

ESCHATOLOGICAL ELIJAH IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
A thesis proposal submitted by
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A. RATIONALE

From the Gospels to the Apocalypse the ministry of Elijah the Tishbite serves as a paradigm for prophetic ministry, and the Epistle of James is no exception. The example of Elijah is set at the end of the epistle. This last chapter begins with the condemnation of the rich and their exploitation of the righteous (5:1-7). Alongside this condemnation, James encourages the righteous to patiently endure their persecution, knowing that their vindication is near (vv 6-12). The imminent coming of the Lord is likened unto the fall and winter rains that will soon bring a harvest of fruit to the patient farmer (v 7). Since “the Judge” is said to be standing at the doors (v 9), James reminds his readers of the importance of proper speech, while waiting for their deliverance, lest they fall under condemnation (vv 9-12). Part of this proper speech includes prayer for healing (vv 13-16) and the restoration of the “wanderer” (vv 19-20). Here, James uses Elijah to illustrate effective prayer (vv 17-18). It is no surprise that James chooses Elijah as an example. The prophet righteously stood against the idolatrous wealth of Ahab and Jezebel, and his prayer restored the life of the widow’s son (1 Kgs 17:17-24). It is a surprise, however, that James does not mention this miracle of resurrection. He instead refers to the prayers of Elijah for both drought and rain. The peculiarity of James’ illustration is all the more striking, given that the Old Testament narrator makes no *explicit* mention of the prophet’s prayer for either drought or rain; nor does it mention the drought’s exact duration of three and a half years, as given by James (and Jesus in Luke 4:25). The purpose of this thesis is to situate Elijah’s prayer for drought and rain, as mentioned in James, within its Old Testament context and within the eschatological expectation of Elijah in the literature of Second Temple Judaism. Tentatively, the observation will be made that James’ teaching on prayer is best understood in the eschatological setting of chapter 5 and that he uses the example of Elijah to instruct his community to prayerfully endure eschatological trials, anticipating the return of Christ as Judge. This anticipation is characterized in part by the righteous prayers of the prophetic community.

B. PROVISIONAL OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. Review of Scholarship on James 5:17-18
3. Elijah’s Drought in 1 Kings 17-18
 - a. Context of 1 Kings
 - b. Drought and rain in other biblical texts
 - c. Drought and rain in Second Temple Jewish Literature
 - d. Drought and rain in Rabbinic Literature
 - e. Use of the narrative in the New Testament
 - f. Implications
4. Eschatological Expectation of Elijah
 - a. Malachi

- b. Second Temple Literature
- c. Rabbinic Literature
- d. New Testament
- e. Implications
- 5. Eschatological Expectation in James
 - a. Eschatological setting of the Epistle of James
 - i. Eschatological address 1:1
 - ii. Eschatological testing in ch. 1
 - b. Focus upon the eschatological setting of ch. 5
 - c. 5:17–18 in light of the above implications
- 6. Conclusion
 - a. Summary
 - b. Implications for the Church, focusing on the Pentecostal tradition

C. CHRONOLOGY FOR COMPLETION

The proposed thesis will be completed in two semesters during the 2005–2006 academic year. The bulk of research will be completed in the first semester, concentrating on the Elijah narratives of 1 Kgs 17–19, the eschatological expectation of the return of Elijah and a review of literature on James, especially 5:17–18. The second semester will concentrate on synthesizing the data, drawing conclusions and composing the thesis.

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