Introduction

Elijah the prophet sparked both the expectation and imagination of first century Jews and Christians. As the prophet par excellence, Elijah’s ministry (1 Kings 17–19; 21:17–29; 2 Kings 1:2–16; 2:1–12) served as a typological palette to paint the prophetic ministries of Jesus, his disciples and his cousin John. In the Synoptic Gospels, John the Baptist is identified with the eschatological Elijah (Mal 4:5–6 [MT 3:23–24; LXX 3:22–23]). In Luke, Jesus compares his own ministry to Elijah’s and Elisha’s (Luke 4:25–27), and his healing of the widow’s son at Nain (Luke 7:11–17) mirrors the healing of the widow’s son at Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:8–16). Luke even patterns the ascension of Jesus and the subsequent ministry of the disciples after the prophet’s ascension and Elisha’s subsequent ministry. The use of the Elijah narrative is not limited to Luke-Acts. For Paul, God’s declaration to Elijah at Horeb (1 Kgs 19:10–18), provided assurance that he would raise “a remnant, chosen by grace” (NRSV

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1 Leonhard Goppelt notes that “the evangelists have emphasized Jesus’ relationship to redemptive history by alluding to the appropriate Old Testament stories [of the prophets] and by quoting suitable prophecies” (Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New [trans. Donald H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 62; see pp. 61–82 on the typological use of Old Testament prophets to describe Jesus’ ministry).


4 The prophetic mantle is passed to Elisha, who witnesses Elijah’s ascension and receives a double portion of his spirit (2 Kgs 2). Jesus commissions his disciples, who witness his ascension as they are promised to receive the Holy Spirit and to be clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–9). Some elements of Jesus’ ministry bare a greater similarity to Elisha than to Elijah (Raymond E. Brown, “Jesus and Elisha,” Perspective 12 [1971]: 85–104; D. Gerald Bostock, “Jesus as the New Elisha,” ExpT 92 [1980]: 39–41; Thomas L. Brodie, “Jesus as the New Elisha: Cracking the Code,” ExpT 93 [1981]: 39–42).
Rom 11:2–5). Finally, at the end of the New Testament, the judgments wrought by both Elijah and Moses serve as a model for the judgments initiated by the two witnesses (Rev 11:3–13; see below).

**The Historical Elijah in James**

Given the frequency with which Elijah is used as a historical exemplar and eschatological figure in the New Testament, it is no surprise that the Epistle of James uses his life to illustrate the “powerful and effective” prayer of the righteous:

Elijah was a man like us, and he fervently prayed that it might not rain, and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months. Again he prayed, and heaven gave rain and the earth produced its fruit. (Jas 5:17–18)

In light of the preceding context of prayer for healing (5:13–16), it is a surprise that James skips the more obvious example of Elijah’s successful prayer for the resuscitation of the widow’s son (1 Kgs 17:17–24) and instead focuses on the drought announced by the prophet (1 Kgs 17–18). The details of the drought narrative provided by James are also seemingly odd, as they do not line up exactly with the explicit narrative of 1 Kings. James states, as a matter of fact, that Elijah prayed for drought and rain, when the Old Testament does not explicitly mention that Elijah prayed for either (1 Kgs 17:1; ch. 18). The Elijah cycle neither

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provides the details that the drought lasted for “three years and six months,” nor that the earth “bore fruit” (ἐβλάστησε τὸν καρπὸν) as a result of the rain.

These interpretive details have led some scholars to believe that James supplemented the biblical account with extrabiblical Jewish tradition.7 Other scholars have concluded that James did not have access to biblical text at all. Wiard Popkes states that “Obviously James received his information from secondary sources . . . , not from direct access to 1 Kings 17–18.”8 Popkes then boldly concludes:

James can hardly be called an OT exegete. He may call himself a ‘teacher’ (διδάσκαλος; 3.1f); but he is not really a ‘teacher of the Bible’. His knowledge of the Bible is second-hand. This pertains to his quotations as well as to the allusions and examples.9

This charge follows the lead of Martin Dibelius, who states that James’ knowledge of Scripture “could have come . . . as easily through propaganda, preaching, teaching, and instruction intended for catechumens or missionaries as through books.”10

Contrary to Dibelius and Popkes, James can certainly be considered an Old Testament exegete, and he is likely aware of the context of Elijah’s drought in the Old Testament. The assertion that Elijah prayed for both drought and rain may be justified based on the prophet’s two postures of prayer: “standing before the LORD” (1 Kgs 17:1) and sitting with “his face between his knees” (18:42).11 The three and a half year duration of the

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9 “James and Scripture,” 228.
11 “Standing” is a regular posture of prayer. Tg. Onq. Gen. 18:22 interprets “he remained standing before the LORD” (וַיְהִי מֶשֶׁשׂ מְבָטָל לָהֶם הָדוּר) as “he was ministering in his prayer before the LORD” (וַיִּהְיוּ עִמּוֹ לָהֶם הָדוּר יְהוָה; see also Tg. Onq. Gen. 19:27; Ropes, 311). Commenting on Gen 19:27, R. Helbo (290–320 AD) in the name of R. Huna (250–290 AD) states that “‘standing’ means nothing else than prayer” (b. Ber. 66b; cf. Gen. Rab. 68.9; Num.
drought could have been derived from the fact that Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal occurred “after many days . . . in the third year” of the drought (18:1).\textsuperscript{12} That the earth “bore fruit” could simply be inferred as a logical progression of the narrative. The lack of rain produced famine (1 Kgs 17:12; 18:2–6), and its return produced a harvest (Deut 11:13–17).\textsuperscript{13}

That James alludes to Elijah’s drought in the context of prayer, suffering, sickness and sin is wholly appropriate given the larger context of the Elijah cycle (1 Kgs 17–18). Elijah’s drought could symbolize the dry spiritual condition or physical weakness of the believers, while the arrival of the rain and the fructification of the land could serve as analogs to the believer who has been restored, healed and forgiven.\textsuperscript{14} The occasion for Elijah’s drought is also appropriate for James’ context. Elijah’s oath served as a tactical strike against the wicked regime of Ahab, his wife Jezebel, and their state-sponsored worship of Baal.\textsuperscript{15} Their infectious idolatry quickly spread throughout Israel, breeding a

\textsuperscript{12} The duration of “three and a half years,” while being justified by 1 Kgs 18:1, could still hold symbolic meaning in early Jewish contexts. See below.

\textsuperscript{13} Note also that Elisha is plowing his family fields when Elijah appoints him as his successor, indicating that the rain had brought with it renewed crops (1 Kgs 19:19–21).


syncretistic worship of $\text{YHWH}$ along with the gods of their pagan neighbors. This split loyalty spurred Elijah to accuse Israel of “limping with two different opinions” (18:21), a phrase similar in meaning to δίψυχος in James (1:8; 4:8). The withholding of the rains revealed Baal’s impotence, while the contest at Mt. Carmel revealed his non-existence. At the prayer of Elijah, lightning struck fire descended the people repented, and shortly thereafter the rains returned (Jas 5:18; 1 Kgs 18:20–45).

That Elijah and the prophets faced the persecution of the rich Omrides (1 Kgs 18:4, 13) provides a further parallel with James, given the letter’s negative portrayal of the rich and their exploitation of the poor (5:1–6). Ahab and his father Omri were known for their entrepreneurial spirit, and even Ahab’s marriage to the pagan priestess Jezebel was forged for the sake of a lucrative treaty with Tyre (1 Kgs 16:29–34). Elijah’s pronouncement of judgment and the subsequent drought not only proved $\text{YHWH}$’s supremacy over Baal, it also struck at the economic heart of the Omridic dynasty, causing even the king to search for water and feed for his livestock (1 Kgs 18:5). The author of 1 Kings makes it plain that

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16 In Tg. 1 Kgs. 18:21, Elijah asks Israel how long they will be “divided into two divisions” (מָלֵינוּ לְחָרֵתֵנוּ הָלָהְרִים) between Baal and $\text{YHWH}$. The Peshitta uses the cognates płγwν and płγyn. In v. 37 Elijah concludes his prayer for fire from heaven and rain, explaining that Israel “gave their divided heart” (אֲנִית יְבוּם יִבְכֵּי). The phrase, “their divided heart” (חֲלֵבֶן פָּלֵי) bears a striking resemblance with the Syriac translation of James’ double-minded man in 1:8 – (יν’ δπλγ βρν). The root “plier” is used for “divided” in both the Peshitta as the reflex of δίψυχος, and in the Targum to describe the “split” loyalties of Israel. While לb is not used for “heart” in the Peshitta, לb is rendered with רעה, a cognate of רע in Tg. Onq. Gen 6:6; Tg. Onq. Num 16:28 and 24:13 (2x). See pages 118–122 in Craig E. Morrison, “Handing on the Mantle: The Transmission of the Elijah Cycle in the Biblical Versions,” in Master of the Sacred Page (eds. Keith J. Egan, et al.; Washington, D.C.: Carmelite Institute, 1997), 109–129. Morrison recognizes the similarities between James’ concept of double-mindedness and the condition of Israel on Carmel (see page 119), but he does not explore its significance for Elijah’s drought in 5:17–18.

17 Martin Cohen paints the Omridic dynasty in a positive light, referring to Omri and Ahab as the David and Solomon of the Northern Kingdom (“In All Fairness to Ahab,” Eretz-Israel 12 [1975]: 87–94). C. F. Whitley states that the author of Kings has a theological agenda that intentionally overlooks the economic and political gains the Omrides made for the kingdom (“The Deuteronomist Presentation of the House of Omri” VT 2 [1952]: 137–152).

18 There is a tragic irony in this passage. Ahab is concerned that his horses and donkeys will not perish (נברח) in the drought (18:5), while Jezebel sees to it that the prophets of $\text{YHWH}$ will perish (נברח) in the drought (18:3).
exploitation was the strong suit of the Omrides—a theme developed further in the story of Naboth’s vineyard (ch. 21). As surely as YHWH heard the prayer of Elijah, “the ears of the Lord of hosts” will hear the cry of his people for justice (Jas 5:4).

In describing Elijah as “a human being like us” (ἀνθρωπὸς ἦν ὃμοιωθῆς ἡμῖν; 5:17), James points to the human nature of this biblical prophet. Earlier in his letter, James encouraged an audience experiencing suffering (κακοπάθεια; 5:10, 13), injustice (2:6; 5:4), and even death (5:6) by pointing them to the example of “suffering and patience” provided by “the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord” (5:10). Indeed, the prophet Elijah, who had pronounced drought, healed the widow’s son, and called fire down from heaven also experienced fear and frustration in the midst of Israel’s sin and Jezebel’s persecution. Thus Elijah provides an attainable example of righteous prayer. Contrary to Popkes and Dibelius, James shows evidence of a first-hand knowledge of the text, and he picks Elijah’s drought as an appropriate illustration of prayer in the midst of suffering.

The biblical story of Elijah ends neither with the prophet’s sojourn to Horeb (1 Kgs 19) nor his ascension (2 Kgs 2:1–12). Rather, the prophet’s renown took on eschatological significance. God promised through Malachi:

19 Jezebel sought to kill the prophets of YHWH (18:4, 13), and after the contest between YHWH and Baal on Mt. Carmel she had issued a death sentence specifically for Elijah (19:2). Elijah’s response to Jezebel’s threat is not certain. If the vocalization of נָרָן provided by the MT (ָנָרָן) from Model: ‘to see’) is correct, then Elijah simply “saw” Jezebel’s threat and fled. The versions (LXX: καὶ ἐφοβῆθη; Peshitta: wdhl; Vul.: timuit) support a different vocalization (נָרָן) from Model: ‘to be afraid’). Either way, Elijah’s later response was near suicidal (19:4), and he deemed his ministry a failure (19:10, 14).

20 In 2 Chronicles, Elijah sends a letter to Jehoram, king of Judah, prophesying doom on account of his idolatry (ch. 21). Seder Olam Rab. 17 places this account seven years after Elijah’s translation. This is understandable, given that the parallel account of Jehoram’s reign in 2 Kgs 8:16–24 is placed in the narrative after Elijah’s ascension. It should be noted, however, that Elijah did minister during the reign of Jehoram (2 Kgs 1:17), and that this episode could have been inserted by the Chronicler from a source other than 1 Kings (Brenda J. Shaver, “The Prophet Elijah in the Literature of the Second Temple Period: The Growth of a Tradition” [PhD diss. University of Chicago, 2001], 65–70).
Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse. (Mal 4:5–6 NRSV; MT 3:23–24; LXX 3:22–23)\(^{21}\)

This promise both echoed and clarified the LORD’s earlier promise in Malachi:

See! I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. (3:1–3 NRSV)

Elijah is sent before the day of the LORD to “turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents” lest Israel’s God “come and strike the land with a curse” (MT 3:23; ET 4:6).\(^{22}\) Elijah’s mission answers the question, “who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” (3:2). Only those generations that have been “reconciled through the agency of Elijah will be able to survive the terrible day of Yahweh.”\(^{23}\)

It is no accident that the ninth-century prophet was assigned this restorative task in Malachi’s prophecy. Because Elijah was spared death, he continued to live in God’s

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\(^{21}\) The LXX places v. 22 after 24. The Masorah notes that in lectionary readings v. 23 is repeated after v. 24. In both cases, the reader avoids finishing the passage with “curse” (כָּרָה) as the last word. Given this transposition of verses (among other things) many scholars assert that vv. 22–23 are an addendum to Malachi and perhaps the entire prophetic canon. See David George Clark, “Elijah as Eschatological High Priest: An Examination of the Elijah Tradition in Mal. 3.23–24” (PhD diss., Notre Dame, 1975), 41; David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 231. See also the well reasoned objections raised in Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* (SBLDS 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 243–270; and Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *vol. 3 of The Minor Prophets* (ed. Thomas E. McComiskey; vol. 3; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1391–1392.

\(^{22}\) The nature of Elijah’s mission to “turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents” reflects both intergenerational restoration as well as a return to the covenant faithfulness of Israel’s forefathers. According to the prophet, Israel should have honored God as a son honors his father (1:6). Instead she has profaned and forsaken the covenant of her fathers (2:10; 3:7). Still, God calls Israel, “Return to me, and I will return to you” (3:7). If Israel repents she will be spared by God, as a father spares his children (3:17; Pieter A. Verhoeef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 342–343).

\(^{23}\) Petersen, 231.
presence after his ascension and was available for the mission. In addition, the ministry of Elijah before his ascension bares a strong resemblance to the message of Malachi. Brevard Childs outlines these similarities quite convincingly:

Like Malachi, Elijah addressed ‘all Israel’ (1 Kings 18.20). The people of Israel were severely fragmented by indecision of faith (18.21). A curse had fallen on the land (18.1 // Mal. 3.24, ESV 4.6). Elijah challenged all Israel to respond to God by forcing a decision between the right and the wrong (// Mal. 3.18). He did it by means of the right offering (// Mal. 3.3) and a fire which fell from heaven (// Mal. 3.3, 19).  

Childs goes on to assert that the author intentionally associates the spiritual condition of his present and future readers with the corrupt spiritual condition of Israel in the time of Elijah by means of “typological analogy.” Thus, the ministry of the historical Elijah is closely linked with the mission of the eschatological Elijah.

As shown above, James quite appropriately chooses the historical Elijah as an example of righteous prayer, but given the close association between the ministry of Elijah in 1 Kings and the mission of Elijah assigned in Malachi, it would seem logical to explore the potential importance of the “eschatological Elijah” for James as well. At first glance this may seem to be a fool’s errand. After all, James does not directly quote or even allude to Malachi’s prophecy in 5:17–18. Elijah is a figure familiar to apocalyptic and eschatological expectations, but James seems to turn away from “apocalyptic speculations to focus upon a human quality that speaks more vividly to his readers.”  

It seems as if James downplays the eschatological Elijah, describing the prophet as “a human being like us” (ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπάθης ἡμῖν; 5:17).

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There are, however, a few factors that suggest benefit in examining both the historical background and the echoes of the eschatological Elijah in James. First it should be noted that while acknowledging James’ harmony with wisdom literature, scholars have also acknowledged the letter’s eschatological and prophetic tenor. In the study of early Jewish and Christian literature, the once sharply held distinctions between wisdom and apocalyptic literature have been challenged, as wisdom literature often appropriates apocalyptic motifs, while apocalyptic often appropriates wisdom. Todd C. Penner applies these findings in his monograph, *The Epistle of James and Eschatology*, and demonstrates that wisdom and apocalyptic eschatology are far from mutually exclusive in James.

Peter H. Davids is correct to note that “eschatology is not the burden of the book,” but it is “the context of the book.” James is certainly not an “apocalypse,” but its eschatological context is clear. Apocalypse as a literary genre has been defined as:

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29 Jackson-McCabe, “Twelve Tribes,” 508. The exact relationship of the terms “apocalypse,” “apocalypticism,” and “apocalyptic eschatology” has been subject to scrutiny in regard to the Epistle of James. In this thesis “apocalypse” will refer to the genre, “apocalypticism” to a historical movement. “Eschatology” will refer to “the larger end-time scheme attested in the New Testament and early Judaism.” Eschatology concerns “life as viewed under the shadow of a future, imminent divine judgment on the wicked and reward for the
revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.  

James is not set within a narrative framework, nor does it depict revelation via otherworldly beings. This should not, however, lead one to believe that apocalyptic eschatology is absent from James. The genre “apocalyptic” has been further defined as literature intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.

Given this expanded definition, James’ apocalyptic eschatology comes into focus. The author certainly interprets “present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future,” and his chief emphasis is on influencing the behavior of his audience.

The supernatural orientation of James’ letter is seen in his description of wisdom as either “from above” or “earthly, unspiritual, devilish” (3:14–17; cf. 2:19). The tongue is “set on fire by hell” (3:6), and whoever is a “friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (4:4). This warning against double-minded loyalty to God and to the world is captured in the imperative, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (4:7). The future orientation of his letter is also evident. Future judgment serves as righteous” (Penner, James and Eschatology, 111). See also Dale C. Allison, “Apocalyptic,” DJG 17–10. John J. Collins, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism (Early Jewish Apocalypticism),” ABD 1:282–283; Paul D. Hanson, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism (The Genre),” ABD 1:279–280.


motivation for correct behavior. Potential teachers are warned of “a greater judgment” (3:1). Slander and contention are subject to the imminent scrutiny of the judge who is “standing at the doors” (4:11; 5:9). Truthfulness of speech is demanded lest one “fall under condemnation” (5:12), and the oppressive rich face “the day of slaughter” (5:1–6). Future reward also serves as motivation. Those who endure temptation will receive “a crown of life” (1:12). The “implanted word” has the power to “save souls” (1:21), and those who hear and obey the law face future blessing (1:25). For James, “life in this world receives its significance from the eschatological future, but the eschatological future of those who hold Jesus’ faith is determined by their present behavior.”

James is not, however simply focused on future weal and woe. Rather, he views his readers as living in an age of eschatological fulfillment, evidencing an “inaugurated eschatology.” James writes to the reconstituted “twelve tribes” (1:1)—the “firstfruits of his creation,” born of the “word of truth” (1:18). Both the poor and rich are admonished to “boast” in eschatological reversal (1:9–11). The poor are declared “heirs of the kingdom” (κληρονόμοι τῆς βασιλείας; 2:5), and the community is subject to the “royal law” (νόμος βασιλικός; 2:8). Yet, while James’ community is the locus of “eschatological fulfillment,” it still faces a world hostile to God’s kingdom. The twelve tribes are still “dispersed” (1:1) and the plight of the widows and orphans is described as “tribulation” (θλίψις; 1:27).

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33 Mußner (209) cites the future verb ἔρχεται as evidence of future orientation in 1:25. He summarizes James’ eschatologically oriented ethic as an Interimsethik. “He tells them what they have to do ‘meanwhile,’ in these last days in order to be able to stand before God in judgment and to participate in his promise” (210). [Er sagt ihnen, was sie ‘einstweilen,’ in diesen letzten Tagen, noch zu tun haben, um vor Gottes nahem Gericht bestehen zu können und seiner Verheißungen teilhaft zu werden.]

34 Wachob, “Apocalyptic Intertexture,” 185.

35 The significance of the letter being written ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ will be explored below.

36 Moo (30) refers to James’ eschatology as reflecting eschatological “fulfillment without consummation.”

37 θλίψις can be viewed as a technical term for the trials and tribulations of the eschaton (Dan 12:1; Matt 24:9, 21, 24; Mark 13:19, 24; 2 Thess 1:4; Rev 1:9; 2:9, 10, 22; 7:14; cf. Herm. Vis. 2.2.7). Hartin applies this
community is dragged into courts (2:6) and exploited by the rich – even to the point of murder (5:1–6). Still, James points his readers to eschatological hope, encouraging the community to remain patient and to “strengthen their hearts,” for “the coming of the Lord is near” (παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἡγημόνευ, 5:7–8). While James is no apocalypse, it is correct to say that the letter is “governed from one end to the other by vivid expectation of the imminent return of Christ.” ⁴⁸ Given this broad eschatological setting, James’ use of Elijah as a paradigm for his community’s behavior could very well evoke the eschatological function of the prophet.

In addition to the overall tenor of the letter, the immediate context of Elijah’s drought in chapter 5 sounds an eschatological note as well. “The prayer of faith will save (σώσει) the sick, and the Lord will raise (ἐγερεί) them up” (v. 15). Robert W. Wall has suggested that James’ use of these “resurrection verbs,” σώζω and ἐγείρω, “underscores healing as an experience of God’s resurrection power, given now to the community in anticipation of the restoration of the entire created order at the Lord’s parousia.” ⁴⁹ The elders’ use of oil to anoint the sick provides another eschatological image. In the Apocalypse of Moses, the healing “oil of mercy” is to be reserved only for the “end of times” (ἔσχατος τῶν καιρῶν), when “all flesh from Adam up to that day shall be raised (ἀναστήσεται). . .” (13:2–3). ⁵⁰ James also explains, immediately following his mention of Elijah’s drought, that

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anyone who “brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death” (σώσει ψυχήν αὐτοῦ ἐκ θανάτου; 5:19–20), thus avoiding final judgment. Thus the immediate context of Elijah’s drought in James is one of eschatological healing and restoration.

That James chose Elijah’s prayer for drought and rain, and that the drought lasted “three years and six months” (ἐνιαυτοῦς τρεῖς καὶ μήνας ἐξ) is certainly similar to the context of judgment implied in Jesus’ sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:25–27) and the drought produced by the two witnesses in Revelation (11:3–13)—both of which last for three years and six months. While scholars are divided regarding the symbolic value of this time period in James, it is possible that it references the apocalyptic imagery of Daniel and Revelation.41

The greater context of James 5 amplifies the eschatological echoes heard in vv. 17–18. In a manner similar to the prophets, James calls the rich to sorrow over their ill-gotten gain (vv. 1–6).42 Though the rich had “laid up treasures for the last days” (v. 3), their treasures would only serve as evidence against them. The complaint of the exploited have “reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (v. 4; cf. Isa 5:7). Ultimately the luxuries and pleasures of the rich only served to “fatten [their] hearts in a day of slaughter” (cf. Jer 12:3; 13:8).

41 Besides the Lukan parallel, “three years and six months” (Luke 4:25), note the overtly apocalyptic half week (Dan 9:27); time, times, and half a time (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:14); 1,290 days (Rev 11:3), 1,290 days (Dan 12:11), 1,335 days (Dan 12:12), and 42 months (Rev 11:2; 13:5)—all of which are either equivalent or near equivalent durations of time. See also the “three and a half days” of Rev 11:9, 11. The symbolic value of this time period will be discussed below.

42 Hartin notes that Ἄγε νῦν in 4:13 and 5:1 introduces a prophetic woe oracles in the same way as οὐαὶ ("Who is wise?" 486)
Mark A. Seifrid observes that by citing Elijah as an example of prayer, “James may be quietly reminding his readers of the efficacy of their cries to ‘the Lord of hosts,’ who shall finally bring judgment upon those who oppress the poor (James 5:4–6)”\(^{44}\) Seifrid’s claim is further supported by the image of patient endurance in the midst of oppression that follows James’ woe to the rich:

> Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord (παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου). The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains (προίμων καὶ δφιμῶν). You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near (ι παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἣγγικεν). (5:7–8 NRSV)

As the farmer is to wait patiently for the sure coming of the rain, James’ audience is admonished to wait patiently for the sure coming of the Lord. This encouragement is followed immediately with the admonition:

> Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See the judge is standing at the doors (ό κριτής πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἐστηκεν). (5:9)

James calls the community to solidarity in light of the imminent coming of God as judge. James begins this eschatologically charged section likening the coming of the Lord to arrival of the early and late rains, and then cites Elijah’s prayer for drought and rain in the context of healing and restoration at the end of the chapter. This creates at the very least a thematic *inclusio* based on “rain” imagery. At the most it could point to an eschatological aspect of Elijah’s prayer.

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James uses the example Elijah in a letter saturated with eschatological expectation. It would behoove the interpreter to closely examine how the eschatological Elijah may fit into James. The epistle’s description of Elijah as “a human like us” ( ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθής ἡμῖν) does not negate the rich eschatological imagery that evolved around the prophet. It will be contended in this thesis that James is fully aware of the eschatological implications of using Elijah as an example of faithful, righteous prayer. In so doing we will show that Elijah’s prayer for drought and rain functions to give the community of faith a prophetic role similar to that of the eschatological Elijah. James’ community, as the restored twelve tribes of Israel, is called to endure in the midst of eschatological trials and to effect repentance before the arrival of the soon-coming King.

This thesis will begin with a review of modern explanations of the function of Elijah’s drought in James, showing that little attention has been paid to the eschatological Elijah as he relates to this passage. Next a review of Elijah’s drought in early Jewish literature will be conducted. Many of these texts blend both the eschatological and historical imagery associated with the paradigmatic prophet, and closely associate Elijah with Israel’s exile and restoration. After this survey, Elijah’s association with Israel’s exile and restoration will be explored as it applies to James. Next, Elijah’s drought, as mentioned in two New Testament contexts outside of James (Luke 4:14–30 and Rev 11:3–13) will be examined, showing that Elijah’s drought was closely associated with eschatological judgment for the sake of repentance and restoration. Finally, the images of drought and rain will be examined showing that their function as covenant curse and blessing developed into images of eschatological judgment and restoration consistent with James’ use of rain imagery. In light of these findings, it will be seen that James uses Elijah’s prayer
for drought and rain to illustrate the function of a prophetic community living in between
the drought of this world and the imminent reign of God.