

A New Reading of Anointing with Oil in James 5:14: Finding First-Century Common Ground in Moses' Glorious Face

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Abstract

The fact that James does not explain the meaning of anointing with oil (James 5:14) likely indicates that he presupposes that his first-century audience will rely upon shared knowledge. But what is this common ground? The logic of our answer rests on several interlocking propositions regarding James 5:14. First, we will demonstrate that James envisioned an anointing of the head or face. Second, we will demonstrate that an anointing of olive oil creates a shining face and that this was a recognized phenomenon. Third, a shiny face would have evoked images of Moses from scripture and history. By creating a physical echo of Moses on the face of the sick, James just might be encouraging the followers of Jesus to seek an intimate encounter with God through prayer that parallels Moses' encounter with Yahweh. In sum, we will argue the plausibility of the thesis that oil was used to anoint the face so that it physically shined and symbolically represented an encounter with God.

Keywords

anointing, oil, Moses, sick, prayer, face, healing

I. Introduction

The reference to anointing the sick with oil in Jam 5:14 presents two challenges for today's interpreters. First, the text of James' epistle does not lend itself to providing much co-textual detail. James (or Jacob) does not elaborate on his instructions and likely understands his text to be easily understood in the context in which he lived.¹ Second, the anointing of the sick with oil has only a few parallels in the entire corpus of the New Testament

¹ For a discussion of the name Jacob (Ἰακώβος and Ἰακώβ) in the first century see John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2004), 270–272. For the sake of the readers I retain the use of the common English name "James."

(e.g. Mk 6:13). In sum, there is little context or co-text in James' epistle to help determine how the "anointing of oil in the name of the Lord" was to be understood in the first-century Greek-speaking Jewish Diaspora.² C. John Collins explains the situation thus: "We notice first that James does not specify the meaning of the anointing with oil, and this likely indicates that it was common ground between author and audience. This then will be a shared referent whose nature we can only infer."³ In this study I want to suggest that the common ground that James presupposes is Moses.

While acknowledging that anointing is subordinate to the concern for prayer, it is nevertheless important to pursue a deeper understanding of the whole. This leaves two other avenues for developing understanding: (1) wider historical clues and (2) intertextual relationships. For the sake of space, we will dismiss at the outset the arguments that the oil is sacramental, cosmetic, or for medicinal purposes.⁴ Following Douglas Moo (and others), we agree that the anointing with oil "refers to a physical action with symbolic significance."⁵ Other commentators state that this oil in James is the "oil of gladness," but this does not appear to solve any historical or interpretive problems without significant exegetical explanation.⁶

Here we are seeking a thicker and more rigorous explanation of this physical action with symbolic significance. When Peter Leithart suggests that "texts are cinematic" he explains that "Entire scenes and story lines can be evoked by an object or two, by a gesture, or a single line stroke."⁷ James' letter, short as it may be, clearly evokes and directly appeals to the wider

² For a helpful discussion on the "Twelve Tribes of Israel" mentioned in Jam 1:1 and the problems with viewing this metaphorically see Darian Lockwood, *Purity and Worldview in the Epistle of James* (LNTS 366; NY/London: T&T Clark, 2008), 69-73. A more precise location than the Greek-speaking Diaspora is not discernible according to David H. Edgar, *Has God Not Chosen the Poor? The Social Setting of the Epistle of James* (JSNTSup 206; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 12.

³ C. John Collins, "James 5:14-16a: What is the Anointing For?" *Presbyterion* 23:2 (1997), 88.

⁴ Also dismissive of medicinal use are: Dan G. McCartney, *James* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 300; R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 256; Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 193. Simply because James does not refer to medicine and physicians does not mean he is "anti-physician" as Robert J. Karris suggests in "Some New Angles on James 5:13-20," *RevExp* 97 (2000), 215.

⁵ Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Leicester: Apollos, 2000), 242.

⁶ Dan G. McCartney, *James* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 300.

⁷ Peter Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 137.

narratives of Jewish scriptures.⁸ By seeking to understand what images that James wants to evoke we may be able put the piece in the place that completes the puzzle. We will aim to do this by exploring sociological and inter-textual relationships. *Specifically, we will argue the plausibility of the thesis that oil was used to anoint the face so that it physically shined and symbolically represented Moses' encounter with God.*

II. The Anointing of the Face

The first minor proposition that I wish to claim is that the anointing that James refers to is primarily applied to the face. James does not indicate what part of the body the elders of the church should anoint with oil. However, there are good reasons to believe that the most plausible scenario is that of anointing the face or head.

From a sociological and cultural perspective, it is highly unlikely that James envisions the elders of the church potentially rubbing oil anywhere on the body of a woman besides the face. Even this touching of the face is not insignificant in light of the fact that James stresses that *anyone* (τις ἐν ὑμῖν) who is sick in the community and calls for the elders should receive this anointing (Jam 5:14). The NET, NASB, and ESV all retain a pattern of pronouns that may imply that James is exclusively referring to those males who are sick. However, the 2011 TNIV accurately captures James' inclusive sense by using the awkward but gender-neutral English construction for the third-person singular: "let *them* call the elders of the church" (Jam 5:14).

With respect to this inclusiveness, Luke Timothy Johnson notes that James' admonition crosses the sociological boundaries between the sick and the healthy: "Sickness then creates the opportunity for social alienation."⁹ Indeed, Johnson is correct to view the use of the *ekklēsia* as a community that welcomes the outsider and the unclean.¹⁰ Yet this must be expanded to include women and men as worthy of receiving the physical touch of anointing in spite of their sickness. This anointing also crosses

⁸ For one comparison (the literature is enormous) of Paul and James' use of Abraham's narrative in Genesis 15 see Steven Moyise, *Evoking Scripture: Seeing the Old Testament in the New* (NY/London: T&T Clark, 2008), 136.

⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (AB; NY: Doubleday, 1995), 343.

¹⁰ For a similar view see Richard Bauckham, *James* (New Testament Readings; NY/Oxford: Routledge, 1999), 99.

gender boundaries as well as Torah-based boundaries for the clean and unclean.

On the one hand, it is likely that New Testament scholars have underestimated James' radical departure from strict regulations that physically separated men and women in first century Judaism.¹¹ On the other hand, it is highly unlikely that James' progressive view of physical touch for the sake of anointing extended beyond that of the face or head because of continual concerns for sexual purity, modesty, and decency in the community of Jewish Diaspora disciples.¹²

Even if the oil was applied to the head, it should be noted that the oil would have eventually run down over the face. For example, Psalm 133 refers to the sacred anointing oil as being placed on the head so that it runs "down over the beard" as it comes off the face. There may have been varying amounts of oil as well as various focal points, but there is good reason to believe that the face was a part of first-century anointing practices. For example, Matt 6:17 refers to the application (ἀλείφω) of oil to the head in conjunction with washing the face for the purpose of every-day grooming.¹³

Johnson notes that the oil is likely the common olive oil which was used by itself or part of sacred mixture.¹⁴ What is significant about the role of olive oil for James' readers is that it was simultaneously common and sacred. Olive oil was used and consumed in a wide variety of ways in the Greco-Roman economy. From a broad perspective, Robert B. Hitchner notes that olive oil in the ancient Roman economy was likely consumed at a rate of 20-25 liters per capita and may have provided up to one-third of an individual's caloric needs.¹⁵ Jodi Magness cites the Book of Susanna, Ruth,

¹¹ Deborah F. Sawyer, *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries* (NY/London: Routledge, 1996) 37; also 40.

¹² William Loader provides a helpful discussion of the idiom (ἅπτεσθαι γυναικός) "to touch a woman" and its strong identification with sexual intercourse in *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 149. Jesus' subversive message and overturning of social boundaries regarding touching unclean women is apparent in healing stories such as the woman who hemorrhaged blood in Mark 5:24-34. See Stephen Barton, *Life Together: Family, Sexuality, and Community in the New Testament and Today* (NY/Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 149. For a survey of the prominent theme of purity in James see Alicia J. Batten, *What Are They Saying about the Letter of James?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 61-62.

¹³ Daniel R. Hayden, "Calling the Elders to Pray," *BibSac* 138 (1981), 265.

¹⁴ Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 343. Gerhard Maier also concludes that this is olive oil in *Der Brief des Jakobus* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus; Giessen: Brunnen, 2004), 229.

¹⁵ Robert B. Hitchner, "Olive Oil Production and the Roman Economy: The Case for Intensive Growth in the Roman Empire" in *The Ancient Economy* (eds. Walter Scheidel, Sitta von

the Babylonian Talmud, and Oxyrhynchus papyrus 840 as all referring to the use of oil for washing and bathing.¹⁶ Sources such as the Book of Judith refer to oil being used for cosmetic and perfume purposes.¹⁷ This is likely why perfume based on the holy anointing oil was forbidden in Exod 30:32-33.¹⁸ Olive oil was simply as common as bread and butter is today. However, if olive oil was mixed and set aside (sanctified) for holy purposes, it became anything but common.

Lockwood takes up and develops Scot McKnight's thesis that "the anointing with oil is a form of purification in which the twelve apostles [and elders] function in a priestly manner."¹⁹ Previously we noted that the anointing oil was capable of being both common (secular) and special (sacred). McKnight's thesis is arguably too close to the pole of the sacred. If James intended the anointing of oil to be priestly, then why does he give so little attention to its application? The notion of priestly application of oil would have been attended by a stricter set of guidelines to maintain the sanctity of the ordinance.

In sum, the anointing of the sick by the elders was radically inclusive and reflected the boundary-breaking model established by Jesus and his disciples. Whereas the anointing oil prescribed to Moses was only for "insiders" (Exod 30:33), James envisions all those who were formally unclean (by gender, race, or sickness) to be worthy of anointing oil.²⁰ However, there is no indication that other boundaries around physical touch and modesty were broken.

Reden; NY: Routledge, 2002), 72.

¹⁶ Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), 122.

¹⁷ Judith 16:8 "For she put off the apparel of her widowhood, For the exaltation of those that were distressed in Israel, She anointed her face with ointment, And bound her hair in a tire." *Apocrypha of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1 (ed. Robert H. Charles; electronic version; Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2004), 266.

¹⁸ Exodus 30:32-33 "It shall not be poured on the body of an ordinary person, and you shall make no other like it in composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. ³³ Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people."

¹⁹ Lockwood, *Purity and Worldview in the Epistle of James*, 19.

²⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson explains that although sin and sickness do not have a causal relationship, "sin and sickness are analogous in their social effects" as both threaten the "stability of any community" and require restoration in *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: 2004), 257.

III. Creating a Physically Shining Face

The second minor proposition that this study seeks to establish is that the application of anointing oil upon the face would have resulted in a physically shiny (gleaming or glowing) face. If the sick person received oil upon the face or even the forehead, the result of a typical olive oil would be a shiny face.

One of the most overlooked parallel passages for Jam 5:14 is the brief but clear description of oil upon the face in Ps 104:15.²¹ The MT Ps 104:15 reads: *לְהַצְחִיל פָּנִים מִשְׁמֶן*. The use of *mem* prefixed to the *shemen* (oil) is generally understood as causative. The oil makes the face shine. However, Robert Alter suggests that the *mem* could be understood as a comparative: “the faces shine brighter than olive oil seen in the sunlight.”²²

The LXX Ps 103:15, with which James’ audience would have been familiar, reads: *καὶ οἶνος εὐφραίνει καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ ἱλαρῦναι πρόσωπον ἐν ἐλαίῳ*. Here, the parallelism between the wine and the oil is based on a causative relationship. The oil causes the face to shine even as wine causes the heart to be glad. If the LXX is causative and the MT is comparative, it does not change the conclusion that oil was applied to the face and that the result was a shining face.

The poetic parallelism in Ps 104:15 (LXX Ps 103:15) creates a relationship between the wine that gladdens the heart and bread to give strength. The oil creates a shining face that expresses the inner state of the person. It may also reflect the dialectical relationship between looking happy and feeling happy. The oil applied to the face makes one look happy which in turn makes them feel better. Thus, luminosity is associated with perfection and righteousness but also with expressing the emotion of happiness.²³ For James, the potential for oil to express and create the emotion of joy is all the more important for those who are sick and likely discouraged or fearful.

Unfortunately, this reference to oil (*ἐλαίον*) from Psalm 104 (LXX Psalm 103) is equally as obscure as James’ reference and many commentators often pass by the opportunity to discuss it. What is clear enough and what

²¹ Unfortunately, there is no entry for James 5:14 in D. A. Carson, “James,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old* (eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids/Nottingham: Baker/Apollos, 2007), 997-1013.

²² Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 365.

²³ Lynn A. Holden, *Forms of Deformity* (LHB/OTS; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 17; Carla Sulzbach, “When Going on a Heavenly Journey, Travel Light and Dress Appropriately,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 19:3 (2010): 179 n40.

is significant for our study; is that the oil applied to the face intentionally or unintentionally caused the face to shine. Furthermore, Psalm 104 (LXX Psalm 103) played a noteworthy role in the Hellenistic Jewish understanding of Jesus the Messiah as is evident in the citations of it in the Letter to the Hebrews (e.g. Heb 1:7 // Ps 104:4). This simply increases the likelihood that Hellenistic Jewish believers in Jerusalem that were associated with James would have made some connection between anointing with oil and a shiny face.

If we are correct about the thesis that anointing oil produces a shiny face, then it has implications for interpreting the difficult reference to the "oil of gladness" that appears twice in the OT (Ps 45:7 [44:8 LXX] and Isa 61:3) and once in the NT (ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιάσεως Heb 1:9). As noted in the introduction, it is not possible to make a strong association between James' reference to oil and the "oil of gladness" without substantial exegetical work. We do not have room to attempt any expansive research on the "oil of gladness" except to point out how the application of our thesis about the reference in James 5:14 would correlate with these references. Despite the voluminous references to the "oil of gladness" few actually take up the question of how this oil is related to the emotion of joy or gladness. Some suggest that this nomenclature reflects the *occasion* in which it is used.²⁴ It may also function as *metonymy* for great joy in a poetic context, but this also does not have great explanatory power for how this came to be.²⁵ What seems to have gone unnoticed is that the oil of gladness likely gave the person who was anointed a glowing or bright face that was associated with joy. For example, the oil of gladness in Isa 61:3 is contrasted with mourning (a sorrowful action that involved the countenance). Simply stated, the thesis that provides the greatest explanatory power is that oil makes the face shiny in order to accent a countenance of radiating joy.

The short proposition in this section is critical to the overall reading of James' anointing presented here. If the oil does not create a shiny face, little of the following argument will stand. However, we have presented strong evidence along two key points. First, the oil James refers to was likely applied to the face or head. The oil of anointing would have changed or

²⁴ "Oil" in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (eds. Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, et al.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 604; similarly H. Schleir, "ἐλαϊον [olive oil]," *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged* (eds. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromily; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 221.

²⁵ Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Psalm 45:6-7 and its Christological Contributions to Hebrews," *Trinity Journal* 22NS (2001), 16.

covered the countenance of one who was physically sick. Second, there is literary evidence that points to knowledge that the oil would have created a shiny face. The fact that this phenomenon is referenced in Jewish scriptures strengthens this scenario considerably.

IV. A Face Like Moses

A sheen upon the face would have evoked one undisputable figure in first century Judaism and early Christianity: Moses. The figure of Moses was ubiquitous in the world of James and his first-century readers. To be more specific: *Moses was interpreted as having a face that radiated the light and glory of Yahweh*. The narrative tradition of Moses' face can be seen in roughly three spheres. The first sphere is the Old Testament scriptures (the Hebrew bible and Septuagint). The second sphere is the early Christian literature and tradition. The third sphere of data comes from extra-biblical literature and tradition.

Hebrew Bible and Septuagint

Our reading of Jam 5:14 requires that we understand the first-century reading of the Hebrew bible and Septuagint account of Moses' face.²⁶ Moses has personally encountered the divine and he has become transformed. Moses' shining face has also been likened to a microcosm of Israel's own identity as a light to the nations.²⁷ Even as Moses' face radiated the glory of God, the nation of Israel was chosen to spread the glory of Yahweh as a kingdom of priests. According to the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint, Moses had a special relationship with Yahweh because he was able to approach and speak directly with him (Exod 33:18-23; 34:5-8; Num 12:6-8; Deut 34:10).²⁸ In support of this reading, the Septuagint translation of Exod 34:29 uses the vocabulary of glory (δοξάζω) for the verb *qaran* (קָרַן).

There is substantial debate about the nature of the change that occurred on Moses' face. Some have argued that Moses actually grew horns. Some argue that Moses acquired some light or heat burn that resembled horns,

²⁶ For a historical-critical analysis of Exod 24:29-35 see Julian Morgenstern, "Moses with the Shining Face," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 11 (1925): 1-27.

²⁷ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 72.

²⁸ William H. Propp, "The Skin of Moses' Face: Transfigured or Disfigured?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987), 384.

bumps, blisters, or an abnormal skin condition.²⁹ What makes this unlikely is that Moses did not know this change occurred (Exod 34:29). It is unlikely that Moses was burned or did not feel physical bumps protruding from his face or forehead. Horns and light are not mutually exclusive as they could have been horns of light.³⁰ By supposing that James and his contemporaries understood Moses' face to have been shining we find our reading of Jam 5:14 reinforced.

Viewing the shining face of the sick in light of Moses' shining face would reflect the paradigm wherein the readers are encouraged to view themselves as similar to heroes or exemplars of Israel such as Elijah. James' reference to anointing follows a reference to the heroes Abraham who believed God (Jam 2:23) and Rahab who acted in faith (Jam 2:25). And the reference to anointing occurs immediately before the reference to the hero Elijah. With respect to Elijah, the reader is enjoined to view themselves as "just like" the hero.³¹ The whole basis for referencing Abraham, Rahab, and Elijah rests upon this relationship. If James intends for the reader to envision the pattern of the hero Moses in the shining face of the sick person, it would fall in line with the pattern that comes before and after. The sick person has a nature just like Moses did. The sick person has encountered the Lord (κύριος) through the prayer of the elders who anointed him or her.³² The oil symbolizes this reality with a glowing face.

A further argument could be marshaled in favor of understanding the face as the primary place of anointing. If we assume our conclusion, that the oily and shiny face evokes the trajectory that began with Moses' shiny face, we may introduce Jesus' own transfiguration. What is significant about Luke's eyewitness testimony regarding Jesus' transfiguration is that he first

²⁹ The literature on the Hebrew verb *qaran* קָרַן (cf. Hab 3:4) as well as the nature and history of Moses' so-called horns is substantial. For a recent treatment of the subject in art history see Stephen Bertman, "The Anti-Semitic Origin of Michelangelo's Horned Moses," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 27:4 (2009): 95-106.

³⁰ Seth L. Sanders finds that there is evidence that ancient Near Eastern speakers may have understood the language in Exodus to parallel the rays or horns of the sun's radiance in "Old Light on Moses' Shining Face," *Vetus Testamentum* 52:3 (2002), 403.

³¹ Keith Warrington, "The Significance of Elijah in James 5:13-18," *Evangelical Quarterly* 66:3 (1994): 217-227; esp. 223.

³² Gerhard Maier argues that the identity of the Lord (κύριος) is Jesus in parallel with 1 Cor 1:2 in *Der Brief des Jakobus*, 229. Further research might inquire into James' use of intentional double referents to Jesus and Yahweh when he uses the "name of the Lord" (κύριος) in Jam 5:14. For research on this matter in Luke see C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 134-136.

points to the appearance of the face changing in Lk 9:29 (τὸ εἶδος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἔτερον). Either the face changed first or Luke takes care to mention the face so that Jesus is understood to be the New Moses who meets with God in a greater way than Moses' own face-to-face meeting.³³

Early Christian Literature and Tradition

What about Jesus' shining face from the Transfiguration literature and tradition? This small question stands to be a possible fly in the ointment in our thesis that the literature and tradition of Moses' shining face provides the missing key to James' use of anointing oil on the sick. There are several three key sources that are important for the intersection of anointing with oil and Moses' face: (1) Paul's interpretation of Moses' face, (2) the Mount of Transfiguration, and (3) Mark's reference to oil.³⁴

First, we are only seeking to establish a very modest sub-thesis: that Moses' shining face was of importance and influence in Paul's thought. Again, we are seeking to establish some historical evidence that helps us understand how an anointed face would have been understood by the first-century readers of James' epistle. To establish the importance of Moses' shining face we need only look at references to it in 1 Cor 13:12 and 2 Cor 3:7-18. The reference in 1 Corinthians 13 likely creates a conflated intertextual relationship to Moses' direct encounter with Yahweh in Num 12:8 and Jacob's "face to face" encounter with Yahweh in Deut 34:12.³⁵ The second reference to Moses' face in 2 Corinthians is legendary for the exegetical difficulties that surround it.³⁶ However, it is clear that Paul is relying upon Moses' encounter in Exodus 32-34.³⁷ For our purposes we

³³ For a detailed study of Moses' face-to-face meeting with Yahweh, see Mark D. Wessner, "Toward a Literary Understanding of Moses and the Lord 'Face to Face' in Exodus 33:7-11," *Restoration Quarterly* 44:2 (2002): 109-116 and Ian Douglas Wilson, "'Face to Face' with God: Another Look," *Restoration Quarterly* 51:2 (2009): 107-114.

³⁴ There is also an important reference to the Mount of Transfiguration in 2 Pet 1:13-18 that emphasizes the "eyewitness" (v.16) account of the majesty and glory of Jesus. In my estimation, this is a significant but secondary piece of evidence for the importance of the shining-face-like-Moses tradition.

³⁵ Harm W. Hollander, "Seeing God 'in a riddle' or 'face to face': An Analysis of 1 Corinthians 13:12," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32:4 (2010), 400.

³⁶ For a detailed monograph on this text see Scott Hafemann, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (WUNT 11/81; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), *passim*.

³⁷ William R. Baker states "no one disputes that Paul's use of καταργέω comments on what happened to Moses when he came down the mountain the second time with the Ten

only need to point to the clear reference and centrality of Moses' face (τὸ πρόσωπον Μωϋσέως) in 2 Cor 3:7. This is critical to Paul's desire to portray the contemporary ministry of the Spirit as having more glory than Moses. Paul's argument develops a rabbinic pattern of arguing from the lesser to the greater (*qal wahomer*). In this case the lesser glory is Moses' face and the greater glory is the ministry of the Spirit and righteousness. In sum, the result of Yahweh's presence manifest itself on Moses' face, is understood by Paul as "glory" in 2 Cor 3:7-18. Perhaps even more significant is Paul's conclusion in 2 Cor 3:18 that the present transforming work of the "Spirit of the Lord" begins on the face (πρόσωπον).

The second most important source for our thesis regarding Jam 5:14 is the Mount of Transfiguration tradition in the early Christian community. The eyewitness accounts of Peter, James (of Zebedee), and John in the Synoptic Gospels reflects the freshness and prominence of this appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus. Even if James was not familiar with this early Christian *literature*, it is highly implausible that he would have been ignorant of the oral tradition and testimony. The appearance of these two patriarchs would have invigorated the entire community of Jesus' disciples and the importance of the pattern that began with Moses. The glorified state of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration would have only reinforced the existing scriptural tradition that encountering Yahweh resulted in a glowing face.

At the time of the writing of James' letter in the first-century, it is also likely that secondary accounts would have been provided to the community of disciples so that historical tradition intermingled with literary accounts. Given these caveats, the enduring tradition about Moses (and his own presence on the Mount of Transfiguration) may have even evoked Moses *before* Jesus in the minds of James' readers. In other words, having a shiny face was more strongly associated with Moses than Jesus. But even when Moses was evoked in the community of disciples who were familiar with the Transfiguration, this event makes him inseparable from the New Moses—Jesus.³⁸

Commandments" in "Did the Glory of Moses' Face Fade? A Reexamination of καταργέω in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10.1 (2000): 5.

³⁸ David P. Moessner, "Luke 9:1-50: Luke's Preview of the Journey of the Prophet Like Moses of Deuteronomy" *JBL* 102:4 (1983): 575-605; David P. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative*, 2nd ed. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.

By suggesting that Moses is the basis for the pattern of the glowing face, we are only suggesting that Moses is the key to the shadow which finds its full reality in Jesus. We do not want to suppose that James intended to minimize Jesus for the sake of Moses. Indeed, it appears that the relationship of Moses and Jesus was as contested as the role of boundary markers (or works of the Law) such as circumcision or food laws. However, texts such as the Letter to the Hebrews clearly resolve this so as to subordinate Moses to Jesus (e.g. Heb 3:1-6).

The Synoptics all reference the Transfiguration of Jesus where his face or body shined: Matthew (17:1-13), Mark (9:2-9), and Luke (9:28-36). But only Matthew and Luke refer to Jesus' face changing (Matt 17: 2 and Lk 9:29). What is significant about Matthew's account is that Jesus' face: "shone like the sun" (καὶ ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος). If Matthew understands Jesus to be the New Moses whose face is changed like Moses, then language about the "sun" may account for the light of glory that shone on Moses' face like horns or rays of sunlight. Furthermore, the book of Revelation portrays Jesus as having a shining face (ὄψις) like the sun in full strength (Rev 1:16): καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

The allusive relationship between the Transfiguration and Moses' own encounter with Yahweh is so strong that Moses becomes transformed into the New Moses.³⁹ The contemporaries of James, such as the writer Luke, find that shining glory on Jesus' face paralleled and developed the tradition of Moses. If the sick receive oil upon the face so that they shined, it is hard to imagine that they did not envision some aspect of the literature or history about Moses or Jesus. Yahweh has broken into the silence and disruption of Israel's exile/diaspora in Jesus.

The third and last important source for our thesis that sees an intersection between anointing oil and Moses' face is the reference to oil in Mk 6:13. Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that the "most impressive parallel to James" is found in Mk 6:13.⁴⁰ However, Douglas Moo plainly states, "Unfortunately, Mark gives no more of an explanation for the anointing than does James."⁴¹ All we can say is that anointing with oil occurs in Mk 6:13 but it is not clear

³⁹) Craig A. Evans, "The Old Testament in the New," in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Current Research* (eds. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 137.

⁴⁰) Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 331. Likewise, Gerhard Maier states, "Dagegen besteht ein enger Zusammenhang mit Mk 6:13, wie alle Exegeten erkennen" [However, there is a close relationship with Mark 6:13, as all exegetes recognize] in *Der Brief des Jakobus*, 229, also 230.

⁴¹) Moo, *The Letter of James*, 238.

if this anointing was for medicinal purposes. Christoph Burchard goes even further in seeing a discontinuity between Mk 6:13 and Jam 5:14 because the latter refers to anointing done by the request of the sick.⁴² However, this ignores the continuity between the references to the sick in both texts. Moreover, Burchard cautions against seeing parallels between Jesus' actions and inner-church ritual. Again, this is a matter of continuity and discontinuity that is not easily solved without evidence, of which we have little. As impressive as this parallel in Mk 6:13 is, it does not help us understand the physical action with symbolic significance in Jam 5:14. The only thing that Mk 6:13 does is demonstrate the pervasive use and consumption of olive oil for a wide range of secular and sacred tasks.

Ancient Literature and Tradition

The third sphere to account for is that of extra-biblical literature. Again, the central thesis this study seeks to advance is that Jam 5:14 refers to *oil that was used to anoint the face so that it physically shined and symbolically represented the pattern of Moses' encounter with God*. So any literature that refers to olive oil being used to anoint the face for the purpose of changing the countenance would be significant. However, outside of the Psalm 104, there are few parallel passages. To be clear, there are indeed many references to anointing and to olive oil, but little that this author could find that explicitly connects olive oil and a shiny face. So we must acknowledge that extra-biblical evidence for this angle of our thesis is scarce. Before summarizing, there are a few points to highlight from Josephus and Philo.

Josephus has many references to oil, some of which provide significant insight into the variety of first-century Jewish perceptions. For example, Jodi Magness points to Josephus' account of how oil can transmit impurity (esp. *War* 2.123 *Whitson's translation*).⁴³ Again, this highlights how radically different James' account of anointing may have been received by those who had concerns about physically touching the sick. This is particularly important because Eusebius of Caesarea's (c. 263-339 C.E.) *Ecclesiastical History* states that James the Just refused to bathe with oil (*Hist. eccl.* 2:23).⁴⁴ In light of our study, we may be able to reconcile this with the various sacred and secular uses of oil.

⁴² Christoph Burchard, *Der Jakobusbrief* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 15:1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 210.

⁴³ Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit*, 121.

⁴⁴ Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit*, 121.

Philo of Alexandria provides some insight into the significance of the countenance or the face. In the sub-section "Concerning the Soul or Life of Man" Philo explains the creation narratives in Genesis in this way (*The Special Laws* IV, 123):

For the essence of the soul of man is the breath of God, especially if we follow the account of Moses, who, in his history of the creation of the world, says that God breathed into the first man, the founder of our race, the breath of life; breathing it into the principal part of his body, namely the *face*, where the outward senses are established, the body-guards of the mind, as if it were the great king. And that which was thus breathed into his *face* was manifestly the breath of the air, or whatever else there may be which is even more excellent than the breath of the air, as being a ray emitted from the blessed and thrice-happy nature of God.⁴⁵

Here, the face is the "principal part" of the body. The face is where the "great king" of senses guard the body. Such a perspective on the face highlights the importance of changing the appearance of sick or ill.

Summary

In sum, we must highlight the fact that James does not explicitly refer to Moses anywhere in his epistle. But what is clear is that the texts and traditions of James' audience would have been familiar with the idea that *Moses was interpreted as having a face that radiated the light and glory of Yahweh*. Those who come into the presence of the Lord are changed even as Jesus the New Moses was changed on the Mount. Those who seek to pattern themselves after the heroes or exemplars of the faith may have sought to change their physical appearance after this tradition with an anointing of olive oil.

V. Conclusion

The logic of our argument rests on several interlocking propositions regarding James 5:14. First, we demonstrated that James envisioned an anointing of the head or face. Second, we demonstrated that such an anointing creates a shining face and that this was a recognized phenomenon. Third, a

⁴⁵ Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 628. Yonge's title for this section is: "A Treatise on Those Special Laws Which Are Contained Under and Have Reference to the Eighth and Ninth, and Tenth Commandments."

shiny face would have evoked images of Moses from scripture and history. Even if a shiny face was not the result of James' anointing, the figure of Moses and his reception of the divine recipe for anointing oil and incense (Exod 30:22-38) stands provides common ground for James' audience. By encountering the κύριος (Jam 5:14) through prayer and anointing with oil, even those who look sickly can reflect the emotion of joy and the righteousness that comes by faith. Further research might inquire into the aromas or smells associated with anointing.⁴⁶

⁴⁶) For a cursory investigation of aromas and anointing oils see, C. Houtman, "On the Function of the Holy Incense (Exodus 30:34-8) and the Sacred Anointing Oil (Exodus 30:22-33)," *Vetus Testamentum* 30:4 (1992): 464-465; Menahem Haran, "The Uses of Incense in the Ancient Israelite Ritual," *Vetus Testamentum* 10:2 (1960): 113-129.