The Rhetoric of Rejuvenation: Restoring the "Weak" and "Wanderers" according to James 5:13–20

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Abstract

The passage of Scripture under consideration in this study, James 5:13–20, is important for several reasons. First, this pericope occurs at the very end of the letter, which is normally a position of topical prominence in the epistles—providing some information that the writer, in closing, did not want his readers to forget. Second, both the form and the content of this text draw attention to its significance, that is, being composed in a very dynamic rhetorical style and dealing with personal sin and forgiveness. Finally, this section includes a selection of words, phrases, and even some complete statements that may have been misunderstood, mistranslated, and hence also misapplied in the history of biblical interpretation, namely, with reference to the nature of the apparent "weakness" (ἀσθενέω) that James's readers are encouraged to "pray" (προσεύχομαι) about (vv. 14–15). In order to lay the necessary foundation for the present examination of this concluding portion of the letter, an initial survey of some of the main contours of its inductive, oratorical organization is provided. This discourse overview provides intratextual support for the hypothesis that the passage concluding chapter five may be viewed as the climax of James's powerful epistolary exhortation, not simply an afterthought or an apostolic "PS." Individual spiritual sickness is indeed a serious issue and needs to be dealt with proactively by fellow faith-motivated members of the Body of Christ (5:19–20).[1]

This article: **https://www.sats.ac.za/rhetoric-rejuvenation-restoring-weak-james**
https://doi.org/10.54725/conspectus.2022.1.1

1 I greatly appreciate the detailed editorial feedback that I received in response to my original submission of this study.

Conspectus

Keywords
James, rhetoric, restoration, church discipline, pastoral theology

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1. Discourse Structure—Deductive or Inductive?

> There is no theme or controlling purpose in this little book. (Kee and Young 1957, 319)
>
> The insights…used in our structural analysis of other texts in the New Testament simply do not apply to the homily of James. (Perrin 1974, 256)
>
> This man was a preacher before he was a writer. (Motyer 1985, 11)

The early scholarly critical assessment of the compositional style as well as the spiritual character of James was not very positive. For example, in the opinion of Martin Luther, not only was James "an epistle of straw" in terms of content because its emphasis upon the believer's works "mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul," but it was also deemed deficient with regard to style, since the author appeared to have a penchant for "throwing things together…chaotically" (Engelbrecht 2009, 2131).[2] Approaching James form-critically in the first half of the last century, Martin Dibelius too was not impressed with the seemingly jumbled character of the book's many proverbial-like sayings and smaller pericopes (Cargal 1993, 12–20; Davids 1982, 23), and even more recently Moo (2000, 7) comes to this conclusion about "the letter's lack of clear organization" (cf. Perrin 1974, 276; Loh and Hatton 1997, 2):

> The author moves quickly from topic to topic, and the logical relationship of the topics is often not at all clear.… [T]he letter has no obvious structure, nor even a clearly defined theme. Moral exhortations flow closely upon one another without connections and without much logical relationship. (Moo 2000, 7)

Although recent scholarship does discern more of a conceptual than a formal unity in the epistle of James,[3] there is little agreement as to how this is reflected in terms of major and minor themes or the letter's overall structural organization. One commentator typically presents a thematic outline that is quite different in significant respects from another, a fact that appears to support the text's general lack of cohesion and coherence, a discourse that "illustrates a structure based on 'stream of consciousness'" (Nida et al. 1983, 116).[4] But could there be a possible alternative explanation for this rather broad range of diversity, a reason that is closely linked to the type of "logic" which is being applied in assessment of this text? The following is a hypothesis that needs to be more fully explored.

2 Luther did appreciate the practical value of James's hortatory appeals, however, and comments, "I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him" (Engelbrecht 2009, 2132).

3 However, according to Fee and Stuart (2003, 57), the epistle of James "completely lacks a formal argument." Johnson (2002, 24), too, concludes that James is "the least theological and the most loosely structured of New Testament writings," and adds: "The concerns of this document are far removed from much of the New Testament." A comparison with the writings of James's two brothers, however (e.g., the Hillside Sermon of Matt 5–7 and 1 John), would lead me to disagree with the preceding assessment.

4 "[T]he term *stream of consciousness* in literature refers to the depiction of the thoughts and feelings which flow, with no apparent logic, through the mind of a character. To create the effect of the chaotic stream that we recognize in reality, the writer presents the seeming random mingling of thoughts, feelings, and sense impressions of a character at a specific time" (Beckson and Ganz 1975, 240). A close (re)reading of James will reveal, I think, a much more stable, structured, and purposeful arrangement of content than the stream of consciousness technique.

Based upon earlier studies of Chewa popular vernacular preaching (2000) and oral (radio) narratives (2004a),[5] I would suggest that instead of a typical Western, sequentially unfolding, deductively outlined development, the text of James appears to be arranged quite differently. Thus, the letter manifests a more "circular," iterative, intuitively associative, inductive style that is common in many non-Western cultures and verbal traditions, both ancient and modern, especially in the case of public oral discourse. *Deductive* reasoning and its characteristic manner of argumentation tends to proceed from general, abstract principles to more specific implications, or from established premises to logically valid (syllogistically fashioned) conclusions. The text, usually written (though it may be articulated orally), is rhetorically organized with explicit reference to certain major themes or topics, under which are listed two or more related sub-points. The discourse thus proceeds from, and may be conveniently summarized by, a formally ordered, multi-layered outline; and it normally presents a more prosaic, information-heavy (facts-based) style of verbal expression.

An *inductive* text, on the other hand, manifests a mode of expository or hortatory reasoning and composition that features particular facts, concrete cases, or individual examples, and the text builds on these in iterative fashion to develop a central theme or a general petition, exhortation, conclusion, or implication. In the case of a religious admonition, we have the additional characteristic of a sequence of specific requests that are based upon some important ethical motivations or accepted theological truths, which tend to be revealed only after the salient petitions have been made. Inductive discourse is characterized by a more energetic, colorful verbal style, frequently incorporating dramatic devices such as these: mini-narratives or parables, personal anecdotes, familiar analogies, vibrant, sense-related imagery, sharp contrasts and antitheses, real or rhetorical questions, maxims and proverbial lore, citations or allusions to well-known authorities, periodic snatches of direct speech, patterns of repetition, and other forceful rhetorical techniques that are especially suited to a vocal presentation, like hyperbole, irony, and enigma (Wendland 2000, 44–62).

Even a cursory overview of the complete discourse of James exhibits a distinctly inductive character that is accordingly well-suited for, and indeed seems to stem from an initial oral proclamation (perhaps recorded by a scribe). However, one cannot conclude that the text is entirely inductive, for it is obviously based on important theological facts and moral principles that the author assumes his audience (readers) are cognizant of.[6] They are simply taken for granted and normally left implicit (though often supported by a variety of intertextual scriptural allusions). This presupposed religious ideology then provides the foundation for the author's periodic assertions about the nature of God as well as his many appeals concerning the divine will for his hearers to adopt a transparent lifestyle that is distinguished by sincere humility, a mutual respect for one another, and the demonstrated service of believers who are serious about living their faith. Furthermore, it would not be correct to say that the form of James in terms of its discourse structure and stylistic features is completely oral-based and inductive in

5 Chewa (technically, *Chi*chewa, also known as *Nyanja* in Zambia) is a major southeastern Bantu Language of Wider Communication spoken as a first or second language by some 15–20 million people in the neighboring countries of Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.

6 I will assume in my argument an "audience" of listeners as being James's primary target group, though certainly readers would have been able to access the text as well. To me it seems, however, that the author's argument in the original is much less effective when mutely read to oneself. I regard the so-called "species" of rhetoric in James as being a varied mixture of the "deliberative" and "epideictic" sub-types, that is, a persuasive confirmation or refutation according to what is generally deemed beneficial or expedient (e.g., 1:2–11) coupled with the emotively-toned promotion or condemnation of basic communal beliefs and values (e.g., 1:12–18) (Wendland 2002, 173–174).

nature; rather, it is an expert mixture and interaction of both.[7] This sort of a blended compositional quality is typical of what Robbins (1993) terms an interactive "rhetorical culture":

> Performing oral and scribal activity in this way creates a rhetorical culture—one in which speech is influenced by writing and writing is influenced by speaking. Recitation, then, is the base of a rhetorical culture.... This interaction characterized their thinking, their speaking, and their writing.... In practice this means that *writing in a rhetorical culture imitates both speech and writing*, and speech in a rhetorical culture imitates both speech and writing. (113, 120–121; emphasis added)

The structural organization of James, when carefully examined according to the principles of linguistic, as well as literary analysis and studies of oral as well as written texts, reveals a rather more sophisticated discourse arrangement than many (mainly older) commentators give the original author credit for.[8] However, one must not go too far in the other direction and postulate neatly symmetrical, but ultimately artificial and reductionistic compositional patterns that cannot be solidly supported on the basis of a holistic, inclusive study of the original text. Motyer (1985, 12), for example, suggests that "[t]he introduction and conclusion [of James] balance each other in this way:

Introduction (1:2–11) The need for **patience** (1:2–4) and **prayer** (1:5–8) in all the contrasting circumstances of life (1:9–11)	*Conclusion* (5:7–20) The need for **patience** (5:7–12) and **prayer** (5:13–18) and **care** (5:19–20) in all the contrasting circumstances of life."

The problem with such schemes is not with the parallels that they reveal, but instead with the material that they very often leave out—at times, some very salient thematic elements, for example, the essential connection of "patience" with *testing* and *faith* in 1:2–4, but contrasting with the Lord's *judgment* and the making of *oaths* in 5:7–12. For Davids (1989, 8), on the other hand, the "conclusion" of James is found only in 5:7–11, and the rest of the letter is what he terms a "closing," which "covers three topics normally discussed in a Greek letter: oaths (5:12), health (5:13–18), and the reason for writing (5:19–20)." However, what distinguishes 5:7–11 as being the letter's "conclusion" (later said to be a summary, 118) is not made clear, and while it is handy to designate the several paragraphs that follow (vv. 12–20) as an "epistolary conclusion" (118), this perspective does require somewhat more substantiation than a mere title. Most thematic outlines of a typical Western, balanced or symmetrical nature are thus rather unconvincing, for example, Martin's (1988, ciii–civ) proposal that "[a]rranged in sections, the entire letter falls into the following pattern: I. Address and Greeting (1:1), II. Enduring Trials (1:2–19a).... III. Applying the Word (1:19b–3:18).... IV. Witnessing to Divine Providence (4:1–5:20)." Such simplified summaries are not very helpful in offering one some insight into the much different, more intricately organized and powerfully argued epistle of James.

7 Certain stylistic questions in this regard are difficult to answer with certainty—for example: To what extent did a NT writer attempt either to "compensate for" or to "cue in" features pertaining to the subsequent oral performance of his document, such as gestures, facial expressions, and the suprasegmental features of sound (pitch, stress, volume, tone, etc.)? I tend to think that these were left up to the skill and inclinations of his emissary as well as those designated to orally proclaim the texts of Scripture for a given worshiping community.

8 For a survey of those commentators who are critical of the discourse structure (or rather, the lack of it) demonstrated in James, see Cargal (1993, 9–11). For a summary and application of my literary-structural approach to the analysis of NT rhetorical discourse, see Wendland (2012).

More in keeping with an inductive, orally-conceived and conveyed discourse is a progressive, but at the same time recursive arrangement that features an initial treatment of a set of key topics, all of which are subsequently developed and enriched from a manifold, diverse perspective.[9] Crucial to the organization of this type of text is the *recycling* of a corpus of core concepts that are related by correspondence, synonymy, contrast, and/or metonymic association. The composition, as a whole, does not fit into a neatly patterned thematic outline, but it nonetheless reveals its own compelling logic. In James, then, we have an iterative articulation of the author's crucial pastoral concerns, expressed in a manner that he felt would best convey the various appeals to his addressees despite the lack of his personal apostolic presence. Repetition, antithesis, positioning, patterning, and the judicious use of assorted rhetorical markers thus act as important clues to help us discern and connect the author's main ideas and emphases along with his chief exhortations (involving consolation, encouragement, warning, prohibition, and so on).

Thus far, my description of the discourse structure of James has been rather general and abstract; we turn now to a closer examination of the text itself in order to see what this demonstrates with respect to either confirming or contradicting the preceding descriptive hypotheses. This takes the form of a sequential categorization of the principal topics that are manifested in each paragraph of the epistle.[10] This is a *paradigmatic* as well as a *syntagmatic* schematic display, for as the individual topics are specified in a linear order vertically down the page, those that appear to semantically correspond in a significant way elsewhere in the epistle are indicated alongside horizontally on the same topical line according to paragraph units of text. Thus, I have demarcated the epistle into what appear to be coherent thematic-functional units, largely based on notable shifts in subject, speech-act (function), the breaking of a chain of repeated lexical elements, plus standard disjunctive devices such as asyndeton and a vocative phrase, often coupled with a distinctive imperative.[11] This is admittedly a rather crude, highly subjective, impressionistic procedure, but at least it is testable with regard to both the initial selection of topics and also the subsequent interpretation of the data at hand as well as my conclusions made on that basis.

1.1 General Theme: Passing the tests of faith is a matter of life and death for the body of believers

Key topics	**Interrelated paragraph (text) units**
God, Lord Jesus Christ	1:1, 16–18; 2:18–19; 5:1–6, 7–9, 10–11
brothers/sisters—fellow believers	1:1, 9–11; 4:4–6 (opposite!)
trials—tests	1:2–4, 12
faith-works/faith dead	1:2–4; 2:5–7, 14–17, 18–19, 20–24, 25–26 (Rahab)

9 This recycling of key concepts naturally has important exegetical significance. For example, "[the] word of truth" (λόγῳ ἀληθείας) in 1:18 clearly refers to the life-giving gospel, and hence it is very likely that the abbreviated expression, "the truth" (τῆς ἀληθείας) in 3:14 and 5:19, has reference to the same divine, saving message.

10 I define a "topic" as a discourse-specific subject or idea having reference to a significant person, thing, action, quality, or event about which a speaker or writer makes one or more substantive predications. Put together, a topic plus a related predication form a "theme."

11 I arrived at 34 "paragraph" units in contrast to Fry's (1978, 428) 18; obviously, we were reading the orally inscribed "signs" of the text differently. For an explanation and exemplification of this method of discourse analysis, see Wendland (2020).

Christian perseverance—maturity	1:2–4, 12; 3:1–2; 5:7–9, 10–11 (Job)
wisdom	1:5–8; 3:13–18
prayer	1:5–8; 4:1–3; 5:13–16, 17–18 (Elijah)
doubt—instability	1:5–8; 4:1–3
rich—poor conflicts	1:9–11; 2:1–4, 5–7, 14–17; 5:1–6
pride—humility	1:9–11; 4:4–6 (opposite!); 4:7–10
eternal life	1:12, 16–18; 4:4–6 (opposite!)
God's blessing—gifts	1:12, 16–18, 22–25
temptation—lust	1:13–15; 4:1–3
deception	1:13–15, 26–27
birth	1:13–15, 16–18
sin—sinners	1:13–15; 3:13–18; 4:7–10
death	1:13–15; 3:3–8; 4:11–12
God's Word—"do it!"	1:16–18, 19–21, 22–25; 3:1–2, 13–18; 4:13–17; 5:19–20
truth	1:16–18; 3:9–12 (opposite!); 3:13–18 (opposite!)
listen—control speech	1:19–21, 26–27; 2:12–13; 3:1–2, 3–8, 9–12; 4:11–12; 5:12
avoid anger—sinful passions, fighting/strife among Christians	1:19–21; 3:13–18; 4:1–3
salvation	1:19–21; 4:4–6 (opposite!); 4:11–12; 5:19–20
righteous life/good fruit	1:19–21; 3:13–18
law of love	1:22–25; 2:5–7, 8–11
freedom	1:22–25; 2:12–13
true religion	1:26–27; 5:1–5 (opposite!)
pollution by world	1:26–27; 5:1–5
care for the disadvantaged	1:26–27; 5:1–5 (opposite!)
discrimination	2:1–4, 5–7; 5:1–6
God's Kingdom	2:5–7
disobeying God's Law	2:8–11
God's judgment	2:12–13; 4:11–12; 5:1–6, 7–9
mercy	2:12–13; 5:10–11
demons—Satan	2:18–19; 3:13–18
Father Abraham (cf. Rahab)	2:20–24 (2:25–26)

faith "justified"/ vindicated	2:20–24, 25–26
church teachers and leaders	3:1–2
praise God	3:9–12
peace-makers	3:13–18; 4:1–3 (opposite!)
repent!	4:4–6, 7–10; 5:1–6, 10–11 ("sick" brother); 5:19–20
false judging	4:11–12
God's will, future planning	4:13–17
Lord's (second) coming	5:1–5 (implicit); 5:7–9
"healing"—physical/ spiritual	5:13–16, 19–20 (implicit)

2. Discourse Structure—Discussion

There are several interesting items of information that the preceding topicalized chart of the text of James provides us with.[12] So as not to extend the scope of this study, I have simply summarized some of the more salient points in the paragraphs below:

In the first place, the chart suggests that the epistle of James is not as loosely or haphazardly organized as some commentators would lead us to believe. To be sure, the discourse does exhibit a perhaps unfamiliar, *non-deductive* form of arrangement, but a purposeful pattern is evident nonetheless, one that would be quite effective when presented orally, as in a sermon. This mode of structuring is constituted by exact as well as correspondent (synonymous and contrastive) conceptual reiteration, both adjacent and remote. It is a richly interwoven, spiral-like compositional texture in which periodic theological assertions serve as warrants for the author's related moral exhortations (Johnson 1998, 181).

The structure of the discourse gradually unfolds in terms of *topic*—that is, interrelated subjects (to the author's mind) being considered one after the other, with a certain amount of reiteration and overlapping—up to and including the lengthy medial passage of 2:14–26.[13] The latter features a sequence of four paragraph units all more or less devoted to the same general *theme*: "A believer's faith must be manifested and matured through action!"[14] Thereafter, from 3:1 to the end of the letter, previously

12 Terry (1992, 124) employs a much more sophisticated method of lexical discourse analysis of James and arrives at the following conclusion: "First, the book is marked by a fairly complex macrostructure that maps onto eighteen sections which are lexically linked. These sections are tied together by the use of lexical chains. Their boundaries are defined by a lack of lexical chaining between adjoining sections.... All eighteen sections are lexically linked together in a 'webbing' relationship between nonadjacent sections."

13 This pericope occurs at the virtual center of "the constituent organization of James" according to the "semantic and structural analysis" of Hart and Hart (2001, 8). James 2:14–26 is an "expository" text that is regarded as being the structural and thematic motivational "[b]asis of 1:21–2:13 and 3:1–5:11" (10). "James' purpose is to clarify the readers' understanding of the true nature of faith in order to provide motivation for obeying all the exhortations in the entire division [*Body*]" (73). Viewing the strong lexical correspondence between 1:12 and 5:11 as structural markers of unit "closure" (Wendland 2004b, 123–130), I would outline the overall structure of the letter as follows: 1:1–12 [185 words], *Opening*; 1:13–5:11, *Body*; 5:12–20 [174 words], *Closing*.

14 Welch (1981, 212) has suggested a similar structure in much more general terms; in fact, he diagrams the first half of the epistle in the form a chiastic arrangement (A-L, with the midpoint,

discussed topics are taken up again in reordered fashion and considered from a conceptually and/or emotively amplified viewpoint. For example, the trials and testing of faith in 5:7–11 (cf. 1:2–4, 12) is considered from the perspective of many different types of "temptation" (cf. 1:13–15) with respect to unrighteous attitudes and behavior (cf. 1:19–5:6). To give another example, issues pertaining to one's use of "the tongue" are discussed broadly in 1:19, but later in graphic detail in the descriptive argument of 3:1–12. The tension between rich and poor believers in the Christian community is broached rather gently in 1:9–10 but then developed with increasing severity in several subsequent sections (e.g., 2:1–13 and, picking up the notion of "judgment," again in 4:11–5:6). The topic of "wisdom," too, turns out to be quite a bit more important to the author than its initial brief mention (1:5) would suggest (3:13–18); in fact, James teaches that wisdom must be expressed in one's life (i.e., through "deeds") in very much the same way that "faith" is (3:13, cf. 2:26).[15] A few new topics are introduced in conjunction with the others after chapter 1—most notably, God's abundant grace/mercy, on the one hand, and the errant or hypocritical person's great need for repentance on the other (e.g., 4:6–11).

The adjacent themes of "allow trials to test your faith and work endurance" and "persevere in faith-ful prayer" are featured at the beginning of the letter (1:2–4, 5–8, 12) and again at the end (5:7–11, 13–18) to form an extended double *inclusio*. The opening paragraphs (1:2–18) enunciate an interlocking set of key concepts: *trials; faith; endurance; works; maturity; completeness; wisdom; prayer; humility; God's Word; truth; birth; life!* One or more of these topics, or their antitheses and complements, come to the fore in each successive paragraph throughout the remainder of the text to the very end, in other words, working in faith to restore someone who has wandered from the life-giving principles of God's Word.[16]

Using a somewhat different approach, we might construe this introductory section as setting forth the epistle's governing notion (macro-theme): "*Testing in life demonstrates the genuineness (or 'maturity') of a professor's faith.*"[17] All the paragraphs in the letter may thus be related in one

M, located at 2:14–26), which apparently deconstructs in the second half (L'–A'). This proposal suffers, however, from a number of interpretive difficulties with regard to both form and meaning, and over- as well as under-specification. For example, 1:21 is listed as an independent unit (G) entitled, "Save your souls," so as to match with an allegedly corresponding section so-named in the letter's second half (G'), namely 5:19–20. Section L (2:10–12), "One either keeps all of the law or none of the law," is somewhat arbitrarily paired with L' (3:9–12), "One either produces good fruit or bad fruit." In addition, several verses are omitted from the scheme (probably accidentally, i.e., 2:13 and 5:13), while a number of key concepts are not mentioned, e.g., "true religion" in 1:26 and 1:27 (which constitute separate sections) and the notion of "strife" in 4:1–5 ("Lust in your members"). Welch rightly points out that "the obvious parallelisms and the abundance of Hebraisms throughout the letter provide *prima facie* evidence that the letter was not composed in haste or without substantial literary precedents" (211). But one might contest the assertion that these "precedents" were indeed "literary"; they could as well have been orally composed—hence *oratorical* in nature.

15 One could argue that this close connection between "wisdom" and "faith-works" relates in turn to the OT sapiential concept of "the fear of the LORD" (e.g., Prov 1:7; Job 28:28; Eccl 12:13), which is thus equivalent to an "active" faith (faithfulness to God) in the sense that James is using it throughout his set of hortatory mini-essays (cf. Matt 7:24).

16 Note in the chart above how each of the broad range of topics found in chapter one is reiterated elsewhere in the epistle.

17 Terry (1992, 118) argues that "Since James is a series of exhortations regarding different topics, the overall macrostructure cannot be summarized as a single sentence. Rather, it is a combination of the key ideas found in the individual macrostructures of the several sections and major paragraphs." Terry proposes the following as the macro-structure (or theme?) of the entire epistle of James: "*Brothers, show the true wisdom of submitting in faith to God (who gives good gifts, including wisdom, and not temptations) rather than trusting in self or in riches so that you will not be judged by him. This wisdom is shown by patient endurance in good words and works. The good words include using the normally evil tongue for singing, praying, confessing sins, weeping, submitting to the Lord's will, and turning the sinner to God, rather than for being angry, being prejudiced, criticizing, grumbling, swearing, boasting, and being false. The good works of clean religion involve doing what God's word says, helping the weak, and keeping oneself from sin*" (119, original italics). In any case, one can conclude that "James uses his themes to point out the spiritual problems of the readers and to encourage them toward spiritual maturity" (Hart and Hart 2001, 17).

respect or another, positively or negatively, to this central notion, which is a common way of organizing an inductive religious homily. Even the text's final segment (5:19–20), sometimes viewed by commentators as being either out-of-place or an odd way to end the letter, manifests a clear relationship to this general theme: This is in fact the ultimate test of faith, and also of biblical "wisdom" (σοφία, 1:5; 3:13; cf. Prov 8:1–21)—namely, to restore a brother or sister who has fallen or strayed from the path of patient discipleship. In a metaphoric sense, such a person, having "wandered" away from the faith (πλανηθῇ), is part of that great spiritual "diaspora" (διασπορᾷ, 1:1), who need to be "brought back" (ἐπιστρέψῃ).[18] The final admonition thus "serves as an excellent conclusion, recommending that the reader do for others what the author has tried to do for the readers" (Johnson 1998, 179).

Several topical complexes that reappear with diverse specifics in the text serve to group the epistle's main ideas and appeals paradigmatically into sets of interrelated concepts: For example, we have the "rich-poor" socio-economic contrast that forms an important aspect of the letter's interpersonal, or rhetorical exigency—a crisis that can only be dealt with by means of an extra dose of "humility," the need to "control one's speech" within the community, and the imperative to put one's "faith into action" in a spirit of merciful "love." There are also the repeated admonitions to avoid "unrighteous behavior" by attending to the saving, liberating "Word of God" and by heeding the closing explicit and implicit calls to "repentance" in order avoid a critical "judgment" when the Lord returns (e.g., 5:9). The prominent faith/works paradigm noted above may be viewed as forming an even larger coherent section of the letter's body on the basis of an *inclusio* that links 1:22 ("Be doers of the word, and not hearers only") and 2:26 ("so faith apart from works is dead").[19]

Those who regard James as a "straw-like" epistle in relation to others in the NT undoubtedly come to this conclusion because of the letter's apparent lack of a strong theology, a prominent Christology in particular. This characteristic can be explained on other grounds,[20] but a close examination of the text, like that attempted above, clearly reveals that "God," for one, does play a rather prominent role throughout the text (θεός appears 17x), and that some significant truths are spoken about the deity—from being the powerful "Father" Creator of every good thing (1:17) to being the personal "friend" (φίλος) of one of his saints (2:23).[21] "Christ" is referred to only twice in the five chapters, but both times in a significant structural position and

18 James 5:19–20 also presents the *climax* of three little case-studies of typical members of the fellowship, each marked by the initial phrase τις ἐν ὑμῖν, "someone among you" (structural "aperture"): (a) the ordinary person, either "suffering misfortune" or in "happy" circumstances (5:13); (b) the spiritually/morally "weak/sick" member, someone requiring the elders' encouragement, prayer support, and anointing (5:14–18); and (c) the worst off, a fallen apostate, in urgent need of active evangelistic intervention by a fellow member (5:19–20).

19 Cargal (1993, 52) posits "four major discursive units" in James based on "inverted parallelisms and thematization," that is, 1:1–21, 1:22–2:26, 3:1–4:12, and 4:11–5:20. While credible in certain respects, this scheme suffers in general from an apparent tendency both to force the data to fit a preconceived pattern (e.g., the obvious overlap between sections three and four) and also to ignore certain important text-structural data (e.g., the major break at 1:19 [asyndeton + imperative + vocative] coupled with the continuative δὲ in 1:22).

20 If James were an early epistle, as argued above, and written to Jewish Christians scattered abroad, away from Jerusalem, it is likely that a lot of Christology could have been left implicit, that is, presupposed as being well-enough known to the primary addressees. In any case, the author's main purpose was not to teach theology, but rather to urgently build upon known moral and doctrinal principles in order to effect a more mutually humble, harmonious relationship among fellow Christians who were being physically, psychologically, and spiritually tested to the limit by various adversities and challenges, both within the community of believers and without.

21 "James is clearly less christocentric than theocentric. It would be difficult to find a New Testament writing with as rich a collection of statements concerning the nature and activity of God. …[*these are then summarized with reference to 36 passages in James*]…Such characterizations are not random but fit within a coherent understanding of God as the source of all reality…who calls humans into a life shaped according to the gifts given them and a community of mutual gift-giving and support" (Johnson 1998, 181).

with the full title "the Lord Jesus Christ" (κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ—1:1; 2:1). The term "Lord" (κύριος) is used ambiguously to designate God in general (1:7), Jesus Christ specifically (5:8), or perhaps both together (e.g., 5:14–15) as a referential reflection of Christ's assumed deity and equality with the Father (1:1).

It is rather difficult, then, to demarcate the epistle of James into coherent and distinct macro-sections—that is, larger than the core pericope of 2:14–26 giving the exhortation to put faith into action. Most other proposals, like those listed earlier, violate either the letter's form (e.g., by indicating a primary structural boundary where clearly none exists) or its content (e.g., by omitting certain relevant "facts" in their thematic sectional designations or in their classification of the data).[22] In his detailed charting of major and minor "themes," Fry (1978, 430) makes a more concerted attempt to discover such a principle of organization and on that basis concludes:

> The book seems to divide into three major sections: 1.2–1.18, 1.19–4.12, and 4.13–5.18.... It can be seen that the same themes come into focus in the first and third sections, the themes of testing, patient endurance, prayer, riches and poverty, humility, and God's character. And there is no other theme which comes into a major position of focus in either of these sections. Then, as far as the second section is concerned, although there are theme links with the rest of the book, none of the major themes discussed in this section come into focus in either of the other two sections. So we see a fairly simple overall structure in the book as a whole, in terms of the themes that come into focus throughout. We may express this structure in writing as A—B—A'....

A major difficulty inherent in this type of analysis (and, indeed, my own charted above) is the decision as to what constitutes a "major" theme—one that "comes into focus" and accordingly gets noted in this system of classification? In any case, there are other problems with Fry's proposal, for example: the need to manage one's speech with reference to boasting (4:13–17), making an oath (5:12), and prayer coupled with confession (5:13–16) all occur in section A'; "God's character" does come into focus within section B in 4:4–6; similarly, the A topic of "riches and poverty" certainly becomes prominent in B at 2:1–4.

Fry (1978, 435) seems to be on surer ground later in his study as he essentially ignores his prior attempt to classify themes according to the letter's structural divisions and instead suggests that "there is a unity of thought, organized around the main theme, which is the testing of faith and patient endurance in trials" which extends throughout the epistle. This jibes with my macro-theme for James proposed above: "*Passing the tests of faith is a matter of life and death for the body of believers*." Thus, the author's inductively arranged epistolary homily presents one tense scenario or challenging situation after another involving faithful discipleship that reflects upon this hortatory theme by way of a recurring, alternating cycle of encouragement, admonition, instruction, rebuke, and consolation. These motivations pertain to a wide range of reiterated spiritual issues and moral concerns that affect the believer's life, both individually and within the sociocultural context of the wider fellowship of faith. The letter ends

22 Here is another reductionistic example of "the argument of James" (Wall 1997, 557–559): Thematic Introduction (Jas 1:1–21 [*note especially 1:19*]); The Wisdom of "Quick to Hear" (Jas 1:22–2:26); The Wisdom of "Slow to Speak" (Jas 3:11–18); The Wisdom of "Slow to Anger" (Jas 4:1–5:6); Concluding Exhortations (Jas 5:7–20). In support of an essentially non-deductive analysis of the discourse structure is the sequential discourse "outline" given for the book of James in the *TransLine New Testament* (Magill 2002, 869).

dramatically with a short but serious case study—on the need for restoring a fellow "brother" who has fallen into an obvious sin. Such matters are as relevant in the transnational global village of today as they were in the Jewish-Christian religious setting of first-century Palestine (and beyond). The problem is how to best convey them to what is typically a multicultural audience in a modern world that has moved from a primary communication situation of orality to print and more or less back again.[23]

3. The Principal Pericope and Its Translation

The Greek text of James 5:13–20 is given below, but it has been segmented into hypothetical "utterance units" that reflect how the original might have been orally articulated in public transmission. The Greek is accompanied by the more formal correspondence rendering of the *English Standard Version* for an additional frame of textual reference. Indented lines represent carry-overs from the preceding colon. Some of the key thematic terms and conceptually related reiterated expressions are emphasized typographically in various ways. The Greek text is followed by an oratorical rendering of this passage in Chewa, which is accompanied by an English back-translation. The vernacular version seeks to reproduce the oral dynamics of James's original discourse idiomatically in terms of meaning and also to make it more aurally perceptible by a listening audience.

13 Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν; προσευχέσθω· εὐθυμεῖ τις; ψαλλέτω.	Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.
14 ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν; προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας, καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες αὐτὸν ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου·	Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
15 καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα, καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· κἂν ἁμαρτίας ᾖ πεποιηκώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.	And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.
16 ἐξομολογεῖσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ εὔχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων, ὅπως ἰαθῆτε. πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη.	Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

23 There is of course a movement between these two ages along a communication continuum ranging from "primary" to "secondary orality." According to Ong (1982, 11), the former is represented by "a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print" in contrast with the latter, the "present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print." Nowadays the "telephone" has been replaced by multifunctional cell ("smart") phones, and the primary example of "other electronic devices" is the personal computer, or "notebook," with its manifold hypertext capabilities, often involving audio and visual access via the internet to the virtually unlimited information reservoir of the "world-wide web."

17 Ἠλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθὴς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῇ προσηύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξαι, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ·	Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.
18 καὶ πάλιν προσηύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.	Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.
19 Ἀδελφοί μου, ἐάν τις ἐν ὑμῖν πλανηθῇ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ ἐπιστρέψῃ τις αὐτόν,	**My brothers,** if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,
20 γινωσκέτω ὅτι ὁ ἐπιστρέψας ἁμαρτωλὸν ἐκ πλάνης ὁδοῦ αὐτοῦ σώσει ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκ θανάτου καὶ καλύψει πλῆθος ἁμαρτιῶν.	let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Kodi wina akudwala? Aitanitse akulu a mpingo. Iwowo adzampempherere ndi kumdzoza m'mafuta pochula dzina la Ambuye.	**14** Is someone sick? Let him (her) call for the church elders. They will pray for him (her) and anoint him (her) with oil while speaking the Lord's name.
Akampempherera pokhulupirira, wodwalayo adzapulumuka, ndipo Ambuye adzamuutsa. Ngati munthuyo anali atachimwa, Ambuye adzamkhululukira machimowo.	**15** If they pray for him (her) while believing that sick person will be saved, and the Lord will raise him (her) up. If the person has sinned, the Lord will forgive those sins.
Motero muziwululirana machimotu, ndipo muzipemphererana kuti muchire. Zoona, pemphero la munthu wolungama limakhala lamphamvu— silipita pachabe, ai!	**16** So you should confess sins to one another and pray for each other for healing. Truly, the prayer of a righteous person is powerful—it is not useless at all!

Mneneri Eliya anali munthu monga ife tomwe. Nthawi ija iyeyo adaapemphera kolimba kuti mvula isagwe pansi pano, ndipo mvula siidagwedi pa dziko zaka zitatu ndi miyezi isanu ndi umodzi.	**17** The prophet Elija was a human being just like we are. At that time he prayed strongly that the rain would not fall down below, and the rain indeed did not fall on the land for three years and six months.
Koma atapempheranso, mvula idagwa, nthaka nkuyambanso kumeretsa mbeu zake.	**18** But after he prayed again, the rain fell, and the soil resumed sprouting its crops.
Abale anga, wina mwa inu akasokera pa kusiya zoona cha chipembedzo chathu, pomwepo mnzake wampingo azimubwezadi.	**19** My brothers, if any one of you goes astray by leaving the truths of our religion, immediately a fellow member should bring him (her) back.
Dziŵani kuti wodzambweza wochimwayo ku njira yake yosokera yauchimo ija, adzapulumutsa moyo wake ku imfa yauzimu.	**20** Know that the one restoring that sinner from that sinful, lost way of his, he will save his life from spiritual death.
Zoonadi, chifukwa cha olanditsa oterewo, machimo ochuluka adzakhululukidwa.	In truth, because of rescuers like that, many sins will be forgiven.

4. The Contextual Co-text

The topically contrastive, iterative compositional style of James continues to be quite evident in what is arguably the final section of his epistle, 5:7–20. As noted earlier, it is rather difficult to divide this letter up into neat portions or paragraphs that manifest a clear, deductively arranged outline because that is not how the author presents his instructive and corrective thoughts. James had his own cyclical, orality-oriented logic in mind as he undoubtedly composed his text aloud or with oral articulation in mind, introducing virtually all of the topics that he wished to discuss in one way or another in his very first major section, which was only much later designated as "chapter one." Many of these same principal subjects then recur in this concluding section, for example, the need for "patience" in view of the imminent "Lord's coming," which headlines the unit, 5:7–9 (cf. 1:3, 12). Such encouragement, including "perseverance," was necessary on account of the external "suffering" and trials that the addressees were enduring (5:10–11; cf. 1:2, 12) as well as the internal tensions and perhaps divisions caused by undisciplined speech by members of the community (5:8, 12; cf. 1:19, 26). In contrast, the crucial necessity of "prayer" and pastoral discipline is stressed, including the letter's keynote emphasis on the need for putting genuine "faith" into practice for the spiritual good of the entire fellowship (5:13–20; cf. 1:6–8, 22–25, 27).

Hayden (1981) provides the following cogent observations on the wider intertextual context of James 5:1–20 (cf. the earlier study of Amerding 1938):

> The interpretation of any verse of the Bible must fit with the thought of the context in both the immediate passage and the overall understanding of Scripture. If James 5:13–18 is a reference to the special healing of physical illness, then it is totally unique to the teaching of the New Testament Epistles and disruptive to the argument of the Book of James. Where in the Epistles, from Romans through Jude, is there emphasis on a special divine healing of the sick through the ministry of church elders? It is not found in the writings of Paul, who gave thorough instructions to the elders regarding their spiritual qualifications and responsibilities.... In fact, in the opinion of this writer, the words and contextual thoughts of James 5 do *not* support the view that "sickness due to sin" is intended in the passage (although there does seem to be an allowance for certain physical ramifications as a part of the individual's problem). The emphasis of James is clearly on the *emotional* distress and *spiritual* exhaustion experienced by God's people in their deep struggle with temptation and their relentless battle with besetting sin. (Hayden 1981, 261–263)

Structurally, the discourse unit covering 5:7–20 appears to be divided into three topically related sub-sections according to the following formal and semantic criteria:

A. On the need for *patience in general* (5:7–9)
1. *Reason*: the Lord is coming soon, with an example of patience (vv. 7–8)
2. *Contrary behavior involving speech*: mutual grumbling, plus warning (v. 9)

B. On the need for *patience in suffering* (5:10–12)
1. *Reason*: the blessing of perseverance, with an example of patience (vv. 10–11)
2. *Contrary behavior involving speech*: frivolous swearing, plus warning (v. 12)[24]

C. On the need for *patience within the fellowship of faith* (5:13–20)
1. *General case*: suffering "misfortune"; solution: "pray/praise" (v. 13)
2. *Specific case*: suffering "weakness"; solution: "pray/anoint/confess" (vv. 14–16)
3. *Classic case*: Elijah's example of persistent, earnest prayer (vv. 17–18)
4. *Special case*: saving "wanderers"; solution: "bring back/turn" (vv. 19–20)[25]

24 Note that each of the A and B units begins with a vocative aperture "brothers" (ἀδελφοί) and manifests an internal enclosure ("inclusio") in the corresponding initial sections delineated by four distinct references to "the Lord" (κύριος).
25 Each of the three types of "case" presented by James in this section is marked by an initial formulaic expression (aperture): "[if] anyone among you [pl.]" (τις ἐν ὑμῖν) in vv. 13, 14, and 19. The third instance is preceded by the familiar example of Elijah's persistent and effectual prayer (vv. 17–18).

The following chiastic structure that appears to traverse most of this pericope (vv. 13–18) presents a progressively narrowing central focus on the forgiveness of sins (Heil 2012, 186), a topic which is again strongly reinforced by the epistle's climactic final two verses:

A. Pray for those suffering among members of the church (13–14)
  B. A prayer in faith will lead to the Lord's positive response (15a–b)
    C. If a person has sinned (15c)
      D. *He will be forgiven* (15d)
    C' Therefore, confess sins to one another (16a)
  B' Pray for healing since the prayers of the righteous are powerful (16b–c)
A' Follow the effective prayer model of Elijah in Israel (17–18)

5. A More Detailed Analysis of the Text

In this section, we will explore the concluding segment of James's epistle (5:13–20) more fully, to reveal how the author employs "the rhetoric of rejuvenation" in order to personally instruct, advise, encourage, and warn his unseen addressees. This is not a detailed exegesis of this passage; however, I hope to cursorily point out several critical aspects of the Greek text that would suggest how James employs a rhetorical strategy featuring reiteration, contrast, allusive imagery, vivid language, progressive development, and end-stress to communicate a message that differs in some significant respects from what one typically reads in contemporary commentaries.

James leads off with a "general case" scenario (v. 13) that introduces his primary biblical "solution" for the several related "problems" within the fellowship of believers that he discusses in this pericope. In striking contrast to the improper use of speech condemned in v. 12, flippant oath-making, he provides the twofold but all-inclusive instruction that applies to whatever happens to be the believers' condition in life—whether they are "experiencing trouble/distress" of some kind (κακοπαθέω) or "enjoying" (εὐθυμέω) their current circumstances. The answer is, as he advised already at the very beginning of the letter (1:2–7), to pray [in faith—implied] to the Lord, with a particular emphasis, depending on the situation, either on "petition" (προσεύχομαι) or "praise" (ψάλλω).

In vv. 14–16, the apostle turns to a specific case study involving serious prayer—and more, as the situation being described unfolds. This concerns a fellow member who is "weak." Now the verb used here (ἀσθενέω) is contextually interpreted by virtually all commentators (e.g., Heil 2012, 191; Richardson 1997, 231) and versions as a reference only to physical "sickness" (e.g., NIV, NLT, NET, GNB).[26] The argument usually goes something like this (Loh and Hatton 1997, 189; italics added):[27]

> James mentions a third circumstance needing prayer, namely sickness. The theme of sickness is most likely suggested by the theme of suffering in verse 13. The verb "to be sick" in Greek can include any kind of

26 For example: "Physical weakness because of sickness is clearly the intended meaning here (cf. τὸν κάμνοντα in 5:15)" (Varner 2017, 365). "Ασθενεῖ, lit. 'without strength,' here (and always in the Gospels) means physically 'sick,' 'ill' (all major EVV and almost all commentators; see G. Stählin, TDNT 4.490-93)" (Vlachos 2013, Kindle Loc. 5935–5936). With regard to v. 15: "σώσει.... The immediate context, with its instructions for how to treat a patient and the subsequent reference to recovery, suggests that the verb σῴζω here refers to being delivered from physical afflictions more than to its eschatological sense" (Adam 2012, 102).

27 After completing my analysis, I found only one exception among the dozen or so commentaries that I consulted on this passage, namely, the essay referred to above by Hayden (1981). In his commentary on James 5:14, Douglas Moo (2000, 236–237) calls attention to this "alternative meaning, 'to be spiritually weak'..." and astutely observes: "An exhortation to pray for such a situation would fit very well at the end of a letter that has regularly chastised its readers for just such spiritual lassitude." However, he quickly retreats from this interpretation in favor of "the usual view, adopted in virtually all modern English Bibles, that James is speaking here of physical illness."

> weakness (compare Rom 14.2; 2 Cor 12.10). However, the obvious contrast with "to be suffering," calling on the elders to pray and to anoint, and the verb "to save" in the sense of "to heal" (verse 15), all suggest that in this context "to be sick" is the intended meaning.

I do not claim that v. 14, in particular, has no reference or relevance, in view of James's associated instructions, to some serious illness or medical condition, but I think that this is not the primary problem that the apostle had in mind. Rather, I believe that he uses this situation, which may well have been a common one in the early church (as it is even today!) as a topical spark, or jumping-off point, in order to make a *metaphorical application* to what he saw as a much greater, even deadly malady within the communal fellowship, namely, the *sickness of unforgiven sin*. I simply note below some of the main points in this section that would argue in favor of such an understanding:[28]

(1) As noted above, the initial verb ἀσθενέω does not automatically refer to physical sickness in the NT; quite frequently, especially in the epistles, some sort of *spiritual* infirmity is being referred to (e.g., Matt 26:41; Rom 5:6; 8:3; 14:1; 1 Cor 8:9).[29]

(2) The same non-medical condition may be applied to the second, less common verb normally translated as "sick" in v. 15: κάμνω. For example, the writer of Hebrews encourages his readers not to "grow weak" in their "struggle against sin" (12:34).

(3) Elders praying over the "weak person" and anointing him "in the name of the Lord" would appear to suggest a sickbed scene, but again, the Greek verb used here, ἀλείφω, is not limited to medicinal usage (e.g., Mark 6:13). Rather, it can also refer to personal acts of consecration (Luke 7:38) and refreshment, even rejuvenation (Matt 6:17).[30]

(4) As we proceed to v. 15, we soon get the sense that *more than* just a healing from illness is being referred to.[31] The prayers offered in faith on behalf of the "weak one," James says, will "save" (σῴζω) him, a verb which "as used elsewhere in the New Testament, often refers to deliverance from sin and spiritual death" (Loh and Hatton 1997, 192).[32] Furthermore, "the Lord

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28 For a detailed socio-symbolic analysis of the text of James 5:14–16 in its cultural setting, see Albl (2002). For example: "James's description of the sick person calling for the elders (5:14) implies a separation between the sick person and the rest of the community. Sin, associated with illness (5:16), manifests itself in division among community members. Both the gathering of the elders (as representatives of the community) and the mutual prayer and forgiveness of sin among all community members (5:16) serve to restore the unity of the corporate body" (2002, 132).

29 "'**ἀσθένεια**'.... This group of words is formed from its opposite *sthenos*, strength, with the *Alpha*-privative prefixed. It conveys the meaning of powerlessness, weakness, lack of strength.... In prophetic texts [LXX] the vb. is found chiefly in prophecies of judgment, describing in a figurative sense the people [who have] rebelled against Yahweh and will therefore stumble and fall (Hos 4:5, 5:5; Jer 6:21, 18:15).... In Paul [*James too?!*], the terms in this group have undergone far-reaching theological reflection, and are developed in relation to man's sinful nature, to Christology, and to ethics" (Brown 1978, 993–994).

30 The symbolic significance of a vegetable oil applied in conjunction with communal prayers for a sick person, or even someone who has made a public confession for some serious, well-known sin, will be more immediately apparent and meaningful in some cultures (e.g., Africa) than others. Furthermore, "[t]he eschatological dimension of anointing in Hellenistic Judaism should not be overlooked. In Second Temple Jewish writings roughly contemporary with James, anointing signifies not only the transition from physical illness to physical health but also the movement from the ills of ordinary human eschatological salvation" (Albl 2002, 138).

31 "In contrast to Jas 5:15 and the unequivocal promise of healing, the Biblical record implies that God does not always heal: Trophimus is probably best known to us for having been 'left sick at Miletus' (2 Ti 4:20). At the very least, all Christians before the Parousia will succumb to final illness and death. Christians are guaranteed final healing in the resurrection, and are also assured of God's concern to heal in this age" (Shogren 1989, 106). However, if James has already shifted to a spiritual frame of reference and the forgiveness of sins in v. 15, then his assertion is correct: God always heals such moral "sickness" through sincere confession and faith in his Son.

32 "[T]he eschatological horizon of James, together with the fact every other occurrence of σῴζω in James refers to ultimate salvation (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:20), confirms that James sees an integral connection between present bodily healing and eschatological salvation: the two cannot be separated" (Albl 2002, 138).

will raise him up"—the verb (ἐγείρω) also being applied with reference to human as well as Christ's own "resurrection" (Matt 27:52, 63). And finally, the closing conditional assertion offers convincing proof that more than a mere healing from sickness is involved in the scene that James is portraying for us: "If he has *sinned*, he will be *forgiven*" (κἂν ἁμαρτίας ᾖ πεποιηκώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ).

(5) Verse 16 continues then either to clarify what has been described in v. 15 or to suggest another scenario where a definite spiritual "healing" is being referred to. In this case, in addition to "prayers" (εὔχομαι) for one another, there is a mutual "confession" (ἐξομολογέομαι) of sins. The verb used for "healing" here (ἰάομαι) is also employed in several significant passages with reference to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 28:27; Heb 12:13; 1 Pet 2:24).

(6) Again, as in the opening verses of James (1:6–7), the nature and prospective potency of the prayers being offered is underscored, for they must be uttered by "righteous" (δίκαιος) persons. And who might these be? In the immediate as well as more remote context of this very letter, they would be people who have confessed their sins and have been forgiven (v. 16)—or more generally in keeping with the main theme of the epistle as a whole, those individuals whose faith is regularly manifested in actions (cf. 1:22; 2:8, 13, 17, 26). The example of Elijah both illustrates and substantiates the point about the nature of "powerful and effective" prayer (vv. 17–18; cf. 1 Kgs 17:1; 18:16–46). In this connection, it is interesting to observe that James does not refer to the presumably well-known faith-healing story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kgs 17:7–24).

(7) As we proceed through this pericope then, it becomes clear that the letter's final two verses (19–20) are not dealing with a completely different subject at all (to be abruptly separated by a distinct topic heading, e.g., NIV). Instead, they take the theme of spiritual healing metaphorically to the next, and arguably ultimate level[33] with reference to a "brother" who is so "weak" in faith that he has actually "wandered (πλανάω) away from the truth" of God's Word and is thus under divine judgment. How can this, the weakest "sinner" (ἁμαρτωλός) be "turned back" (ἐπιστρέφω)—"turned back…from the error of his way" and "saved" (σῴζω) from [spiritual] "death" through God's merciful "covering" (καλύπτω) of his sins? James's evangelical answer promoting a faith-that-works was already overtly detailed in vv. 15–16 (cf. 1:22). And by this point in the passage, presumably every reader/hearer of these words would have grasped the potent pastoral message of Christ's apostolic brother!

6. Contemporary Application and Conclusion

Here then at the end, the epistle of James leaves its addressees with a powerful question and a challenge that affects the entire Christian community, which was going through some serious internal conflicts and struggles.[34] Obviously, if the danger of "wandering," back-sliding

33 This thematic climax in v. 18 is indicated by the cluster of central soteriological terms that this verse includes: turn back, sinner, save, soul, death, cover sins—with "the Lord" (vv. 14–15, Jesus Christ!) being the implied active agent of this personal series of events pertaining to salvation, the believer being the overt, indirect agent.

34 The various paragraphs and larger pericopes in James frequently manifest a similar rhetorical progression and build-up that climaxes in "end stress"—a concluding passage or even a single utterance that exhibits some key topical notion, often accompanied by a perceptible degree of graphic language, verbal emphasis, and/or emotion. Examples that traverse chapter 1 alone are as follows: "…so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (1:4); "He is a double-minded man—unstable in all he does!" (1:8); "In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business" (1:11); "…and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death!" (1:15); "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created" (1:18); "…and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you!" (1:21); "But the man who…continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does!" (1:25); "Religion…is this…to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (1:27, NIV).

members were not a potentially serious matter, he would not have left his readers with this brotherly obligation ringing in their ears.[35] However, in the light of this letter as a whole, a final warning against lukewarm, even hypocritical, participation within the Body of Christ does not really appear as an unexpected, out of place appeal. James obviously knew personally of, or had been informed about, so-called "Christians," who were not living out their faith in congregation-building behavior. In addition to the examples found in chapter one (e.g., 1:8, 13, 21, 26), we hear the apostle contrastively (i.e., in relation to any actions contrary to "the word of truth"—1:18) and sternly "call-out" these spiritually "weak" or "wandering" members of the fellowship. This occurs not only in the familiar "faith-works" chapter two, but also in some prominent chunks of text throughout the remainder of this epistle: 3:10–12, 14–16; 4:1–6, 8–9, 11–12, 13–17; 5:1–6, 9, 12—with the appropriate "solution" to the gravest of problem cases given in the group-challenging conclusion of 5:9–20. As Peter Davids (1982, 198) aptly notes:

> James concludes with a final exhortation which on the one hand 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.

Thus, the "misfortune" mentioned in v. 13 and the "weakness" referred to in v. 14 deeply concern the community of believers since, in James's thinking, they are not mere maladies affecting the body's physical health. Rather, if any underlying or associated spiritual problems are not dealt with as outlined in these final verses, he warns, "the Judge is standing at the door!" (v. 9)—and there is no need to spell out for readers what that means. On the other hand, when appropriate corrective or disciplinary action is taken prayerfully and confessionally "in the name of the Lord" (vv. 14–16), then individual and corporate "healing" will take place as promised, and a "multitude of sins [will be] covered" in keeping with God's abundant "compassion and mercy" (v. 11).

I will conclude this short study with two suggestions regarding the salient translation-related implications of James 5:13–20 that obviously concern our efforts to communicate his pastoral message in a rhetorically corresponding manner today:

First of all, the vibrantly emotive verbal rhetoric of James's sermonic epistle needs to be reflected in a corresponding, "functionally-equivalent" rendering of the Greek text.[36] Why should the brilliant, persuasively engaging style of the biblical author be dulled, eclipsed, or completely left behind by a literalistic, linguistically "weak" contemporary translation? Furthermore, the text also needs to be expressed and formatted in an oral-aurally perceptive way so that the dynamic dialogue between James and his distant "brothers and sisters" may also be conveyed appropriately with similar vigor and vitality by those proclaiming this passage in a public setting of study, correction, or worship.

Second, the essential contextual and extratextual background necessary for more fully understanding this pericope should be made available in footnotes or sectional introductions for those who desire such supplementary information. This would include a brief description of the thematic development of this epistle which leads up to this climactic passage

35 We find a similar, somewhat unforeseen, and mildly confrontational conclusion to the message of 1 John: "Dear children, keep yourself from idols!" (5:21; cf. also Jude 22).

36 For further suggestions, see Wendland (2011).

as well as notes which explain the biblical and related contextual references that are associated with the main terms and concepts[37]—for example, the near-eastern medicinal and/or symbolic practice of anointing with olive oil; the importance of personal confession within the Christian community; expounding the Old Testament prayer references to Elijah in 1 Kings.

The burning concern of James for a persistent purity of faith and life that preserves the unity and harmony of the Christian community shines brightly throughout this epistle from beginning to end. Thus, whenever repentance or rejuvenation is needed within the fellowship of reborn believers (cf. 1:18), as it inevitably will be, the proper scriptural approach for dealing with such spiritual "weakness" has been patently set forth in an epistolary location where it may readily be found and applied. Thus, James invites the Lord's faithful followers of every generation—"elders" as well as the laity—to frequently review his urgent pastoral encouragement and apostolic admonition, above all, expending every effort to put these foundational principles into practice both patiently and prayerfully, for indeed, "the Lord's coming is near!" (ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν, 5:8).

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37 The distinct perspective of the present study might also be supplied as a hermeneutical option at least with reference to 5:13–20.

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