***INITIAL THOUGHTS ON JAMES' USE OF* Euxh*, JAMES 5:13-18***

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The letter of James (the author of which is here assumed to be the half brother of Jesus and a leader of the Jerusalem Church) contains important teaching on prayer (5:13-18). In this passage James uses three different Greek words dehsis (*deesis*, Strong’s 1162, pronounced *deh’-ay-sis*), euxh (*euche*, Strong’s 2171, pronounced *yoo-khay’* or *yoo-khee’*), and proseuxh (*proseuche*, Strong’s 4335, pronounced: *pros-yoo-khay’* or *pros-yoo-khee’*) to refer to the general concept of prayer, intercession, etc. Most English Bibles translate both euxh (*euche*) and proseuxh (*prosuche*) as "prayer" without distinguishing between them. Careful attention to the background of euxh (*euche*) and its relationship to the author suggests that it is not merely a synonym for proseuxh (*proseuche*), but that drawing on the fact that it can convey the idea of vow" as well as "prayer," James may well have chosen it as a way of emphasizing the forceful, consistent, nature of the kind of prayer he envisioned.

It is perhaps useful to note at this point that the conditions for which James is recommending prayer can include physical illness and need not be limited to the salvation of the lost or the sin of believers, etc. In summary, this is clear for the following reasons:

(1) James uses aliepsanies (*aleipsanies*, Strong’s 218, from aleifw, *aleiphoo*, the lexical verbal form, pronounced: *al-i’-fo*, meaning "daub" or "smear") not xriw (*chrioo*, Strong’s 5548, pronounced: *khree’-o*, which generally carries a more sacred meaning) for our word "anoint," thus emphasizing the medicinal and not the liturgical aspects.

(2) The Greek words for "sick," "heal," etc. are not inconsistent with physical illness.

(3) The third class condition, "If he sinned . . ." (v 15), requires that sin need not be present. Tasker takes firm exception to this, arguing "There is no suggestion in the conditional clause . . . that the man in question may not have sinned at all." Davids, and most others, are content to take the condition as stated. (For a less than convincing modern rethinking of the contrary opinion wherein the malady is not physical, but emotional distress and ongoing sin, see D. R. Hayden.)

**A PROVISIONAL REVISED TRANSLATION OF JAMES 5:13-18**

The following translation is based on the *New International Version* except where noted below. Special attention is paid to the James' use of the words that are usually translated "prayer:"

(13) Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

(14) Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

(15) And the vow-like prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

(16) Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray in a vow-like manner for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest petition of a righteous man is powerful, being made effective(through vow-like prayer).

(17) Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed in prayer that it would not rain on the land for three and a half years.

(18) Again he prayed and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Note the following points:

(1) All Changes from the *NIV* are emphasized.

(2) This translation rigorously translates certain Greek words: (a) Poseuxh (*Proseuche*) and proseuxomai (*proseuchomai*, Strong’s 4336, pronounced: *pros-yoo’-khom-ahee*, the verb form of the noun proseuche) are translated "prayer" and "pray." (This is the standard term for "prayer" in Greek.) (b) Euxh (*Euche*) and euxhomai (*euchomai*, pronounced: *yoo’-khom-ai*, the verb form of the noun *euchomai*) are translated as "prayer" and "pray" in conjunction with the modifying phrase "vow-like." (c) Dehsis (*Deesis*) is translated "earnest petition" (This is the standard term for "request," "earnest petition," etc. in Greek.)

(3) "Being made effective" is a possible translation of the Greek energimenh (*energoumene*) (see below).

(4) ("Through vow-like prayer) is not in the Greek, but is suggested by it (see below).

(5) "Prayed in prayer" is the literal translation of a Hebrew idiom that James translated into Greek. It often can mean to pray with great fervency. It uses the Greek terms proseuxomai (*proseuchomai*) / proseuxh (*proseuche*).

**A BRIEF REVIEW OF SEVERAL TRANSLATIONS**

Several English translations and versions were reviewed: Wyclif (1380), Tyndale (1534), Cranmer (1539), Geneva (1557), Rheims (1582), King James (1611), Darby (1890), Revised Standard (1952), Lamsa (1961), New American Standard (1963), New King James (1982), King James II (1983), and the New International (1983). All these use "prayer" and "pray" for euxh (*euche*) and euxomai (*euchomai*). The King James II alone renders the last phrase of v 16 along the lines of the provisional revised translation above: "The prayer of a righteous one is very powerful, having been made effective."

In addition, the Old Latin and the Vulgate, without exception in its manuscripts, uses *oratio* and *oro*, *orare* for euxh (*euche*) and euxomai (*euchomai*). (Special thanks to Randy Jenkins for his kind review of my conclusions in the Vulgate.) Luther (my edition, 1980) translates the key words of the "right strawy epistle" with *Gebet* and *beten*, typical German words for "prayer" and "pray." The French *Nouvelle Version Segond Revisee* (1980) also employs standard words for prayer (*prier* and *priere*) for euxh (*euche*) and euxomai (*euchomai*). The same is true of Russian, Ukraine, Czech, and Korean translations. In summary, none of the English and foreign language translations reviewed take particular note of euxh (*euche*).

**WHY TRANSLATE euxh / euxhomai AS VOW?**

The points of argument presented below tend to be cumulative in their effect and should be considered together.

(1) If James had simply meant prayer, he could have used other words, such as: proseuxh (*proseuche*) / proseuxomai (*proseuchomai*) and dehsis (*deesis*). That he chose to introduce euxh (*euche*) suggests he may have had something more specific in mind.

(2) Euxh (*Euche*), the noun form, can mean either prayer or vow in Greek texts outside the Bible.

(3) Euxomai (E*uchomai*), the verb form, can mean to pray, to desire, or to vow in extra-canonical literature.

(4) Either the "prayer/pray" or "vow/vow" meanings fit the passage in James 5.

(5) There are only two other occurrences of euxh (*euche*), the noun form, in the New Testament (Acts 18:18, Paul's "vow;" and Acts 21:23, the "vow" of the four Jerusalem Christians). In both of these cases euxh (*euche*) must carry the idea of vow.

(6) Euxh (*Euchomai*), the verb form, occurs only six other times in the New Testament, in every case it carries the force strong desire (Acts 26:29, Paul's desire for Agrippa's salvation; Acts 27:29, the sailor's desire for safety from the shipwreck; Rom. 9:3, Paul's desire to be accursed for his brethren's sake; 2 Cor. 13:7-19 [2 times], Paul's desire that the Corinthians should refrain from evil and be perfected; 3 John 2, John's desire that his readers do well).

(7) Since the idea of vow carries more of a force of activity than prayer, it fits better with James' general ideas of faith enlivened by deeds (2:14-26).

(8) An analysis of James' Old Testament quotations indicates that he used the well respected ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint (*LXX*) as opposed to the Masoretic text. (A conservative estimate indicates ten quotations or significant allusions from the Old Testament in James. In six of the passages there is no meaningful difference between the *LXX* and the MT: Jas. 2:8 = Lev. 19:18; Jas. 2:11 = Exod. 20:14, 13 [*cf*: Deut. 5:18,17]; Jas. 2:21 = Gen. 22:9; 2:23b // Isa. 41:8; Jas. 3:9; Gen. 1:26; 5:11; Ps. 103:8. In the four passages where the *LXX* and the MT do differ, James follows the *LXX*: Jas. 1:10-11 // Isa. 40:6-7; Jas. 2:23a // Gen. 15:6; Jas. 4:6 = Prov. 3:34; Jas. 5:4; Isa. 5:9.). In virtually all places where the Septuagint uses euxh (*euche*) (see Prov. 15:8,29 for two probable exceptions out of some 80 canonical occurrences), it must mean vow. This is especially true of the "Nazirite Vow chapter," Numbers 6. Hence, when James thought of the word euxh (*euche*), he thought of the idea of vow.

(9) The audience to whom the book of James was addressed was the Diaspora, the Jews that were scattered (dispersed) outside Palestine around the Mediterranean (Jas. 1:1). Almost all these Jews spoke Greek and used the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament as their Bible. Hence, when they read euxh (*euche*), they thought of the idea of vow. James probably would have considered this when he wrote to them.

(10) Scholars such as Ramsay and Metzger, observing that euxh (*euche*) was not much used by Christian writers for the idea prayer, believe that these writers did so in order to not confuse their readers who might think they meant vow instead of prayer. If this is so, it seems that James, who lived in Jerusalem and died before *AD* 62, may have been aware of this. Hence, he may well have used euxh (*euche*) knowingly.

(11) The idea of vow was current in James' culture: Acts 18:18; 21:23. See also 1 Maccabees 3:47-50; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 19.6.1; *Mishna*, *Nashim*, *Nazir*, as well as the considerable Talmudic material on the subject. Special note should be made to 1 Samuel 1 where Hanna "vowed a vow" to the Lord to end her infertility, particularly since she vows the child will be a Nazarite (in fact, if not in terminology). From the *LXX*:

And she *was* very much grieved in spirit, and prayed to the Lord, and wept abundantly. And she vowed a vow to the Lord saying, O Lord God of Sabaoth, if Thou wilt indeed look upon the humiliation of thine handmaid, and remember me, and give to thine handmaid a man-child, then will I indeed dedicate him to Thee till the day of his death; and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and no razor shall come upon his head.

(12) Of note here is the fact that infertility falls within the general category of medical conditions which James is, in part, addressing. A somewhat parallel story appears in *Talmud*, *Berakoth* 46a, which begins: "R. Zera once was ill. R. Abbahu went to visit him, and made a vow saying, If the little one with the scorched legs [a nickname for R. Zera] recovers, I will make a feast for the Rabbis. He did recover, and he made a feast for all the Rabbis." The passage goes on to describe the feast. Several things are significant about the passage: (a) Unfortunately, although the rendering in the authoritative Soncino translation (above) is "vow,"  (*neder*, Strong’s 05088, pronounced: *nay’-der*) is not used here the concept is as is attested in the authoritative Soncino translation. It may, however be added that: (b) R. Abbahu is an important rabbinical personage. (c) In a way very similar to the vow of Hanna, he commits himself to a God-pleasing action with respect to the hoped-for answer. (d) The story is presented in a very incidental manner, suggesting it may not be an unusual occurrence.

(13) Psalm 61:5 and 8 seem to connect the idea of David(s) vows with long life (61:6).

(14) James, as can be seen from his letter and other New Testament accounts of him, is very aware of and sensitive to Jewish custom (particularly Acts 15:1-21, the decree concerning rules for the Gentiles at the Jerusalem Council; Acts 21:17-26, the "vow" of the four Christians at Jerusalem; Gal. 1-2 [esp. v 11], the Judaisers). It would not be unreasonable for him to develop the idea of the Nazirite vow.

(15) James himself is the leader of the group that uses the word euxh (*euche*) in the sense of vow in Acts 21 (see v 18).

(16) Eusebius (263-339 AD), the "Father of Church History," clearly describes James as a Nazirite (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.23):

Hegesippius [a Christian commentator who lived between *AD* 100 and 200 and is here quoted by Eusebius] also, who flourished nearest the days of the apostles, in the fifth book of his commentaries gives the most accurate account of him [James], thus: . . . This Apostle was consecrated from his mother’s womb. He drank neither wine nor fermented liquors, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head, he never anointed with oil, and never used a bath.” [Note the parallels with Num. 6.]

While this passage is still a matter of scholarly debate its significance cannot be ignored.

(17) Origen, in his classic work, *On Prayer* (3), sees euxh (*euche*) as referring to "vow."

(18) The last phrase of James 5:16, with the enigmatic energoumenh (*energoumene*, Strong’s 1754, pronounced *en-erg-ou’-mene* or *en-erg-eh’-o* in the lexical form), can be translated in a number of ways: "The most obvious possibility" (Dibelius, although he in fact opts for energoumenh (*energoumene*) "almost as an adjective;" another option is understanding it as a middle," perhaps: "by means of the power within it") is as a passive: "is made effective." Such a translation, however, raises the question: By what is the prayer made effective? Some scholars suggest the Holy Spirit (Mayor); but, He is not mentioned in the passage. Most translations (the King James II is a notable exception here) simply render it "effective;" this makes better sense in the context, but it is somewhat less natural in the Greek. It seems possible that James' focus is on the human dimension prayer, and that the request dehsis (*deesis*) is made effective through the euxh (*euche*) of faith. (A considerable number of authors hold to the passive though not to the identification of the agency suggested: Clark, Davids, Mayor [a classic treatment of the subject], and Wilkinson.)

(19) The description of Elijah, "a man just like us," in verses 17 and 18; seems to be intended to bring out the point that even "regular" people praying intensively can have tremendous results. James may use the Hebraism "prayed a prayer" in verse 17 to emphasize this.

**JAMES 5:13-18, AND THE BELIEVER TODAY**

It is perhaps relevant to reconsider the foregoing with more of an eye toward praxis and pastoral concern. If James really is emphasizing fervent, committed prayer to the extent that he is calling to the mind of his hearers the idea of vow, how might one understand and the everyday aspects of a "vow-like prayer"?

1. We must look to the whole Bible, particularly the Old Testament, for our information. At the same time we must remember, that James did not use the term Nazirite, nor was he contrasting prayer with vow. We also must remember that a Nazirite-like vow was acceptable and current among New Testament Christians (Acts 18, Paul's vow; Acts 21, the four Jerusalem Christians).
2. We must be very clear, because of God's grace in the Gospel, that our idea of vow is not tainted by "dead works."
3. The vow-like prayer is not: (a) Something to be used in trade with God, (b) A form of penance for ourselves or for another, (c) Dead ritual, (d) Swearing an oath by something (Matt. 5:33-37; Jas. 5:12), (e) Relying on ourselves instead of God (consider Samson).
4. It is a setting apart of ourselves. The Nazirite vow is a vow of separation (Num. 6:1-2). Can we not commit ourselves to special prayer?
5. It is a setting apart unto the Lord (Num. 6:1-2). It involves the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives. Can we not move unusually close to the Lord at special times?
6. The Spirit initiates the vow (Amos 2:11 "I also raised up . . . . Nazirites from among your young men;" Luke 1:11-17, John the Baptist's call by God). Can we not be sensitive to God's call and seek Him and make ourselves available to Him when we see a need?
7. It is a public commitment (note the hair-cutting, etc. in Num. 6, etc.) Can we not share with the needy our desire to intercede and take the additional risk of doing so publicly (but unostentatiously)?
8. It is the setting apart of ourselves for a specific purpose that is not necessarily physical healing (Samson for the military salvation of Israel, John the Baptist for the proclamation of Jesus, Jas. 5:13-18 for healing).
9. Can we not focus for a specific time on a specific need?
10. It is a setting apart for a specific length of time (lifetime: Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist; shorter periods: Numb. 6; Paul in Acts 18; and the *Mishna*, *Nashim*, *Nazir* [Nazirite-vow], part 3 discusses a number of limited periods based primarily on units of 30 days.) Can we not set ourselves apart for a specific period of time?
11. It emphasizes the idea of ascetic denial (note the prohibitions in Num. 6, etc.) Can we not deny ourselves certain pleasures so we can have a clearer frame of mind and get closer to the Lord?
12. It emphasizes the idea of an exceptionally clean and pure life-style (note the prohibitions in Num. 6, especially in light of Ps. 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart;" etc.). Can we not be unusually rigorous for a set period of time?
13. James' emphasis on the prayer offered in faith reminds us of standing firm in prayer (5:15 *cf*. 1:2-8). Cannot even those of us who are weak in faith "hold out" for a specific period of time? Further, will not the action of changing our lifestyle and drawing closer to God encourage our faith?
14. The general concept is one of changing our life-style for a specific period of time so we can become ready and efficient instruments for God. (It is here that we get beyond the idea of mere verbal prayer.) Is this not an important aspect of what it means really to make us available to God?
15. The offerings that terminate the vow remind us to be expectant and to give God praise (Num. 6:13-21 *cf*. *Mishna*, *Nazir* 4-7). May not the vow-like prayer change the one prayer more than the situation?
16. Others may wish to assist the one vowing (Acts 21:23-24, Paul paying the temple offering for the four Jerusalem Christians; in Jewish tradition, paying the temple offering for another involved in the Nazirite vow was a great honor). (Extra-Biblical references of paying the vow for another are found in 1 Maccabees 3:47-50 and Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 19.6.1.) Could we not emotionally, domestically, and financially help others who have good reason to commit themselves for a season of intercessory prayer?
17. Some related references include: Matthew 15:21-28 = Mark 7:24-30, the Syrophonecian woman; Matthew 17:14-21 = Mark 9:14-29, the demoniac son ("Help my unbelief!" "By prayer and fasting."); Luke 18:1-8, the unjust judge; Acts 10:30-32, Cornelius' fasting and prayer; 1 Corinthians 7:5, abstaining from marital relations; 2 Corinthians 12:8, Paul's three requests for his “thorn in the flesh;” Ephesians 6:12-20, spiritual warfare; Hebrews 11:6, God rewards diligent seekers; James 4:8-10, humility; James 5:13-16, elder prayer, elder anointing (and here the idea is more of a pouring on than a symbolic dabbing), mutual believer's prayer, and mutual confession.

**CONCLUSION**

There seems to be considerable evidence suggesting that James employment of euxh (*euche*) and euxomai (*euchomai*) involved more than the simple selection for a synonym. Rather, the availability of other synonyms, the range of meaning in the euxomai (*euchomai*) word group, the compatibility with the context of euxh (*euche*) / euxomai (*euchomai*) as an intensifier for the concept of prayer, the necessity of translating the other NT occurrences of the noun as "vow," the emphatic nature of the other NT occurrences of the verb, the consistency of concept with James' emphasis on works, the meaning of euxh (*euche*) in the *LXX* and James' dependence on it, the dependence of James' audience on the *LXX*, the currency of the concept of vow in James' culture, James' sensitivity to Jewish custom in general, James' personal history as a Nazirite, and the possible rendering of verse 16, and the continuity with the Elijah story; all suggest that James' choice of euxh (*euche*) was not arbitrary. By examining some of the range of meanings associated with euxh (*euche*) in when it carries the force of "vow" some practical insights can be developed concerning prayer.

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(1) Bill’s notes from Qumran.

1. Similarities between the Shepherd of Hermes and James.
2. The controversy over the Hegesippius quotation.
3. 2Macc. 4:7-26 discusses Hellenization of the Jews.
4. Isa. 19:21 speaks of a Gentile vow in what may be an eschatological context.