

EPISTLE OF JAMES



CONSTITUTION OF THE TEXT

Canonicity

During the course of the first centuries of the common era, quotations from the epistle of James are scarce. Origen (d. 254) is the first writer clearly to cite James as Scripture and accept its apostolic authorship, though it is probable that *Shepherd of Hermas* (mid-2nd c.) alludes to it. Its canonicity was first accepted in the Alexandrian Church: Didymus the Blind (4th c.) wrote the first known commentary on James; Athanasius includes it in his famous canonical list in *Festal Letter* 39 (367); Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) quotes James extensively.

Eusebius, writing in the early 4th century, lists James among the works whose canonicity was at times disputed (*antilegomena*: cf. *Hist. eccl.* 3,25,3), no doubt because of the book's relatively late attestation (*Hist. ecc.* 2,23,25). Yet he also reports that it is "publicly used in most of the churches" and that it is "known and approved by many," including Eusebius

himself. However, Jerome (347-420) reports that some attributed it to an unknown author bearing the pseudonym of James the Just (*Vir. Ill.* 2). The letter is omitted in the canon list of the Council of Nicaea (325).

In the West, evidence of the epistle's canonical status is later: it is omitted in the Muratorian Canon. The texts that cite the epistle as a book of Scripture appear at the end of the 4th century. Accepted by Rufinus, Hilary of Poitiers (mid-4th c.), Jerome, and Augustine, its canonical status was firmly established by the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397).

There is no evidence for James' acceptance in pre-Peshitta Syriac Christianity. Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), educated at Antioch, reportedly rejected it. The Peshitta (early 5th c.) itself, however, does include James.

Traditional Importance

Among the early commentaries on James the following in particular are to be retained:

- in Greek: Didymus the Blind (Alexandria; 4th c.); (Pseudo-)Oecumenius (after the 6th c.); and Theophylact of Ohrid (modern Bulgaria; 11th c.);
- in Latin: Hilary of Arles (5th century); and Bede the Venerable (England; early 8th c.);
- in Syriac finally: Isho'dad of Merv (9th c.); and Dionysius Bar Salibi (12th c.).

The epistle was cited frequently by monastic writers: the Egyptian desert fathers, John Chrysostom (4th c.), and John Cassian (late 4th-early 5th c.).

Erasmus (in 1516) questioned the apostolic authorship of James. In Luther's 1522 edition of the New Testament, he refers to James as a "strawy epistle" of questionable apostolic authority that contradicts Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone. Luther thus relegated it to the end of his New Testament. Other Reformers, however, including Tyndale, Melancthon, Calvin, and Zwingli, did not question the letter's canonicity. In the Catholic Church, the Council of Trent asserted again its canonicity.

INTERPRETATION

Literary Genre

James is possibly a redaction of originally oral discourses of James the Just.

The opening salutation (1:1) signals the epistolary genre, although the work lacks closing salutations.

With its address to the “twelve tribes in the Dispersion,” the work is clearly intended as a circulatory letter for a broad range of readers.

General Plan of the Book

Beyond the epistolary introduction, an overall structure of the work is not obvious. Certain themes, however, do emerge consistently: exhortations to bear suffering and testing with patience and humility, concern for the rights and dignity of the poor (and a concomitant criticism of the arrogance of the wealthy), a concern with honest and integral speech, the value of faithful prayer, the conflict between the “earthly” and the “heavenly” realms, and an overriding concern for wholeness and integrity, both within the individual and within the community.

This concern for wholeness is obvious at the level of James’ word choices: the adjective *teleios* (“perfect, whole”) is found in Jas 1:4, 17.25; 3:2 (a cognate noun and verbs in 1:15; 2:8, 22; 5:11); the word *holos* (whole)

occurs in 2:10; 3:2.6, (*holoklēros* in 1:4). James warns against the evils of division within one’s self: a person should not be double-minded (1:8, 4:8) or be doubtful in prayer (1:6); the tongue should not both bless the Lord and curse humans (3:9–12). A person’s action should be consistent with his faith (2:14–26). The ultimate source of this integrity and wholeness is God, who is one (2:19; 4:12).

Divisions in the community arise precisely out of divisions in the self (4:1); church members should thus not judge one another or make distinctions (2:1–4; 4:11). The integral, whole body of the individual (healthy both physically and spiritually) should mirror the integral, whole body of the community.

HISTORICAL ELEMENTS: LITERARY HISTORY

The consensus among ancient authors identifies the author as James the Just, the “brother of the Lord”, and head of the Jerusalem Church (ca. 40–62). The great majority of modern authors also agree that the “James” of the salutation refers ultimately to James the Just: no other “James” in early Christianity had the authority to identify himself solely by name without further identification. Already in ancient times, however, this identification was disputed (as noted by Jerome); both Erasmus and Luther also raised questions.

Major modern positions regarding authorship and date include:

1. For some, James is pseudonymous, dating to the late 1st or early 2nd c. of our era. Major arguments for this position are the good quality of the epistle’s Greek and its Hellenistic (rather than Jewish) form and thought-world (both characteristics unlikely to be found in an epistle written by a Galilean relative of the Lord), as well as its late attestation and its perceived reaction against Pauline doctrine in 2:14–26 (both indicating a date later than James the Just).

2. For others on the contrary, James the Just is the author. Against the first two arguments above, supporters point out that Hellenistic/Semitic opposition is a false dichotomy for first-century Palestine; James (or perhaps a secretary) might easily have commanded the Hellenistic culture necessary to write the epistle. On the other hand, the epistle’s text includes undeniable Semitisms. Finally, even if it is possible to establish that the letter’s author has knowledge of the Pauline teaching, this conclusion would require a date only slightly later than the writing and circulation of the epistle to the Galatians.
3. Still others believe that texts originating from James the Just were recorded or edited by a secretary shortly after his death.
4. Others finally could consider the epistle of James to be an originally Jewish work that was then taken up and enriched with Christian interpolations.

The late attestation of the epistle remains a puzzle for any of these positions: if the letter is considered to be

a work emanating from the authority of James the Just, its late attestation remains unexplained; if on the contrary, the text is considered to be pseudonymous and late, we do not know how it could have gained acceptance later by the Church as a whole.

Theories regarding the place where the letter was written cover quite a varied range of regions: Egypt,

Rome, and Palestine-Syria. The letter addresses Diaspora Jewish-Christians in general (without necessarily excluding Gentile-Christians). Not only is it addressed to “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion,” but it presupposes familiarity with both the Scriptures and certain ethical traditions in the Hellenistic world.

PRESENTATION OF THE PERICOPE JAS 5:13-18

This passage forms part of the closing exhortations of the letter. It is loosely attached to the preceding exhortation (5:12: “Do not swear”, theme of honesty of speech) and to the following passage, which speaks

of the help given to the lost sinner in view of saving him (5:19-20). It also gives a precious insight into the rituals and beliefs of the early Church.

Jas 5:13-18

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

Themes: The passage focuses on prayer **dev13-18*, illustrating the epistle's teaching that a person who prays should ask God in faith, not doubting (1:5-8) and without asking God for something that can lead to our being lost (4:2-3).

Doctrine: The passage presents a holistic view of illness and healing; here, these two elements are closely associated: physical illness and "spiritual illness" (sin) on the one hand, and physical healing and forgiveness of sin, on the other, are closely linked. There is also a strong link between understanding the ritual as providing healing (both spiritual and physical) in this life, and understanding the anointing and prayer as preparation for ultimate healing in the resurrection and eternal life. This holistic emphasis reflects the theme of wholeness and integrity found throughout the letter.

→ *intro*

Catholic tradition has drawn out the meaning of the passage in various ways, primarily through the development of the teaching on the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. The tradition has at various times emphasized the different aspects of James' integral vision: spiritual healing (Origen, Chrysostom, Council of Trent), physical healing (Caesarius, Vatican II's emphasis on a broader understanding of healing), and the eschatological dimension (the traditional emphasis on "last rites" as preparation for eternal life). **chr *lit*

TEXT

≈ Text ≈

14: B; om. "of the" before "anointing"; A; om. "of the": B om. "of the Lord".

≈ Vocabulary ≈

13 is he serene the verb *euthumeō* (*V aequo animo est*, lit. *having an equal mind*, whence *being serene* or *trusting*) refers in koinè Greek to the idea of courage, assurance and interior calm.

14a sick: The verb *astheneō* ("being sick") refers generally to physical illness or weakness (e.g., Mt 25:36), in contrast to the broader range of physical, mental, or emotional suffering denoted by the term "suffering" (*kakopatheō*) (*V tristatur: being gloomy, dismal*), used in v. 13. **chr *lit*

14b Presbyters A recognizable, official group of Church leaders elsewhere in the NT, (e.g., Acts 14:23; 15:2; Tit 1:5; see especially the same phrase "presbyters of the Church" in Acts 20:17). The *presbuteroi* are ministers of the Church, who have been appointed to this office by the Apostles (Acts 14:23) or their direct successors (Tit 1:5) through the laying on of hands (1Tim 5:22), which confers upon them a special and lasting grace (*to charisma tou Theou ho estin en soi*: 2 Tim 1:6; cf. 1 Tim 4:14). During Christianity's first two centuries, the word *presbuteros* was used as the hyperonym (generic name) of *episkopos*. The term *presbuteros*, which connotes dignity, was used to designate both the local Church ministers and the Apostles (cf. 2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1; EUSEBIUS *Hist. Eccl.* 3,39, 2-5) or their successors (EUSEBIUS *Hist. Eccl.* 5,20,4-7; 5,24,16f.). **theo14b*

14c anointing: The verb for anointing with oil (*aleiphō*) is commonly used for physical healing (Mk 6:13) or as a sign of good health (Mt 6:17) in contrast with *chriō*, the usual Greek term for the ritual anointing of the kings or the prophets in the OT. **anc *bib *ptes *jew *chr*

- 13** Is anyone among you suffering
^V *sad*? He should pray.
 Is anyone serene
^S *cheerful*? He should sing a song of praise.
- 14** Is anyone among you sick?
 He should summon
^V *bring in* the presbyters of the Church,
 and they should pray over him,
 anointing him with oil in the name of the
^S *our* Lord.

≈ Grammar ≈

13f. The three opening questions may also be translated as indicatives, e.g., "The one among you who is suffering," or (as S does) as conditional clauses: "If someone among you is suffering."

14b over him (*ep' auton*). This phrase has the sense of prayers for the sick person said during the anointing. They may include the action of placing hands on the patient. **chr*

≈ Literary Devices ≈

13-18 pray, prayer, plea *Isotopy of prayer* Every verse in this passage refers to prayer; however, the words used are not simple synonyms. The noun *euchē* (prayer, v. 15) and the corresponding verb *euchomai* (to pray, v. 16) are generic terms. The verb expressing the prayer of petition is *proseuchomai* (v. 13, 14, 17,18) or *proseuchē* (v. 17). More concretely, the noun *deēsis* (v. 16) stands for a supplication or a particular request. As for *psallō* (*to sing a hymn*, v. 13), it applies to prayer in the form of a hymn, in particular in the liturgical context.

13 suffers / is... serene *Antithesis* The first two questions establish an antithesis between interior suffering and serenity. V, which translates *kakopathei* with the verb *tristatur* (evoking affliction or discouragement) only makes this antithesis more precise. Far from focusing on a contrast between sadness and cheerfulness, as is often thought, the phrase evokes rather the opposition between interior grief and appeasement, frames of mind that each lead to a different form of prayer.

13f. Rhetorical question James frequently uses questions, and here the rapid series of three questions and responses (but see: **gra*) gives the flavor of an oral give-and-take (cf. 3:13 for the same construction).

14c in the name of the Lord *Syllepsis*: this may refer to (1) a specific invocation of the Lord's name (e.g., Acts 10:48), (2) or as here, in an instrumental sense, to the power by which the anointing is done (cf. Mt 7:22; Acts 4:10). **chr*

CONTEXT

≈ Ancient cultures ≈

14c oil: In ancient Greco-Roman cultures, olive oil was associated with strength, cleanliness, and good health. Athletes rubbed themselves with it in the gymnasia to prepare for exercise (PLINY *Nat.* 15.19) and anointing after bathing was common (e.g., HIPPOCRATES *Acut.* 65). Olive oil was a major export item in the Roman Empire, and

¶ 13c **singing:** Ep 5:19; Col 3:16

¶ 14d **anointing with oil:** Mk 6:13

was commonly used in daily life for cooking and for illumination in oil lamps. Its medicinal value was specifically recognized (CELSUS *Med.* 2,14,4; SENECA *Ep.* 53,5; PLINY *Nat.* 15,19; 23,79). Oil was used in cultic worship (PAUSANIAS *Descr.* 8,42,11; 10,24,6), especially in burial rituals or the honoring of the dead (PLUTARCH *Arist.* 21; VIRGIL *Aen.* 6,212–234). *ptes *chr *lit

≈ Ancient Texts ≈

14c oil PLINY *Nat.* 15,7–8: “Nature...did not desire us to be sparing in the use of oil, and she has made it universal even among common people.”

14c.15 anointing, saving Two passages from the *Iliad* echo James’ allusions to eschatological salvation:

“Immediately then he [Apollo] lifted up noble Sarpedon out of the range of the missiles, and carrying him far away, bathed him in the streams of the river, and anointed him with ambrosia, and clothed him with immortal raiment, and gave him to swift conveyors, to the twin brothers, Sleep and Death, to bring with them, and they set him down speedily in the rich land of wide Lycia” (*Il.* 16,677–680).

“So he [Achilles] spoke threatening, but no dogs were busy with Hector [i.e., his body], but the daughter of Zeus, Aphrodite, kept dogs from him by day and by night alike, and with oil she anointed him, rose-sweet, ambrosial, so that Achilles might not tear him as he dragged him” (*Il.* 23,184–187).

≈ Biblical Intertextuality ≈

14b They should pray Prayers for healing 1K 17:20–22; 2K 20:2–6; Sir 38:9,14. The Psalmist often prays for healing: Ps 6:2; 30:2; 41:4.

14c anointing him with oil The use of olive oil is well attested throughout the Scriptures. It was a general sign of wealth (Ezek 16:13), health (Ps 104:15: “oil to make their faces glow”) and happiness (Isa 61:3: the “oil of gladness”; cf. Ps 133:1–2). It was used in everyday cooking (1K 17:12), for lighting in homes (Mt 25:1) and in the Temple (Ex 27:20), and was an essential agricultural product (Deut 11:14). Anointing with oil was associated with cleanliness (Ruth 3:3) and with God’s blessing (Ps 23:5): “You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup brims over.” *anc *ptes *jew *chr *lit

Anointing was also used in specifically ritual contexts: the anointing of a king (e.g., 1Sam 10:1), a priest (Ex 28:41), and a prophet (1K 19:16); it also served for consecrating sacred objects (Gen 28:18; Lev 8:11). In these cultic contexts, however, the verb *chriō* (or “pour

upon” *epicheō*) is regularly used, not the *aleiphō* used by James. *voc

14c anointing him with oil. Natural elements combined with supernatural healing. Other Old Testament passages combine prayers for supernatural healing with a use of natural remedies: The Lord promises to heal Hezekiah in response to his prayers (Isa 38:5), but Isaiah also ordered “a poultice of figs to be taken and applied to the boil, that he might recover” (Isa 38:21). A similar combination is found in the wisdom literature: “My son, when you are ill, delay not, but pray to God, who will heal you.... Then give the doctor his place lest he leave; for you need him too” (Sir 38:9–12).

In his own healings, Jesus occasionally makes use of natural elements: he uses saliva (Mk 7:33; 8:23; Jn 9:6) and often physical touch (Mk 1:41; 3:10; 5:28–31,41; 6:56; Lk 6:19); his disciples employed olive oil in their healings (Mk 6:13) and also employed physical touch (Acts 3:7; 5:15; 19:11–12).

≈ Peritestamental Literature & Jewish Tradition ≈

14c anointing him with oil The use of olive oil for medicinal purposes was very common among ancient Jews: Isa 1:6 (treating wounds); PHILO *Somn.* 2,58 (oil strengthens and firms muscles); JOSEPHUS *Ant.* 17,172 (*B.J.* 1,657) (Herod’s physicians bathe him in warm oil). Rabbinic traditions also recognize the medicinal properties of oil: anointing painful loins with oil (*m. Šabb.* 14,4); use of a compress made of old wine and oil (*j. Ber.* 1,2). *anc *bib *chr *lit

14c.15 anointing ... save The link between the anointing ritual and eschatological salvation reflects the Second Temple Jewish connection between anointing with oil and final salvation. Adam, ill because of his sins, will receive a healing anointing (with oil from a tree in Paradise) at the final resurrection (*Apoc. Mos.*, 9,3; 13,2–3; other references to an olive tree in Paradise: 2 *En.* 8,4 [shorter recension]; *Gen. Rab.* 33,6 on Gen 8:10). Enoch’s anointing marks his transition from his earthly existence into becoming “like one of the glorious ones” (2 *En.* 22,8–10; cf. 56,2). See also 3 *Bar.* 15 (Greek) (vases of oil as heavenly reward); *Jos. Asen.* 8,5; and 16,16 (anointing with an “ointment of incorruptibility”); *Test. Adam* 1,7. *voc *anc *chr *lit *isl

RECEPTION

≈ Christian Tradition ≈

14b over him Origen reads “they will place their hands on him” in his quotation of this verse (*Hom. Lev.* 2,4,5). *gra

14b Presbyters Polycarp identifies caring for the sick as one of the duties of “presbyters” (*Phil.* 6,1).

14b Presbyters Non-sacramental use of healing oil by the laity Alongside the proper sacramental anointing by ordained presbyters, lay people also sometimes anointed the sick with consecrated oil. INNOCENT I declares that “in case of emergency, this anointing is permitted not only for priests but even for all Christians” (*Ep. Dec.* 8; cf. BEDE *Comm. Jas.* and CAESARIUS OF ARLES *Serm.* 13,3: “a sick man should receive the Body and Blood of Christ, humbly and devoutly ask the presbyters for blessed oil, and anoint his body with it” [quotation of Jas 5:14–15 follows]). OUVEN (DADO) *Vita S. Elig.* 2,16: “But let the invalid...ask the church faithfully for blessing and oil, with which he might anoint his body in the name of Christ and, according to the apostle, “the prayer of faith will save the

infirm and the Lord will relieve him.” Healing non-sacramental anointments by holy lay people are attested elsewhere (e.g., PALLADIUS *Hist. Laus.* 12). **theo14b*

14c anointing him with oil Jesus’ twelve disciples “anointed many sick people with oil and cured them” (Mk 6:13). Tertullian refers to the healing of a Roman emperor by a Christian: “Even Severus himself, the father of Antonine, was graciously mindful of the Christians; for he sought out the Christian Proclus, surnamed Torpacion, the steward of Euhodias, and in gratitude for his having once cured him by anointing, he kept him in his palace until the day of his death” (*Scap.* 4).

INNOCENT I (*Ep. Dec.* 8) understood James to refer to “the holy oil of chrism, which has been made by the Bishop.” **theo14c*

14c in the name of the Lord Invocation of the name of the Lord forms a regular part of Christian healing (cf. Acts 3:6; 4:10), exorcism (Mk 9:38; 16:17; Lk 10:17), and baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48, 19:5). BEDE *Comm. Jas.*: “For what he [James] says, ‘with oil in the name of the Lord,’ means with oil consecrated in the name of the Lord or at least that when they anoint the sick person they ought to invoke the name of the Lord over him at the same time.” **gra14b *dev14c*

≈ Liturgy ≈

5,13-20 Use in lectionary In the Roman lectionary for the Saturday of the seventh week of the year, Jas 5:13-20 is read along with Ps 141:1,2,3,8 and Mk 10:13-16. The inclusion of Jas 5:19-20 emphasizes the responsibility of Church members for one another, and the connection between sin, repentance, and final salvation. Ps 141 (on prayer) and the Markan passage (on Jesus blessing the children) reinforce James’ focus on praying to God with a simple trust.

14b they should pray over him *Prayers and anointing*

Many liturgical texts contain prayers for consecrating the oil for baptism and other rituals.

Before anointing: *Sacr. Serap.* 17: “Prayer for Oil of the Sick or for Bread or for Water”: “Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, having all authority and power, the savior of all people, we call upon you and we implore you that healing power of your only-begotten may be sent out from heaven upon this oil. May it become to those who are anointed (or to those who receive of these your creatures) for a rejection of every disease and every sickness, for an amulet warding off every demon, for a departing of every unclean spirit, for a taking away of every evil spirit, for a driving away of all fever and shiverings and every weakness, for good grace and forgiveness of sins, for a medicine of life and salvation, for health and wholeness of soul, body, spirit, for perfect strength. Master, let every satanic energy, every demon, every plot of the opposing one, every blow, every lash, every pain, or every slap in the face, or shaking, or evil shadow, be afraid of your holy Name, which we have now called upon, and the name of the only-begotten; and let them depart from the inner and the outer parts of these your servants so that the name of Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified and risen for us, who took to himself our diseases and weaknesses, and is

coming to judge the living and the dead, may be glorified. For through him (be) to you the glory and the power in the holy Spirit both now and to all the ages of ages. Amen.”

Test. Dom. 1,24: “Christ... you are the healer of all who are ill and all who suffer. You who gave the gift of healing to those you deemed worthy of this [gift], send the deliverance of your compassion upon this oil which is a type of your richness, that it may deliver those who are diseased, and [that] it may heal the sick and sanctify those who return, as they draw near to your faith.”

Apos. Trad. 5: “As, sanctifying this oil, you give, God, health to those using and receiving [it], whence you have anointed kings, priests, and prophets, so also may it afford strengthening to all tasting [it] and health to all using it.”

Apos. Con. 8,29,1-3: “O Lord of hosts, the God of powers, creator of the waters and provider of the oil...the giver of water for drinking and for cleansing, and of oil that cheers [man’s] countenance for joy and gladness; do you yourself now, through Christ, sanctify this water and this oil, in the name of him or her that has brought [them], and grant [them] the power to restore health, to drive away diseases, to put demons to flight, to protect the household, [and] to put to flight all snares [of the enemy], through Christ our hope...”

Roman Rite Ritual of Anointing (revised) 75: “God of all consolation, you chose and sent your Son to heal the world. Graciously listen to our prayer of faith: send the power of your Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this precious oil, this soothing ointment, this rich gift, this fruit of the earth. Bless this oil [sign of the cross is made] and sanctify it for our use. Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul, and in spirit, and deliver them from every affliction. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”

Further prayers for blessing of healing oil are in *Can. Hipp.* 3; *Sacr. Gel.* 1.40; the Gregorian *Lib. Sacr.* 269, and in various Orthodox (*euchelaion*), Coptic, and Eastern traditions. **chr *theo*

During anointing: The traditional Catholic anointing ritual was accompanied by the prayer, “Through this holy unction, and His most tender mercy, may the Lord pardon you whatever sins you have committed” (cf. THOMAS *STh Suppl.* Q. 29 a. 8; Thomas connects the prayer with Jas 5:15). The phrasing of the revised Roman Ritual is more directly based on Jas 5:15: [While anointing the forehead]: “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.” [While anointing the hands]: “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”

After anointing: *Roman Ritual Rite of Anointing* (revised) 77a: “Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, by the grace of your Holy Spirit cure the weakness of your servant N. Heal his / her sickness and forgive his / her sins; expel all afflictions of mind and body; mercifully restore him / her to full health, and enable him / her to resume his / her former duties, for you are Lord for ever and ever. **chr*

The Roman rite also provides another prayer to be used **in cases of extreme or terminal illness:** “**extreme unction**” *Roman Ritual Rite of Anointing* (revised) 77b: “Lord Jesus Christ, you chose to share

our human nature, to redeem all people, and to heal the sick. Look with compassion upon your servant N., whom we have anointed in your name with this holy oil for the healing of his / her body and spirit. Support him / her with your power, comfort him / her with your protection, and give him / her the strength to fight against evil. Since you have given him / her a share in your own passion, help him / her to find hope in suffering, for you are Lord for ever and ever.”

14c anointing him with oil

Method of anointing By medieval times, the sick were typically anointed five times, one for each of the senses (cf. THOMAS *STh Suppl.* Q. 32 a. 6; Council of Florence; DS 1324). In the revised Roman ritual, the sick person is anointed on the forehead and hands; the Eastern rite still includes anointing on other parts of the body.

Anointing with oil and other Christian rituals Anointing with oil plays an essential role in several Christian rituals. It forms part of the pre-baptismal ritual (*Apos. Con.* 7.22; CYRIL OF JERUSALEM *Myst.* 2.3; *Acts Thom.* 120–21; *Ps.Clem. Rec.* 3.67); anointing with scented oil (chrism) became a post-baptismal ritual (*Apos. Con.* 7.22; CYRIL OF JERUSALEM *Myst.* 3.1; TERTULLIAN *Bapt.* 7; *Gos. Phil.* 74–75; CCC 1241); it also became part of the ritual for confirmation and holy orders (CCC 1294). The close connection between anointing for healing of the sick and the healing power of other rituals is shown in Ignatius of Antioch’s characterization of the “breaking of the bread” as a “medicine that brings immortality” (*Eph.* 20.2). *chr

≈ Theology ≈

14f. Sacramentology: Promulgation of the anointing of the sick. Erasmus (1516) questioned whether the passage supported the sacraments of penance and extreme unction (*Annot. Ep. Jac.* 1038) and Cajetan (1529) denied that Jas 5:14 supported extreme unction (*Ep. Pauli et al. Ap.*) *chr. Roman Catholic doctrine, however, understands Jas 5:14–15 as the “promulgation” by the apostle James of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (previously known as “Extreme Unction”). CCC 1510: “Tradition has recognized in this rite (i.e., Jas 5:14–15) one of the seven sacraments.” (cf. 1499–1532). Council of Trent (DS 1695 and 1716): “This sacred unction for the sick, however, was instituted by Christ our Lord as truly and properly a sacrament of the New Testament, alluded to by Mark [6:13], indeed, but recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James the apostle and brother of the Lord.” [Quotation of Jas 5:14–15].

14.15b Is any among you sick? the Lord will raise him up Sacramentology: essence of the sacrament: anointing of the sick or extreme unction? By the Middle Ages, there was at times a tendency in the Roman Catholic Church to understand this passage as referring exclusively to those who were dying; the sacrament based on this passage in James was thus known as “Extreme Unction” (e.g., THOMAS *STh Suppl.* Q. 32 a. 2). LUTHER (*Bab.Capt.*) and CALVIN (*Inst.* 4.19,21), in rejecting this interpretation, insisted that James refers to general sickness.

The Second Vatican Council recalled the broad scope of the sacrament, avoiding the name “Extreme Unction” in favour of the more traditional “Anointing of the Sick,” although the recipient is still anyone who “begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age.” “‘Extreme unction,’ which may also and more fittingly be called ‘anointing of the sick,’ is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived” (SC 73). *lit

14b Presbyters Sacramentology: ministers Thomas recognizes lay healings *chr, but holds that they are not sacramental, attributing them to the “grace of healing” as found in 1Cor 12:9 (*STh Suppl.* Q. 31 a. 1). LUTHER (*Bab. Capt.*) held that James’ presbyters (*presbuteroi*) were not necessarily priests or ministers: “We may suspect that the apostle desired the older, graver men in the church to visit the sick”; CALVIN rejects the contemporary Roman Catholic belief that the presbyters are priests (*Inst.* 4.19,21). However, the Council of Trent (DS 1697) stated that: “the proper ministers of this sacrament are the presbyters of the Church, under which name in that place are to be understood not the elders by age or the foremost in rank among the people, but either bishops or priests duly ordained” (cf. CCC 1516).

14bc pray over him, [...] in the name of the Lord Sacramentology: form of the sacrament. The traditional prayer accompanying the Extreme Unction focused on spiritual healing: “Through this holy unction, and His most tender mercy, may the Lord pardon you whatever sins you have committed” (cf. THOMAS *STh Suppl.* Q. 29 a. 8). Thomas calls this prayer the “form” of the sacrament, and relates it to Jas 5:15. *chr

14c anointing him with oil Sacramentology: Natural elements combined with supernatural healing. The *Catechism* links Jesus’ use of “signs of healing” (use of saliva and touch) with the physical aspect of the sacraments: “And so in the sacraments Christ continues to ‘touch’ us in order to heal us” (CCC 1504).

14c anointing him with oil Sacramentology: matter of the anointing of the sick. CALVIN argues that James refers to ordinary, not consecrated, oil (*Inst.* 4.19.21). The Council of Trent on Jas 5,14–15 on the other hand says: “the oil very appropriately represents the grace of the Holy Spirit, with which the soul of the sick person is visibly anointed” (DS 1695). *chr

≈ Islam ≈

14c.15 anointing ... save The tradition of the olive tree in Paradise appears also in Muslim tradition: “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of his light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp; the lamp enclosed in glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fires scarce touch it: light upon light! (*Qur’an sur.* 24,35). *ptes

TEXT

≈ Text ≈

16 Confess Nes (⌘ BAC) retains *oun* (then) after “confess”.

16 “transgressions” Thus TR: (*ta paraptomata*). Nes (⌘ BA) has “sins” (*tas amartias*).

17 in his prayer S does not have “in his prayer”

≈ Vocabulary ≈

15b raise: The verb *egeirō* has two possible meanings: it may refer, as in the direct meaning of this passage, to raising up a person physically (e.g. Acts 3:7); it is also used for raising from the dead (e.g., Mt 10:8), especially in reference to Jesus’ resurrection (Mt 16:21; Acts 3:15; Rom 6:4). James seems to imply an intimate connection between the two: perhaps the physical raising is a sign or foreshadowing of the eschatological raising, or perhaps the physical raising already participates in the eschatological raising in a proleptic manner. *chr *lit *theo

≈ Grammar ≈

17 in his prayer he prayed: *Semitism* The Greek *proseuchē*, *prosēuxato* imitates the Semitic infinitive absolute construction — one indication (along with, e.g., the frequent use of *kai*) of the Semitic background of the letter.

≈ Literary Devices ≈

15a save *Syllepsis*: The verb *sōzō* has two possible meanings: it can refer both to physical healing (e.g., Mk 5:23,28; Jn 11:12), and to final, eschatological salvation. Since every other occurrence of the word in the epistle refers to eschatological salvation (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:20), James no doubt meant to play on both senses: physical healing and eternal salvation are closely linked together in this text. *ptes *chr *theo

CONTEXT

≈ Biblical Intertextuality ≈

15f. *Association of sin and illness* Ps 38:3-8; 41:4. Disease is understood as a punishment for breaking God’s law in some portions of the Bible: Ex 15:26; Deut 7:15; 28:15-22; this causal connection between illness and sin is challenged in the Book of Job (Job 4:7-9; 7:20; 9:22-23). *jew *chr

15f. *Association of healing and forgiveness of sin*

OT Ps 103:3: “He forgives all your offences, cures all your diseases.” “The man of the Old Testament lives his sickness in the presence of God. It is before God that he laments his illness, and it is of God, Master of life and death, that he implores healing (cf. Ps 6:3; Ps 38; Isa 38). Illness becomes a way to conversion (cf. Pss 38:5; 39:9,12); God’s forgiveness initiates the healing (cf. Pss 32:5; 107:17-20). It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God according to his law restores life: ‘For I am the Lord, your healer’ (Ex 15:26). The prophet intuitively that suffering can also have a redemptive meaning for the sins of others (cf. Isa 53:11). Finally Isaiah announces that God will usher in a time for Zion when he will pardon every offence and heal every illness (Isa 33:24)” (CCC 1502).

NT Jesus himself presumes the connection between disability and sin in his healing of the paralytic (Mt 9:1-8//), as does Paul (1Cor 11:30). In two further passages, however, Jesus denies a causal relation: those who suffer oppression or accident are no worse sinners than those who do not (Lk 13:1-5; Jn 9:3). Jesus’ own healing is holistic. His healing of the paralytic is associated with forgiveness of sin in Mt 9:1-8// (cf. Mk 2:17: “It is not the healthy who need

- 15 And the prayer of faith will save
^S heal the suffering person,
 and the
^S our Lord will raise him up.
 And if he happens to have committed any
 sins, it
^S they will be forgiven him.
- 16 Confess ^V your sins to one another,
 and pray for one another so that you may be
 healed.
 Powerful indeed is the effective
^V persistent plea
 of a righteous person.
- 17 Elijah was a human, a mortal man like us,
 and in his prayer he prayed that it would not
 rain ^S upon the earth,
 and it did not rain upon the earth
 for three years and six months.
- 18 And he prayed again, and heaven gave rain,
 and the earth produced its fruit.

the doctor, but the sick. I came to call not the upright, but sinners.” His healings are regularly associated with a call for faith (cf. Mk 2:5; 5:34,36; 9:23), and are understood as signs that the Kingdom of God has come near (cf. Mt 11:5-6). “Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases’ (cf. Mt 8:17; Isa 53:4). But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the ‘sin of the world,’ (Jn 1:29; cf. Isa 53:4-6) of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion (CCC 1505).” *ptes (the 3 on 15-16) *chr *theo

16a confess sins to one another: e.g., Lev 5:5 (associated with a cultic offering); Num 5:7; Lev 16:21 (priest confesses sin of people). The Psalmist connects confession of sin and relief from suffering: “I said not a word, but my bones wasted away...I made my sin known to you...and you for your part, took away my guilt” (Ps 32:3-5). *ptes16a *chr16 *theo16a

≈ Peritestamental Literature & Jewish Tradition ≈

15f. *Association of sin and illness*: *Test. Rub.* 1,7; *Test. Sim.* 2,12-13; *Test. Zeb.* 5,4; *Test. Gad* 5,9-11.

15f. *Association of physical healing and forgiveness of sin*: *b. Ned.* 41a: “R. Alexander said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Abba: ‘A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him, as it is written, ‘Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases’” (Ps 103:3) *bib *chr *lit *theo

16a confess [your] sins to one another “And the Levites shall recite the sins of the children of Israel...And all those who enter the

¶ 15a **faith and healing:** Mk 2:5; 5:34, 36; 6:5-6; 9:23-29 //

¶ 15b **raising the sick:** Mk 5:41

¶ 15c-16 **Sin, illness and healing:**
Mt 9:1-8 //; Ps 103:3

¶ 17-18 **Elijah's prayer:** I K 17:1;
18:41-45; Sir 48,3

covenant shall confess after them and they shall say: "We have acted sinfully, [we have transgressed]...." (IQS 1,22-25).

17a in his prayer [Elijah] prayed: James draws not only on the laconic biblical narrative (1K 17:1; 18:41-45; Sir 48:3), but also on extra-biblical traditions that emphasize the efficacy of Elijah's prayers (e.g., 2 Esd (4 Ezra) 7,109; *m. Ta'an.* 2,4; *b. Sanh.* 113a).

RECEPTION

≈ Christian Tradition ≈

15b the Lord will raise him up Oil and eschatological salvation / resurrection *Gos. Phil.* 92: "But the tree of life stands in the midst of paradise. And indeed (it is) the olive-tree. From it came the chrism. Through it <came> the resurrection"; cf. Origen *Cels.* 6,27: report of a group whose members profess, "I have been anointed with white ointment from the tree of life." *Ps.-Clem. Rec.* 1,45: "Him [Christ] first God anointed with oil which was taken from the wood of the tree of life: from that anointing therefore He is called Christ. Thence, moreover, He Himself also, according to the appointment of His Father, anoints with similar oil every one of the pious when they come to His kingdom, for their refreshment after their labours, as having got over the difficulties of the way; so that their light may shine, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, they may be endowed with immortality." Cf. *Gos. Nic.* 19: Christ will anoint Adam in Hades with oil from the tree in paradise. **ptes14c.15-16. *theo15c*

15c sins...will be forgiven Emphasis on forgiveness of sin. In the earliest known quotation of our passage, ORIGEN comments only on spiritual healing, referring to the passage as an example of forgiveness of sin: "And there is still a seventh remission of sins through penance...when he is not ashamed to make known his sin to the priest of the Lord and to seek a cure...What the Apostle James said is fulfilled in this: [quotation of Jas 5:14-15, including the addition "they will place their hands on him"] (*Hom. Lev.* 2,4,5).

15c.16b forgiven ... healed Physical and spiritual healing. Some Christian writers contrasted the healing power of the Eucharist and of sacramental anointing with non-Christian methods of healing: CAESARIUS *Serm.* 19,5: [If someone is ill]: "Let him receive the Body and Blood of Christ, be anointed by the presbyters with consecrated oil, and ask these presbyters and deacons to pray over him in Christ's name. If he does this, he will receive not only bodily health, but also the forgiveness of sins. [quotation of Jas 5:14-15]. "Why, then, should a man kill his soul with sorcerers and seers, enchanters and diabolical phylacteries, when he can heal both his soul and his body by the prayer of the priest and consecrated oil?" (cf. *Serm.* 13,3; 184,5). OUVEN (DADO) *Vit. S. Elig* 2,16.: [After a warning not to seek out sorcerers or magicians or use "diabolical phylacteries"] "But let the invalid confide solely in the mercy of God and take the body and blood of Christ with faith and devotion and ask the church faithfully for blessing and oil, with which he might anoint his body in the name of Christ and, according to the apostle, 'the prayer of faith will save the infirm and the Lord will relieve him.' And he will not only receive health for the body but for the soul and what the Lord promised in the Gospel will be fulfilled saying: 'For whatever you shall ask, you will receive through believing prayer.'" (cf. Jas 5:15; Mt 21:22).

16 confess transgression to one another: *Did.* 14,1: "On the Lord's own day, when you gather together, break bread and give thanks [Or: celebrate the eucharist] after you have confessed your unlawful deeds" (cf. 4,14).

≈ Theology ≈

15c sins will be forgiven him Sacramentology: effects of the anointing of the sick. The Council of Trent on Jas 5:15: "For the thing signified is the grace of the Holy Spirit, whose anointing wipes away sins, if there be any still to be expiated...the sick person bears more lightly the miseries and pains of his illness...and *sometimes* attains bodily health, *when it is expedient* for the salvation of the soul" (*DS* 1696; emphasis added; cf. THOMAS SCG 73,2). **chr*

16a confess [your] sins to one another. CHRYSOSTOM quotes Jas 5:14-15 as an illustration of a priest's power to forgive sins (*Sac.* 3,6; cf. also ORIGEN *Hom. Lev.* 2,4,5) CALVIN insists that this passage contradicts the Roman Catholic sacrament of confession to a priest only; in his opinion, lay people should confess their sins to one another (*Inst.* 3,4,6). The Council of Trent, implicitly replying to Calvin and the Reformers, insists that only priests and bishops have the authority to forgive sins, though its references are to Mt 16:19 and Jn 20:23 (14th session; "On the most holy sacraments of penance and extreme unction" c. 6).