolutely, single-mindedly, centered on, the *parousia*.⁴⁹

Further, one may ask, 'why does he do it this way?' If this is his intention, why does he use such loaded terms, and why doesn't he just call on the name of Jesus the Christ? What we see is the theological tension between the Old and the New, and the epistemological struggle to speak of the New in terms of the Old. James is using the language he knows and lives, the language of the Old; but filling it with the content of the New, the content of fulfillment. This tension does not manifest itself quite so intensely for the 21st-century reader. Thus, we must struggle to extricate ourselves from our expectation of neat categories and clear boundaries in order to get inside this developing worldview and experience just this *telos*. James calls the community, even as he has been called, to live in communion in this paradigm shift. This is the work brought forth by the fullness of faith, and this is the profoundly saving action that will bring about redemption and restoration.

⁴⁸ For discussion of the Epistle of James as fundamentally oriented toward a social gospel, see Elsa Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works Is Dead* (New York: Crossroad, 1999); LeAnn Snow Flesher, 'Mercy Triumphs Over Judgement: James as Social Gospel', *Review & Expositor* 111 (2014): 180–6; Esa Autero 'Reading the Epistle of James with Socioeconomically Marginalized Immigrants in the Southern United States', *Pneuma* 39 (2017): 504–35.

⁴⁹ Patrick J. Hartin, 'The Letter of James: Faith Leads to Action (The Indicative Leads to the Imperative)', *Word & World* 35 (2015): 222–30.