

# THE THEOLOGY OF PRAYER IN JAMES

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## I. Introduction

One of the strangest and saddest omissions in modern theology is prayer. A. Strong, for example, devoted but six pages to prayer under the heading of providence.<sup>1</sup> M. Erickson's fine recent work contains only two pages on the subject, also under providence.<sup>2</sup> On a single page W. G. T. Shedd lists prayer as one of the external "means of sanctification," along with Scripture, "Providential discipline," and the "sacrament of the Supper."<sup>3</sup> C. Hodge interprets prayer in light of both providence and sanctification, still in less than twenty pages.<sup>4</sup> Examples need not be multiplied.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever accounts for this degree of neglect may also explain the near oblivion to prayer as a major theme in the Epistle of James. The introductions to James only rarely include prayer among the theological themes, motifs and values of the Letter. Interpreters tend to orient the

<sup>1</sup> A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, three volumes in one (Valley Forge: Judson, 1907) 433-39.

<sup>2</sup> M. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (3 vols; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 1.405-6.

<sup>3</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (3 vols; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889; Reprinted. Grand Rapids: Klock and Klock, 1979) 2B.555.

<sup>4</sup> C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1977) 3.231, 692-709.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, of the major contemporary theologies, K. Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1969) treats prayer most comprehensively. His interpretation of prayer in terms of the "election of Christ" will be considered later. The section on prayer in Calvin's Institutes remains as the standard. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill: [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960] 3.20). The finest recent treatment on the subject is D. Bloesch, *The Struggle of Prayer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

theology of James around the nature of God, wisdom, righteousness and sin, or perhaps in prolonged reaction to Luther, faith and works. Most writers discern a combination of theological ideas, and many would agree with B. Reicke that the practical dimensions of James virtually preempt theological unity.<sup>6</sup>

It is worth considering, however, whether the theology of prayer gives the Epistle precisely that theological unity it seems to lack. An observation by J. Adamson is telling. In his introduction to the "anointing" passage (5:13-18), Adamson argues that, despite the sundry hermeneutical problems, "[James] observed care in structure suggests that throughout there is one dominant theme, prayer." At that point, Adamson begins his commentary on the passage by noting: "In the end of his Epistle, James comes round to where he began."<sup>7</sup>

The remark is particularly telling in that James not only begins and ends his Letter "with trials;" as Adamson correctly points out, but. James also begins (1:5-8) and ends (5:13-18) with prayer as the instrumental means for managing trials. And the fourth chapter, which represents a major shift in emphasis, begins with prayer as well (4:1-3).

The centrality of prayer in James provides the impetus for this article. The first section of the article will relate prayer to the overall purpose of the Letter. Detailed exegesis of the three prayer passages in James will constitute the second section. The final section will analyze the theology of Prayer in James in a more technical fashion.

### *Prayer and the Purpose of James*

Most interpreters would agree that, in some way or other, James was written to contradict a defective understanding of faith. "Pithy, prophetic, practical," writes A. M. Hunter, ". . . what James is driving at from start to finish is a Christian profession which will issue in practice."<sup>8</sup> D. Guthrie suggests that while "it is not easy to arrive at any definite conclusion regarding the purpose" of James, it is clear that

<sup>6</sup> B. Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (AB: Garden City: Doubleday, 1964) 6-7. His terse conclusion is that while the purpose of James is "to admonish the recipients to Christian patience," it actually "consists of a series of admonitions on different themes which are dealt with one after another without any clearly discernible plan." Similarly, A. Clarke (*The New Testament of Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Vol. II. Romans to the Revelation* [New York: The Methodist Book Concern, n.d.] 2.796) thinks it a connecting link between prophetic Judaism and Christian faith. Apart from two references to Christ, it need not be Christian at all, he argues. Not unexpectedly, then, "[t]here is neither plan nor arrangement in it; but it contains many invaluable lessons which no serious person can read without profit."

<sup>7</sup> J. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 196.

<sup>8</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament* (3 ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 170.

“[t]he Epistle is essentially practical and would appear to be designed to correct certain known tendencies in behavior.”<sup>9</sup>

The likelihood that the author was James, the half-brother of the Lord and pastor of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13),<sup>10</sup> makes the purpose uniquely intelligible. Owing no doubt to a pastoral heart, the Letter reads more like an impassioned sermon than a treatise.<sup>11</sup> Eminently practical, the Epistle here and there exhorts and admonishes, exposes, explains, warns and comforts. James is preoccupied with the relation of theology to life. He cannot abide a speculative, cerebral faith.

James' concept of faith correlates with another dominant motif in the letter, viz., “wisdom.” Clearly wisdom means something to James other than mental acuity. The whole point of the contrast between “the wisdom from above” (3:17) and the “earthly, natural, demonic [wisdom]” (3:15) is moral. Whatever may be claimed for the wisdom from below, it fails as true wisdom because it does not issue in “righteousness” (3:18).

James thus stands within the tradition of wisdom in the OT and later Judaism. G. Fohrer has shown that the counterpart of σοφία (“wisdom”) in the OT, חָכְמָה, relates not to “the theoretical mastery of the questions of life and the universe,” rather “to prudent, considered, experienced and competent action to subjugate the world and to master the various problems of life and life itself.”<sup>12</sup> Wisdom has a profoundly ethical character.

No dichotomy exists, however, between ethical behavior on the one hand, and the true knowledge of God on the other, either in James or in the OT. Thus E. Jacob can speak of the “wise men” (חֲכָמִים) as

<sup>9</sup> D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (3 ed.; Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1970) 764.

<sup>10</sup> There is no need to rehearse the arguments about authorship. Guthrie (*ibid.*, 736-58), surveys the field in considerable detail and concludes that “[i]t would seem preferable to incline to the traditional view.” Even attempts to reconcile the problems associated with the traditional view usually involve James the Lord's brother. W. E. Oesterley [“The General Epistle of James,” *The Expositor's Greek New Testament* (5 vols.; ed. W. R. Nicoll; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1979) 4.385-407] for example, suggests that James represents a kind of Jewish-Christian Mishna, the original Jacobean material being expanded by later commentary. Even W. Marxsen [*Introduction to the New Testament: An Approach to Its Problems* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 231] who supposes that the Epistle must be “post-Pauline,” believes it plausible that “a writing by James forms the basis of the document as we know it.” Note that all quotations from Scripture are NASV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>11</sup> Hunter, *New Testament* 109. Actually, Hunter says, James consists of “five little sermons.”

<sup>12</sup> G. Fohrer and U. Wilckens, “σοφία, σοφός,” *TDNT* 8 (1971) 476.

channels "through which God's presence is communicated to men."<sup>13</sup>  
To know wisdom is quite literally to know God (Prov 9:10).

Perhaps then J. A. Kirk is correct when he suggests that James' use of the concept of wisdom parallels the use, by other NT writers, of the concept of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Kirk argues his case along three lines.

First, he argues that the wisdom contexts of James are more or less exact parallels of other NT passages where the Holy Spirit rather than wisdom is the subject. Thus Jas 1:5 parallels Matt 7:7 (as frequently noted in the literature). In both passages, "asking" (αἰτέω) dominates, in James with the conditional "in faith," in Matthew by repetition (five times). Additionally, in each passage the Father is prominent as the giver, in James by comparison between 1:5 and 1:17, in Matthew by the context fixed in 7:11. In the Lucan parallel to Matthew (Luke 11:13), however, the Father is not "in heaven" (7:11), He gives as the "heavenly Father" ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (cf. Jas 3:15); and, the "good gifts" He gives are specified as "the Holy Spirit."

According to Kirk, the second wisdom passage (3:9-18) parallels the Pauline contrast between the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-23). Both passages build on the analogy of "fruit" (Gal 5:22; Jas 3:18). Kirk hypothesizes that the reference to "spirit" in Jas 4:5, if construed as man's spirit, provides not only a balance to "wisdom" (Holy Spirit?) in Jas 3, but also corresponds to "flesh" in Gal 5, thus completing the parallel.

Kirk also observes that other NT passages make wisdom christological (e.g., 1 Cor 1:24, "Christ. . . the wisdom of God"). Other passages make it either a divine gift,<sup>15</sup> or a humanistic function which hardens and blinds one to the things of God (cf. 1. Cor 2:11-12).

Finally, Kirk argues that some significant OT contexts either identify the Holy Spirit and wisdom, ascribe similar functions to them, or make wisdom the supreme gift of the Spirit. Allowing for the intertestamental period, the identification becomes nearly total. Kirk supposes that Jewish Christians in a Palestinian milieu could readily appropriate a similar identification in James.<sup>16</sup>

Kirk is convincing. The purpose of James is the production of a certain kind of person--"perfect and complete" (1:4). The development of character, however, only begins with faith, for trials constitute

<sup>13</sup> E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) 253.1

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Kirk, "The Meaning of Wisdom in James: Examination of a Hypothesis," *NTS* 16 (1969) 24.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Eph 1:11 where Paul prays that the Father may give πνεῦμα σοφίας. The phrase clearly links the Holy Spirit and wisdom, if it does not identify them.

a "testing for your faith" (1:3). Wisdom, on the other hand, permits the testing of faith to have its "perfect result."<sup>17</sup> But wisdom is God's gift.

If wisdom virtually comprehends the work of God in the believer's life, prayer is the (only) medium by which that work is actualized. The faith which is tested by trials appropriates wisdom by prayer, and wisdom is sufficient to accept trials as agents for the development of character. It is not too much to say, then, that for James prayer incarnates the whole of the life of God.

This thesis makes A. Motyer's structural analysis of James very attractive. Motyer divides the Epistle into three parts: (1) a large thematic content section (1:12-5:6), oriented around the notion of Christian growth in stages of "birth" (1:13-19a), "growth," (1:19b-25) and "development" (1:26-5:6); (2) an introduction, and (3) a conclusion, each built around the dual concepts of "patience" and "prayer."<sup>18</sup> Motyer fails to integrate the three sections, however, and does not indicate how the third prayer passage in James might affect the analysis.

With prayer at the theological center of the Epistle, the purpose of James seems to demand a slightly different structure. On this account, James appears to fall into two major divisions, each related specifically to prayer, and both of course related to the pastoral purpose. The first division (1:9-3:18) may well be taken as an exposition of 1:5-8. The material of this section builds on the theme expressed in 1:5-6: ". . . if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives. . . (αἰτέῖτω παρὰ τοῦ διδοντος θεοῦ) . . . But let him ask in faith (αἰτέῖτω δὲ ἐν πίστει). . . ." The theme is double-edged in that prayer depends on the nature of God, and faith has only to apprehend that nature. God not only delights to grant wisdom fully, he effectively actualizes himself in the life of the believer when he does. A dynamic interplay produces the "perfect" (τελείος) man.

James characteristically oscillates between "faith" and the "nature of God" in the first section. Thus 1:13-17 speak of God's nature in terms of the *kinds* of gifts He gives, while 1:19-25 speak of faith in terms of doing the Word, not just hearing it. In 2:1-13, the "faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" must recognize the nature (cf. 2:1, δοξῆς!) of God

<sup>17</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that the brethren should count as joy the experience of trials "knowing (γινώσκοντες) . . . endurance" (1:3). As R. Bultmann ["γινώσκω," *TDNT* 1 (1964) 704] points out, the NT use of γινώσκω diverges from the characteristic Greek usage in that the former appropriates the OT sense which "is no mere question of objective confirmation but of a knowledge which accept the consequences of knowledge." The use of ἐχέτω (1:4) bespeaks this acceptance of consequences.

<sup>18</sup> A. Motyer, *The Meaning of James*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1985) 12-13.

who chose "the poor of this world to be rich in faith" (2:5). It may even be possible to interpret the "faith and works" passage (2:14-26) in terms of this structure. If faith lays hold of wisdom through prayer, and if wisdom actualizes the life of God in a fallen world, then the real thrust of the context is the relation of character (τελείος) to prayer-wisdom, rather than the relation of conversion-faith to works of the law. James returns to the nature of God motif in chap 3 with his lament that the tongue blesses "our Lord and Father" while it curses "men, who have been made in the likeness of God" (3:9).

The first division reaches a climax in 3:13-18 with a recapitulation of wisdom. God's wisdom is categorically "from above" (ἄνωθεν). How else could it be realized, then, but by prayer? James has come full circle (cf. 1:5, 17).

The recapitulation of wisdom also provides a transition to the second major division (4:1-5:18), because God's wisdom contrasts so dramatically with man's wisdom. James has already hinted at the tragic distinction between the two wisdoms (cf. 1:20); but, here, the opposition becomes central. Whereas the first division focuses on the nature of God, the second focuses on the nature of man.

Once again, prayer dominates. The very nature of man, characterized by "earthly" wisdom, keeps believers from praying (4:2) or from praying aright (4:3).

As in the first section, the theme appears to be double-edged. Whereas the proper response to the nature of God is *faith*, the proper response to the nature of man is *humility-confession*: "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts you double-minded" (4:8). In both cases the proper response is prayer-response, and the overarching goal is the gift of wisdom producing the "perfect" (τελείος) character. And once again, as in the first section, James oscillates between the nature (of man)<sup>19</sup> and response (humility-confession)<sup>20</sup> motifs. The division constitutes a nearly verbatim exposition of the "earthly" wisdom described in 3:14-16.<sup>21</sup>

The third prayer passage presents a peculiar set of problems, solution for which awaits the exegesis to follow. For present purposes,

<sup>19</sup> E.g., "who are you?" (4:12); "you are just a vapor" (4:14); "you boast in your arrogance. . . evil" (4:16); "your miseries are coming" (5:1-6); and "strengthen your hearts" (5:7-11).

<sup>20</sup> E.g., "Come now" (Ἔλθε νῦν; 4:13, 5:1); "you ought to say" (4:15); "Do not complain. . . may not be judged" (5:9). All of these exhortations and warnings center on prayer-kinds of attitudes.. See Calvin's (*Institutes* 3.20.28) discussion of "private prayer."

<sup>21</sup> The "from below" wisdom (3:15) is ἐπιγείος (cf. 4:13-15; 5:1; 5:4). ψυχική (cf. 5:5) and δαιμονιώδης (cf. 4:11-12). It produces ζήλος (cf. 5:8-11) and ἐριθεία (cf. 5:121).

it will suffice to note that the two double-edged themes recur: (1) The (giving) nature of God ("the Lord will raise him up," 5:15) and faith ("the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick," 5:15); and (2) The (weak and sinful) nature of man ("if he has committed sins," 5:16; "nature like ours," 5:17) and humility-confession ("confess your sins," 5:16). The passage appears to recapitulate the entire letter much as the discussion of the two wisdoms recapitulated the first section. If so, then the theme of the Epistle of James may well be summarized by 5:16b: "The effective (i.e., "in faith") prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (i.e., the life of God is actualized)."

### *Prayer and the Life of James*

Before leaving this introductory section, a word is due relative to the life and character of the Lord's brother. At least two distinctive and relevant features emerge from the extant biographical information. Both Josephus and Eusebius have versions of the death of James. Eusebius' account derived, by his own testimony, from Hegesippus, a second century writer whose chief interest evidently lay in opposing Gnosticism. Hegesippus' account included many details about James' character and practice.

The versions differ significantly, however, as to the details of James' martyrdom. Josephus makes it the work of the Sanhedrin, during the interval between the death of Festus and the arrival of Albinus, the new procurator from Alexandria (probably about A.D. 62). According to Josephus, "the most equitable of the citizens" protested the unlawful assembly and sentence, some even going to meet Albinus himself. James and some others were accused, according to Josephus, as "breakers of the Law."<sup>22</sup> Hegesippus, on the other hand, claimed that certain scribes and Pharisees, who deeply respected James, (called the Just), led him to the Temple and insisted that he publicly correct the misunderstanding that Jesus was "the Christ." Instead, James affirmed his own belief, whereupon the scribes and Pharisees threw him from the Temple, then stoned and bludgeoned him to death.<sup>23</sup>

J. B. Mayor agrees with Lightfoot that the former account poses fewer problems in detail than the latter.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the kernel in both accounts, and in fragments of others that survive, attributes to James a profoundly virtuous character. Doubtless the training which James received at home,<sup>25</sup> and the restored vision received from his

<sup>22</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 20.9.1.

<sup>23</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.

<sup>24</sup> J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of James* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1978) xxxviii -xlii.

<sup>25</sup> Note that Joseph was called δίκαιος (Matt 1:19)!

brother, combined to produce a reverence for the Law as the very revelation of God.<sup>26</sup> Life ordered in such a way comes very close to the wisdom James espouses in his Epistle.

A second feature of James' character is even more striking, in light of the present case. Hegesippus described James' lifestyle specifically and comprehensively in terms of prayer. His full account bears notice:

But James the brother of the Lord, who, as there were many of this name, was surnamed the Just by all, from the days of our Lord until now, received the government of the church with the apostles. . . . He was in the habit of entering the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, and interceding for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as camel's, in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, however spurious the narrative may be historically, Hegesippus added that when he was stoned James "knelt down saying, 'I entreat thee, O Lord God and Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"<sup>28</sup>

The Epistle which bears his name betrays the very character of James. If, as Phillips Brooks said, "preaching is truth through personality,"<sup>29</sup> this sermonic letter is best understood as an extension of James the Just.

## II. *The Prayer Passages of James*

Since the prayer passages in James have been set already within a contextual framework, the purpose of this exegetical section can be defined rather narrowly. The focus now becomes content rather than purpose and structure. "What" James teaches about prayer replaces "how" or "why" he structured his Epistle around the prayer motif. Exegetical studies provide the data for analysis of James' prayer-theology .

### *Praying for Wisdom--Jas 1:2-8*

The first prayer passage is 1:5-8, set in the larger context of 1:2-8. Kirk summarizes the argument of this context according to the following scheme:

<sup>26</sup> Mayor, *James* xli,

<sup>27</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2,2.3.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching*, Yale Lectures on Preaching [1877] (New York: Dutton, n.d.) 5. The actual quote is: "The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's will, communicated in any other way than the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth."

"The brethren" and "Trials" = "The testing of faith"  
 "The testing of faith" and "Wisdom" = "Steadfastness"  
 "Steadfastness" and more "Wisdom" = "Perfection and completion"<sup>30</sup>

James characteristically develops a thought in steps or stages only to return suddenly to the original thought. The mention of "wisdom" at 1:5 inaugurates this tendency. The main verb of this passage, ἡγήσασθε ("to consider"), indicates a considered response to the "trials" into which believers invariably (note "when," ὅταν) fall. It represents active wisdom<sup>31</sup> in the face of that which serves as a "means of testing."<sup>32</sup> James describes the ultimate goal of this process of active wisdom both positively ("perfect and complete") and negatively ("lacking in nothing"). James does not, therefore, *introduce* wisdom in 1:5, he *returns* to it, and shows it to be contingent.

The contingency of wisdom is expressed in two ways. First, the use of a first class conditional sentence demonstrates that James does not regard wisdom as a "possible" or "probable" lack, but as a universal lack--he *assumes* the reality of the condition.<sup>33</sup> The contingency is simple awareness. Second, wisdom is a gift of God, who gives however in answer to prayer. Thus the imperative, αἰτέτω ("let him ask"), is juxtaposed with καὶ δοθήσεται ("and it will be given," future indicative).<sup>34</sup> The indicatives show that James encourages "asking" as an ongoing practice and "giving" as ongoing response.<sup>35</sup>

A certainty which countermands the contingency of wisdom is expressed in several ways. One is the use of αἰτέω ("to pray") itself. In contrast to the other major NT words for "pray,"<sup>36</sup> αἰτέω connotes

<sup>30</sup> Kirk, "Wisdom" 31.

<sup>31</sup> ἡγέομαι can mean "to lead," or, as here, "to believe" or "regard as." F. Buchsel, "ἡγέομαι," *TDNT* 2 (1964) 907. Thayer [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962)] noted that the word indicates a belief resting "on the due consideration of external grounds."

<sup>32</sup> This is the significance of δοκίμιον (1,3). w. Grundmann, "δόκιμος," *TDNT* 2 (1964) 255-59.

<sup>33</sup> A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament* (10th ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) para. 350. In view of his attack on "earthly" wisdom in 3:13ff, this may be an ironic twist by James.

<sup>34</sup> The "asking" and "giving" juxtaposition constitute a kind of tacit third class condition where the condition is undetermined but the conclusion is sure, James used the imperative, not the subjunctive, however, in what would have been the protasis. First and third class conditionals frequently occur together, and serve to sharpen the distinction between the two. Cf. Robertson and Davis, *Grammar* para. 353.

<sup>35</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith* (Chicago: Moody, 1979) BO.

<sup>36</sup> προσεύχομαι (pray worshipfully), εὐχόμεαι (earnestly wish), δέομαι (supplicate), ἐρωτᾶω (freely pray), and ἐντυγχάνω (draw near, perhaps on behalf of another).

simplicity, if not childlikeness.<sup>37</sup> Again there is juxtaposition, this time with ἀπλῶς ("generously, simply"). The believer asks simply, God gives "to all men simply."<sup>38</sup> The parallel with Matt 7:7 is unmistakable. Clearly both texts stress the simplicity of the act of prayer itself: "It is as if the NT witnesses wished particularly to encourage men to pray, by assuring the suppliant that his requests are heard by God."<sup>39</sup>

Another expression of certainty in this prayer passage is the participle διδόντος, translated "who gives." The unusual position (διδόντος θεοῦ) "gives a special prominence to πασῶν ἀπλῶς."<sup>40</sup> In summary, it is God's nature to give the wisdom necessary for maturity simply--so ask simply.

A third expression of this certainty completes a cycle by reintroducing the notion of contingency: "But let him ask in faith." As wisdom depends on the asking-giving dynamic, so receiving depends on the "in faith" dynamic. So the believer must ask μηδὲν διακρινόμενος, literally "in no way at variance with oneself." This phrase, together with "double-minded" (1:8) and the simile "like the surf of the sea. . ." (1:6) suggest an inner conflict which results in psycho-spiritual distress and failure. The believer simultaneously asks and doubts.

For James then the "one who doubts" represents the very negation of prayer.<sup>41</sup> Prayer is simply resort to the giving nature of God. Doubt effectively denies that nature. Heb 11:6 echoes the conclusion: "[H]e who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them who seek Him." Simply stated, prayer is the fulcrum that balances an awareness of need with an awareness of supply.

#### *Praying with Intent--Jas 4:1-10*

As previously noted, the fourth chapter appears to shift the focus of the Epistle of James, specifically toward human nature. The question of how prayer relates to this new focus is complicated somewhat by James' use of technical terminology and asyndetic form.

The passage is dominated in the first place by four technical terms, πόλεμοι ("quarrels"), μάχαι ("conflicts"), στρατευομένων ("that wage war"), and φονεύω ("commit murder"). The first two words move the

<sup>37</sup> "Prayer," *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*. Stahlin suggested that αἰτέω hints: (1) At wanting something, especially for oneself; (2) At "demanding;" and (3) At less intimacy. G. Stahlin, "εἰτέω," *TDNT* 1 (1964) 192-93.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, reprint 1976) 4.2.276.

<sup>39</sup> H. Schonweiss, "Prayer," *DNTT* 2 (1976) 857.

<sup>40</sup> Mayor, *James* 37.

<sup>41</sup> Thus 1:7: "For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord."

readers abruptly from "peace" (3:18) to armed conflict, for thus the terms appear in every literary genre and milieu.<sup>42</sup> The latter two words likewise have rather narrow, technical nuances, "waging war," and "kill."<sup>43</sup>

Besides the use of technical language, the use of asyndetic structure (which recurs, incidentally, in the third prayer passage), dramatizes the intensity of the conflict, but tends to obscure its essential character. The context of the passage, however, seems largely to resolve the problems. On one hand, the contrast between "quarrels" and "peace," so well-attested in the literature,<sup>44</sup> relates the summary wisdom passage of 3:13-18 to the prayer passage of 4:1-3. On another hand, the juxtaposition of ἡδονῶν ("lusts," 4:1) and μοικαλίδες ("You adulteresses," 4:4) links the prayer passage with the repentance passage of 4:4-10. G. Stahlin has shown that by NT times ἡδονή ("lust") had developed, in Greek literature at least, a slight "declension of meaning" in the direction of "sensual [especially sexual] lust."<sup>45</sup> As always, however, ἡδονή in the NT represents "a definite orientation of life" which is "opposed to God."<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, James locates the great struggle between the wisdom which eventuates in "righteousness" and "peace," and the "earthly" wisdom which eventuates in "hostility toward God" and "quarrels and conflicts." The first comes "from above," the second ἐντεύθεν (literally "from here").<sup>47</sup> The dichotomy was introduced earlier. Jas 1:13-17 had contrasted the produce of lust (cf. 4:2) and the giving of God (cf. 3:15).

In light of these parallels, it is pointless to demand a particular object for the "asking" which James mentions in 4:2-3.<sup>48</sup> The emphasis obviously falls on the sorts of people who ask (or refuse to ask) rather than on the requests themselves.

<sup>42</sup> R. C. Trench [*Synonyms of the New Testament* (9th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1953) 322] supposes that the two terms differ principally in scope, πόλεμος; signifying "war," μάχη signifying "battle:" BAGD note that μάχη refers to fighting without actual weapons, as a fistfight. The juxtaposition of the terms, however, makes Trench's distinction wholly acceptable.

<sup>43</sup> Thus Thayer and BAGD.

<sup>44</sup> O. Bauernfeind, "πόλεμος," *TDNT* 6 (1968) 502-13.

<sup>45</sup> G. Stahlin, "ἡδονή," *TDNT* 2 (1964) 919.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> The word invites the image of a speaker's pointing to his own chest.

<sup>48</sup> P. Davids [*Commentary on James* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 1. 41-47, 56] writes that the object might well be for "material goods," especially in view of the "poverty-piety" theme of the Epistle. He would agree, however, that the primary focus of this, and other prayer-objects in James is "relationship with God." It is, as Calvin (*Institutes* 3.20.2) notes, "by the benefit of prayer that we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father."

Indeed, the kind of person who prays (αἰτέω) forms the core of the passage in its broad context, and ties this passage to the initial prayer passage (1:5-8). This characterological analysis investigates two problems: (1) the psycho-spiritual dynamic of interpersonal conflict; and (2) the psycho-spiritual dynamic of divine human estrangement.<sup>49</sup> James situates prayer strategically between the two.

### *The Dynamic of Interpersonal Conflict*

As noted earlier, the problems of 4:1-3 revolve around language and structure. Is the language metaphorical or literal? Who are the referents? Does the *Sitz im Leben* make material differences in the meaning? What logic properly comprehends the asyndetic arrangement of 4:2?

As noted earlier, one category of difficulties in the interpretation of the passage arises out of the technical vocabulary. None of the words presents a real problem, however, except φονεύω ("to kill"), "As it stands," M. Townsend declares, "it is difficult to see how this can mean anything other than 'you murder' or 'you kill.'"<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, it is at least as difficult to take the whole account literally, if the readers are Christians.<sup>51</sup> Small wonder that Calvin, Luther and a number of others followed Erasmus in his emendation of φονεύετε to φθονείτε ("to envy"), an expedient devoid of MSS support. The evidence pleads for some other explanation.

Two options are plausible. James could have in mind the involvement of believers in Zealotry.<sup>52</sup> A variation, offered by J. P. Lange and J. J. van Oosterzee, has James passing from Jewish Christians to Judaizing Christians, and beyond them, to the "real Judaistic Jews," with a missionary purpose in mind;<sup>53</sup> Lange and Oosterzee conclude

<sup>49</sup> The author uses "psycho-spiritual" for what some might mean by "psychological" and others by "spiritual." The latter two terms are ambiguous at best. Therefore, "psycho-spiritual" is used to indicate that a relationship exists between the psychological life of man (in the most comprehensive sense) and his nature as a morally responsible being.

<sup>50</sup> M. Townsend, "James 4:1-4: A Warning against Zealotry?" *ExpTim* 87 (1976) 211.

<sup>51</sup> Alford (*Greek* 312) takes the word literally in a Christian context, and cites the examples of David and Ahab as justification.

<sup>52</sup> Townsend, "James" 212-13. Davids (*James* 33-34) also hints at a "temptation to join the Zealots."

<sup>53</sup> J. P. Lange; and J. J. van Oosterzee, "The Epistle General of James," *James-Revelation* (12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960) 12.110. R. R. Williams [*The Letters of John and James* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965) 124-25] contends that James' words are ambiguous enough to allow application to non-Christians: "a general moral challenge to society," The specificity of the charges and warnings do not seem to warrant this liberty. Cf. R. V. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James* (Tyndale NT Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 33-38.

that "quarrels and conflicts" represented the actual situation in first century Judaism. On this understanding, "you kill" can bear the full weight of literal interpretation.

Another option involves taking **φονεύω** in a figurative sense, along with the other technical terms in the passage. BAGD indicate the admissibility of such a move; and, in light of James' argument and usage, it makes good sense. On this account, James distinguishes the manifestations of conflict from the human dynamic. The use of "members" is particularly significant not only because the word **μέλος** refers to a part of the body (cf. 3:5), but also because both the OT and the NT regard the use of the **μέλος** as a responsible act toward God.<sup>54</sup>

The second type of difficulty in this passage has to do with the asyndetic structure of the material. The problem is apparent in the A V rendering of 4:2:

You lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

On this reading, two difficulties appear. One is that "you commit murder" and "you are envious" seem not only grossly mismatched, but out of any reasonable order. The second is that a Greek basis for "yet" does not occur in the text.

P. Davids solves the dilemma by taking **φονεύετε** ("you commit murder") as figurative and by placing a **καί** between **πολεμείτε** ("you quarrel") and **οὐκ ἔχετε** (You do not have) on the strength of a minority textual attestation.<sup>55</sup> He proposes a four part scheme:

- a **ἐπιθυμείτε** ("You, lust")
  - καὶ οὐκ ἔχετε** (and do not have)
- b **φονεύετε καὶ ζηλοῦτε** ("you commit murder and you are envious")
  - καὶ οὐ δύνασθε ἐπιτυχεῖν** ("and cannot obtain")
- a' **μάχεσθε καὶ πολεμείτε** ("you fight and quarrel")
  - [καὶ] **οὐκ ἔχετε διὰ τὸ μὴ αἰτέισθε ὑμᾶς** ("[and] you do not have because you do not ask")
- b' **αἰτέετε** ("You ask")
  - καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε διότι κακῶς αἰτέισθε ἵνα. . .**<sup>56</sup> ("and do not receive, because you ask. . .")

<sup>54</sup> J. Horst, "μέλος," *TDNT* 4 (1967) 559-60.

<sup>55</sup> The UBS does not mention the variant. The Nestle-Aland apparatus traces the reading to the "Alexandrian" texts and P, it vg<sup>cl</sup>, and sy, even though it adopts the shorter variant.

<sup>56</sup> Davids, James 157-58; cf. also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1938) 623-24.

Despite an impressive symmetry, this scheme seems to miss two important points. First, the passage is ruled by a characterological assessment. Therefore, other things being equal, "quarrels and conflicts" should be taken as effects, not causes. Second, the scheme is asymmetrical precisely at the critical point of prayer. Prayer clearly does not belong to the "effect" of "battling" and "warring." James has already said that the "quarrels and conflicts" result from "lusts." His point here, then, would seem to be that what "lust" (ἡδονή) hopes for, prayer alone realizes. Lust, operating apart from prayer, amounts to "earthly" wisdom. It results in struggle, not "righteousness-peace" (3:18).

Granting Mayor's contention that φονεύετε καὶ ζηλοῦτε ("you commit murder and you are envious") is an "extraordinary anti-climax,"<sup>57</sup> the best sense of the passage develops from a perception of the tension between what the (weak and sinful) person desires and how it is obtained. The terms ἡδονή, ἐπιθυμία and ζηλόω thus become functionally equivalent<sup>58</sup> and the argument flows thus:

4:1 Consequences of exercising "earthly" wisdom

4:2a Analysis of the frustrated dynamic of need and fulfillment

ἐπιθυμεῖτε καὶ οὐκ ἔχετε φονεύετε  
καὶ ζηλοῦτε καὶ οὐ δύνασθε ἐπιτυχεῖν  
μάχεσθε καὶ πολεμεῖτε

4:2b-3 Analysis of the potential dynamic of need and fulfillment

οὐκ ἔχετε διὰ . . .  
αἰτεῖτε καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε . . .

Understood this way, the passage answers negatively and anthropocentrically to the positive and theocentric assertion of 1:5-8. In both instances, circumstances and conditions external to the believer serve as a means of testing the inner life of the believer in his relation to God. And in both cases, prayer articulates and incarnates that relation. In the former passage, prayer represents a means, a potentiality which faith may simply grasp. In this passage, prayer represents a critique of alienation, that is, prayer-life betrays true desire.

The life derived from the "pleasures that wage war" serves itself as an end, therefore, while the life "in faith" exists as a means to an end. Significantly, this passage cycles back in 4:2b and 4:3 to the opening thought of 4:1. The self-seeking may not pray at all; and if they do pray, they pray only to gratify the lusts which orient their lives.

<sup>57</sup> Mayor, *James* 130. The order is reversed, no matter what latitude in meaning the terms may permit.

<sup>58</sup> Curtis Vaughan, *James: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969) 84-86.

An interesting exegetical point arises here. The verb αἰτέω ("to pray") occurs three times in this passage, first in the middle voice, then in the active, and again in the middle. Mayor, J. Moulton and G. Milligan, and others<sup>59</sup> suggest a possible intensified earnestness in the middle as opposed to the active. Despite Hiebert's argument that the reflexive nuance of the middle sufficiently conveys the sense of the passage,<sup>60</sup> it is hard to resist Moulton's contention that a subtle difference in meaning not only fits the context, but gives a very fine shade to James' tightly woven logic.<sup>61</sup> Following Moulton's interpretation, and in light of the present argument, the passage might read:

You do not have [your true desire] because you do not ask [in faith to the giving God].

You ask [superficially as a religious duty] and do not receive [cf. 1.7!] because you ask amiss [earnestly but wrongly].

### *The Dynamic of Divine-Human Alienation*

The second major theme in the context of this second prayer passage relates to the alienation of a believer from God. The abrupt vocative "You adulteresses" (4:4)<sup>62</sup>, which identifies the subjects of 4:1-3, shows that the dynamic of need-fulfillment does not operate in a vacuum. It rather operates in direct relation to God. The radical disjunction between the "from above" and the "earthly" wisdom recurs. The context of 4:4-10 adds two qualities to this disjunction that bear notice.

First, James suggests a correlation between the frustrated need-fulfillment paradigm and alienation from God. The one who lives according to lusts, therefore, stands as an "enemy of God," being simultaneously "a friend of the world." In this case, as throughout Scripture, ἐχθρός ("enemy") denotes one whose inner disposition is one of hostility, and from whom "quarrels" might be expected.<sup>53</sup> And, whatever the final solution to the complicated set of possibilities in

<sup>59</sup> Mayor, James 133; BAGD; Moulton and Milligan. J. Ropes [A *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1910) 259] demurs.

<sup>60</sup> Hiebert, *James* 248 tn.

<sup>61</sup> J. Moulton, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901) 1.100-61.

<sup>62</sup> Doubtless the correct reading, *μοικοὶ καὶ* being added perhaps to balance a literal interpretation of the word (Tasker, *James* 88), or to direct the address to both sexes (Lenski, *Interpretation* 627). The symbolism of spiritual infidelity finds precedent throughout both Testaments, however, in the husband (God)-wife (people of God) theme (cf. Matt 12:39).

<sup>63</sup> W. Foerster, "ἐχθρος," *TDNT* 2 (1964) 811-15.

4:5,<sup>64</sup> clearly James establishes the fact that the life which is governed by selfish motives is fundamentally incompatible with the life of God. Not unexpectedly, then, James can label his readers not only "sinners," but "double-minded." The similarity with 1:8 is patent. He who asks apart from faith is "double-minded"; but the condition is psycho-spiritual and behavioral, not judicial or rhetorical.

The second quality which this context adds to the disjunction between the two wisdoms is functional. Implicitly at least, if not explicitly, James prescribes prayer as the corrective to alienation: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." The clause is striking and vivid. The verb ἐγγίξω ("to draw near") is used in two basic ways in Scripture. In the LXX (and Philo) it has a more strictly religious (cultic) sense of approaching God on the basis of righteousness.<sup>65</sup> In the NT, it reflects almost wholly the eschatological hope of the kingdom of God.<sup>66</sup> The use here (and also in Heb 7:19) is a NT anomaly, characterized, so it seems, by a melding of the cultic and eschatological ideals. In both passages (Heb and Jas), the realization of the kingdom opens the way to God (in prayer) as never before. At the same time, prayer realizes the extraordinary eschatological benefits of the rule of God.

Another cycle is complete. Prayer, in this second passage, stands both as critique of alienation (4:2-3) and as a means to the realization of the deepest longings. Whereas in 1:5-8 effective prayer requires only the proper response to God's nature, here it demands proper response to human nature. The key description of that response is "humility," as the citation of Prov 3:34 (LXX, J as 4:6) and the summary statement of 4:10 show. Taken as a whole, the material of 4:6-10 suggests a two-sided qualification of prayer as the response of humility,<sup>67</sup> followed by a summary:

1. God promises to give grace [cf. 1:5!] to the *humble* (4:6), that is,
  - [on the one hand], to those who submit to God (4:7a),<sup>68</sup> and,
  - [on the other hand], to those who recognize and resist the chief adversary of that commitment (4:7b).<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Hiebert's exegesis (*James* 2.55-57) is thorough and his conclusion attractive: "The Spirit which He made to dwell in us yearns enviously."

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Exod 3:5; Lev 21:21; Ezek 40:46.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Matt 3:2; Mark 1:15; Matt 21:34. Cf. also Jas 5:8! H. Preisker, "ἐγγύς," TDNT 2 (1964) 331.

<sup>67</sup> Hiebert (*James* 260) calls 4:7 "the basic demand" and 4:8-10 the "specific elements required for a renewed attitude Godward."

<sup>68</sup> "Submit" is ὑποτάσσω. In general, the term suggests "readiness to renounce one's own will for the sake of others." G. Delling, "τάσσω," TDNT 8 (1972) 45. .

<sup>69</sup> Oesterley (*James* 460) notes the intensely Jewish sense here of Satan as "something in the way."

2. The right approach to God in prayer, realizes this gift (4:8a), so, "Cleanse your hands" (4:8b) and "Purify your hearts" (4:8c),<sup>70</sup> only let the cleansing be complete (4:9).<sup>71</sup>
3. Your earnest, sincere humility will be rewarded (4:10).

The passage simultaneously restates the "nature of God" theme in light of the human condition, and adds the "nature of man" theme in light of the divine assurance.

*Prayer as Ministry--James 5:13-20*

Historically, the notion of praying for the sick has dominated the interpretation of this third prayer passage.<sup>72</sup> And a natural reading of 5:14-15 certainly seems to imply that healing of physical afflictions governs the thought here. Several features of the context, however, raise considerable doubt that this in fact obtains, at least obtains so simply.

First, 5:13 seems to answer, with a kind of generic principle, the exhortation of 5:7-12 to endure circumstances in the hope of the *parousia* (5:7). Prayer, rather than inappropriate complaints (5:9) or oaths (5:12)<sup>73</sup> is appropriate to trials. The repetition of a form of *κακοπαθέω* ("to suffer") in 5:10 and 5:13 strengthens the idea. This is true even though 5:10 has the substantive (a *hapax legomenon*) with an active force ("enduring affliction"), while the verb of 5:13 connotes the experience of sufferings *per se*, yet qualified, as throughout James, by the idea that hardship tests psycho-spiritual life.<sup>74</sup> Further, by juxtaposing the ideas of hardship and prayer, cheerfulness and praise, James manages to comprehend the whole of the Christian response to temporal conditions.<sup>75</sup> If the passage as a whole relates to healing,

<sup>70</sup> Both expressions are taken from the OT purification rituals (cf. Exod 30:19-21; Ps 24:4). To the degree that a difference exists between them it may be that the former points to behavior, the latter to attitude (Motyer, *James* 152)--thus answering to *πόλεμοι* and *ἐχθρά* above.

<sup>71</sup> It is tempting to find an allusion in 4:8-9 to Isa 29:131

<sup>72</sup> Calvin's (*Institutes* 4.19) exposition of the passage to refute the Roman Catholic practice of "Extreme Unction" illustrates.

<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, both words suggest a kind of perverse prayerfulness: (1) *στενάζω* has the idea of groaning by "reason of a condition which man suffers and from which he longs to be free because it is not in accord with his nature, expectation, or hopes." J. Schneider, "*στενάζω*," *TDNT* 7 (1971) 601. In contexts such as Rom 8:23, the word is virtually equivalent to "pray." (2) Similarly, *ὀμνύω* connotes an invocation (thus Moulton and Milligan, p. 448).

<sup>74</sup> W. Michaelis, "*πάσχω*," *TDNT* 5 (1967) 937; also BAGD. Note that James parallels *κακοπαθέω* and *εὐθυμέω* in 5:13, indicating that the psyche, not circumstances, defines the experience.

<sup>75</sup> "*προσευχή* denotes prayer comprehensively." J. Hermann and H. Greeven, "*εὐχόμεαι*," *TDNT* 2 (1964); H. Greeven, "*προσεύχομαι*," 807. The use of *ψάλλω*, unusual

therefore, it seems best to consider it a *specific* instance (5:14-15) of a more *general* milieu (5:13).<sup>76</sup>

Second, the terms used for the ideas of sickness and healing admit some ambiguity. The term translated "sick" (ἀσθενέω, 5:14), bears the sense "to be weak or feeble" (Thayer). It is thus used in the majority of instances. Sickness is clearly a secondary idea here. Similarly, κἀμνω in 5:15 can mean "to be sick," but principally denotes "to be weary, fatigued" (BAGD). The context of the word's only other NT occurrence (Heb 12:3) makes this clear. The terms for healing likewise do double duty in the literature. By far the most characteristic use of σώζω ("to save," 5:15) is the theological.<sup>77</sup> Of the other instances of the word, less than twenty relate specifically to physical restoration, the majority of those in the Synoptics (none in John). Significantly, in no single instance does the word apply to healing of a part of the body--rather the term refers to restored wholeness, realized characteristically through faith.<sup>78</sup> The use of ἐγείρω ("to raise up," 5:15) is more striking still. Very rarely used in healing contexts (Mark 1:31; 9:27; Acts 3:7), and only once of the Lord (Mark 9:27), the term refers almost exclusively to resurrection. If James has the healing acts of Jesus in view, then, he seems to transcend the restrictions of physiology. Even the most nearly therapeutic term in the passage, ἰαομαι ("to heal"), frequently refers to psycho-spiritual restoration.<sup>79</sup>

Third, the real crux of the passage is 5:15, where "will restore" (σώζω) and "will raise him up" (ἐγείρω) are future, indicating that James "does not contemplate failure."<sup>80</sup> However, prayer with the certainty of healing contradicts any number of NT passages (1 Cor 12:7 -10).

Fourth, the use of "therefore" (5:16) clearly links the anointing passage (5:14-15) with the mutual confession-intercession of 5:16a. In fact, the notions of prayer and confession of sin seem to parallel in the two instances. In each case εὔχομαι ("to ask") or a cognate describes the act of prayer, while "sin" appears in each as limiting factor. In the first case, the sins are forgiven (future indicative) through prayer. In the second, they restrict the efficacy of prayer--hence, the exhortation to "confess."

in the NT, conveys, from LXX and the context, a sense of worshipful gratitude. G. Dellling, "ὑμνος," TDNT 8 (1972) 499.

<sup>76</sup> Thus Mayor, *James* 163.

<sup>77</sup> In over ninety of some 120 occurrences.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., Acts 14:9; Matt 9:22; Matt 5:34; and Luke 8:48,50.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. "by His wounds you were healed". (1 Pet 2:24); also Matt 13:15; John 12:40; Acts 28:27; Heb 12:13. .

<sup>80</sup> Hiebert, *James* 322. Doubtless a *gnomic* future (cf. BDF para. 348).

Fifth, the "healing" passage(s) culminate with the OT example of Elijah. Notably, James does not mention healing at all in the context, focusing rather on the (remarkable) fact that the prophet "was a man with a nature like ours" (5:17).<sup>81</sup> Elijah is an ordinary man, but he is an extraordinary man of prayer,<sup>82</sup> and thereby realizes extraordinary things. Effective prayer distinguishes Elijah from ordinary folk.

Finally, the concluding verses of the Letter reiterate some of the key thoughts of the prayer section *per se*. The idea of mutual ministry recurs, as does the notion of sin as a threat, and of the hope of deliverance (σώτει, future indicative). While some interpreters<sup>83</sup> find little or no connection with the preceding material, a number of others link the thought.<sup>84</sup> Davids may come closest when he suggests a kind of double *entendre*:

on the one hand [the exhortation] flows out of the theme of confession and forgiveness of the preceding section (5:13-18) and on the other gives what must have been the author's purpose in publishing the epistle, i.e., turning or preserving people from error, . . .<sup>85</sup>

If Davids is right, James has woven his purpose and theme very finely. The life of prayer reaches its climax in restorative wisdom, which purpose James, the man of prayer, has for *himself* in the Letter.

On the basis of this kind of interpretation, 5:13-20 forms a striking progression of ministry, from coping to altruism, covering, in principle at least, the full range of human experience. Note that the ministry moves in stages from the occupation of the self with the self (in all kinds of circumstances), to the concern of the self wholly with another.<sup>86</sup> Explicitly or implicitly, prayer governs every level of the progression. Note also that, in this scheme, James appears to follow a generic concept with a specific action in two cycles.

<sup>81</sup> Note that the copulative ἦν imperfect, indicating the Elijah struggled throughout life with the shared human condition.

<sup>82</sup> While the use of προσεύχομαι and its cognates is unremarkable (see above), James uses an unusual construction to describe Elijah's prayer-life. Elijah προσευχῆ προσήύξατο (prayed with prayer). BDF (para. 198) call this a special case of the associative dative which intensifies the force. Taking the dative with Robertson (*Grammar* para. 347) as the case of "personal interest" used "with persons or things personified," the intensification must lie, presumably, with the quality of personal involvement, rather than earnestness of effort. One might almost say that James cannot distinguish prayer and relationship with God. The specific prayers (for drought and rain) come as articulate pieces of the life of God. Cf. Adamson, *James* 201.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. e.g., Hiebert, *James* 331; Adamson, *James* 202; Ropes, *James* 313.

<sup>84</sup> Alford, *Greek* 329; Mayor, *James* 177; Vaughan, *James* 122 ("Close and clear"); Lenski, *Interpretation* 671; Tasker, *James* 142 ("not very clear").

<sup>85</sup> Davids, *James* 198.

<sup>86</sup> See Williams, *James* 141, for a discussion of the pure altruism in 5:19-20.

*Ministry to self* (5:13-15)

(Generic) By the self (5:13)

Prayer as proper response to all circumstances.

(Specific) By others, called by the self (5:14-15)

Request for prayer as awareness of need.

*Ministry to others* (5:16-20)

(Generic) With others, consideration of the self (5:16-18)

Prayer (intercession) as mutual awareness of need.

(Specific) For others, self transcended (5:19-20)

Outgrowth of prayer-ministry as response to wrong behavior.

What, then, of the "healing" passage? Clearly, corporeal healing occupies a place on the periphery of the whole discussion, if it enters at all. Nevertheless, one must account for the fact that the majority of interpreters find that sort of healing in the passage. If the verses do constitute what Motyer calls a "case,"<sup>87</sup> physical sickness and healing certainly fit the context well enough; and, the language, while a bit ambiguous, does not rule it out.

As noted earlier, the *crux interpretorum* of the healing passage is 5:15, especially the first half: "and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick." The possibility of psychosomatic<sup>88</sup> involvement creates no great problems, since connections of sin and sickness are common in the ancient world, and acknowledged in the modern. The *crux* identified here turns on the answer to the question: "What did James actually describe?" Further, the answer hinges on two ancillary questions: (1) "What is the 'prayer of faith?'" and (2) "What does 'will restore' (and by implication 'will raise up') mean here?"<sup>89</sup>

The answer to the first of these two questions begins with the word used for "prayer," εὐχή. Rare in the NT, the word can mean "a vow" (cf. Acts 18:18), as well as, of course, "prayer"; but, with the nuance of

<sup>87</sup> Motyer, *James* 209.

<sup>88</sup> "Psychosomatic" properly refers to illness caused by psychological (psycho-spiritual) disorder; "somatoform" to *symptoms* with no organic basis.

<sup>89</sup> The answer to these questions affect all other questions about the passage. Lenski's (*Interpretation* 660-62) contention that ἀλείψω (5:14) must be medicinal not sacramental or symbolic is groundless. Cf. BAGD. Ropes (*James* 305) sees the use of oil as a refutation of pagan practice. Schlier distinguishes ἀλείψω from χρίω only in terms of external application, although the former may have "its own inner meaning." He notes a long and varied history of the practice; (1) As "bodily comfort" expressing a "mood of joy" (Matt 6:17); (2) A "mark of honour" (e.g., Matt 26:7; Luke 7:38); and (3) For the sick--medicinally, sacramentally and otherwise--in Jewish, Greek and Christian traditions. H. Schlier, "ἀλείψω," *TDNT* I (1964) 229-30. Obviously, the meaning of ἀλείψω here depends entirely on the interpretation of the *crux*.

"invocation" and "wishing."<sup>90</sup> The word thus contrasts specifically with the oath-making of 5:12, and bespeaks the orientation of the elders (and of the κάμνοντα who summon them).

Whether one reads the genitive "of faith" as subjective ("prayer proceeding from faith"), or attributive ("a faith-kind of prayer") appears to make little material difference.<sup>91</sup> Hermeneutic rather than grammatical considerations dominate here. Two possibilities are open. One is that the prayer of faith is a "charisma" on the order of 1 Cor 12:9-10,<sup>92</sup> or a technical term for "the prayer prompted by the Spirit-wrought conviction that it is the Lord's will to heal the one being prayed for."<sup>93</sup> The other is that the prayer of faith is intense, earnest or sincere prayer. The first set of options mollifies the problem of the certainty which both "restore" and "raise up" demand. It also harmonizes extraordinarily well with 5:16 if the participle translated "effective" is passive,<sup>94</sup> possibly, in the latter case, even if it is middle.<sup>95</sup> Despite Tasker's opinion that "there can be no Christian prayer at all without, faith,"<sup>96</sup> the second option integrates very well with James' emphasis on praying "in faith." The major objection to the interpretation is that it seems to force a guarantee of healing if prayer is earnest, or faith strong enough.

Perhaps another alternative should be sought. Might not Alford's contention that "restore" "can only be used of corporeal healing" because James mentions the possibility of sin separately<sup>97</sup> ignore a third option? D. Hayden argues that physical sickness and healing lie entirely outside the scope of the passage--James "is rather giving instructions," he says, "for dealing with persons who are discouraged or depressed."<sup>98</sup> Hayden may overstate the case, but his point is well-taken. In view of

<sup>90</sup> H. Greeven, "εὐχόμεαι," *TDNT* 2 (1964) 776-78.

<sup>91</sup> Most interpreters take it as subjective. Cf. Mayor, *James* 168; et al.

<sup>92</sup> Lange and Oosterzee, "James" 139.

<sup>93</sup> Hiebert, *James* 322.

<sup>94</sup> Thus Mayor, *James* 177-79; Ropes, *James* 309; et al.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Adamson, *James* 205-10. In this latter case the prayer of faith would grow out of the operation of prayer. C. S. Lewis ["Petitionary Prayer: A Problem without an Answer," *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 150] has an interesting insight that bears on this point: "Whatever else faith may mean (that is, faith in the granting of the blessing asked, . . .) I feel quite sure that it does not mean any state of psychological certitude such as might be--I think sometimes is--manufactured from within by the natural action of a strong will upon an obedient imagination. The faith that moves mountains is a gift from Him who created mountains." This is the only hint of an answer Lewis can find to the paradox of praying "according to Thy will," over against "whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

<sup>96</sup> Tasker, *James* 130.

<sup>97</sup> Alford, *Greek* 327.

<sup>98</sup> D. R. Hayden, "Calling the Elders to Pray," *BibSac* 138 (1981) 258.

the ambiguous terminology, might not *σώσει* ("will restore") denote deliverance from the psycho-spiritual effect of illness, rather than the illness itself?

This hypothesis preserves for *σώζω* its usual sense of restoration to wholeness;<sup>99</sup> and, equally importantly, affirms the consistency of James' use of the term. If physical healing is in view, *σώζω* is used anomalously in this passage.<sup>100</sup> In addition, this hypothesis allows to the verb *κάμνω* its primary sense: "weariness of soul" (perhaps as a result of sickness).<sup>101</sup> Most significantly, however, this proposal integrates the passage with the dominate motif of prayer as the actualization of wisdom. James emphasizes throughout his Letter endurance in trials, not removal of trials! The "prayer of faith" thus becomes full trust in God to carry one through. Finally, this hypothesis fully accepts the implications of ambiguity in the terms used for the ideas of sickness and healing. In James, no circumstance (including physical illness) is a simple datum. It is a *πειράσμος* or "trial," a *δοκίμιον*, or "means of testing" faith. Illness calls for prayer only because it tests the soul; but, where sickness weakens (*ἀσθενεία*), prayer is "strong" (*πολὺ ἰσχύει*, 5:16).<sup>102</sup>

A. Motyer<sup>103</sup> entitles this third prayer passage "The last word: prayer and care." An apt description in light of the logical flow of this letter. In broad outline, with prayer as the theological core, the Epistle might be structured as follows:

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| 1:1-8    | <i>Theme:</i> Prayer is the grasp of faith on the God who freely gives wisdom.              |
| 1:9-3:12 | <i>Exposition:</i> Faith is the active apprehension of God's nature.                        |
| 3:13-18  | <i>Transition:</i> God's wisdom and man's wisdom are irreconcilable.                        |
| 4:1-10   | <i>Theme Interpretation:</i> Prayer acknowledges human nature in relation to God's nature.  |
| 4:11-5:6 | <i>Exposition:</i> The free play of human nature ("earthy wisdom") opposes the life of God. |

<sup>99</sup> Historically, the "healing" function of pastoral care identified by Clebsch and Jaeckle [*Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (New York: Jacob Aronson, 1964) 7] has been understood this way: "A representative Christian person helps a debilitated person to be restored to a condition of wholeness on the assumption that this restoration achieves also a new level of insight." Cf. also H. Newton Maloney, Maloney, ed, *Wholeness and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 26-27. The question, says Maloney, is "one's status in relation to one's body."

<sup>100</sup> The word occurs five times (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:20; and here). In every other instance, the meaning is clearly (if broadly) psycho-spiritual,

<sup>101</sup> Thus BAGD and Thayer. Moulton and Milligan point out that the idea of "illness" *per se* is derivative. Cf. the use in Heb 12:3.

<sup>102</sup> See Hiebert, *James* 326,

<sup>103</sup> Motyer, *James* 167.

- 5:8-12      *Transition:* Wisdom accepts circumstances in light of God's program
- 5:13-20     *Theme Application:* Prayer (individual, ministerial, intercessory) represents the means to and ministry of this wisdom (patient endurance).

### III. Conclusion--*The Theology of Prayer in James*

This article began by noting the tragic omission of prayer in theological reflection. Tragic, to be sure, not surprising. Skeptics are not the only people who wonder about the necessity, the efficacy, or the rationality, of beseeching a Being who presumably knows and wills the best for his own creatures, comprehensively and ceaselessly.<sup>104</sup> Only half a step separates the doctrine of divine sovereignty from the devaluation of prayer altogether.

James will have none of this. His theology of prayer, like every element of his Epistle, is pragmatic-practical or pastoral theology, in contemporary terms. If 5:16 constitutes a thesis, four pillars support this pastoral prayer theology. These provide a convenient outline for this summary of the theology of prayer in James.

#### *Prayer and the Nature of God*

Implicit in 5:16, explicit in 1:5 and throughout James is the relation of prayer to the nature of God. D. Z. Phillips' little paradox that "One cannot pray to know God's will unless God's will is already known"<sup>105</sup> strikes a chord. What one prays and who one conceives God to be can scarcely be separated.<sup>106</sup> In one sense prayer is always confessional.<sup>107</sup>

The prayer that James describes relates to the divine nature specifically, however, not generally. Prayer is the simple grasp of faith upon the God who displays the most profound interest in real life. James is pragmatic because God is! Thus wisdom becomes virtually the life of God (the Holy Spirit?) realized in the life of man--and the giving God is anxious to grant it upon request. As vital as it may be in its

<sup>104</sup> Cf. D. Basinger, "Why Petition an Omnipotent, Omniscient, Wholly Good God?" *Religious Studies* 19 (1983) 25-41.

<sup>105</sup> D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (New York: Seabury, 1981) 157.

<sup>106</sup> This, of course, stands behind F. Heiler's classic typologies of prayer. *Prayer* (London: Oxford, 1932).

<sup>107</sup> Cf. J. Harold Ellens, "Communication Theory and Petitionary Prayer," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 5 (1977) 54. Ellens argues that the "Our Father," at least, is solely confessional, "opening [one] to see all of his life as from his gracious Father, God."

own right, the philosophical rationale for beseeching a truly providential God is academic here. The only petitions in which James has any interest are for the ability to cope in the real world. God shares the interest, as it were; and, through prayer, shares the ability.

*Prayer and the Nature of Man*

The philosophical/theological problems do not vanish so easily of course. Given God's interest in man's ability to cope, why does he want, even require, man to ask for it? James' assertion that "you do not have because you do not ask" highlights the problem. And, whether or not the thesis of this article has any merit, his emphasis on prayer as the proper response of man sharpens the focus even more.

While it will not yield an answer, per se, it may help to observe in the first place, that James betrays some interest in what psychologists like to call the "instinct" of prayer. In his classic psychological analysis, G. Buttrick ventures that prayer "may be the instinct, the motivation that gathers and unites all our motives"<sup>108</sup> What he means is that, if man is made for God, the only motivation which, if properly obeyed, can integrate man's being-is prayer. James appears to come very close to saying just that. Prayer lays hold of the highest realities, authority, commitments, meanings and values. The magnificent conclusion James draws (4:1-3) is that the life of prayer receives God's gift of his (man's) own cherished, but unrecognized (unconscious?) desires.

At another level, however, James makes prayer the acknowledgement of human nature. On the one hand, sinful separation from God vitiates prayer life (4:2-3). The "double-minded," the "sinners," do not pray, or they pray for evil intent. They are separated from God and from themselves. On the other hand, prayer is an orientation. The proper response to the human condition is to "draw near" in humility; that is, to pray (4:6-10). Thus the "righteous man," whose prayer is effective (5:16), has only *approached*, he has not *arrived*.

At yet another level, James regards prayer as the proper resort of (weak and sinful) human nature in the face of *specific* circumstances. In effect the third prayer passage reverts to the initial exhortation of 1:2 ("Consider it all joy. . ."), in light of the human condition. Faith turns to prayer not only because of who God is, but because nothing else will suffice for the dilemma of living in the real world. Not without reason, therefore, does James use δέησις; for "prayer" in 5:16, indicating, as H. Schonweiss observes, "lack" and "need."<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> G. A. Buttrick, *Prayer* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1942) 165. Cf. Kirk's ["Prayer and Personality," *Iliff Review* 19, no. 2 (1962) 24] definition of prayer: "a fearless serching of the very depth's of one's total self in the presence of God."

<sup>109</sup> Schonweiss, "Prayer," *DNTT* 2 (1976) 860. Perhaps it is significant that this is the single occurrence of δέησις; in James. Note the uses of other terms for prayer in the

James relates prayer comprehensively to the human situation. At one level, to the being of man, as a responsible creature of God. At another, to the fallen condition of man. At yet another, to the *Sitz im Leben* of the fallen man, in the full range of his personal and inter-personal experience. The nature of God demands the response of faith. The nature of man demands the response of humility. The vehicle for both responses is prayer, and only prayer.

*Prayer and the Dynamic of Operation*

This modal dimension of prayer qualifies the Jacobean theology of prayer in another way. Prayer *operates* dynamically. Notwithstanding the exegetical questions, the participle ἐνεργουμένη (translated "effective," 5:16) stands for the dynamic quality of prayer. In light of the James prayer-theology, the grammatical debate may be "rather profitless;"<sup>110</sup> for on any account,<sup>111</sup> etymology transcends syntax (ἐνεργέω, "to work"). In some sense, prayer "works." Lange and Oosterzee may have a better grip on the meaning, therefore, when they suggest that prayer is a "passivo-active working, i.e., a working set in motion by a previously experienced impulse."<sup>112</sup>

No point in the prayer-theology of James (or of the NT) is more crucial than this. Prayer constitutes the operative relationship of man with God. Here, perhaps, is the beginning of an answer to the question "Why pray?" All of life, especially the Christian life, is relational. Relationships cannot exist without communication; and, more emphatically, relationships derive their character from communication. James knows the truth better than the psychologists. He declares that prayer (communication) has two foci. On the one hand, God is known in prayer. To be sure, the pray-er comes knowing something about God already, as one goes to see "a doctor," on the recommendation of a friend. If prayer is the vehicle of the life of God (wisdom), however, it acquaints one with God at another level--as one might come to

exegesis. This is Calvin's (*Institutes* 3.20.6) second "rule" of prayer: "that in our petitions we ever sense our own insufficiency."

<sup>110</sup> Tasker, *James* 137. There are two basic questions: (1) Does it modify δεήσις (adjectival) or define ἰσχύει (adverbial)? and (2) Is it passive or middle?

<sup>111</sup> In survey form, the options are as follows: (1) *adj., pass.* "[Spirit] energized prayer is powerful." Cf. A. Wallis, *Pray in the Spirit* (London: Victory, 1970) 23-26; (2) *adj., mid.* "Earnest prayer is powerful" (e.g., R. F. Weymouth, *Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech* [New York: Harper and Row, 1966]); (3) *adv., pass.* "Prayer is powerful when it is exercised" (Ropes, *James* 309) or "actualized" (Mayor, *James* 177; also Davids, *James* 197); and (4) *adv., mid.* "Prayer is powerful in its operation" (Adamson, *James* 205-10) or "when it keeps at work" (Htebert, *James* 327).

<sup>112</sup> Lange and Oosterzee, "James" 141.

appreciate a particular doctor's manner, compassion or skill.<sup>113</sup> God is known (one says it fearfully) as a person.

On the other hand, prayer invites the truest self-disclosure. The act of prayer itself acknowledges finiteness and sinfulness (4:6). But in a larger sense, James envisions Christian life as an ongoing admission through prayer of weakness and need in the face of reality. As P. Tournier says it: "When we come, honestly and often, to keep this tryst with God we discover the God of the Bible, the personal God who cares personally for us, . . ."<sup>114</sup>

If man is a person only when he discloses himself as he is to another as he is, prayer makes sense. Lewis phrases it eloquently:

Ordinarily, to be known by God is to be, for this purpose, in the category of things. We are, like earthworms, cabbages, and nebulae, objects of Divine knowledge. But when we (a) become aware of the fact--the present fact, not the generalisation--and (b) assent with all our will to be so known, then we treat ourselves, in relation to God, not as things but as persons. We have unveiled. Not that any veil could have baffled His sight. The change is not in us. The passive changes to the active. Instead of merely being known, we show, we tell, we offer ourselves to view.

To put ourselves thus on a personal footing with God could, in itself and without warrant be nothing but presumption and illusion. But we are taught that it is not; that it is God who gives us that footing. For it is by the Holy Spirit that we cry 'Father'. By unveiling, by confessing our sins and 'making known' our requests, we assume the high rank of persons before Him. And He, descending, becomes a Person to us.<sup>115</sup>

### *Prayer and the Effect of Operation*

For James, the dynamic of prayer means also that movement always occurs. The ongoing life of prayer moves one toward the fullest experience of the life of God--"perfect and complete." The ongoing life of self-gratification moves one toward sin and finally death (1:14-15).

In some ways, then, Barth is right when he speaks of prayer as a "confirmation of election." For Barth, the absolute sovereignty of God rules out synergism of any kind. Man does not "cooperate" with God, except that in prayer he actualizes the "rejection of sin and election of

<sup>113</sup> I. Grant Howard, "Interpersonal Communication: Biblical Insights on the Problem and the Solution," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 3 (1975) 251-56.

<sup>114</sup> P. Tournier, *The Meaning of Person* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957) 171.

<sup>115</sup> Significantly, the Prayer Therapy of William Parker and Elaine St. Johns [*Prayer Can Change Your Life* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1957) 163ff.], one of the very few psychotherapeutic utilizations of prayer, demands "self-honesty" as the first step. To this degree, Hinson [*The Reaffirmation of Prayer* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979) 15-19] has an argument when he warns about the tendency of spontaneous prayer "to lapse into a one-dimensional style, namely petition." His call for more liturgical forms of prayer as a corrective may not harmonize very well, however, with James; apparent emphasis on spontaneous prayer-life.

obedience." Prayer decides, as it were, within the limits of God's electing grace.<sup>116</sup>

But sin is also "active in history," Barth warns.<sup>117</sup> James of course is fully aware of it. His entire message presupposes the δοκίμιον, the "means of testing" of faith! His Epistle casts the Christian life in terms of conflict. If prayer is central to that life, it must also be the central conflict. For that reason, James grants no quarter to the enemies. The present indicatives (e.g., 1:5; 4:2-3; 5:13) demonstrate that, for James, praying alone settles the conflict of prayer, and, at last, of the whole Christian life.<sup>118</sup> Thus, in the words of C. Winters, prayer is "circular." Each "new life" realized through prayer establishes the "setting" for yet another.<sup>119</sup> The operation of prayer is "effective." Prayer is not "thinking," as John MacQuarrie suggests, even "passionate," "compassionate," and "responsible" thinking.<sup>120</sup> Nor is it as E. Jackson argues, a kind of therapeutic process which the soul undergoes on its way to the realization of the self.<sup>121</sup> The effectiveness of prayer inheres its very essence—the faith-appropriation of God.

James does not need to consider the philosophical/theological issues of providence or cause and effect. Men should pray because no other way is open to know the life of God. Nor can the proof that prayer "works" appear from any account of natural laws, miracles, or psychological phenomena. For James, life itself vindicates the efficacy of prayer. In Strong's words:

If asked whether [the] relation between prayer and its providential answer can be scientifically tested,<sup>122</sup> we reply that it may be tested just as a father's love may be tested by a dutiful son.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics* 2.2.194: The prayer of Jesus for God's will creates the paradigm for prayer in Barth's theology.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Even though he does not deal specifically with prayer, Nelson's ["The Psychology of Spiritual Conflict," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 4 (1976) 35-36] fascinating psychological account of conflict resolution in the Epistle shows that James interprets the struggle of faith as dynamic, goal-oriented and relational. Nelson points out that James' emphasis on the act of praying, in the fuller light of God's nature, remarkably with standard psychological descriptions of conflict-resolution.

<sup>119</sup> C. L. Winters, "The Theology of Prayer," *St. Luke Journal*.16 (1973) 12.

<sup>120</sup> J. MacQuarrie, "Prayer Is Thinking," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 14 (1972) 43-45.

<sup>121</sup> E. N. Jackson, *Understanding Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1968) 101-6.

<sup>122</sup> Strong has reference here to the famous "Prayer-test" proposed in 1872, The test amounted to a controlled experiment in that patients in one hospital ward would "be of special prayer by the whole body of the faithful" and then compared to similar in other hospitals and wards. "Prayer-test," *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 437.

Prayer, O. Hallesby declares, is "the breath of the soul."<sup>124</sup> An apt analogy for James' prayer-theology. A living body proves that a man breathes. Godliness proves that he prays--

And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, . . . (1:4-5a).

<sup>124</sup> O. Hallesby, *Prayer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1931) 13.

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