

# INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER FROM JAMES

At first glance, this Letter seems to be a series of disconnected maxims (pithy sayings), dealing with "Everyday Christian life." But as we look deeper into the reasons behind its writing, we learn to appreciate the way it is *put together*.

Beza thought this Letter was written specifically to the Jewish Christians scattered all over the world. Lardner thought it was written to all Jews, whether Christian or not. But certainly it is of value to every believer in Christ.

Many of the Jewish Christians had been Pharisees. They still held to the teachings which said, that: (1) "What is to be will be." Man is a helpless tool of *fate*. (2) "The Decrees of God." That is, *absolute predestination*. In the *idiom* of the Hebrew language, God is said to do what He permits to be done. But refusing to understand this, they distorted some things which Paul said (2 *Pet.* 3:15-16) on the basis of the two things mentioned above. Paul said that God has given the Gentiles over to corrupted minds (*Rom.* 1:28); that "So I am not really the one who does this thing; rather it is the sin that lives in me" (*Rom.* 7:17); "And he makes stubborn whom he wishes" (*Rom.* 9:18); "God made them dull of heart and mind" (*Rom.* 11:8). These false teachers then said: "The sinful actions of men are decreed by God, and no one can resist His will." "Since it is God who tempts men to sin, He is actually the source of men's sins." "Since Paul says faith saves, separate and apart from Law, merely believing in Christ will save a man." "Actions don't count! You can get drunk and murder somebody, die in the condition, and still go straight to heaven!"

It was necessary, then, that the "apostles of circumcision" who were still living, should use their authority to oppose these false ideas. The Letters from James through Jude deal with these matters. But James makes the strongest statement of all!

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James, the brother of John, could not have written this Letter, since he was dead (*Acts 12:2*), killed by Herod. James the son of Alphaeus could have been the author, but from the earliest times, James the Lord's brother is the one accepted as the writer. Although not originally a believer (*John 7:5*), he is called *an apostle* (*Gal. 1:19*), although he was not one of the Twelve. He became a leader in the Jerusalem church (*Acts 15:13*), and may have been the leader of the *circumcision party*, although he certainly showed he was on the Lord's side at the Jerusalem Meeting in *Acts 15*. See also *Acts 21:18*; *Gal. 2:9*. Josephus tells us that Ananias, the high priest, convened the Sanhedrin and had this James stoned to death, around 63 A.D.

The Letter was probably written at Jerusalem, about 60 A.D.

# THE LETTER FROM JAMES

**1** From James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Greetings to all God's people, scattered over the whole world.

## Faith and Wisdom

<sup>2</sup>My brothers! Consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way, <sup>3</sup>because you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure. <sup>4</sup>Be sure that your endurance carries you all the way, without failing, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. <sup>5</sup>But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should pray to God, who will give it to him; because God gives generously and

**1** James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:  
Greetings.

## Trial and Temptations

Consider it pure joy, my **2**  
brothers, whenever you face  
trials of many kinds, be- **3**  
cause you know that the test-  
ing of your faith develops  
perseverance. Perseverance **4**  
must finish its work so that  
you may be mature and com-  
plete, not lacking anything. **5**  
If any of you lacks wisdom,  
he should ask God, who gives  
generously to all without  
finding fault, and it will be

1. **From James.** Both Paul (*Gal. 1:19*), and Josephus, the Jewish Historian, call this James *the Lord's brother*. See the introduction to this Letter. A **servant**. He was not an apostle in the same sense as were the Twelve and Paul [On the meaning of *apostle*, see note on *Heb. 3:1*] **To all God's people.** Twelve Tribes = Jewish Nation/Race = God's People. **Scattered.** If we apply this *literally*, it would mean the Greek-speaking Jews (see note on *Acts 6:1*). It is probably better to follow *Lardner* and apply it to all Christians, Jew and Gentile.

2. **My brothers!** This phrase appears again and again, to emphasize the ONE faith and life which Christians share in Christ, both Jew and Gentile. **Consider yourself fortunate.** *Trials* do not make you glad when you are suffering through them, but the *results* ought to make you *joyful!* Compare *Heb. 12:5-13* and notes. Many were becoming *restive* because they were suffering because of Christ; and their unbelieving countrymen were saying that the suffering proved God was angry with them because they had accepted Christ. Compare *1 Thess. 2:13-16*.

3. **Because.** God's purpose in this is to train you to endure!

4. **Be sure.** Don't be a *fatalist*, who thinks he is a passive plaything of *fate*, but accept these things as the discipline of a loving Father. **Perfect and complete.** "*For endurance is a strong power, and patience produces many good things.*"

5. **Lacks wisdom.** This verse begins a new thought. *Wisdom* is the cluster of good qualities which form true religion. Jewish thought placed a lot of emphasis on the ethical side of religion. Compare *James 3:17*; *Prov. 8:22-31*. **Pray to God.** "*It is the Lord who gives wisdom. Knowledge and understanding come from him*" (*Prov. 2:6*). **Who will give it.** Being put right with God through Christ, the Christian looks to God as *Father!* This brings man up closer to God's level. God is available to all who are *his children* in Christ! God will give wisdom generously to all his people who ask him for it! **Graciously.** "He will not be angry with you because you did not already have wisdom!"

graciously to all. <sup>6</sup>But you must believe when you pray, and not doubt at all. Whoever doubts is like a wave in the sea that is driven and blown about by the wind. <sup>7-8</sup>Such a person is a hypocrite, undecided in all he does, and he must not think that he will receive anything from the Lord.

### Poverty and Riches

<sup>9</sup>The poor brother must be glad when God lifts him up, <sup>10</sup>and the rich brother when God brings him down. For the rich will pass away like the bloom of a wild plant. <sup>11</sup>The sun rises with its blazing heat and burns the plant; its bloom falls off, and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way the rich man will be destroyed while busy conducting his affairs.

### Testing and Tempting

<sup>12</sup>Happy is the man who remains faithful under trials, because when he succeeds in passing the test he will receive as his reward the life which

given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the victor's crown, the life God has promised to those who love him.

6. **But you must believe.** This is absolutely necessary to SINCERE prayer. Compare what Jesus said in *Mark 11:23-24*, and notes. **Whoever doubts.** *Aphraates* quotes the following as something which Jesus said: "Do not doubt, so that you will not sink into the world, as Simon (Peter), when he doubted, began to sink into the lake." As a wave in the sea is driven first one way and then the other, so one who sinks in indecision never really comes to trust God.

7-8. **Such a person is a hypocrite.** He is unreliable, and has no *standard plan* of conduct or goal. Because he doesn't really know what he wants, he can never get anything! **That he will receive anything.** *MacKnight* says: "Now, let not that man think, that, by the mere uttering of words not accompanied with sincere desires and actions, he shall receive any spiritual blessings from the Lord."

9. **The poor brother.** This verse begins a new thought. Since James is usually *plain-spoken* in what he says, we may take this statement at *face value*. If the poor brother is blessed by God and becomes wealthy, he should not be ashamed of this. There is no *virtue* in being poor.

10. **And the rich brother.** If persecution takes away the rich man's wealth, he must be glad. After all, he is escaping the temptations and dangers that come to the rich. In any case, wealth is not a permanent thing!

11. **In the same way.** The unbelieving Jews believed wealth was proof of God's blessing. James shows how temporary it really is! As a rich man is conducting his affairs, a robber, or inflation, or some other such thing can make him penniless in a flash! [*Johnson* views these three verses as saying the same thing as *1 Cor. 7:17-24*.]

12. **Happy is the man.** Jubilant!!! This verse begins a new thought. The *key* to this section of six verses is: "God tempts no one to do evil." **Who remains faithful.** Since life is like the puff of smoke that vanishes, it is the one (whether rich or poor) who remains faithful under trials, who will receive the *life* which God has promised to those who love him.

God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup>If a man is tempted by such testing, he must not say, "This temptation comes from God." For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup>But a person is tempted when he is drawn away and trapped by his own evil desire. <sup>15</sup>Then his evil desire conceives and gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

<sup>16</sup>Do not be deceived, my dear brothers! <sup>17</sup>Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven; it comes down from God, the Creator of the heavenly lights. He himself does not change or cause darkness by turning. <sup>18</sup>By his own will he brought us into being through the word of truth, so that we should have first place among all his creatures.

When tempted, no one <sup>13</sup> should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one <sup>14</sup> is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, <sup>15</sup> after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Don't be deceived, my <sup>16</sup> dear brothers. Every good <sup>17</sup> and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose <sup>18</sup> to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

13. **If a man is tempted.** "If trials and suffering cause a man to fall into sin, he must not say, 'This temptation comes from God,' as the false teachers are saying." **For God.** "God cannot be seduced by evil, nor does He himself use evil things to seduce anyone!" God does permit temptation to come to us, and in this sense He is *said* to tempt people, but He who is INFINITELY HOLY cannot himself be the source of temptation!!! *Verse 14* explains.

14. **By his own evil desire.** This is really what Paul was saying in *Rom. 7:14-25*. Any temptation depends upon our own response. This is why Jesus could be tempted without sinning (*Heb. 2:18; 4:15*). God limits the amount of temptation which comes to us (*1 Cor. 10:13*). But our own evil desire draws us away and traps us *when we permit it to do so!!!*

15. **Then his evil desire.** The false teachers passionately loved adultery, so James uses the symbolism of a birth. Evil desire conceives, grows, and gives birth to sin. See *2 Pet. 2:14*. **When it is full-grown.** When sin comes to maturity, it gives birth to death (*eternal death*).

16. **Do not be deceived!** "Do not let the false teachers fool you into believing that God himself is the source of sin, and will not punish it!"

17. **Every good gift.** "To demonstrate that God cannot seduce people with sin and evil, I tell you that God himself is the source of every *good gift* that blesses us (such as a sound mind, health, good fortune, etc.), and every *perfect present* (such as the forgiveness of sin, God's grace, eternal life) comes down out of heaven from God!!!!" **Of the heavenly lights.** To the Jewish mind, God's creation of light is a demonstration of His goodness! Compare *1 John 1:5*. **He himself.** "He does not rise and set like the sun and the moon! Will He give us holy desires one time, and then seduce us to do evil??? NO! He is always the source of GOOD, and nothing but good!!! It is blasphemy, then, to say that God seduces men to sin so He will have an excuse to bring misery on them."

18. **By his own will.** "The spiritual birth made possible by God's act in Christ was not something God was forced to do. He did this by his own free will, because He loves us." **He brought us into being.** "We are spiritually brought into being by the word of truth, and born of water and the Spirit (*John 3:5*)." **First place.** The symbolism would be familiar to the Jew. Just as the first fruits herald the new season, so those who are brought into being by the word of truth declare a new order of things in the spiritual world. God is *calling* a spiritual harvest out of the world and into Eternity!!! See *Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:20*.

## Hearing and Doing

<sup>19</sup>Remember this, my dear brothers! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak, and slow to become angry. <sup>20</sup>Man's anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose. <sup>21</sup>Rid yourselves, then, of every filthy habit and all wicked conduct. Submit to God and accept the word that he plants in your hearts, which is able to save you.

<sup>22</sup>Do not fool yourselves by just listening to his word. Instead, put it into practice. <sup>23</sup>Whoever listens to the word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks in a mirror and sees himself as he is. <sup>24</sup>He takes a good look at himself and then goes away, and at once forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup>But whoever looks closely into the perfect law that sets men free, who keeps on paying attention to it, and does not simply listen and then forget it, but puts it into practice

## Listening and Doing

My dear brothers, take 19 note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man's anger does 20 not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all 21 moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the 22 word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Any- 23 one who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after 24 looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the 25 man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he

19. **Remember this.** This verse begins a new thought. Compare *Rom. 12:1*. **Everyone must be.** "Be quick to hear the Good News of God's act in Christ; but be slow to speak about it until you understand it; and be slow to become angry in religious matters. Incomplete knowledge is dangerous in the hands of one who does not know what he is doing!"

20. **Man's anger.** "Anger is a normal human response, and some use anger and persecution to try to bring others to their beliefs. But this cannot bring the faith which pleases God. It can only make men hypocrites by forcing them to profess what they really do not believe. A blind, furious zeal in religious matters is a *subversive evil*, which will destroy the one who uses it."

21. **Rid yourselves.** "Get rid of those things which will destroy you!" **Every filthy habit.** Evil desires, greed, drunkenness, immorality, etc. The false teachers were *addicted* to these things. **All wicked conduct.** This is the deep hostility which leads people to do as much meanness and evil to each other as they can. **Submit to God.** The word which God plants in your heart is the Good News (compare *John 6:45*). But it has value **ONLY** as you submit to God! Jesus explained this by the parable of the Sower (*Matt. 13:1-23*).

22. **Do not fool yourself.** "You do not *practice what you preach* because you think the Scriptures are a *good-luck charm*, and that if you listen to them being read, you will have life. But you are only fooling yourself, because you must put it into practice! (*Matt. 7:24-27*.)"

23-24. **Is like a man.** "A man looks into a mirror and a few minutes later has forgotten what he looked like."

25. **The perfect law that sets men free.** The Good News is the *perfect law that sets men free*, because: (1) It frees men and women from the slavery of their *human nature* and gives them back *free will*; (2) It freed the Jews from the Law of Moses, which was a curse; (3) It sets believers free from the guilt of sin and from the punishment to come; (4) It shows us that everyone is entitled to receive and obey the Good

—that person will be blessed by God in what he does.

<sup>26</sup>Does anyone think he is a religious man? If he does not control his tongue his religion is worthless and he deceives himself. <sup>27</sup>What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering, and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world.

### Warning against Prejudice

**2** My brothers! As believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, you must never treat people in different ways, according to their outward appearance. <sup>3</sup>Suppose a rich man wearing a gold ring and fine clothes comes to your meeting, and a poor man in ragged clothes also

has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father <sup>27</sup> accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

### Favoritism Forbidden

**2** My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man <sup>2</sup> comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.

News; (5) Because it forbids prejudice. In what he does. In the things he does in response to the Lord's commands, as he sees them in the perfect law that sets men free. Faith cannot be divorced from action, as James 2:22 shows. See also Matt. 7:21-23.

**26. If he does not.** "If you think of yourself as religious, but rant and rave against those who differ with you in religious opinion (and think of this ranting and raving as a mark of devotion to God), your religion is worthless!" You can see this in certain types of people, such as in Acts 17:5. "If you do not have enough faith to control your tongue, you do not have enough to be saved!"

**27. What God the Father.** "Hypocrites think religion is doing religious things, but here is what God the Father says is religious." Note: the word translated religion means worship through external things. Christians are to think of good works as being worship to God! But, only those things which God has commanded. Pure and genuine religion is this: Faith is made perfect through actions. MacKnight says: "According to the apostle, religion does not consist so much in the warmth of affection with which we worship God, as in good works." Even driving out demons and performing miracles cannot substitute for doing what the Father wants you to do! See what Jesus said in Matt. 7:21-23. "Value this as the best sacrifice and the greatest worship, to offer yourself as good and as just as possible!" Compare Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:28; Matt. 25:31-46.

**1. My brothers!** See note on James 1:2. As believers. "You are new in your union to Christ (2 Cor. 5:17)." You must never. "You must never be guilty of prejudice and discrimination in your dealings with people!" Christian love is acting toward others as God has acted toward you in Christ. Since God treats all men on the same basis (Acts 10:34), the believer in Christ must act the same way in his dealings with others. The Law also banned discrimination (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 16:19).

**2. Suppose.** "This is an example to show you that you have been doing wrong by discriminating against people." There was a much wider gap between rich and poor in New Testament times, and the middle-class probably did not exist as it does in our society.

comes. <sup>3</sup>If you show more respect to the well-dressed man and say to him, "Have this best seat here," but say to the poor man, "Stand, or sit down here on the floor by my feet," then you are guilty of creating distinctions among yourselves and making judgments based on evil motives.

<sup>5</sup>Listen, my dear brothers! God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the Kingdom which he promised to those who love him. <sup>6</sup>But you dishonor the poor! Who are the ones who oppress you and drag you before the judges? The rich! <sup>7</sup>They are the ones who speak evil of that good name which has been given to you.

<sup>8</sup>You will be doing the right thing if you obey the law of the Kingdom, which is found in the scripture, "Love your fellow-man as yourself." <sup>9</sup>But if you treat people according to their outward appearance, you are guilty of sin, and the

If you show special attention <sup>3</sup>  
to the man wearing fine  
clothes and say, "Here's a  
good seat for you," but say  
to the poor man, "You stand  
there," or "Sit on the floor  
by my feet," have you not <sup>4</sup>  
discriminated among your-  
selves and become judges  
with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers: <sup>5</sup>  
Has not God chosen those  
who are poor in the eyes of  
the world to be rich in faith  
and to inherit the kingdom  
he promised those who love  
him? But you have insulted <sup>6</sup>  
the poor. Is it not the rich  
who are exploiting you? Are  
they not the ones who are  
dragging you into court? Are <sup>7</sup>  
they not the ones who are  
slandering the noble name of  
him to whom you belong?

If you really keep <sup>8</sup>  
the royal law found in Scripture,  
"Love your neighbor as your-  
self," you are doing right.  
But if you show favoritism, <sup>9</sup>  
you sin and are convicted by

3. **If you show more respect.** The point is: clothes, not character, is the basis used to decide the value of each person. God does not allow this!!!

4. **Then you are guilty.** (1) Of creating distinctions where God has made none; (2) Of allowing evil motives to influence you. These things destroy the unity of the worshipers, and create the same kind of problems that were in the church at Corinth (*1 Cor. 1:10-13*).

5. **Listen, my dear brothers!** "To show it is wrong to respect the rich more than the poor, I ask you to hear this." **God chose the poor.** See *1 Cor. 1:26-27*. Remember the Jews felt the rich had been more blessed by God, and were therefore closer to Him. But James shows that God himself chose the poor and they have the right to come to Him. **And to possess the Kingdom.** Compare *Matt. 5:3* and note.

6. **But you dishonor the poor!** "Contrary to the example set for you by God himself, you create distinctions and allow evil motives to influence you." **Who are the ones?** The Bible usually speaks of the rich in a bad sense, because it is looking at those who make their wealth by oppressing the poor. Such men as Abraham and the Patriarchs, Job, Joseph of Arimathea, etc., were rich through honest means and were not condemned for it. But James is thinking of those who *oppress* the poor!

7. **They are the ones.** It was the *rich Jewish leaders* as a class that blasphemed the name of Jesus and said he was a phony (fraud) who deserved the death he died. Yet some in the church were showing more respect to these, than to the poor brothers!!! [The *synagogue* was the center of Jewish life, and would be used for both Jewish and Christian worship at this time. Compare *Acts 2:46; 21:20.*]

8. **The right thing.** This has always been God's law, both through Moses and through Christ. The quotation is from *Lev. 19:18; also Rom 13:9; and see Gal. 4:14.*

9. **But.** James makes this as strong as he can! It is a deliberate, conscious act of sin if they make distinctions on the basis of outward appearance (social rank, wealth, clothes, etc.) **The Law** condemns you as a lawbreaker, because it forbids such discrimination, and requires you to love your fellow-man as yourself.



Law condemns you as a lawbreaker. <sup>10</sup>Whoever breaks one command of the Law is guilty of breaking them all. <sup>11</sup>For the same one who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Even if you do not commit adultery, you have become a lawbreaker if you murder. <sup>12</sup>Speak and act as people who will be judged by the law that sets men free. <sup>13</sup>For God will not show mercy when he judges the man who has not been merciful; but mercy triumphs over judgment.

### Faith and Actions

<sup>14</sup>My brothers! What good is it for someone to say, "I have faith," if his actions do not prove it? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup>Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't

the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles at just one point, is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, <sup>11</sup>"Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Speak and act as those <sup>12</sup>who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment <sup>13</sup>without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

### Faith and Deeds

What good is it, my <sup>14</sup>brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is <sup>15</sup>without clothes and daily

10. **Whoever.** The Jews taught that if you kept *one* commandment, you would be given credit for all the rest, even though you did not keep them. James shows that if you break one, you have broken them all!! It is not possible then, to make up for (expiate) a sin by a *good work*. James explains this in the next verse.

11. **For the same one.** The same God gave each command, and in breaking any command, you sin against the same Lawgiver. **Even if you do not,** "The fact that you did not commit adultery would not make up for the sin of murder. In the same way, if you create distinctions on the basis of outward appearance, the fact that you do other things the way God commands cannot make up for it and take away your guilt."

12. **Speak and act.** "Since you know you will be judged by the *law that sets men free* (see note on *James 1:25*), be sure you speak and act so that the Good News will not condemn you!!!" The law of Christ (the Good News) is a *new attitude and spirit*. See *Rom. 8:2, 15* and notes. Compare *Matt. 5:22, 28* and notes.

13. **For God.** The way we treat others will be the way God treats us!! Jesus taught this in many ways. See *Matt. 7:1-5; 18:21-35; 25:31-46*. **Mercy triumphs over judgment.** *MacKnight* says: "But at that day mercy will triumph over judgment to him who showed mercy." See *Psalms 18:25-27*.

14. **My brothers.** See note on *James 1:2*. James begins a study of *faith and actions*. Because some have misunderstood the nature of faith, they have said: (1) James deliberately contradicts and corrects the teaching of Paul. (2) James did not even know what Paul taught, and so writes without any reference to Paul's understanding of faith and actions. Neither of these can be right!! *2 Pet. 3:16* shows us that some things which Paul said were being misunderstood, *perhaps deliberately*. See Introduction to James. Therefore, James writes: (3) To correct those who misunderstood what Paul said about faith and actions. **If his actions do not prove it?** Actions prove faith, and are evidence of spiritual life. **Can that faith?** See *verse 19*.

15. **Suppose.** "To show you the foolishness of claiming to have faith without the proof of actions, think about this example."

have enough to eat. <sup>16</sup>What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!"—if you don't give them the necessities of life? <sup>17</sup>So it is with faith: if it is alone and has no actions with it, then it is dead.

<sup>18</sup>But someone will say, "One person has faith, another has actions." My answer is, "Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions." <sup>19</sup>Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe—and tremble with fear. <sup>20</sup>You fool! Do you want to be shown that faith

food. If one of you says to <sup>16</sup> him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by <sup>17</sup> itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, <sup>18</sup> "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without <sup>19</sup> deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and <sup>20</sup> shudder.

You foolish man, do you <sup>20</sup> want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

16. **What good?** "If you ask God's blessing on them and pray that *somebody else* will take care of them, but do not yourself give them the necessities of life, what help have you been to them??? Will such speeches feed and clothe the poor???"

17. **So it is with faith.** "Faith which does not prove itself by actions is as worthless as good wishes to the poor without food and clothing."

18. **But someone will say.** Jewish teaching said good works placed an obligation on God, and all who had more good works than bad works to their credit, would be saved. The Good News placed salvation entirely on *Christ-on-the-cross*, that is, on the *merit* of his sacrifice. Therefore some Jewish Christians went to the opposite extreme and said it made no difference at all what you did or didn't do. **My answer is.** "Show me, if you can, how anyone can have faith without doing good. Faith can only be identified by the good actions which it produces. I can easily show you my faith by the actions it has produced in my life." See *verse 24*.

19. **Do you believe?** The basic belief of the Jew was stated in the *Shema* "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (*Deut. 6:4-6*). This is the *profession of faith* which every Jew makes on his death-bed. This *Shema* was thought of in superstitious terms, as a *good luck charm* which would keep away evil spirits, etc. **The demons also believe.** "Belief in the One True God is good! But, if you merely accept the fact of God, and this belief does not translate itself into action in your life, you are really no different from the demons. As the faith they have will not save them, neither will your faith save you, even though it is both real and true as it looks to God." A. C. wrote: "To believe in Christ, is to receive him in all the glory of his character, both personal and official; to trust in him, in all the relationships which he has to us, as our Prophet, our Priest, and our King; to see in him our only hope and refuge; and renouncing ourselves, our confidence in ourself, our righteousness, and our own merit, to seize him as our only Rock-foundation, and to look to *him only* as the "Lord our righteousness," as our salvation and as our life." Faith is the link between man and God! FAITH = LOVE = ACTION. Compare *Heb. 11:1* and note.

20. **You fool!** [This is not the same word translated *worthless fool* in *Matt. 5:22*. *KENOS* = empty, to no purpose, foolish, senseless.] "Faith without actions cannot put anyone right with God!" We *reach out through faith* to seize the sacrifice of Christ and make ourselves part of it.

without actions is useless? <sup>21</sup>How was our ancestor Abraham put right with God? It was through his actions, when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. <sup>22</sup>Can't you see? His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions. <sup>23</sup>And the scripture came true that said, "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous." And so Abraham was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup>You see, then, that a man is put right with God by what he does, and not because of his faith alone.

<sup>25</sup>It was the same with prostitute Rahab. She was put right with God through her actions, by welcoming the Jewish messengers and helping them escape by a different road.

<sup>26</sup>So then, as the body without the spirit is dead, also faith without actions is dead.

Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

21. **How?** "Our ancestor Abraham is an example of what I am talking about. **It was through his actions.**" The whole life of Abraham was living proof that he believed God! I especially point you to the incident with Isaac. He did not question God's command to him, but went up on the mountain to sacrifice his son." Compare *Heb. 11:17-19* and notes. See also *1 John 4:18*.

22. **Can't you see?** This is emphatic! **Worked together.** *Lightfoot* says that these words "bridge over the gulf which seems to separate the language of St. Paul and St. James. Both assert a principle of practical energy, as opposed to a barren, inactive theory." The doctrine of "faith only" actually takes the merit away from Christ and puts it in *faith* itself.

23. **And the scripture.** Note the climax which James uses!!! Abraham's faith being made perfect through his actions made this come true!!! The quotation is from *Gen. 15:6* Septuagint. God accepted Abraham as righteous (imputed righteousness to him) because he believed Him! **God's friend.** *Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7*. Compare this with *2 Cor. 5:18-19*.

24. **You see, then.** "The example of Abraham proves that the faith that puts people right with God is a faith that becomes perfect through actions!" *MacKnight* says "Wherefore, from Moses ascribing (crediting) the justification of Abraham to the work of offering up Isaac, ye see that by works proceeding from faith a man is justified, and not by faith without works."

25. **The prostitute Rahab.** This verse is proof that God's acceptance of a person does not depend upon their past. She was well known to the Jews, because she was the great-great-grandmother of David the king. Because she believed God, she acted on the basis of her faith. In doing this, she showed the same kind of faith that Abraham had. See *Joshua 2:3-11; Heb. 11:31; Matt. 1:3-5*.

26. **So then.** *MacKnight* says: "In no way but by faith accompanied with works can any one be justified." The body without the spirit has no real life or existence. In the same way, faith that does not reach out through actions to seize the sacrifice of Christ and continue to hold firmly to it, has no real life or existence and cannot put a man right with God. [This does not contradict any of Paul's teaching about faith, as *verse 22* shows. Salvation is not achieved, but seized! Even though *Jesus paid it all!* - human response to God's act in Christ is still necessary. If this is not true, then the preaching

## The Tongue

**3** My brothers! Not many of you should become teachers, because you know that we teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others. <sup>2</sup>All of us often make mistakes. The person who never makes a mistake in what he says is perfect, able also to control his whole being. <sup>3</sup>We put a bit into the mouth of a horse to make it obey us, and we are able to make it go where we want. <sup>4</sup>Or think of a ship: big as it is, and driven by such strong winds, it can be steered by a very small rudder, and goes wherever the pilot wants it to go. <sup>5</sup>So it is with the tongue: small as it is, it can boast about great things.

Just think how large a forest can be set on fire

## Taming the Tongue

**3** Not many of you should act as teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. <sup>2</sup>

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup>

of the Good News would have no meaning! Paul shows us that actions without faith cannot put us right with God, and so he emphasizes *faith*. But Paul also shows us that *faith alone* is worthless (*1 Cor. 13:2*). James shows us that faith without actions cannot put us right with God, and emphasizes *actions*. Neither *faith alone* nor *actions alone* can put us right with God; only faith made perfect through actions can do that.]

1. **My brothers.** See note on *James 1:2*. **Not many of you.** Some, in their conceit, wanted to immediately become teachers. The burning passion of certain Jews was to teach the Law of Moses to the Gentile Christians. But these Jews had not yet gotten rid of their prejudices and misunderstandings (*1 Tim. 1:7*). These teachers of the Law in Christ's church were the great distorters of the Good News! **With greater strictness.** James includes himself in this. Because teachers have great influence on others, they will be judged with greater strictness. The ones who make dogmatic statements are usually the ones with the least knowledge of their subject. [For this reason I have not relied on my own scholarship, but have drawn heavily from the minds and abilities of many individuals. RDI]

2. **All of us.** No Christian is completely without sin! This included James himself. See what John says in *1 John 1:8-10*. But it is more serious when a teacher makes a mistake. **In what he says.** James is thinking of the *ranting and raving* which certain Jews did in arguing matters of religion, as well as teaching false things. Compare *Matt. 5:22* and note. We can also apply this to everyday life, since the *tongue* demonstrates the *inner man*.

3. **We put a bit.** "We use a *bit* in the mouth of a horse to control it. Such a small thing has great influence."

4. **A very small rudder.** "A rudder is small compared to the ship, but it controls its direction."

5. **So it is.** "Even though the tongue is small, it can control us, just like the bit controls the horse or the rudder controls the ship." **It can boast.** *Mayor* says: "There is no idea of vain boasting, the whole argument turns upon the reality of the power which the tongue possesses." **Can be set on fire!** Bitterness existed in certain Synagogues (which were used by both Jews and Christians), fanned into flame by the ranting and raving of various "teachers." James wants to make peace. The tongue of one speaker can set ablaze all the combustible material which is created by fighting and quarreling! So it is vital to the survival of the messianic community that tongues be controlled!

by a tiny flame! <sup>6</sup>And the tongue is like a fire. It is a world of wrong, occupying its place in our bodies and spreading evil through our whole being. It sets on fire the entire course of our existence with the fire that comes to it from hell itself. <sup>7</sup>Man is able to tame, and has tamed, all other creatures—wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish. <sup>8</sup>But no man has ever been able to tame the tongue. It is evil and uncontrollable, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father, and also to curse our fellowmen, created in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup>Words of thanksgiving and cursing pour out from the same mouth. My brothers! This should not happen! <sup>11</sup>No spring of water pours out sweet and bitter water from the same opening. <sup>12</sup>A fig tree, my brothers, cannot bear olives; a grapevine cannot bear figs; nor can salty water produce fresh water.

### The Wisdom from Above

<sup>13</sup>Is there someone among you who is wise and understanding? He is to prove it by his good life, by his good deeds performed with humility and

spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 6

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 7 8

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. 9 10 11 12

### Two Kinds of Wisdom

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 13

6. **And the tongue.** "Not only will the tongue destroy others when it is uncontrolled, but it destroys the one who uses it as well!" **From hell itself.** The ranting and raving of these teachers did not come from God, but was from hell itself and totally evil! Compare *James 1:20* and note.

7. **Man is able to tame.** "Human ingenuity has tamed and used all the other creatures of the earth!"

8. **Has ever been able.** *MacKnight* says: "But the tongue of other men no one is able to subdue." *Verse 2* shows that it is possible to control our own tongue, even though few do it. **Full of deadly poison.** The tongue often brings death to those on whom it is *let loose!* See *Psalms 140:1-3*.

9. **We use it.** James includes himself, but he aims this in particular against certain Jewish "teachers." They would never speak the name of God without adding: "Blessed be He." But these same Jews (who did not believe in Christ) often cursed and damned the Christians in their synagogues. We are no better, if we act the same way! **Created in the likeness of God.** See *Gen. 1:26-27*. The lesson is that he who curses the man who was created in the likeness of God is *effectively* cursing the God he claims to praise. See *1 John 4:20-21*.

10. **Words.** These are a contradiction! If you love God and praise Him, you cannot curse your fellowmen. You cannot be both holy and unholy at the same time.

11. **No spring of water.** "No such stupidity is found in the natural world!"

12. **A fig tree.** "A fig tree cannot produce such opposite fruits!" **Nor can salty water.** "It is just as unnatural for the same tongue to praise God and curse man made in the likeness of God!"

13. **Is there someone?** "Although you cannot control other men's tongues, you can control your own. Someone who is wise and understanding must prove it by his good life. True wisdom shows itself in good actions performed with humility and wisdom."

wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, then you must not be proud and tell lies against the truth. <sup>15</sup>This kind of wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. <sup>16</sup>Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is pure, first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.

But if you harbor bitter envy <sup>14</sup> and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes <sup>17</sup> from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

### Friendship with the World

**4** Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your desires

### Submit Yourselves to God

**4** What causes fights and quarrels among you?

14. **But if in your heart.** Compare *Matt. 15:18* and note. "If you have jealousy, bitterness, and selfishness in your heart against others, and this comes off your tongue as curses against others, you must not be proud as though these things were wisdom. To be proud of such action is to lie against the truth."

15. **This kind of wisdom.** The kind that produces jealousy, bitterness, and selfishness. Heaven is not the source of such things! **It belongs to the world.** "This unholy method of trying to spread religion by ranting and raving is not God's way! It is both unspiritual and comes from demons! The *Expositor's Greek Testament* says: "The wisdom referred to, - acute argument, subtle distinctions, clever controversia, methods which took small account of truth so long as a temporary point was gained, skilful dialectics, bitter sarcasms, the more enjoyed and triumphed in if the poisonous shaft came home and rankled in the breast of the opponent, - in short, all these tricks of the unscrupulous controversialist which are none the less contemptible for being clever, - this was wisdom of a certain kind."

16. **Where.** "Where there is jealousy because of opinions and selfishness which brings *party spirit* in defending them, there you will also find disorder (*Acts 17:5*) and every kind of evil deed."

17. **But the wisdom from above.** "This is the kind of wisdom which ought to guide every teacher of religion!" **Pure.** Not adulterated with false teaching and evil desires. **Peaceful,** in contrast to the quarreling and fighting of the other "wisdom" (*verse 15*). **Gentle,** not violent, harsh, or relentless. **Friendly.** Full of good will toward others, easily persuaded to forgive. **Compassion.** Showing mercy to others, generous. **Good deeds,** which praise God. See *James 1:27; Matt. 5:16*. **Free from.** Prejudice and hypocrisy go together. One who has the *true wisdom* will be free from such things! See *1 Pet. 1:22*.

18. **And goodness.** Goodness = righteousness. The Greek-speaking Jews put great emphasis on the ethical side of religion, and were very proud of their relationship to God. **Goodness** is the goal here, and it *grows out of* the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace. See what Jesus said in *Matt. 5:9*. If *goodness* is the harvest, then *goodness* must have been the seeds which the peacemakers planted in peace. Goodness and peace go together.

1. **Where do?** "What is the source of all the fights and quarrels which take place both among you Christians and against the non-Christians?" **They come from.** The crimes which James condemns were so horrible and done so openly, that we can hardly believe Christians would be guilty of such behavior! Yet human nature being what it is, and Christian growth being necessary, we must accept the

for pleasure, which are constantly fighting within your bodies. <sup>2</sup>You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you strongly desire things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it. <sup>3</sup>And when you ask you do not receive it, because your motives are bad; you ask for things to use for your own pleasures. <sup>4</sup>Unfaithful people! Don't you know that to be the world's friend means to be God's enemy? Whoever wants to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy. <sup>5</sup>Do not think that the scripture means nothing that says, "The spirit that God placed in us is filled

Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in

fact. Compare *1 Cor. 3:1-3*. "The church is a hospital for sinners, not a rest home for saints." We as Christians must cooperate with God by actively resisting our human nature and making a positive effort to live both holy and good lives. See *Rom. 8:12-13; 12:1-2*. **Your desires for pleasure.** The TEV gives the literal translation. These desires include: pride, greed, lust, and grandiose ambition. Compare *Rom 7:23; 1 Pet. 2:11*.

**2. You want things.** The *Expositor's Greek Testament* says: "It must be confessed that these verses are very difficult to understand." Yet I think *MacKnight* gives the key by viewing James as a unity. He says: "Next he told them, they never could succeed in converting the heathens, and destroying idolatry, because they did not use the methods proper for these ends (results). They neither prayed to God for assistance and success, nor exercised (used) meekness towards those whom they wished to convert." The Jews still expected an earthly version of Messiah's Kingdom, and they thought it would come by converting Gentiles to Judaism. Even many Christian Jews still thought this, and they expected to be able to live their lives wallowing in sensual pleasure when Messiah's Kingdom came!! The paradox is their mixed attitude, wanting to bring the Gentiles to Christ, but also to the Law of Moses. Rather than asking God's guidance, they used ranting and raving, quarreling and fighting, to try to make converts, and were ready to kill when they failed to succeed!!!

**3. Because your motives are bad.** "Even when you do ask God for success, you do not receive it, because you ask God to bless your wicked and unspiritual efforts, rather than changing your methods to match his instructions!" Their motivation in wanting to make converts, was not to bring God glory; but to get money from these converts to spend on their own pleasures. Compare *1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11*.

**4. Unfaithful people!** "As an adulterous wife is unfaithful to her husband, so your spiritual adultery is unfaithful to your God!" Don't you know? "You gain the friendship of worldly people by sharing in their sins, but in doing this, you make yourself God's enemy!" Compare *John 15:18-20*.

**5. Do not think.** Verse 6 shows it is not the Holy Spirit, but the human spirit, which James is talking about here. "The human spirit which God placed in us is filled with fierce desires which can destroy us if we do not control them!" [This exact quotation is not found, but it is a lot like *Gal. 5:17*. *Beza* connected it with *Gen. 8:21*. Compare *Rom. 7:14-25*.]

with fierce desires." <sup>6</sup>But the grace that God gives is even stronger. As the scripture says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

<sup>7</sup>So then, submit yourselves to God. Resist the Devil, and he will run away from you. <sup>8</sup>Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners! Cleanse your hearts, you hypocrites! <sup>9</sup>Be sorrowful, cry, and weep; change your laughter into crying, your joy into gloom! <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

**Warning against Judging a Brother**

<sup>11</sup>Do not criticize one another, my brothers. Whoever criticizes his brother, or judges him, criticizes the Law and judges it. If you judge the Law, then you are no longer one who obeys the

us tends toward envy, but he gives us more grace? That is why Scripture says;

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will

come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-

minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves

before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother, or judges him, speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sit-

6. **But the grace.** "God gives us the grace to overcome our human spirit! And God shows us a better way of making converts to Christ!" **God resists the proud.** *Prov. 3:34.* "God makes the schemes of the proud fail, and frustrates their desires." **But gives grace.** "God helps the humble to succeed!" Compare *Matt. 5:1-13.*

7. **So then.** "Submit yourselves to God, especially when you try to convert the pagans!" **Resist the Devil,** who by filling you with pride and anger, seduces you to use unholy methods to spread your religion." **And he.** *Benson* says: "We may chase away the Devil, not by holy water, the sign of the cross, or any superstitious charm, but by steady virtue and resolute goodness."

8. **Come near to God.** "Worship God with your life, with a deep sense of his holiness and justice, deal with others as he deals with you, and he will bless and assist you in your efforts to serve him!" *Johnson* says: "If we wish God very near to us we must seek to dwell very near to him." **Wash your hands.** Some of these Jews were "Zealots." See note on *Mark 15:7.* "Before you can worship God, you must make yourself pure from crimes of violence and unholy methods, which you have been using." **Cleanse your hearts.** "You must get rid of those evil desires and bad motives which make you act in such contradictory ways!" See *James 3:9-12.*

9. **Be sorrowful!** These words show the contrast between the vulgar gaiety of the pleasure-seeker, and the humility of the one who has turned away from sin and turned to God. *Joel 2:12-13.* [This does not mean that a Christian must go around with a long face! See *1 Thess. 5:16* and note.]

10. **Humble yourselves.** See *Matt. 23:12* and note.

11. **Do not criticize.** "Do not slander each other because of your opinions in religion." **Whoever.** "In criticizing and judging your brother in matters of conscience (*Rom. 14:1-4*), you are opposing the Law of both Moses and Christ, which does not permit such things." **If you judge the Law.** *The Expositor's Greek Testament* says: "When a man misinterprets the Law, and then acted upon that misinterpretation, and denounced others who did not do likewise, then he was truly not a doer of the Law, but a judge, - and a very bad one too!"



Law, but one who judges it. <sup>12</sup>God is the only lawgiver and judge. He alone can save and destroy. Who do you think you are, to judge your fellow-man?

### Warning against Boasting

<sup>13</sup>Now listen to me, you that say, "Today or tomorrow we will travel to a certain city, where we will stay a year, and go into business and make a lot of money." <sup>14</sup>You don't even know what your life tomorrow will be! You are like a thin fog, which appears for a moment and then disappears. <sup>15</sup>What you should say is this, "If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup>But now you are proud, and you boast; all such boasting is wrong.

<sup>17</sup>So then, the person who does not do the good he knows he should do is guilty of sin.

### Warning to the Rich

**5** And now, you rich people, listen to me! Weep and wail over the miseries that are

ting in judgment on it. There <sup>12</sup> is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

### Boasting About Tomorrow

Now listen, you who say, <sup>13</sup> "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know <sup>14</sup> what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> Any one, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

### Warning to Rich Oppressors

**5** Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is

12. **God is the only lawgiver and judge.** The *Expositor's Greek Testament* says: "The words are intended to show the arrogant impertinence of those who were judging their neighbors on a misinterpretation of the Law." *Taylor* says: "Give every man the benefit of the doubt."

13. **Now listen to me.** "You act as though everything were yours to decide, and that God had nothing to do with the events of the world!"

14. **You don't even know.** "You speak confidently of the future, but you don't even know for sure if you will even be living tomorrow!"

15. **If the Lord is willing.** "This is the proper way to plan things, because it will make you more aware of how much you depend upon God!" "*You may make your plans, but God directs your actions*" (*Prov. 16:9*). See *Heb. 6:3* and note.

16. **But now.** "You are proud of your words and you boast about the future as if you were completely independent from God. All such boasting is wrong, because it shows you are ignorant both about yourselves and about God!"

17. **So then.** "If you know what is right and good and fail to do it, this makes you guilty of sin. Your guilt is even greater, because you *knew better*, yet did not do it!" This proves there are *sins of omission*.

1. **You rich people.** *MacKnight* thinks James is speaking to the unbelieving Jews who opposed the gospel. It can be applied to all who become rich by cheating and oppressing the poor. The Jewish wars and the destruction of Jerusalem were to make drastic changes in the fortunes of the Jews!!! God has a "pay day" for all, and sin will not go unpunished. We see this same thought in *Rev. ch 16*. See notes there.

coming upon you! <sup>2</sup>Your riches have rotted away, and your clothes have been eaten by moths. <sup>3</sup>Your gold and silver are covered with rust, and this rust will be a witness against you, and eat up your flesh like fire. You have piled up riches in these last days. <sup>4</sup>You have not paid the wages to the men who work in your fields. Hear their complaints! The cries of those who gather in your crops have reached the ears of God, the Lord Almighty. <sup>5</sup>Your life here on earth has been full of luxury and pleasure. You have made yourselves fat for the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup>You have condemned and murdered the innocent man, and he does not resist you.

### Patience and Prayer

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, then, my brothers, until the Lord comes. See how the farmer is patient as he waits for his land to produce precious crops. He waits

coming upon you. Your <sup>2</sup> wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are cor- <sup>3</sup> roded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last <sup>4</sup> days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord <sup>5</sup> All-powerful. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fat- <sup>6</sup> tened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have con- demned and murdered inno- cent men, who were not op- posing you.

### Patience in Suffering

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the

2. **Have rotted away.** Much of their wealth was in perishable foodstuffs. See note on *Matt. 24:21*. **Your clothes.** Much wealth was also in the form of clothes, rugs, tapestries, etc.

3. **Your gold and silver.** They rust (tarnish) because they have been stored away so long. This shows they have been hoarded. Hoarded wealth, gotten by cheating the poor, will be a curse to the one who hoards it. See the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (*Luke 16:1-13* and notes). See note on *verse 1*.

4. **You have not paid.** "You made your wealth by not paying your workers, and have disobeyed God's Law (*Lev. 19:13*). He hears their cries! Will He not punish you???"

5. **Your life here on earth.** "You have lived in luxury and opulence by cheating others. You have had the pleasure, and they have had the hardships! But you have prepared your own doom!" See what Jesus predicted in *Matt. 23:34-39* and notes there. See also *1 Thess. 2:14-16* and notes.

6. **You have.** The "Zealots" (note on *Mark 15:7*) especially, killed with no feeling of guilt. The climax of their sin was the murder of the *Innocent Man*, Christ Jesus. Compare *Acts 7:52*. [Both Jew and Gentile were involved in the death of Christ, but see *Matt. 23:34-36; 27:25* and notes.]

7. **Be patient, then.** "You who are being persecuted as He was, learn from His example and be patient." **Until the Lord comes.** I think James is pointing to the destruction of Jerusalem, not the Second Coming. See *Matt. 24:29-31* and notes. For us who live today, these words of James point to the Second Coming! **See how the farmer.** Time is essential! It requires time for a crop to grow and mature so it can be harvested. Some who harshly treated their fellow-man and opposed the Good News would change. Enough time must pass, so that God's purpose could be completed. Compare *Rev. 6:9-11* and notes.

patiently for the autumn and spring rains. <sup>8</sup>You also must be patient. Keep your hopes high, for the day of the Lord's coming is near.

<sup>9</sup>Do not complain against one another, my brothers, so that God will not judge you. The Judge is near, ready to come in. <sup>10</sup>My brothers, remember the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Take them as examples of patient endurance under suffering. <sup>11</sup>We call them happy because they endured. You have heard of Job's patience, and you know how the Lord provided for him in the end. For the Lord is full of mercy and compassion.

<sup>12</sup>Above all, my brothers, do not use an oath when you make a promise; do not swear by heaven, or by earth, or by anything else. Say only "Yes" when you mean yes, and "No" when you mean no, so that you will not come under God's judgment.

<sup>13</sup>Is anyone among you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? He should sing praises.

fail and spring rains. You <sup>8</sup> too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

Brothers, as an example <sup>10</sup> of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we <sup>11</sup> consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Above all, my brothers, do <sup>12</sup> not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

#### The Prayer of Faith

Is any one of you in <sup>13</sup> trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing

8. **You also.** "You must follow the example of the farmer and wait patiently!" **Keep your hopes high.** "The Lord will soon relieve your suffering by destroying those who persecute you and oppose the gospel!" Compare *2 Tim. 4:18* and note. **For the day.** See note on *verse 7*.

9. **Do not complain.** This begins a new thought. "I told you about the quick destruction of those who persecute you to give you hope, but do not let this make you resentful against them." **So that God.** See *Matt. 7:1-2* and notes. **The Judge is near.** See *Matt. 24:33* and note. The Jewish *Mishna* says: "*This world is as if it were a vestibule to the future world; prepare thyself in the vestibule, that thou mayest enter the reception-room.*"

10. **Remember the prophets.** Compare *Acts 7:51-53* and notes.

11. **We call them happy.** See *Matt. 5:11-12*; *3 John 3-5* and notes. **Job's patience.** Job was a real person and his life-story teaches us a great lesson about being patient. **For the Lord.** "He is full of mercy and compassion, even when he permits suffering to come to us!" Compare *Heb. 12:5-13* and notes.

12. **Do not use an oath.** Jesus said this same thing in *Matt. 5:33-37* and notes there. Our modern sin of *profanity* grew out of the habit of using an oath (vow) to affirm a promise. Since Jews believed some oaths were binding, but others were not, *MacKnight* thinks some were falsely swearing an oath and denying they were Christians to avoid persecution. They would do this with their "fingers crossed," expecting God not to *hold them to it*.

13. **In trouble?** "Are you suffering because you are a Christian? Then don't try to escape it by swearing an oath falsely." **He should pray.** "When in trouble, ask God for strength! Ask him for *wisdom* (*James 1:5*)! He will help you in the right way (*Rom. 8:28*)!" **Happy?** "Christians show their happiness by singing praise to God!" Compare *Acts 16:25*; *Eph. 5:18-19*.

<sup>14</sup>Is there anyone who is sick? He should call the church elders, who will pray for him and rub oil on him in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>This prayer, made in faith, will heal the sick man; the Lord will restore him to health, and the sins he has committed will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>So then, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you will be healed. The prayer of a good man has a powerful effect. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was the same kind of person that we are. He prayed earnestly that there would be no rain, and no rain fell on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup>Once again he prayed, and the sky poured out its rain and the earth produced its crops.

<sup>19</sup>My brothers! If one of you wanders away from the truth, and another one brings him back again, <sup>20</sup>remember this: whoever turns a sinner back from his wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death, and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

songs of praise. Is any one of 14  
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. And the prayer offered 15  
in faith will make the sick  
person well; the Lord will  
raise him up. If he has sinned,  
he will be forgiven.  
Therefore, confess your sins 16  
to each other and pray for  
each other so that you may  
be healed. The prayer of a  
righteous man is powerful  
and effective.

Elijah was a man just like 17  
us. He prayed earnestly that  
it would not rain, and it did  
not rain on the land for three  
and a half years. Again he 18  
prayed, and the heavens gave  
rain, and the earth produced  
its crops.

My brothers, if one of you 19  
should wander from the  
truth and someone should  
bring him back, remember 20  
this: Whoever turns a sinner  
away from his error will save  
him from death and cover  
many sins.

14. **Who is sick.** In most of the churches begun by the apostles, some one of the church elders would have the *gift from the Spirit* to heal the sick. Oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. See *Mark 6:13* and note.

15. **Made in faith.** The faith was *IN* the church elders *who prayed* for the man. Compare *Matt. 17:19-20*; *1 John 5:16* and notes. **And the sins.** In general, disease is not *SENT* as a punishment for sin (see *Luke 13:1-5*; *John 9:2-3*), but sometimes it may have been, especially in the first century (*1 Cor. 11:30*) [Jewish theology said: "No death without sin, no chastisement without evil-doing." But compare this with *Heb. 12:5-13*.]

16. **So then.** *MacKnight* thinks this should be taken literally. There can be no doubt that hate, bitterness, etc., impede recovery from sickness. We can set our consciences at ease by confessing our sins to one another (even though only God forgives sin) and restore broken relationships. **The prayer of a good man.** [*Man* is not in the Greek here, but may be implied.] *MacKnight* sees this as the *inspired prayer* of a church elder who has the gift of faith (*1 Cor. 12:9*). But we can certainly take this as a general statement about the *power of prayer*!

17. **The same kind of person.** Elijah was as human as any of us! What he did was an example of the power of prayer. *1 Kings 17:1*. **He prayed earnestly.** This is something we may all do, since every *child of God* has that right. **No rain fell.** This was God's visible answer to his prayer. [But God does not always give a visible answer, at least not in the form which we expect. See *Acts 28:16* and note.]

18. **Once again.** This was a second example. Elijah plays a large part in later Jewish literature.

19. **My brothers!** See note on *James 1:2*. **Wanders away.** "You must try to help each other! If one of you wanders away from the truth, you must try to bring him back again! (*Gal. 6:1*.)"

20. **Remember this.** "To show you how important it really is for you to help each other, I tell you this. Whoever brings a sinner back from his wrong way will save that sinner's soul from spiritual (and eternal) death! And this will also bring about the forgiveness of many sins, which can only be forgiven if the sinner turns back to God (that is, repents). (*Psalms 32:1*.)" Compare this **WORK OF LOVE** with *1 Pet. 4:8* and note. This is a special honor, as *Dan. 12:3* shows!