

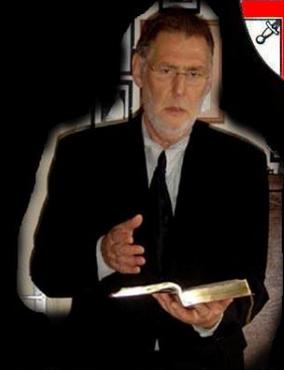


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet  
and a light unto my path.  
Psalm 119: 105**



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**Evangelical House Churches**

## **Exposition of the Epistle of James**

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including

**The Proto-Gospel of James**

**The Secret Book of James**

(for information only)

The **Proto-Gospel of James** is sometimes called a “Proto-Gospel” because it narrates events that took place prior to Jesus’ birth (although it includes an account of the birth as well.) Ancient manuscripts that preserve the book have different titles, including “The Birth of Mary,” “The Story of the Birth of Saint Mary, Mother of God,” and “The Birth of Mary; The Revelation of James.” Its author claims to be James usually understood to be Jesus’ (half-) brother known from the New Testament (e.g., Mark 6; Galatians 1). Here he is assumed to be Joseph’s son by a previous marriage.

The **Secret Book (or Apocryphon) of James** is a text known about like the Letter of Peter to Philip, within the frame of an introductory letter as a secret book with sayings of Jesus that his followers remembered.

**Note:** Much of the information on the above two manuscripts may be found in the standard sources, such as New Testament and various Introductions, commentaries on James, and Bible encyclopaedias. The material here is compiled largely from these sources and so is not copyrighted.

## **Introduction to the Epistle of James**

Of the three apostles who comprised the inner circle of Jesus' disciples (Peter, James and John), we know the least about the apostle James. We do know, however, that the apostle James was the eldest brother of the apostle John and that their father's name was Zebedee (their mother's name was Salome.)

James does not come to us with a clear-cut traditional date, since the book does not mention any historical events or people other than the author in James 1:1. Although strong connections to some of the sayings of Jesus can be seen in verses like 5:12, "let your yes be yes" (compare Matt 5:37), it is probably impossible to say whether or not James has a literary dependence on Matthew or any other New Testament book, so the book's date stands essentially independent from the rest of the New Testament.

### **I. The Author**

The traditional understanding of authorship is that the book was penned by James, the brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church. Since James was executed in 62 A.D., that would be the latest possible date for the book. Evidence for authorship by this James, as opposed to another Christian by that name or by someone writing in his name, is good. No one else but the head of the Jerusalem church could write a letter to a large audience ("the twelve tribes scattered abroad" – 1:1) and call himself simply "James", without further clarification. There are also verbal parallels between the book of James and the words of James recorded in Acts 15. Within the New Testament, the salutation used in both passages is unique to James (author to recipients: "greetings" – Acts 15:23, James 1:1). Compare also Acts 15:13 with James 2:5, Acts 15:17 with James 2:7, Acts 15:29 with James 1:27.

So, in keeping with the ancient custom, the author of the letter identifies himself at the very beginning. But in a sense, the author here is not very specific in his identification of himself. James 1:1 merely reads, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." This does tell us, though, that whoever this James was, he was well known to the readers. Further, only a cursory reading of the epistle reveals that he was a man highly esteemed among them, one who stood in a position of recognized spiritual authority, and one whom they were obliged to obey. Assuming that the critical view (namely, that the book was pseudepigraphal, written by someone who deceivingly took the name James) is in error, the following four men named James in the NT provide for us a list of the possibilities.

Several things are clear from the internal evidence of the book. First, unlike many of the other books of the New Testament which seem to have been written in Rome or Asia Minor, James clearly has a setting in the land of Israel. The term “former and latter rain” (3:7) addresses a weather concern unique to Israel and regions closely adjacent. James is the only book in the Bible outside of the gospels to use “gehenna” for “hell”. Gehenna was a valley outside Jerusalem where trash was burned. Verses like 3:11-12 fit with Israeli geography and farming culture.

## **A. Survey of the Choices**

### **1. James the son of Zebedee and brother of John**

This man was the most prominent "James" in the gospels. He was one of the "sons of thunder," originally a fisherman with John (his brother), along with Peter and Andrew. He became a disciple of Jesus and was later martyred by Herod Agrippa I, as recorded in Acts 12:2 (circa A.D. 44). There is not much chance that this James could have written this letter before he was killed, and there is no tradition arguing that he did.

### **2. James the son of Alphaeus, another disciple**

Very little is known about this James, the brother of Matthew (Levi). He was another disciple of our Lord, but again, there is no hint that he is the one who wrote this epistle.

### **3. James the father of Judas the disciple (Judas Thaddaeus)**

This man is even more obscure. Not a likely candidate.

### **4. James the brother of Jude & half-brother of our Lord**

This seems to be the author of our epistle. He is not so identified, but much about his character is revealed that is in keeping with what is known about him. This choice is also in keeping with tradition which tells us that he remained in Jerusalem and that Peter, James, & John chose James, the brother of Jesus to be the pastor of the Jerusalem church after the ascension of Christ (cf. Clement of Alexandria). The fact that he does not so identify himself (as our Lord's brother) may be an indication of his humility, but it also reveals the standing and personal authority he had in the opinion of his readers. He was a man well known and highly esteemed in the new Christian community. "James, a servant of God and of Jesus Christ" was an entirely sufficient identification to them. The brevity of it only makes the author obscure to the modern reader.

## **B. Biographical Sketch**

James is first introduced in Matthew 13:55 as one of our Lord's brethren. John 7:5 relates the sad fact that even as late as six months before the crucifixion (the feast of tabernacles), James was still an unbeliever. I Cor. 15:7 tells us that in the midst of the resurrection appearances of Christ, "He was seen of James." A little later, a number of people are recorded as meeting for prayer with the apostles in the upper room, as they awaited Pentecost; among them were "Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brethren." In Gal. 1:18-19 Paul is describing the events of his life following his three years in Arabia after his conversion; at this time he spent two weeks with Peter in Jerusalem and also met another important church leader by the names of James, who "was the Lord's brother." By the time of Acts 12:17 James was evidently already a leader in the Jerusalem church, for Peter, released from prison, asks that the news be reported to James. In Acts 15:13 James is the one presiding at the great council of Jerusalem which met to decide the important question of the relationship of Christianity to the Mosaic law; his leadership role is evident. In Gal. 2:9 Paul refers to him as a "pillar" of the church—equal to Peter and John. So far James has come from his unbelief! The remaining references to James (Gal. 2:12-13 & Acts 21:18-19) reveal his zeal for the Mosaic law. He was evidently in firm agreement with the decision of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13-19), but he was also careful to keep peace between the Gentile believers and the more "legalistic"(?) Jewish Christians (verse 20). Perhaps he himself (as Peter, cf. Gal. 2:11) carried this matter too far; this does not minimize his standing as an apostle, however (Gal. 1:19). (Note: At least four other men beside the original 11 have apostolic status: Matthias [Acts 1:26], Barnabas [Acts 14:4, 14], Paul, and James.) He was "nicknamed" "James the Just" because of his recognized piety, and was said to have "knees like those of camels" because of his much time spent in prayer. Josephus records that James was martyred during an uprising against Christians while Ananus was high priest in 62 A.D.

## **II. The Date**

Liberal scholars assign a very late date to the epistle of James (A.D. 85-130), but the evidence demands a much earlier date than that. It would seem that an event as important as the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) would have been somehow evident in such a Jewish writing, had it yet occurred. Further, if we are correct in assigning this letter to James the brother of our Lord, the writing would obviously have been before A.D. 62, the time of his death. Moreover, the very elementary church order reflected in the epistle points to a very early date: there are no bishops or deacons mentioned at all, and the meeting place of the church is still the "synagogue" (James 2:2

"assembly," Greek, *sunagoge*). The opinion of the ancient church was also in keeping with an early date of writing, for in their arrangement of the books of the NT James is placed before the Pauline epistles. Added to all this, the obvious Jewish tone of the letter, the very thin line which appears to exist between Judaism and Christianity, the absence of developed Christian phraseology, the lack of elaborated Christian doctrine, no mention at all of the later conflict between the Jewish demands upon the Gentiles within the church or of circumcision or of the Jerusalem council of A.D. 49 (i.e., Christianity is still wearing its "Jewish diapers," and there is yet no Gentile prominence within the church)—all point to a date of writing sometime around A.D. 46. This, then, is the earliest of all the NT books, the "First Epistle To the Christians." But prepare yourself for the study of it—as it has been well said, while James is ancient, it is not musty!

### **III. The Recipients**

The letter is addressed "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1b). "Twelve tribes," obviously, identifies the readers as Jewish, and "of the dispersion" (diaspora) further identifies them as those Jews living outside of Palestine. The fact that the letter was written in Greek (rather than Aramaic) seems further to specify those living in the Western area of the dispersion (e.g., Syria), which was an early center of Christian evangelistic outreach (Acts 11:19). James further identifies them as "brethren" having "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1). Adding up the evidence specifies the recipients as early Jewish believers outside of Palestine. (James' influence was far-reaching!) The letter was written from an apostle in Jerusalem to the Christian Jews abroad.

As such, the content of James is very strictly Jewish, and some have noted that if verses 1:1 and 2:1 were removed, the book could almost (though not quite) pass as a sermon from a non-Christian Jew. Certainly there is no evidence of any break between Judaism and Christianity. Abraham is described as "our father" (2:21), with no effort made to differentiate between physical and spiritual lineage. The book has no mention of any gentiles. Likewise, there is no mention of any of the issues associated with gentile involvement in the church, such as idolatry, food offered to idols, fellowship between Jewish and gentile Christians, etc. This, as an argument from silence, would seem to date the book prior to the Jerusalem conference of 50 A.D. A date of around 48 would seem reasonable.

### **IV. The Style**

This epistle (letter) is in many ways very different from the other NT epistles. It often sounds more like a sermon preached and recorded by a

stenographer! More than likely, the letter was intended to be read publicly at the meetings of the churches to whom it was sent. What follows is a brief sketch of some of its chief characteristics.

## **A. Literary Devices and Techniques**

### **1. Duadiplosis (paronomasia)**

This literary device is a subtle but effective method of emphasizing a point by linking together clauses and sentences or ideas by repeating its key words. For instance, in James 1:3-4 "patience" is emphasized—"the trying of your faith worketh patience, but let patience have its perfect work." Verses 4-5 emphasize the thought of maturity in the negative—"no lack." Verses 5-6 speak of "asking." See also "temptation" (verses 12-14), "lust" (14-15), "wrath" (19-20), etc. Remaining alert to these will often be an aid to interpretation.

### **2. Figures of Speech — chiefly metaphor & simile**

Metaphors and similes are methods of comparison, speaking of one thing in terms of another. James employs these figures from all areas of life:

#### **a. Rural Life**

He speaks of earthly prosperity as a flower that withers (1:10), speech as a spring and a tree (3:11), righteousness as fruit (3:18), life as a fog that is soon gone (4:14), etc.

#### **b. Marine Life and Astronomy**

A man who cannot make up his mind to trust God is compared to a wave of the sea (1:6). God, the source of good gifts is unchanging as the sun (1:17). etc.

#### **c. Domestic Life**

The development and result of sin is likened to conception, birth, growth, and death (1:15). The careless listener is likened to the man who doesn't look into the mirror very well (1:23). In 4:4 unfaithfulness is compared to adultery. etc.

#### **d. Public Life**

The future bliss of believers is compared to receiving the victor's "crown" (1:12). Hedonistic pleasures are like a hostile army encamped in our body (4:1). etc.

### **3. Illustrations**

Most of James' illustrations are taken from the normal experiences of everyday life. He often refers, to illustrate a point, to wind, flowers, sun, vapor, farming. There is more poetic imagery in James' short epistle than in all of Paul's epistles combined. (Maybe he learned it from his mother, cf. Lk.1).

### **4. Rhetorical Questions**

James often asks questions which answer themselves. Few things are as effective in argument as forcing someone to answer an obvious question. James does this repeatedly (e.g., 2:4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 16, 20, 21 etc.)

### **5. Excellent Greek**

Greek scholars agree that the Greek written in the original of James is the best in the entire NT, except for the book of Hebrews. He seems to have been a well-educated man.

### **6. Plain and Direct**

The net effect of all this is that his letter comes across as plainly, vividly, and directly as any possibly could. With his fervency, poetical imagery, illustrations, questions, and superior use of language in general, there is never a reason for misunderstanding him. With James, the issues are never abstract but real and familiar and very personal.

## **B. Other Characteristics**

### **1. Authoritative**

James does not hesitate to tell you what you should do. You can't even read the letter casually without recognizing that James preaches to us from a superior position. He commands and even rebukes and never apologizes for it. No OT prophet ever spoke with more authority. In this brief letter of 108 verses there are 54 imperatives (commands).

### **2. Practical**

It is evident that James' purpose is not to instruct us merely in what to believe but in what we should do because of what we believe.

### **3. Relevant**

The personal issues which James deals with are as contemporary as tomorrow's news!

#### **4. Jewish**

Addressed to the twelve tribes of the dispersion, the whole mental atmosphere of the letter is Jewish. Almost every subject in the letter is emphasized in the Old Testament, the Tanakh, and there is almost no distinctively Christian teaching. The meeting place is the synagogue (2:1), Abraham is their father (2:21), God is called The Lord of Sabbaoth (5:4, only time in NT), His illustrations are often from the OT, and the whole approach is that of an OT prophet. It is the most Jewish writing of the NT.

#### **5. Different from Paul**

Much has been made of James' difference from Paul. The two apostles each begin their letters with a salutation, but the similarity seems, at times, to end there. This is true, to some extent, in regard to style as well as content. Martin Luther's opinions about James are well known (as are most of Luther's opinions!). "It is a right strawy epistle," he said, because of James' emphasis on works rather than faith. (In typical Luther fashion: "At the University of Wittenburg, we fire our stoves with the epistle of James.") This is simply a misunderstanding of James, and Luther is said to have moderated his views later in life. This misunderstanding stems from a failure to recognize the issues in focus in James and Paul—they are not standing face to face fighting each other but back to back fighting different enemies. Paul attacks the idea that a man can be saved by works and so emphasizes faith. James attacks the idea that a man's faith may be dead (i.e., unproductive) yet real, and so James emphasizes works. The two men are not contradictory but complementary to each other.

#### **6. Identical to Paul**

For the record, it should be understood that everything James says is also found in the writings of Paul. Compare Rom. 2:6-10 & Eph. 2:8-10 to James 2:1, 5, & 23. Also, it should be noted that the two often use the same terminology with different meanings. The "works" Paul attacks are those which pretend to save; the "works" James demands are those which demonstrate salvation.

#### **7. Similar to Jesus**

It has been said that if John rested on Jesus' bosom, James sat at his feet. James preserves more of Christ's teaching than all the other epistles combined. He never actually quotes his older brother, but he seems to constantly refer to his teachings as a basis for his own. There are at least 10 parallels to Jesus' sermon on the mount, and for almost everything we read in James we can recall some statement of Jesus which may have suggested

it. This is so pervasive that even when the parallels fail, many are inclined to suspect that James may be repeating some unrecorded teaching of our Lord. This is all the more interesting seeing that James was an unbeliever until after Jesus' resurrection. (Cf. Mt. 5:48 & James 1:4, Mt. 7:7 & James 1:5, Mk. 11:23 & James 1:6, Mt. 7:24-26 & James 1:22, Mt. 7:1 & James 4:11-12, Mt. 23:12 & James 4:10, Mt. 7:16 & James 3:12, etc.)

## **V. Its Canonicity**

When the ancient church sat to determine which writings were Inspired and so to be included in the "Canon" of Holy Scripture, the epistle of James faced some problems. It was a part of the antilegomena — books "disputed" by at least some section of the Church. The ancient church historian, Eusebius (265-340) records this for us, although he himself accepted James. The problems were provoked basically by two considerations, much later by a third. The first problem was its relative obscurity—the letter had remained for some time unknown to a good many churches, especially those in Africa. This problem was resolved by the consideration that the letter was addressed only to a specific locality and people; furthermore, it finally became evident that the letter was more widely recognized than previously thought. The second problem was its questionable authorship even after the book had become more widely known. They questioned who the writer was and what was his authority for doing so (i.e., his apostleship). With the author identified & its wide acceptance, these doubts were settled by the fourth century, and at the third council of Carthage (397) it became universally recognized. James suffered no further problems until Martin Luther questioned it on the grounds of a supposed conflict with Paul (see above).

## **VI. Its Position in the Canon**

Although James was written before Paul's letters, it has been placed after Paul's for several reasons, perhaps the best of which is the fact that Paul's are a more complete and systematic presentation of Christian Truth, and James is therefore supplementary to Paul. It falls into a group of NT books called the General ("catholic") Epistles (Hebrews-Jude). They are called "General" because the authors & audiences are varied.

## **VII. Survey**

The burden of James' letter is to exhort us to consistent Christian living. He does this by dealing with many dangers which face us (problems which can lead us into sin) and by exhorting us to proper Christian virtues. One by one these issues are handled, and we are instructed in regard to them. The subjects which James takes up are as follows.

- A. Trials
- B. Temptations
- C. Hypocrisy
- D. Partiality
- E. Empty Faith
- F. Tongue
- G. Worldly Wisdom
- H. Sin
- I. Slander
- J. Self-Confidence
- K. Injustice
- L. Prayer
- M. The Erring Brother

## **VIII. Summary**

It often seems that any attempt to outline the book of James is futile. Discovering the major divisions of the letter is a task which has seen many give up. But however the book is divided, it must be kept in mind that James' purpose is simply to exhort us in matters of daily Christian living. The following is one humble attempt to summarize that exhortation.

### **A. The Christian Attitude**

- 1. Toward Trials
  - 2. Toward Temptations
  - 3. Toward the Word
  - 4. Toward Others

### **B. The Christian Faith**

- 1. The Demonstration of It
  - 2. The Illustrations of It

### **C. The Christian Life**

- 1. The Dangers
  - a. The Tongue
  - b. The World
  - c. The Flesh
  - d. Injustice
- 2. The Virtues
  - a. Patience
  - b. Prayer

## **IX. Purpose, Theme of the Letter**

James is concerned to show us the proper "behaviour of belief"; that is, his letter consists of a series of tests of our faith. What we profess to believe, he insists, must be evident by how we live. The issues he takes up, then, are not trivial—these things tell on us! A man is saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone!

## **X. Remarks of Historians and Early Church Fathers**

James "the brother of the Lord" was indeed widely known. (Galatians 1:19) The Jewish historian Josephus mentions his death as taking place at the order of Ananus, one of the five sons of Ananus (Annas) who held the office of high priest. This younger Ananus was a very arrogant man who, like the other members of the sect of the Sadducees, was very harsh in judging offenders. After the Roman governor Festus had died and his replacement Albinus was on the way to Judea, Ananus seized the opportunity to exercise his authority. He assembled the Sanhedrin and "brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others." After Ananus had formulated an accusation against them as violators of the law, he handed them over to be stoned to death. (*Antiquities*, XX, ix, 1)

Ananus did not have the authority to act in this manner, and certain Jews undertook to meet Albinus before his arrival in Judea to inform him about what had taken place. Albinus then wrote to Ananus, threatening to have him punished. Subsequently, Herod Agrippa II, who then had the authority to appoint the Jewish high priests, deposed Ananus after he had served as high priest for just three months. (*Antiquities*, XX, ix, 1)

It appears that James came to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah or Christ when he appeared to him after his resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:7; compare John 7:3-5.) Although he became a devoted disciple, James continued to live according to the requirements of the Mosaic law among the Jews in Jerusalem and so appears to have been held in high regard, as the complaint made against the actions of Ananus may imply. (Compare Acts 21:18-26.) An account from Hegesippus (second century CE) quoted by Eusebius indicates that James lived like a Nazarite. The account of Hegesippus implies that, as a Nazarite, James had priestly privileges. To what extent Hegesippus preserved a reliable tradition about him cannot be determined, and his account has little in common with that of Josephus.

According to Eusebius, Hegesippus wrote about James in his fifth book: "He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath. He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place;

for he wore not woollen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 5, 6)

On account of the testimony of James, numerous Jews came to believe in Jesus. The unbelieving Jews were disturbed and feared that the danger existed that all the people would come to regard Jesus as the promised Messiah or Christ. So, according to Hegesippus, they approached James, saying to him: “Restrain the people; for they have gone astray in regard to Jesus, as if he were the Christ. We entreat you to persuade all who have come to the Passover festival concerning Jesus; for all of us have confidence in you. For we bear you witness, as do all the people, that you are just, and do not respect persons. Therefore, persuade the multitude not to be led astray concerning Jesus. For the whole people, and all of us also, have confidence in you. Stand therefore upon the pinnacle of the temple, that from that high position you may be clearly seen, and that your words may be readily heard by all the people. For all the tribes, with the Gentiles also, have come together on account of the Passover.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 10, 11)

Certain scribes and Pharisees then had James stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and cried out to him, “You just one, in whom we ought all to have confidence, forasmuch as the people are led astray after Jesus, the crucified one, declare to us, What is the gate of Jesus?” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 12 [The reference to the “gate of Jesus” may relate to Jesus’ words, “I am the gate of the sheep.” (John 10:7)])

James reportedly answered with a loud voice, “Why do you ask me concerning Jesus, the Son of Man? He himself sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 13)

The same scribes and Pharisees then regretted that they had arranged for James to give his testimony and decided to throw him down. The fall did not kill him, and so they determined to stone him to death, saying, “Let us stone James the Just.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 14-16)

Josephus and Hegesippus are in agreement that a decision was made to stone James to death, but they do not corroborate any of the specifics in either of their accounts. Eusebius, although quoting from Josephus’s *Antiquities*, Book XX, provided no explanation regarding the differences. He, however, did add regarding this James, “These things are recorded in regard to James, who is said to be the author of the first of the so-called catholic epistles [likely meaning the first of the seven (James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude) to be

written]. But it is to be observed that it is disputed; at least, not many of the ancients have mentioned it, as is the case likewise with the epistle that bears the name of Jude, which is also one of the seven so-called catholic epistles. Nevertheless we know that these also, with the rest, have been read publicly in very many churches.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 25)

Many have thought that the expressions about the importance of works in the letter of James do not agree with Paul’s words that being justified (or being granted an approved standing with God) is not possible on the basis of works. There is, however, no real contradiction. Paul repeatedly emphasized the need for believers to live upright lives, always letting love guide their actions. Like James, Paul urged them to speak and act in a manner that harmonized with their faith in God and Christ. (Romans 12:1, 2; 13:8-14; 14:15; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 6:9-11; 10:31-33; 13:1-7; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Galatians 5:16-21; 6:7-10; Ephesians 4:20-5:20; Colossians 3:5-14; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

Whereas James highlighted works as an essential evidence of a living faith that made one acceptable to God, Paul made it clear that the existence of the faith on the basis of which one gains an approved standing with God is productive of upright conduct or good works. (James 2:14-26; Galatians 5:13-25; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10) God’s declaring individuals guiltless on the basis of their faith in his Son and his Son’s sacrificial death for them, however, is an expression of his gracious favor and is not something that can be earned by works. This aspect is not the focus of the letter James wrote. His objective was to admonish believers who had been justified or had come to have a divinely approved standing as members of the true Israel, the people of God. They needed to be concerned about having a living faith, a faith that revealed itself by works of love and compassion for others. (James 2:19-26)

Such an active faith was also essential for them to remain loyal to God and Christ when subjected to trials. As persons with genuine faith, believers would persevere in prayer, petitioning their heavenly Father to sustain them in their trials and to grant them the needed wisdom to deal with the distressing circumstances they faced. (James 1:2-8)

## **XI. Key Verse**

James 2:17 states the theme very well—“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

# Commentary on the Book of James

## James 1: 1-27

### 1:1-4. The purpose of trials

#### Verse 1. The author.

As a proper name, the English form “James” is not the best representation for the Greek *Jákobos* or the Hebrew *Ya‘qov* (Jacob). This name was common among the Jews, indicating that the writer of the letter was known so well that his original readers would not have been puzzled about who had sent it. James identified himself as a “slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” thereby acknowledging that he belonged to both and that he had been granted the inestimable honour of being in their service and accountable to them. The letter is addressed to the “twelve tribes in the dispersion.” This suggests that James regarded all the believers in Jesus Christ who lived in various parts of the Greco-Roman world as part of the real Israel, God’s true people. The apostle Paul expressed himself similarly, referring to non-Jewish believers as having been grafted into the olive tree that had its roots in the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (1:1; Romans 11:11-24; see the Notes section.)

The Greek term rendered “greetings” (*chaírein*, a form of *chaíro*) often appears at the beginning of other ancient letters. This expression, a form of the verb meaning “rejoice” (*chaíro*), is a greeting that wishes one well. (1:1)

#### Verses 2-4. His message

James addressed believers as “brothers,” fellow members of the family of God’s beloved children. He encouraged them to regard the trials they might face as “all joy.” The encounter with trials would be unexpected and could be in the form of persecution, sickness, or hardships resulting from adverse circumstances. In themselves, all trials are distressing and unpleasant. From the standpoint of the spiritual benefits they could gain from faithfully enduring their various trials, however, believers could face them with joy. (1:2)

They knew that trials would test their faith in God and Christ and that, when subjected to testing, their faith could produce endurance. Their faith would enable them to bear up patiently under the distressing situation while they looked confidently to their heavenly Father to sustain them by means of his spirit. (1:3)

To have a faith that has survived testing, believers need to let the trial take its full course without becoming bitter, resentful, disheartened, or ready to give up. By thus remaining steadfast, they would allow endurance to develop fully (literally, “let endurance have perfect work”). With a tested faith that has

endured distress to the very end, believers would be “perfect” or complete, “whole” or sound in every respect, with “nothing lacking.” They would be in possession of a stronger faith, a tested capacity for steadfast endurance, and enhanced compassion and concern for others who are experiencing affliction. (1:4)

### **1:5-12. Wisdom for trials**

#### **Verses 5-8. The need and supply of wisdom for trials.**

In the context of this letter, the lack in wisdom would relate to one’s not knowing how to deal with a particular trial. If any believers found themselves to be lacking in wisdom, they should ask “the giving God” for it. His giving is described as *haplós*, a Greek adverb that can mean “sincerely,” “openly,” “generously,” “ungrudgingly,” or “without reservation.” His giving is also without reproaching, berating, or disparaging. His spirit would never engender within believers who make their petitions for wisdom any feelings of unworthiness, guilt, being foolish, or having imposed on him with too many requests. God is not like humans who tend to become irritated when they are repeatedly asked for aid by persons who never seem to be able to help themselves. Believers can be confident that God will give them the wisdom for which they petition him. (1:5)

When praying to God, they should do so “in faith, not doubting [form of *diakrino*].” The Greek verb *diakrino* can mean to “evaluate,” “judge,” or “differentiate.” Persons who doubt are at odds with themselves, differentiating one course from another but still unable to determine just what they should do. When asking “in faith,” believers would be doing so with the confidence that God’s answer will be in keeping with what they truly need. A doubter, on the other hand, would be “like a wave of the sea, driven by wind and tossed about.” Waves are unstable, and so are doubters when they are faced with distressing circumstances comparable to wind. Plagued by doubts, they do not allow themselves to trust fully in the wisdom that God generously supplies. They yield to the pressure that the changing external circumstances produce. (1:6)

A man who doubts should not expect to receive anything from the Lord to whom his petitions are addressed. As one who is at odds with himself, such a man would not be receptive to the wisdom that God grants generously. The doubter does not really trust God and engages in an internal battle with godly wisdom, for the external circumstances sway his thinking in various directions. (1:7)

The doubter is double-minded (literally, “double-souled”), “unstable in all his ways.” He is like two persons, with divided loyalties, and not single-minded in his devotion to God and earnest desire to do his will. In all his ways or actions,

the doubter is unstable or unsteady. He cannot be relied upon for adhering to a divinely approved course, for the ever-changing external circumstances continue to influence his attitude, words, and deeds. (1:8)

### **Verses 9-12. The rewards of exercising wisdom in trials**

- (1) Wisdom enables the brother of ‘humble circumstances’ to see and rejoice in his high and exalted position as Christ’s own, having a place of eminence and dignity with his Saviour.
- (2) Wisdom enables the rich brother, on the other hand, to see and rejoice in his lowliness apart from his salvation, the low estate of all his wealth apart from God (Isaiah 57:15) in the light of transiency of mortal life and material possessions.

Believers found themselves in a variety of situations, with many being poor while some among them prospered materially. Whatever their circumstances proved to be, they needed to avoid becoming preoccupied with what they possessed or did not possess from a material standpoint. The “lowly brother,” one of limited means and an inferior social status, had little control of his life. From a spiritual standpoint, though, he could “boast” or glory in “his exaltation.” Upon putting faith in Jesus Christ and what his sacrificial death accomplished, the lowly believer gained the dignified standing of a beloved “son” or child of God. He came to be an heir with Christ, assured of receiving all the privileges and blessings that are associated with this heirship. In the family of God’s children, the “lowly brother” does not have an inferior standing but has the same dignity as all the other “sons,” for Christ alone is the “firstborn,” the preeminent one. Accordingly, the “lowly brother” had good reason for taking pride in what God through Christ had done for him. (1:9; Romans 8:16, 17, 29; Galatians 3:28, 29; Ephesians 3:6)

A wealthy brother should boast or glory in his humiliation. Before coming to be a believer, he enjoyed an honourable standing in the Greco-Roman world. As a possessor of significant means, he was respected and exercised considerable control over his personal affairs. Upon putting faith in Jesus Christ, he identified himself with a body of people whom unbelievers viewed with contempt. Moreover, the wealthy brother also came to recognize that the standing he enjoyed on account of his possessions rested on a false foundation, a foundation that had no permanence. This resulted in a different view of himself, one that was not based on his riches. Apart from his possessions, he was no different from any other person, and so he was humbled. (1:10)

Wealth is transitory, and so a rich man (from the standpoint of his identity as it relates to his possessions) perishes like a beautiful flower that fades and withers.

His identity is just as transitory as the riches on which it is based. (1:10; see the Notes section.)

In the case of vegetation, the scorching heat from the risen sun (or the risen sun along with a scorching wind) dried up the grass, and “the blossom [‘its blossom,’ according to other manuscripts] fell, and the beauty of its appearance [literally, ‘face’] perished; so also the rich man will wither away in his ways.” It does not take long for the sun’s intense heat to dry up the grass. Especially does this happen quickly when a scorching wind accompanies the intense heat from the rays of the summer sun. Faded, dried-up blossoms drop from their stems. Nothing remains of the former beauty of the flowers. Likewise, it proves to be with the rich man as he carries out his pursuits. The time comes when his life ends, and the flourishing state he enjoyed while dressed in finery and in control of abundant means then fades away. Death parts the wealthy man from all his material possessions. (1:11)

Returning to the subject of trials, James pronounced the man who endured them as being “fortunate,” or in a highly desirable state. This is because the individual’s remaining faithful to God when experiencing trials would result in his receiving the “crown of life.” This “crown” is life itself, which is what God has promised to those who love him. “Life” is the real life of an enduring approved relationship with God (and also with his Son), and receiving the “crown of life” signifies being granted this life. All who love God, demonstrating that love by earnestly seeking to do his will, can be confident about receiving the “crown of life.” The assurance is based on God’s unchangeable promise. (1:12)

### **1:13-18 God and trials**

#### **Verses 13-15. God tempts no one to sin.**

When experiencing trials, a believer should not say, “I am being tried by God, for God cannot be tried with evils and does not try anyone.” One’s attributing being tried, tested, or tempted to God could hinder one from regarding him as a loving and caring Father. He is absolutely free from even the slightest taint of defilement and so cannot be tried or tempted with bad, or any kind of moral corruption, to act in a manner that is contrary to his holiness or purity. Therefore, he would never seduce anyone to do wrong, making evil look attractive or desirable to the individual. As a loving Father, he will come to the aid of his beloved children who appeal to him, strengthening them with his spirit to endure the distressing circumstances they may be experiencing at the time. (1:13)

Temptation arises from an individual’s own desire, which exerts tremendous pressure to act and has entrapping power. When faced with a distressing

situation, a person's natural desire is for relief. If the only discernible avenue of escape from the painful circumstance is one that would be out of harmony with God's upright ways, the desire for relief could build up in individuals to the point of prompting them to consider taking the wrong course and then seduce them to act on it. (1:14)

Once a wrong desire is allowed to grow unchecked, it becomes "fertile" or fully developed. The desire then impels the individual to act on it, thus "giving birth to sin" (a missing of the mark of loyal obedience to God). Nothing good can come from sin, for it always leads to condemnation. So, in its fully developed state, sin breeds death. (1:15; compare Romans 6:23.)

### **Verses 16-18. God is good to men.**

James admonished his "beloved brothers," fellow members of his family of God's children, not to be misled. They should never deceive themselves into thinking that God is the one who tries or tempts them, failing to remember that the source of temptation is an individual's own wrong desire that he has failed to dismiss or resist with the aid God supplies through his spirit. (1:16)

Nothing bad ever comes from God. "From above," from his exalted heavenly realm, only comes the bestowal of good and of every gift that is "perfect," without flaw and exactly what is needed for well-being. This differs from the giving of sinful humans. They may do so with ulterior motives. At times their presents can even be harmful to the recipients. The bountiful good gifts come from a loving Father who deeply cares for his children and whose generosity is pure. (1:17)

He is the "Father of the lights," and so he could never be linked to anything of an evil nature. Corrupt individuals are the ones who try to conceal their actions, often committing their vile deeds under the cover of darkness. God, however, is consistent in never deviating from his being the "Father of the lights" and, therefore, the source of what is truly good and always beneficial to the recipients. As the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, he is the "Father of lights." (Jeremiah 31:35) He is also the source of enlightenment, of the knowledge that leads to the real life of an enduring relationship with him. (2 Corinthians 4:6) Depending on its perceived position in the sky in relation to the earth, the sun casts shadows and the degree of warmth at various times or locations differs considerably. With God, no such variations exist. There is nothing comparable to the lengthening or shortening of shadows or their appearance and disappearance. God is always dependable, never changing in giving what is good and in the best interests of his beloved children. (1:17)

The approved relationship that believers have with God came about because he willed it. By means of the "word of truth," he brought them to birth as his

children to be a kind of “firstfruits of his creatures.” This “word of truth” is the message about Christ and how, through him and his sacrificial death, humans can be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to his Father as members of his family. It is the “word of truth,” for it is a truthful or wholly dependable message. The individual’s response in faith to this “word” results in a newness of life as a person forgiven of sin and no longer under the condemnation of death. (1:18)

### **1: 19-25. God’s word and trials**

#### **Verses 19-21; God’s goodness and the believer’s responsibility**

As a kind of “firstfruits” among God’s creatures, believers are set apart as holy for him and, therefore, objects of his special care. In ancient Israel, the firstfruits were offered to God. Consequently, in being designated as a kind of firstfruits, believers are under obligation to present themselves as an acceptable offering to God, putting their all at his disposal for the doing of his will. (1:18; Romans 12:1)

In every aspect of life (disposition, word, and conduct), believers should behave as God’s obedient children. James exhorted his beloved brothers to be “quick in hearing,” responsive or obedient to divine direction, “slow in speaking, slow in wrath.” (1:19)

Later (in 3:1), James admonished his readers not to be hasty about seeking to be teachers of fellow believers. Possibly this is included in being “slow” to speak, not pushing oneself forward as an instructor of others without really being qualified to do so. (Compare 1 Timothy 1:7.) Other situations calling for being slow to speak would be when such speaking could lead to quarrels and an escalation of personal attacks, or make one a busybody for being too free in giving unsolicited advice. Moreover, before responding to others about significant matters, one should listen carefully and give serious thought before making a reply. (1:19)

Anciently, like today, there was much in the world that could make one angry. Believers had to exercise care that they did not begin to rail angrily against individuals and about injustices. They needed to be patient, not being quick to take offense when others acted in an unfair, unkind, or thoughtless manner. When being corrected or called to account for an indiscretion, many tend to respond in anger. Believers, however, should endeavor to avoid becoming irritated and be willing to acknowledge their error. In verse 21, the reference is to acceptance of the saving “word” or message with “meekness,” or with humility, not in a spirit of angry resistance. Whenever God’s word calls for a change in one’s attitude, speech, or conduct, the believer would want to submit readily. (1:19)

Wrath is to be avoided, for it does not produce anything that promotes God's righteousness. Instead, wrath is often the reflection of a justifying or vengeful spirit, and results from a failure to consider that God is the one who will right injustices and judge by means of his Son with absolute impartiality. (1:20)

“Therefore” (that is, because human wrath does not effect divine righteousness but runs counter to it), believers need to cast away “all filthiness” (everything that is impure and repugnant in God's sight) and the “surplus [*perisseía*] of evil.” The Greek word *perisseía* can mean “abundance,” “surplus,” or “excess,” and the expression “surplus of evil” could refer to any evil that might still be clinging to believers. Possibly this expression relates to the abundance of evil that is all around believers but which must be banished from their lives. The “evil” could apply to any attitudes, words, or deeds that are unloving or contrary to God's pure and just ways. Translators have variously rendered the expression “surplus of evil” as “wicked excess” (REB), “the evil that is so prevalent” (NIV), “every other evil which touches the lives of others” (J. B. Phillips), and “remnants of evil.” (NJB) Everything that is abhorrent and corrupt must be banished from the life of believers in order for them to be transformed by God's word and spirit. (1:21)

Anything that is sordid or corrupt would be resistant to God's word that calls upon believers to conduct themselves as his obedient children who are earnestly seeking to live a life of moral purity. Their getting rid of everything that is morally defiling puts them in a condition where they, with meekness or humility, can be responsive to the “implanted word that is able to save [their] souls.” This “word” is the message about Christ, which they initially embraced upon putting faith in him and his sacrificial death for them. As having been embraced by them, this word can be spoken of as the “implanted word.” This “implanted word” has the power to save “their souls” or to deliver them as individuals from condemnation, for it reveals what they need to do as God's children to live in a manner that would meet his approval. In keeping with their new status as God's children, they must cease to live a life of sin and to continue living a life of faith, a faith that reveals their love for him and his ways. Their living in this manner requires that they continue to be accepting of the “implanted word,” letting it (in conjunction with God's spirit) progressively transform them into the persons their heavenly Father wants them to be as his children, finally to be completely liberated from sin and thereafter to enjoy an enduring relationship with him and his Son as sinless members of his family. (1:21)

### **Verses 22-25. God's Word and the believer's obedience**

The saving power of the “word” or message relating to Christ and his sacrifice depends on the continued obedient response of the believer, a response that reflects meekness or humility. More is required than just respectful listening.

James urged, “But become doers of the word, and not hearers only, misleading yourselves.” The message about Christ must be lived, with his example and teaching governing the believer’s disposition, words, and deeds. Persons who merely listen without recognizing their weighty responsibility of living in a manner that honours God and Christ are deceiving themselves. A mere confession of the lips is empty when not backed by corresponding action. (1:22) Jesus Christ made this clear when he said, “But why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46) “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father [will].” (Matthew 7:21)

James likened a mere “hearer of” or “listener” to the “word” (that is, a person who is not a doer or fails to put what he hears into practice) to a man who looks at his face (literally, “the face of his birth”) in a mirror. The expression “face of his birth” could signify the natural features of the face, with the emphasis being just on the outward or surface appearance. (1:23)

Once the man stops looking at his face in the mirror and then attends to his affairs, he forgets all about the reflected image in the mirror. So it is with individuals who listen to the message about Christ but who are not transformed by it. Outwardly they may profess to believe, but they continue to live their lives as they did formerly, giving no thought to the responsibilities that acceptance of the message imposed on them. Faith in God and Christ does not become the governing principle in their lives. (1:24)

Unlike the mere hearer of the word, the one who listens and acts on what is heard gives the message undivided attention. The Greek verb *parakypso* expresses what he does about the “perfect law of freedom.” This term (*parakypso*) literally means to “bend down beside” or to “bend over” and so is indicative of the special attention one would give when bending over to take a closer look at something. Accordingly, the responsive listener manifests an earnest interest in the “law of freedom.” This “law” is the good news about Christ and what he accomplished when laying down his life sacrificially. As it relates to Christ, the “law” includes what he taught by word and example. For his disciples, his authoritative teaching has the force of law. It is the “law of freedom,” for an obedient response in faith leads to liberation from sin. From the standpoint of attaining its objective and including all that is essential for those who choose to live in harmony with it, it is a “perfect” or flawless law. (1:25)

The responsive listener does more than just give the “perfect law of freedom” his full attention on particular occasions, he “stays” with it, continuing to seek to be guided by it. This “law” proves to be the governing principle of his whole life. So he does not become a “forgetful hearer,” but lets the “law of freedom” guide him in all affairs of life. As a doer of the “work” (the good work that the “law of freedom” prompts and which is a product of genuine love for God,

Christ, and fellow humans), the individual will be happy (*makários*) in doing it. The Greek term *makários*, in this context, denotes a state of inner joy and well-being resulting from knowing that one is doing what is pleasing to God. (1:25)

### **1:26-27 True religion and trials**

#### **Verse 26. False religion**

A person may think of himself as “religious,” “pious,” or “godly.” If, however, he does not bridle his tongue, he would be guilty of “deceiving his heart.” This would be a serious self-deception, for it involves the “heart” or inmost self. An unbridled tongue expresses what is hurtful and reveals a lack of love for others. All attitudes, words, and actions that are contrary to love violate the “perfect law of freedom.” By word and example, Jesus Christ revealed the kind of self-sacrificing love his disciples must have, and this includes using the tongue in a manner that has a wholesome effect on others. (Matthew 5:43-48; John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 13; Romans 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:29) The person who misuses his tongue may think of himself as godly, but his “piety” or religious profession is empty, bringing no honour to God and Christ. (1:26)

#### **Verse 27. True religion**

The “piety” or godliness that “our God and Father” acknowledges as “pure and undefiled is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself spotless from the world.” Everything that is contrary to love is sinful and, therefore, impure and defiling. Those whom God acknowledges as his own respond to the needs of others in a loving and caring way. In the Greco-Roman world, orphans and widows often were greatly impoverished and in need of help. The neglect of such needy ones would have been a heartless act and thus impure and defiling. (1:27)

For believers to keep themselves spotless from the world required that they refrain from conducting themselves like people of the world who are in a state of alienation from God. An uncaring and selfish spirit has no place among those whom God approves. To remain unsullied by the corruption of the world, believers must strive to imitate the love of their heavenly Father and his Son. This is not just a matter of refraining from hurtful acts. It involves actively doing what one can to respond kindly and compassionately to others, especially to those in need. (1:27)

#### **Notes:**

In verse 1, a number of manuscripts add “Father” after “God.”

In verse 10, the rich person is not specifically identified as a “brother.” So while the boasting or glorying about the humiliation would particularly fit a wealthy

believer, the points then made about the perishing of the rich man like a beautiful blossom can apply to all those having abundant possessions.

Later manuscripts (in verse 12) add either “Lord” or “God” to identify the one who has promised.

For the concluding phrase of verse 17, the readings of manuscripts vary. A literal rendering of what is commonly regarded as the better manuscript reading would be, “with whom there is no variation or a shadow of turning.” This could mean that, with God, there is no variation or a shadow (or darkening) that is caused by turning or by a change. The text of fourth-century Codex Vaticanus could be interpreted to mean that, with God, there is “no variation that stems from the turning of a shadow.” Translators have variously rendered the phrase (“with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” [NRSV]; “with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change” [NAB]; “there is no variation, no play of passing shadows” [REB]).

The opening expression in verse 19 varies in manuscripts. Many later manuscripts read *hóste* (“therefore”), whereas fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and numerous other manuscripts say *íste* (“know”), which is both the second person plural indicative or imperative form of the verb *oída*. Depending on which Greek text they followed or whether they considered the verb for “know” to be either indicative or imperative, translators have varied in their renderings.

J. B. Phillips interpretively paraphrased the passage in keeping with the reading “therefore.” “In view of what he has made us then, dear brothers, let every man be quick to listen but slow to use his tongue, and slow to lose his temper.”

Translators who considered the verb for “know” to be an imperative have added an object (often the word “this”), as there is none in the Greek text. “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” (NIV) “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (NRSV) “Remember this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to listen but slow to speak and slow to human anger.” (NJB)

In *The Revised English Bible*, the thought of “knowing” is linked to the previous verse, indicating that believers can be certain of what God has done in bringing them to birth by the word of truth to be a kind of firstfruits. “Of that you may be certain, my dear friends. But everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to be angry.”

Part of the directive in verse 19 is found in Sirach 5:11(13), “Be quick in hearing, and with patience express a reply.” Admonition to control one’s speaking and temper is also found in the book of Proverbs. “He who controls his

lips has insight.” (Proverbs 10:19) “A quick-tempered man acts foolishly.” (Proverbs 14:17)

In verse 26, many later manuscripts add “among you” in relation to the one considering himself to be pious.



*James reminds his readers of the importance of the bit in making the horse or donkey obey.*

## **James 2: 1-26**

### **2:1-9. Dead faith manifested in partiality**

#### **Verses 1-5. How the sin nullifies genuine faith.**

Addressing believers as “my brothers,” fellow members of God’s family of beloved children, James admonished them not to show favouritism (literally, “accept faces”), assessing the worth of others on the basis of their possessions and social status. His words may be understood either as a question or as an introductory statement to the exhortation that follows. As a question, the verse could be rendered literally, “My brothers, do you not, with partiality, hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory?” Another possible literal translation could be, “My brothers, do not, with partiality, hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory.” (2:1)

Translators have variously rendered verse 1, often supplying words that are not in the Greek text. “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” (NRSV) “My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” (NAB) “My dear brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, never think some people are more important than others.” (NCV) “My friends, you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ who reigns in glory and you must always be impartial.” (REB)

The “faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” is the faith that has him as its object. It is faith or trust in him and all that he accomplished when surrendering his life. As the highly exalted one with divinely granted authority over everything in heaven and on earth, Jesus Christ is the Lord of “glory,” the glorious or magnificent Lord. Any display of partiality is inconsistent with faith in Jesus Christ. This is because all who put their faith in him come to be “sons” of God, enjoying the same standing in God’s family as all others who have been reconciled to him as his beloved children. (2:1)

Among those to whom James wrote, certain believers did not act in harmony with their faith in Christ. They showed partiality, treating wealthy or influential individuals with far greater respect than poor persons. Two visitors might enter their meeting place (literally, “synagogue,” which can apply either to a place of gathering or the meeting itself). One of the men may be splendidly attired and have gold rings on his fingers, indicative of his wealth and social standing. The other visitor may be extremely poor and dressed in rags (literally, “filthy” or “soiled clothing”). (2:2)

If the well-dressed man is given special attention and offered a choice seat while the poor man is told to keep standing or to sit on the floor (below someone’s footstool), believers would be guilty of discrimination and reveal themselves to be judges who make “evil decisions.” Their judgments would be based on outward appearances and, therefore, on the wrong standards. To make this important point about partiality, James presented it in the form of a rhetorical question. (2:3, 4)

He then stressed the impropriety of such preferential treatment, introducing his comments with the words, “Listen, my beloved brothers.” Although certain ones had acted wrongly, he did not reject them but addressed them as beloved fellow members of God’s family. By means of a rhetorical question, James reminded them that God had chosen the poor (the nobodies as far as the world was concerned) to be “rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those loving him.” (2:5)

The communities of believers to whom James directed his words were much like the one in Corinth. Based on human evaluation, not many among them were wise, influential, or of noble birth. (Compare 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.) Nevertheless, God had chosen the poor or insignificant ones to be rich in faith. They had responded to the message about Christ, and so God chose them to be his children, members of his family who are “rich in faith,” having the fullness of trust in him and his Son that is a priceless possession. This faith is their true wealth, for it makes possible an enduring relationship with him and his Son. As God’s children, they are “heirs of the kingdom,” which signifies finally entering as sinless persons into the realm where he is recognized as the Sovereign who exercises supreme authority by means of his unique Son Jesus Christ. This is the kingdom or royal realm that God has promised to all who love him, and this love is evident from their earnest desire to do his will. (2:5)

### **Verses 6-7. Why the sin is serious.**

When according greater honour to the wealthy, believers dishonored the poor, the very ones who had proved to be more responsive to the good news about Jesus Christ. The rich, on the other hand, were undeserving of the kind of deference certain believers showed to them when they came to one of their gatherings. As a class, the wealthy mistreated believers and dragged them before courts. While the oppression from the rich may, in part, have been prompted by their hostile rejection of the message about Jesus Christ, it could also have been from their greed for material advantage. The rich commonly were intent on increasing their holdings. (2:6)

Wealthy unbelievers often were the ones who blasphemed the “good name.” Believers identified themselves as belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, when unbelievers spoke abusively of them, they blasphemed him or the “good name” (the most excellent name by which believers were called). (2:7)

### **Verse 8. Partiality breaks the royal law.**

The ones to whom James wrote would be doing well if they “fulfilled” or observed the “kingly” or “royal law according to the scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Leviticus 19:18, LXX) The command calling for love to be shown to one’s neighbour or fellow is “according to” or set forth in the holy writings. It is a “kingly law,” for it is the command of God, the Supreme Sovereign. Moreover, it is “kingly” from the standpoint of being the command that sums up all the others that relate to the treatment of fellow humans. So it is a law that stands in the foremost position like a king in relation to all the other commands. In relation to the context, heeding the kingly law of love required that believers treat others impartially. (2:8)

## **Verse 9. The royal law convicts of guilt**

If, however, believers were to show partiality (literally, “accept faces”), judging by outward appearances and acting accordingly, they would be “working” or practicing sin. The law of love would reprove them as transgressors. Their partial treatment of others would reveal lack of love for those whom they dishonoured, exposing the partial believers as having transgressed the command to love their neighbours as themselves. (2:9)

## **2:10-13. Dead faith results in judgment**

### **Verses 10-11. The reason for judgment**

James referred to the law with its numerous commands as being one law. Accordingly, individuals who observed all the requirements of the law but violated one command made themselves guilty of lawbreaking and so violated “all,” that is, the law as a whole. The keeping of numerous other commands did not cancel out the violation of any one command. (2:10)

The whole law has one source, God. He is the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” and also said, “You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13, 14 [13, 15, LXX]; Deuteronomy 5:17, 18, LXX) Therefore, the man who did not commit adultery but did murder constituted himself a transgressor of the law. His observing one command did not offset his violating the other one. It appears that James purposely singled out the two commands because he later discussed how believers could make themselves guilty of adultery through friendship with the world and commit murder through unloving actions. (2:11; 4:1, 2, 4; 5:4)

### **Verses 12-13. The reason for mercy**

Believers needed to speak and act like persons who would be judged by the “law of freedom.” Based on the context, the “law of freedom” would be the “kingly law,” which obligates believers to treat others in a loving manner. The motivation for speaking and acting in harmony with the command to love one’s neighbour or fellow as oneself would not be the restraint stemming from a fear of punishment for transgressions. Instead, an inner motivation is involved, for (as set forth in Jeremiah 31:33 regarding the new covenant) the law is written on the hearts and so is an integral part of the individual’s inmost self. Accordingly, it is not a law characterized by the imposition of external restraints but a law of freedom, one that rightly motivated individuals choose to obey in response to the prompting of their inmost selves. At the same time, believers need to recognize that they are accountable to God and his Son for their words and actions. This means that they will be judged by the “law of freedom,” that is, the

basis for judgment will be whether love guided their words and deeds. (2:12; compare Matthew 25:31-46.)

One's showing mercy or compassion for others and actively responding to their needs is an expression of love. Therefore, the one who did not act in a compassionate manner toward those in need would not be shown any mercy when faced with judgment. "Mercy glories over judgment." One's having acted compassionately toward others means that one will be shown mercy at the time of judgment. In this way, the individual's record of mercy determines whether the judgment will be favourable or condemnatory. In the case of merciful persons, their record of mercy and the corresponding mercy associated with their judgment, will glory or triumph over any unfavourable judgment that might otherwise be pronounced against them. (2:13)

### **2:14-20. Dead faith is useless**

#### **Verses 14-16. The principle stated and illustrated**

"Of what benefit [is it], my brothers, if one should say, '[I] have faith,' but he does not have works? That faith cannot save him, [can it]?" A faith or belief that is a mere expression of the lips has no substance. It gives no evidence of being a genuine trust in God and Christ. There must be actions that demonstrate the existence of a vibrant faith. Mere words cannot save or deliver anyone from sin and the condemnation to which it leads. When one truly puts faith in Christ and the value of his sacrificial death, conduct consistent with that faith follows. (2:14)

James illustrated that words are not enough; there must be action. A brother or a sister may be "naked," lacking adequate clothing, and without essential food for the day. If someone were to do nothing to help the destitute person but say, "Go in peace; keep warm and well-nourished," the needy one would not be benefited. To send a poor brother or sister away with such words and nothing for bodily needs would actually be hurtful and cruel, revealing a tremendous lack of love and compassion. (2:15, 16)

#### **Verses 17-20. The inseparability of faith and works**

Only if the poor brother or sister had been given needed food and clothing would it have been appropriate to wish him or her well. Likewise, faith must be accompanied by works that harmonize with it. Faith without works, or belief expressed merely with the lips, is "dead," unproductive, or nonexistent. "According to itself," or "by itself" and so without any tangible evidence of accompanying works, any claimed faith would lack substantive proof of existence as an activating force in the life of the individual. (2:17)

It appears that James introduced an objection to what he had written about faith and works. “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’” This could be understood to be an assertion that, in their relationship to God and Christ, individuals vary, with certain ones having faith and others having deeds. (2:18)

To indicate that only the first statement in verse 18 constitutes the objection, numerous translations use quotation marks (NAB, NIV, NRSV), and others are more explicit in their renderings. “But someone may say: ‘One chooses faith, another action.’” (REB) “Suppose someone disagrees and says, ‘It is possible to have faith without doing kind deeds.’” (CEV)

If only the opening statement of verse 18 is regarded as the objection, the response of James follows. A number of translations make this explicit in their renderings, “To which I reply: ‘Show me this faith you speak of with no actions to prove it, while I by my actions will prove to you my faith.’” (REB) “I would answer, ‘Prove that you have faith without doing kind deeds, and I will prove that I have faith by doing them.’” (CEV) The implication is that, without “works” or “deeds,” a person would not be able to prove that he had faith. (2:18; for other possible ways this verse may be understood, see the Notes section at the end of this chapter.)

Seemingly, certain believers may have felt that faith or belief in one God was sufficient. While belief in the one God is acknowledged as good (“you are doing well”), this in itself is not enough to be divinely approved. “Even the demons believe and shudder.” The demons or disobedient angels (Jude 6) do not deny that God exists, but their belief in God did not prevent them from pursuing a course contrary to his will for them. Their belief was not a faith that manifested itself through good deeds. Therefore, they shudder or tremble in fear on account of the severe judgment that will be expressed against them. (2:19)

James addressed as an “empty man” the person who would object to the necessity of deeds that were a product of genuine faith. Such an individual would be one who thoughtlessly failed to give the essential consideration to the matter of faith and so remained ignorant. James asked whether the “empty man” wished to know or desired proof or evidence that “faith without works is inactive” (*argós*), useless, or unproductive of any positive good. Instead of the Greek word *argós* many manuscripts read “dead” (*nekrós*), and one seventh-century manuscript (P74) says “empty” (*kenós*). While the words appearing in manuscripts differ, the basic thought is that a faith without corresponding deeds is worthless, dead, and lacking all vitality. (2:20)

## **2:21-26. Living faith proves a man righteous**

### **Verses 21-24. The case of Abraham**

When referring to Abraham as “our father” or ancestor, James may have had Jewish believers in mind. There is also the possibility that he considered Abraham as the “father” of all who possessed a faith like his, which would have included non-Jewish believers. Directing his rhetorical question to the “empty” objector, James asked, “Was not Abraham our father justified by [literally, ‘out of’ or ‘from’] works when he presented his son Isaac on the altar?” This question, as the next verse indicates, is not to be understood as meaning to preclude faith. What Abraham did in attempting to offer Isaac proved that he fully trusted God and the promise he had made to him regarding his son. God accounted Abraham as righteous, upright, or approved because he acted in harmony with his faith or trust. (2:21)

Based on what Abraham did, James continued, “You see that faith operated along with his works, and, by [literally, ‘out of’ or ‘from’] works, faith was perfected.” Abraham’s “works,” or his action in attempting to offer Isaac, did not take place apart from his faith. The “works” constituted a tangible expression of his faith, the works being active along with his trust in God and his word. Upon having demonstrated his willingness to obey God’s command to the point of attempting to offer his own son as a sacrifice, Abraham’s faith came to be perfected or completed as a tested faith that had been revealed as truly genuine. (2:22)

On account of what Abraham did, the “scripture” about his being justified “was fulfilled.” The words of this “scripture” are found in Genesis 15:6, where they are linked to God’s covenant promise made to Abraham long before Isaac’s birth. The “scripture” says, “But [not in all manuscripts] Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” After Abraham had demonstrated his faith under test, the words about his being justified took on their fullest significance, for he then, on account of the “works” that expressed his faith, received the angelic confirmation of having God’s approval and the assurance of future blessing. (Genesis 22:10-18) Moreover, Abraham came to be called “friend of God,” a man whom God loved and approved. He was also a “friend of God” from the standpoint of his loving God, demonstrating that love by loyal obedience. (2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8)

The case of Abraham established that a man is justified or constituted right with God by (literally, “out of” or “from”) “works” and not by (literally, “out of” or “from”) “faith alone.” The mere profession of faith or belief in God is not enough; there must be deeds that undeniably establish that the individual truly has faith or trust in God and his word. (2:24)

## **Verses 25-26. The case of Rahab**

Likewise, by works, the harlot Rahab was justified or divinely approved. Based on her knowledge of the miracle at the Red Sea after the Israelites left Egypt and of the later defeat of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og, she expressed her faith or belief that YHWH, the God whom the Israelites worshiped, had given them the land of Canaan. (Joshua 2:8-10) Her faith proved to be genuine, for she acted on it when accepting the Israelite “messengers” (“spies,” according to other manuscripts) into her home and afterward sending them away by another route so that they would escape detection and be able to return safely to the Israelite camp on the east side of the Jordan River. So, by reason of her good “works” for the two Israelite spies and which deeds had been prompted by faith, Rahab came to be approved, resulting in the preservation of her life and that of her relatives when Jericho was destroyed. (2:25; Joshua 2:14-19; 6:17)

As illustrated in the case of Abraham and of Rahab, a genuine faith is expressed in action. Deeds motivated by trust in God and his word are the tangible expressions of an existing faith. “Just as the body without spirit is dead, thus also faith without works is dead.” Without the “spirit” or the animating life principle, a physical body is dead. Likewise, when there are no deeds that prove the existence of belief, the professed faith is merely an expression of the lips. It is dead, for such a faith is unproductive. (2:26)

### **Notes:**

In verse 5, manuscript readings differ. The ones God has chosen are designated as the “poor to the world” (that is, poor in the estimation of the world of mankind), the “poor in the world,” or the “poor of the world.”

The quotations in verses 8 and 11 correspond to the wording in the extant Septuagint text.

In verse 18, the addition of quotation marks or of words to make the meaning explicit affects the way in which what James said is understood. Nevertheless, the basic message is that actions prove the existence of faith.

Many regard only the first statement of verse 18 to be the objection, but others have understood the objection to include the entire verse. “If we only ‘have faith’ [a] man could easily challenge us by saying: ‘You say that you have faith and I have merely good actions. Well, all you can do is to show me a faith without corresponding actions, but I can show you by my actions that I have faith as well.’” (J. B. Phillips)

The German *Gute Nachricht Bibel*, on the other hand, presents the objector's words as only relating to faith. *Aber vielleicht wendet jemand ein: »Hast du überhaupt Glauben?« Darauf antworte ich: Ich habe die Taten! Zeig mir doch einmal deinen Glauben, wenn du mir nicht die entsprechenden Taten zeigen kannst! Aber ich will dir meinen Glauben aus meinen Taten beweisen.* (But perhaps someone may object: "Do you even have faith?" To that I answer: I have the deeds! Show me then your faith if you cannot show me the corresponding deeds! But I will show you my faith by my deeds.")

Still another view is that James introduced the speaker to support the point that faith without works is dead. This introduced speaker would then be represented as addressing someone who objected to what James had said about faith and works. "You maintain that you have faith, but I have works. Show me the faith you claim to have without works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

In his letter to the Romans (4:3), Paul used Genesis 15:6 to prove that Abraham was not justified on the basis of works. His purpose for quoting from Genesis 15:6 was not the same as that of James in his letter (2:23). The apostle Paul established that works could not earn one an approved standing with God but that the individual is justified on the basis of faith. James, on the other hand, presented matters from a different perspective. A living faith is revealed when it prompts good works. So the individual is justified on the basis of the works that are a product of faith. Both Paul and James are in agreement that the faith which leads to having an approved standing with God is not a mere expression of the lips but is an active faith that manifests itself in words and actions that are consistent with it. Like James, Paul emphasized the need for believers to live upright lives.

## **James 3:1-18**

### **3:1-5. Living faith and the influence of the tongue**

#### **Verses 1-2. Our weighty responsibility for what we say**

The admonition that not many should seek to become teachers appears to be directed to those who were not qualified. Addressing fellow believers as “my brothers,” James reminded them that teachers were subject to a severer judgment or greater scrutiny than others in the community of believers. As instructors of fellow believers, teachers had a larger sphere of influence, and any errors they might make could have serious consequences. They needed to be exemplary in their personal conduct, and those being taught would rightly expect them to adhere to the highest standards possible. (3:1)

James included himself when he acknowledged that all of us stumble often or make many mistakes. A man who does not stumble in word, making no mistakes, would be a “perfect man, able to bridle his whole body.” Even for qualified teachers, making mistakes is inevitable. The potential for serious error is far greater in the case of persons who are in no position to be teachers. This should have prompted those who wanted to be teachers to think seriously about whether they were prepared to face greater accountability than others, especially since the potential for making mistakes was very real and could cause harm to those who followed the erroneous instruction. Only a “perfect man” would succeed in being able to express himself correctly at all times and with the right disposition. Sound teaching involves more than one’s imparting and applying information accurately. What is being taught also needs to be conveyed with the right disposition and with a deep interest in all who would benefit from good teaching. Considering the difficulty of flawless control over one’s speaking, the man who would have perfect mastery over what he says and how he expresses it would be able to exercise like control over his whole body, using every part of his body in a faultless manner. (3:2)

#### **3-5 verses. The power of the tongue illustrated**

With bits in the mouths of horses, humans control the entire body of the animals, forcing them to move according to the will of the riders. Large sailing ships, driven along by strong winds, are controlled by the small rudder which the pilots steer. Both of these examples illustrate that a comparatively small device can control something that is far larger. Moreover, the two examples also serve to confirm that perfect control of the comparatively small tongue would mean that the one who had such mastery of it could bridle his entire body. (3:3, 4)

As the organ of speech, the tongue, though a small body part, is involved in voicing great “brags” or pretensions. Often the uttered claims fall far short of actual accomplishments, and the expressions of the tongue can also cause much

harm. James illustrated that something that may appear insignificant in size can be responsible for great damage. It takes just a little fire, a spark, to set a whole forest ablaze. (3:5)

### **3:6-12. Living faith and the treachery of the tongue**

#### **Verses 6-8. Its unruly nature**

The tongue, when used to utter slander, inflammatory remarks, or abusive speech, is a “fire,” unleashing a destructive force that can reach out to harm many. James added that, among the parts of the body, the tongue is a “world of unrighteousness.” Every conceivable evil or injustice can first be expressed or incited by the tongue. In a sense, therefore, the tongue is a whole world of wickedness in miniature form. (3:6)

When used to express hurtful, abusive, or slanderous words, the tongue becomes an instrument of defilement. The whole body is soiled, for the utterances come to identify the whole person as a slanderer, a liar, or a hateful individual. (3:6)

A misused tongue sets the “wheel of the birth” or “existence” ablaze. The expression “wheel of existence” could designate the course of life. Translators have rendered it as “the entire course of our lives” (NAB), “cycle of nature” (NRSV), “a person’s entire life” (CEV), “our entire environment” (*unsere ganze Umgebung* [German, *Hoffnung für alle*]), and “our life from birth to death” (*unser Leben von der Geburt bis zum Tod* [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*]). The misused tongue damages the individual speaker and can corrupt everyone who is directly affected by it, polluting the whole environment into which a person comes at birth. (3:6)

James referred to the destructive power the misused tongue can unleash as “being set ablaze by Gehenna.” The designation “Gehenna” is evidently to be linked to the Valley of Hinnom, where unfaithful Israelites anciently engaged in idolatrous rites. Godly king Josiah eradicated idolatry and defiled the location, at which time or later the valley came to be used as a refuse dump. (2 Kings 23:10) It appears that this is the reason fire and worms or maggots are associated with Gehenna. With reference to the tongue, the meaning appears to be that the destructive power of the tongue is fuelled by the intensity of the blazing Gehenna. (3:6)

Humans have tamed and been able to tame all kinds of wild animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures. (3:7) Ancient accounts reveal just how successful people have been. Among the tamed animals were lions, panthers, bears, elephants, apes, and monkeys. Apes were taught to play musical instruments, and they were trained to drive chariots to which dogs were hitched. According to Suetonius (*Twelve Caesars*, Tiberius, 72), Caesar Tiberius had a serpent that he fed “from his own hand.” Pliny the Elder (in his *Natural History*, Book X,

chapter 43) mentioned that nightingales were very popular among the Romans, frequently being sold for as much as the price of a slave. Often the birds would “sing at command.” In his fictional work, the first-century writer Petronius, says about the home of Trimalchio, “A golden cage hung in the doorway, and a spotted magpie in it greeted visitors.” Ravens were also popular for imitating human speech, as was the green Indian parrot. Mullets and eels were trained to feed from the hands of their owners.

While able to manage, train, or tame a great variety of creatures, sinful humans have not been able to restrain their tongue from speaking what should never be uttered. As the organ of speech, the tongue has proved to be injurious and filled with lethal poison. The lies, slander, bad advice, and error it expresses repeatedly are responsible for much harm and even death. (3:8)

### **Verses 9-12. Its unpredictable inconsistencies**

With the tongue, humans can bless or praise the “Lord and Father,” the God to whom all owe their existence. Yet with the same organ, people can curse men who are made in God’s likeness. They direct abusive words against persons who are his creation and, being in his image, are endowed with attributes like his. These godly qualities include the capacity for thought, wisdom, love, a sense of right and wrong, compassion, fairness, sympathy, and an appreciation of beauty. (3:9)

“Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing.” That this would be the case is incongruous, contrary to the norm in the natural world. When directing his words to fellow believers, his “brothers,” James noted that this should not be so. (3:10)

Using rhetorical questions directed to fellow believers (his “brothers”), he then illustrated how this is contrary to what occurs in the natural world. Spring water flowing from the same opening does not change from fresh to brackish (literally, “pours forth the sweet and the bitter”), does it? Can a fig tree yield olives or a grapevine produce figs? Of itself, salt water does not produce fresh water suitable for drinking purposes. (3:11, 12)

### **3:13-18. Living faith and wisdom**

#### **Verses 13-16. Earthly Wisdom**

The emphasis on the great harm that the tongue can cause served to warn individuals not to be hasty in considering themselves qualified to teach others. James then raised the question, “Who among you is wise and knowledgeable?” This relates to the wisdom and knowledge needed in order to teach others. Wisdom requires being able to impart knowledge in a manner that has a wholesome effect on those who are being taught. Therefore, James stressed the

need for the right disposition. A man who is truly wise should be able to show by his good conduct that his deeds give evidence of the gentleness, meekness, or humility that comes from wisdom. For his teaching to be effective, a teacher must be able to engender a favourable response in those whom he instructs. This requires treating the ones being taught with respect, not making them feel that they are ignorant inferiors. An arrogant bearing and harshness are repelling, whereas kindness, gentleness, and an unassuming disposition on the part of a teacher invite a positive response in those who are being taught. (3:13)

If in the “heart,” the deep inner self, a man were to harbor bitter envy or jealousy and contentiousness, selfish ambition, or a quarrelsome spirit, he would have no basis for boasting about how suitable he was to function as an instructor of others. Instead, any of such bragging about himself would actually be “lying against the truth.” Bitter envy, or begrudging what others are or may possess and being resentful toward them, and a quarrelsome attitude run counter to what an exemplary teacher should be. Accordingly, any claim by envious and quarrelsome individuals about their suitability as teachers would be a lie. It would be “false to the truth,” the truth being that they are unfit as teachers because of their jealousy or envy and their contentiousness or selfish ambition. Their quarrelsome disposition would also be contrary to the words and example of Jesus Christ and, therefore, would grossly misrepresent the truth he taught. (3:14)

“Wisdom” that is linked to envy and contentiousness is no real wisdom. It does not “come down from above,” for it does not have a heavenly or a divine source. God is not the one responsible for this ignoble kind of “wisdom.” It is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” In being “earthly,” this professed “wisdom” is of a debased nature as if derived from the dirt. It is the possession of earthlings who are not endowed with the genuine wisdom that comes from God. This ignoble “wisdom” is unspiritual (literally, “soulical”), being more like that of an animal that has no moral discrimination and is controlled by its senses to act instinctively. In being demonic, it is a wisdom associated with evil, corruption, hatred, and depravity. (3:15)

Jealousy or envy and contentiousness, strife, or selfish ambition destroy good relationships and give rise to ill-will and constant quarreling. Therefore, wherever these destructive traits exist, there will be a disorderly or tumultuous environment. Insecurity, suspicion, hatred, and divisiveness will prevail. Envy or jealousy and contentiousness or selfish ambition provide the breeding ground for every base or morally corrupt thing. (3:16)

### **Verses 17-18. Heavenly wisdom**

Traits that are of an earthly, unspiritual, and demonic kind are the antithesis of the wisdom that comes from above, the wisdom that has God as its source. This

wisdom is “first pure” or “chaste.” There is nothing of a defiling nature associated it, and those who are guided by it conduct themselves uprightly and interact with fellow humans in a loving and caring manner. (3:17)

The wisdom from above is “peaceable.” Persons who possess this wisdom are not quarrelsome nor vengeful. In their dealings with fellow humans, they promote good relationships with and among them. They endeavor to resolve differences amicably and seek to understand others better. (3:17)

Persons who have the wisdom that comes from above are forbearing (*epieikés*), tolerant, gentle or courteous. Instead of insisting on the letter of the law, they look at matters humanely and understandingly. (3:17)

Heavenly wisdom is revealed in an individual’s readiness to comply with whatever is right and fair. The Greek word *eupeithés* is descriptive of a person who is compliant and cooperative, not stubborn or resistant but yielding when the situation calls for making changes. (3:17)

Individuals who are “full of mercy” would be ready and eager to aid persons who are in need. Compassionate people would be willing to forgive, not harboring grudges or becoming resentful. They would give others the benefit of the doubt, not putting the worst construction possible on what fellow humans may do or say. (3:17)

“Good fruits” would include all actions that are morally good, deeds that stem from pure motivation and even exceed what others might expect from an upright person. Good fruits would be an evidence of love, a selfless and kindly disposition. (3:17)

Partiality is not the product of heavenly wisdom. Persons who manifest this wisdom do not show favoritism, not giving preferential treatment to those who are wealthy, prominent, or influential. In their interactions with others, they are considerate, kind, and loving, diligently striving to accord everyone the respect that is their rightful due. (3:17)

A hypocrite is a person who dissembles or puts on a pretence. In its basic sense, the Greek word for “hypocrite” (*hypokrités*) designates “one who answers” and came to be the term for an “actor,” a person who plays a part on the stage. Actors wore large masks equipped with devices that amplified the voice, and so the term *hypokrités* came to be used in a metaphoric sense to apply to a person who plays a part, a pretender, or a dissembler. Persons who are free from hypocrisy do not put on a false front. Their words and actions are a true reflection of their inmost selves. (3:17)

The “fruit of righteousness” may refer to all the good that results from righteousness, uprightness, or right living. Another possibility is that

“righteousness” (that is, what God considers to be right, just, or upright) is itself the fruit. Either what righteousness yields or righteousness itself can only flourish where peace prevails or in an environment of mutual understanding and unity. One way to understand the concluding verse of chapter 3 is that persons who promote peace, working to further good relationships with and among others, are the ones who sow the seed that yields righteousness or right living as a fruit or that produces the deeds that are right and good. (3:18; see the Notes section.)

### Notes:

In verse 9, numerous later manuscripts read “God” instead of “Lord.”

Verse 18 has been variously understood, and this is reflected in modern translations. “And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NASB) “When peacemakers plant seeds of peace, they will harvest justice.” (CEV) “And the wise are peacemakers who go on quietly sowing for a harvest of righteousness — in other people and themselves.” (J. B. Phillips) “Peace is the seed-bed of righteousness, and the peacemakers will reap its harvest.” (REB) “And peace, for those who strive for peace, is the seed of which the harvest is righteousness.” (Weymouth) *Die Frucht der Gerechtigkeit aber wird in Frieden denen gesät, die Frieden stiften.* (The fruit of righteousness, however, will be sown in peace for those who promote peace. [German, revised *Elberfelder Bibel*]) *Die Früchte, die vor Gott bestehen können, wachsen dort, wo Friedensstifter eine Saat des Friedens säen.* (The fruits that can remain before God grow there where peacemakers sow a seed of peace. [German, *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*]) *Die Saat der Gerechtigkeit, von Gott gesät, geht nur bei denen auf, die auf Frieden aus sind, und nur bei ihnen bringt sie Frucht.* (The seed of righteousness, sown by God, only springs up among those who aim for peace, and it bears fruit only among them. [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*]) *Wo Frieden herrscht, wird (von Gott) für die Menschen, die Frieden stiften, die Saat der Gerechtigkeit ausgestreut.* (Where peace prevails, the seed of righteousness will be scattered [by God] for the people who promote peace. [German, *Einheitsübersetzung*])

## James 4:1-17

### 4:1-5. Living faith and worldliness

#### Verses 1-4. The manifestation of worldliness

James appears to have been informed about serious cases of disunity existing in the communities of believers to whom he directed his letter. He raised the question as to why conflicts and fighting existed among them. To identify the source, he raised another rhetorical question, “[Is it] not from here, from your lusts [*hedoné*] that battle in your members?” (4:1)

The Greek word *hedoné* basically means “pleasure.” In this context, the term may be understood to signify “selfish desire,” “passion,” or “lust.” Within the individuals, the improper desires carry on a conflict, exerting increasing pressure to be satisfied. These desires are like an occupying army that seeks to command and control the members of the body. When individuals yield to the desires, the welfare of others is ignored, with the focus being on self-interest or on what is presumed to bring personal pleasure. Whenever this happens in a community of believers, unity is destroyed. Distrust, suspicion, exploitation, and hurt feelings ruin what may at one time have been an environment where exemplary love prevailed. As a result, individuals begin to quarrel and fight with one another. (4:1)

Even though certain ones had wrong desires and yielded to them, they still did “not have” or did not obtain what they wanted, leaving them empty-handed. Seemingly, regarding the lengths to which they went in efforts to satisfy their cravings, James continued, “You murder and are jealous [*zelóo*].” Their murdering may be understood to apply to their manifesting a hateful disposition and a callous disregard for others, which would have been tantamount to murder. Another possibility is that the rich withheld the rightful wages from workers or deprived them of life’s necessities by means of judicial proceedings, robbing them of their livelihood and so, in effect, murdering them. (4:2; compare 1 Corinthians 6:5-9 and see the Notes section.)

The Greek verb *zelóo* can also mean “to envy” or “to covet.” Certain ones were apparently filled with ill-will toward those who possessed what they themselves did not have but strongly desired. Their actions and their desires, however, did not result in obtaining what they wanted. (4:2)

The lusts and the base means to which individuals resorted to attain their selfish objectives led to fights and conflicts. Those who came to be embroiled in fighting and warring did not come to have or possess because they did not ask. They did not pray to God and, in view of their conduct, could not have done so in an acceptable manner. (4:2)

Those who did ask, or pray, did “not receive.” Their petitions did not receive God’s favourable hearing because of their asking wrongly. When praying, they had neither the right disposition nor the proper motive. All they really wanted was to satisfy their selfish desires (literally, “that you might spend [the things asked for] on your lusts”). (4:3)

Believers are parties in the new covenant and, on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice, have been reconciled to his Father. Their relationship to God, however, depends on continuing to live in a manner that accords with their having been forgiven of their sins and on being faithful to him. A failure to do so constitutes a violation of the covenant relationship with him and, therefore, is “adultery.” James addressed those who engaged in “fighting and warring” as “adulteresses” or, according to other manuscripts, as “adulterers and adulteresses.” By means of a rhetorical question, he reminded them (literally, “do you not know,” or do you not recognize) that friendship with the world means enmity with God. Therefore, anyone desiring to be the world’s friend would be choosing to have God as his enemy. (4:4)

Conflicts and quarrelling, envy or jealousy, and selfish desires are common in the world of mankind that is in a state of alienation from God. Individuals make themselves friends of the world when they think, plan, speak, and act like persons who are alienated from God and have no regard for his ways. Whenever individuals reject the course of selfless love and compassion, and then manifest selfishness, callousness, or hatred, or fight, quarrel, slander, and speak abusively, they incur God’s enmity or displeasure. They reveal themselves to be friends of the world, refusing to reject its hateful ways but, instead, choosing to be like it in its state of alienation from God. (4:4)

### **Verse 5. The cure for worldliness**

No scripture corresponding to the quotation in verse 5 is found in the extant recognized “holy writings.” If the original reading of James 4:5 relates to the condition of sinful humans, possibly Genesis 8:21 may be regarded as expressing a similar thought (“the inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”).

The “scripture” is introduced with the words, “Or do you think that, for nothing [for no reason or purpose], the scripture says.” How this “scripture” is to be understood depends on which manuscript reading is followed. According to the oldest extant manuscripts, the verb for “dwell” or “reside” is *katókisen* (form of *katoikízo*). As the third-person singular indicative verb form in the aorist tense and the active voice, *katókisen* can be rendered “he made to dwell.” Literally, the passage could be translated, “Toward envy [*phthónos*] the spirit that he made to dwell in us is longing.” Many have concluded that the word *phthónos* here denotes “jealousy,” but this is by no means certain. Translators have either

retained the meaning “envy” or have used “jealousy” or a related expression, and some (based on the third-person singular verb) have made an explicit application to God. “The spirit that he has made to dwell in us tends toward jealousy.” (NAB) “The spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely.” (NIV) “The spirit which God implanted in us is filled with envious longings.” (REB) “God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.” (NRSV) Earlier, James pointed out that God does not try or tempt anyone (1:13), and so the passage could not mean that God is the active agent in implanting a spirit that “longs” or is inclined to envy. Possibly the thought is that the spirit (the activating or motivating principle) that God permitted to take up residence within sinful humans is inclined to envy. (4:5)

Many later manuscripts contain an intransitive form of the verb for “dwell” (*katókesen*, from *katoikéo*) not the causative form *katókisen* (from *katoikízo*) that is spelled with the iota [i], not the eta [e], after kappa [k] and so, in relation to “spirit,” could mean “the spirit which has taken up dwelling in us.” Based on this significance of the verb, the words of the “scripture” could be rendered, “Toward envy is the longing of the spirit which has taken up residence in us.” This could be understood to signify that the longing, yearning, or strong inclination of the spirit or motivating principle in humans is to envy what others may have or enjoy. Although divinely approved by reason of their faith in Christ and his sacrifice for them, believers are not sinless or liberated from the tendency to envy. (4:5)

#### **4:6-10 Living faith and humility**

##### **Verse 6. The source of humility**

If verse 5 relates to the sinful human tendency to envy, the next verse shows why believers can resist succumbing to the improper longing to which the human spirit in its fallen state gives rise. “But the favor God gives us is greater.” In expression of his gracious favour or unmerited kindness, God gives his spirit to believers and strengthens them to resist the inclination to sin. Accordingly, the power that God’s gracious favour exerts is far greater than the strong inclination or longing of the human spirit to envy. That believers will be granted divine favor, provided they maintain the right disposition, is confirmed by the quotation from Proverbs 3:34 (LXX), “God opposes the haughty, but gives favor to the humble.” To be a recipient of God’s favour calls for one to submit willingly to his pure ways, not arrogantly resisting or fighting against his permissive or express will. Humble persons acknowledge their need for God’s help, whereas the arrogant trust in themselves and fail to recognize their helpless condition. (4:6)

## **Verses 7-10. The way to humility**

Because God grants his gracious favour to the humble, believers should seek to subject themselves to him. This requires being responsive to his ways, which are summed up in the commands to love him and fellow humans. It is also essential to submit to whatever trials he may permit one to face, never resorting to base means to gain relief but always relying on him to grant the needed strength to endure. The devil's objective would be for one, when undergoing distress, to give up or to endeavour to escape by committing sinful acts. Therefore, believers must oppose the devil, relying on divine aid to resist becoming his victim. Believers who take a firm stand for what is right, continuing to look to their heavenly Father and his Son to aid them, can be assured that the devil "will flee from [them]." The adversary would not succeed and so would suffer defeat like that of an enemy who takes to flight. (4:7)

To be able to approach God acceptably, certain believers needed to make changes in their lives. James admonished them, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify [your] hearts, double-minded ones [literally, double-souled ones]." (Compare Psalm 24:3, 4.) Cleansing the hands would have meant repenting and abandoning divinely disapproved conduct. The "heart" denotes the inmost self, and to purify the heart would signify to cease being divided in affection and loyalty. Among the believers whom James addressed were "double-minded" or "double-souled" ones. Individually, they were like two persons, clinging to the world and, at the same time, professing to be devoted to God and Christ. Therefore, they needed to exert themselves to be exclusively devoted to God and his Son, ceasing to be tainted by a love for the world and its God-dishonouring ways. (4:8)

Believers who had defiled themselves by failing to display love in attitude, word, or deed needed to give serious consideration to their standing before God. This should have made it possible for them to recognize their miserable state and to mourn and weep on account of their having strayed from his ways. Their laughter associated with self-indulgent conduct should have been replaced by mourning. They had reason to be sad about having failed to conduct themselves in a manner that honoured God and Christ. The joy they may have had as they pursued their own selfish desires needed to be recognized as having been improper. Their joy or the elated state should have been changed to dejection, a sense of bitter disappointment, shame, and regret. (4:9)

Believers who had sinned needed to humble themselves "before the Lord" ("God," according to numerous later manuscripts). Their approach to him should have been like destitute beggars, acknowledging their sins and supplicating him for his forgiveness. Upon thus humbling themselves before him as helpless sinners in need of being shown compassion, they could rest assured that they

would be granted forgiveness and thus exalted as persons who would be acceptable to him. (4:10)

#### **4:11-12. Living faith and evil speaking**

##### **Verse 11a. The injunction**

##### **Verses 11b-12. The reason for the injunction,**

As members of God's family of children ("brothers"), believers should not be speaking ill of one another. A believer who speaks evil of his "brother," demeaning him, blatantly exposing his faults, or raising doubts about his motives, or who "judges" him would make himself guilty of speaking against law and judging law. (4:11)

To "judge" a brother would mean to condemn him on the basis of personal standards, scruples, or biases. This kind of judging would stem from an overly critical and censorious disposition. (4:11)

Divine law requires that love be shown to one's fellow, but the person who speaks against his "brother" and condemns him violates this law. Acting as if the law did not apply to him, he treats it contemptuously and so speaks against it. He judges law as not deserving to be obeyed. One who thus judges law is not a "doer of law," for he does not live in harmony with it. In not doing what the law requires, he makes himself a "judge," a person who has the right to decide his own course or to make his own rules and regulations. When setting up his own standards for judgment, he judges divine law as inadequate. (4:11)

Persons who thus assume the role of judges of divine law are acting presumptuously. "One is lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and destroy." God alone is the rightful lawgiver, for he knows what is best for his creation. He is also the one who flawlessly discerns the hidden motives, is not fooled by outward appearances, and can weigh all the factors when rendering his impartial decisions. Jesus Christ, as the divinely appointed judge, is in position to conform perfectly to his Father's way of judging. Whereas the Father has committed judging to his Son, he continues to be the Supreme Judge. He is "able to save and destroy," delivering individuals from condemnation and granting them his approval or destroying them, cutting them off as disapproved without the possibility of any future relationship with him. No human can save or destroy in this manner. Fittingly, James raised the rhetorical question, "You, however [*dé*, omitted in a number of manuscripts], who are you to judge [your] neighbour?" For believers to presume to be judges would mean to overstep their boundaries as persons who are obligated to love fellow humans, especially their own "brothers" in the faith. (4:12)

## **4:13-17. Living faith and secularism**

### **Verse 13. The spirit of secularism**

Some believers appear to have relied on their own abilities and resources, giving no consideration to their dependence on God when formulating their plans. “Today or tomorrow,” they would say, “we will go to this [particular] city,” remaining there for a year and doing business and making money. (4:13)

### **Verses 14-17. The folly of secularism**

They ignored the fact that they did not know what their life would be the next day, let alone a year from then. Human life is transitory. As persons, therefore, people are like a vapour or puff of smoke that appears and then quickly disappears. (4:14)

Instead of arrogantly speaking and planning as if success were sure, believers needed to keep in mind that life has its uncertainties. At all times they should take into consideration God’s will. James gave the admonition, “You ought to say, ‘If the Lord wishes, we shall live and do this or that.’” Whatever God wishes includes both his express will and what he may permit. So when making plans, believers should recognize that they are subject to God’s will. Though not necessarily each time saying, “If the Lord wishes,” they should always plan with an awareness of his will. If he permits that our life continue or he so wills it, then we will live and be able to do “this or that.” (4:15)

Among those to whom James wrote were believers who did not conduct their affairs of life in a manner that reflected an awareness of God’s will. They trusted in themselves and their abilities, resorting to boasting in their arrogance. Their haughty reliance on themselves and their own resources was “evil,” for it ignored God. (4:16)

“If, therefore,” James continued, “one knows the right thing to do and does not, it is sin to him.” In this context, the right thing is to live life according to God’s will. Any failure to do so would be a reflection of haughty self-reliance. This would be sin, for one’s uprightness is demonstrated by one’s recognition of and submission to God’s will. (4:17)

### **Notes:**

Translators vary in the way they punctuate verse 2, which has a bearing on the meaning that is conveyed. “You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.” (NRSV) “You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask.” (NAB) “You

want things, but you do not have them. So you are ready to kill and are jealous of other people, but you still cannot get what you want. So you argue and fight. You do not get what you want, because you do not ask God.” (NCV) “You want what you cannot have, so you murder; you are envious, and cannot attain your ambition, so you quarrel and fight. You do not get what you want, because you do not pray for it.” (REB)

For verse 5, translations vary considerably in their interpretive renderings. Many consider the reference to be to God’s spirit. A footnote in the German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* presents the following as a possible rendering, *Mit leidenschaftlichem Eifer sehnt sich der Geist, den Gott in uns hat Wohnung nehmen lassen, danach, dass wir Gott allein ergeben sind.* (With passionate zeal, the Spirit that God permitted to take up residence in us longs that we be exclusively devoted to God.) J. B. Phillips omitted words found in the Greek text, and his paraphrase is more of a rewrite than a translation. “Or do you imagine that this spirit of passionate jealousy is the Spirit he has caused to live in us?”

## **James 5:1-20**

### **5:1-6 Living faith exercised by persecution**

#### **Verses 1-3. Oppressors doom predicted**

When pronouncing woe upon the wealthy, James focused on those who exploited the poor. As these rich ones did not use their means to benefit others, they would face divine condemnation. Then they would weep and howl, raising their voices in bitter lamentation over the misery or calamity that would befall them. (5:1)

The wealthy had piled up riches, and so plentiful were their possessions that they had deteriorated from disuse. Their riches had rotted, corroded, or spoiled, and their garments had become moth-eaten. (5:2)

An example from the first century BCE of the kind of wealth certain men in the Greco-Roman world had accumulated can be seen from the comments of the Greek historian Plutarch. In his *Lives*, he wrote about Lucullus, the Roman general who had gained fabulous wealth from his successful military campaigns and, after his retirement from public and military life, indulged in luxurious living. In Naples, Lucullus had constructed “hills upon vast tunnels,” and had “brought in the sea for moats and fish ponds around his house,” and had “built pleasure houses in the waters.” After seeing this, Tubero the stoic called Lucullus “Xerxes in a gown.” The accommodations of Lucullus in Tusculum featured belvederes, “large open balconies for men’s apartments, and porticos to

walk in.” When Pompey came to see him, he criticized him for making a residence that would be “pleasant in summer but uninhabitable in winter.” With a smile, Lucullus replied, “You think me, then, less provident than cranes and storks, not to change my home with the season.”

A praetor, in the process of preparing a lavish performance for the people, asked Lucullus whether he could “lend him some purple robes for the performers in a chorus.” Lucullus responded that he would see whether he had any purple robes and, if he did, “he would let him have them.” The next day he asked the praetor how many purple robes he wanted. “Being told that a hundred would suffice,” Lucullus offered him two hundred. Regarding this incident, the poet Horace reportedly observed, “A house is but a poor one where the unseen and unthought-of valuables do not exceed all those that meet the eye.”

James referred to the gold and silver of the wealthy as having “corroded” (*katióo*). The Greek verb *katióo* is understood to apply to rusting, tarnishing, or corroding. In its pure state, gold does not corrode. From ancient times, however, gold has been alloyed with silver, which does corrode, discolouring the gold alloy. (5:3)

The corrosion of the stored-up wealth would prove to be a testimony against the possessors thereof, for the corrosion would prove that these riches had not been put to good use in relieving the distress of the needy. This corrosion or rust would consume their flesh. In their own person, they would experience the bitter consequences from the corrosion that gave evidence of their lack of compassion. No mercy would be extended to them when they faced divine judgment for the record of corrosion that testified against them and which would prove to be their ruin. The words “like fire” could relate to their flesh that would be consumed just like fire consumes combustible materials. (5:3)

Another possibility is that “like fire” is to be linked to the phrase that follows. “It is like a fire which you have stored up for the final days.” (NJB) This would mean that the corrosion is like a fire that they had stored up by their self-indulgent ways and their failure to use their riches aright. This stored-up fire would consume them at the time divine judgment would be executed against them. (5:3)

In the Greek text, the last phrase of verse 3 literally reads, “You have treasured up in [the] last days.” Numerous translations do not include the words “like fire” with this phrase and render the words to indicate that the “last days” had already begun. “You have piled up wealth in an age that is near its close.” (REB) “Yet you keep on storing up wealth in these last days.” (CEV) “You have hoarded wealth in the last days.” (NIV) “You have made a fine pile in these last days,

haven't you?" (J. B. Phillips) With the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, a new age dawned and so the "last days" had their start. These "last days" would culminate upon his return in glory and the execution of divine judgment. From this standpoint, it could be said that the self-indulgent wealthy were piling up treasures in or during the "last days." (5:3; compare Acts 2:16-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.)

Other translations represent the storing up of treasures to be "for the last days," meaning for the judgment then to be executed. "You saved your treasure for the last days." (NCV) "This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment." (NLT)

### **Verses 4-6. Oppressors' crimes exposed**

In their greed for more wealth, the rich had withheld the wages of the laborers who had harvested their fields. These held-back wages are represented as crying out, that is, crying out to be paid. Wages were due at the end of each workday, and the reapers depended on their pay to obtain daily necessities for themselves and their families. When the agricultural workers did not receive their compensation, they, in their distress, cried out to God. Their cries reached "the ears of the Lord Sabaoth." "Sabaoth" is a transliteration of the Greek term that is itself a transliteration of the Hebrew word that means "hosts" or "armies," and the expression "Lord Sabaoth" identifies God as the Lord who has hosts or armies of angels at his command and service. He heard the cries of the unpaid reapers, and so would act against those who had dealt fraudulently with them. (5:4)

Here, on earth, the wealthy lived luxuriously and indulged in pleasures without restraint. They "fattened [their] hearts in a day of slaughter." The fattening of their hearts could apply to indulging their appetites to the full or to making themselves insensitive to the needs and suffering of fellow humans. (5:5; compare 1 Samuel 2:29; Psalm 119:70; Jeremiah 5:27, 28.)

A "day of slaughter" could designate a festive occasion when animals were slaughtered for sumptuous feasting. (Compare Isaiah 22:13.) Another possibility is that, on a day when innocent persons were slaughtered, wealthy oppressors continued to feast. "On earth you have had a life of comfort and luxury; in the time of slaughter you went on eating to your heart's content." (5:5, NJB)

Numerous translations render verse 5 to apply to a future day of slaughter, that is, to the time when divine judgment would be executed against the self-indulgent rich. This would mean that, for this future day of slaughter, the rich, like animals to be killed, had fattened their hearts or themselves. "While here on

earth, you have thought only of filling your own stomachs and having a good time. But now you are like fat cattle on their way to be butchered.” (CEV) “You have lived on the land in wanton luxury, gorging yourselves — and that on the day appointed for your slaughter.” (REB)

The “righteous one” whom the rich had condemned and then murdered may designate any upright or innocent person. Numerous translations make the general sense explicit, rendering the singular “righteous one” as a plural. “You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.” (NIV) “You have judged guilty and then murdered innocent people, who were not against you.” (NCV) “It was you who condemned the upright and killed them; they offered you no resistance.” (NJB) “You have condemned and murdered innocent people, who couldn’t even fight back.” (CEV) Through corrupt legal means, the wealthy either brought about the death of innocent victims to attain their base aims or deprived them of their means of livelihood, which would have been tantamount to murder. Because the wealthy had the power, the upright had no recourse. (5:6)

It may be that James also had in mind Jesus Christ, “the righteous one,” in whose judicial murder the rich and influential ones were involved. The Son of God did not resort to violent opposition, but allowed himself to be seized, mistreated, and killed. Moreover, he considers what is done to his disciples as being done to him. (Matthew 25:34-45) So when the rich either brought about the death of any disciples or deprived them of their livelihood, they murdered Jesus Christ, the righteous one. (5:6)

On account of what believers experienced at the hands of influential wealthy persons who persisted in unbelief, they needed to be patient, bearing up under distressing circumstances without bitter complaint or resorting to wrongful means to be relieved of their suffering. Deliverance was certain to come at the time of the Lord’s presence or upon his return as the highly exalted Lord of lords and King of kings. Believers would then be united with him, whereas those who defiantly rejected him would experience eternal ruin. So until the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ, believers would have to endure patiently when subjected to trials and hardships. (5:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

### **5:7-11. Living faith exercised by patience under persecution**

#### **Verses 7-9. Ground for patience**

Their patient endurance would assure them of a good outcome. With examples, James illustrated this for his “brothers,” fellow believers in the family of God’s beloved children. A farmer had to wait patiently until the crop matured and he

could harvest “the precious fruit of the soil.” Sufficient rainfall is needed for there to be a good harvest. So the farmer had to be patient as he waited for the “early and late” rains. In the land of Israel where James resided, planting was done in the fall, and this was also the season for the early rains. The late rains came in the spring, providing essential water for the maturing crops. (5:7)

Like the farmer, believers needed to be patient. Strengthening their “hearts” could include building an inner resolve not to give up or not to yield to discouragement. Believers were not to allow their hope of future deliverance to grow weak but were to look forward to the glorious arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ. James referred to the Lord’s presence, arrival, or his again being with believers as having “drawn near.” He did not know just when Jesus Christ would return but spoke of his arrival as imminent. At all times, believers were to regard Jesus Christ’s coming again with the kind of certainty associated with an event that was close at hand. (5:8)

In the community of believers, as also in any family, problems and misunderstandings can develop. What others may say and do can at times create friction. James urged his “brothers,” fellow believers, not to complain (literally, “groan”) against one another. They should not make their own standards, views, or scruples the basis for finding fault with their brothers, for this could result in their coming under judgment. God is the Supreme Judge, and he has granted his Son the authority to judge. So the judge to whom James referred could be either the Father or the Son. The previous mention of the arrival of the Lord, however, would indicate that the application is to the Lord Jesus Christ in his capacity as judge. Believers were to keep in mind that the judge was “standing before the doors,” fully aware of what was taking place among them and in a position to judge anyone who wrongly censured his “brother.” This should have restrained them from grumbling about their brothers and making personal judgments concerning them. (5:9)

### **Verses 10-11. Encouraging examples of patience**

When it came to distressing experiences, believers should consider the example of the ancient Hebrew prophets, “who spoke in the name of the Lord,” or as representatives of YHWH. Among the people to whom they declared God’s message, they patiently endured suffering, not giving up. Jeremiah, for example, was subjected to mistreatment and imprisonment. Although he at times complained bitterly about his lot, he continued to discharge his commission faithfully and so endured submissively without resorting to sinful acts to free himself from distress. (5:10; Jeremiah 11:18-21; 12:1-4; 15:10-18; 20:1, 2; 37:12-16; 38:1-6)

The record of those who faithfully endured moved James to say, “Look! We call fortunate the ones who have endured. You have heard [about] Job’s endurance, and you have seen the Lord’s end result [*télos*], that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” All who endured faithfully could be referred to as “fortunate,” or in an enviable or desirable state. They enjoyed God’s approval and, therefore, their relationship with him proved to be secure. Believers knew about what had happened to Job. He lost his flocks and herds, all his children perished, he himself was afflicted with an exceedingly painful disease, and three of his close companions falsely accused him of secret sins because they had wrongly concluded that God was punishing him. Like the prophet Jeremiah, Job also complained about his distressing experience, but he did not deny his God and so endured his trials as one who remained faithful to him. (5:11)

The Greek word *télos* literally means “end,” but it can also denote that which is the end result, the outcome, the conclusion, or the purpose. In the context of verse 11, translators have variously rendered the term. “You remember how patient Job was and how the Lord finally helped him.” (CEV) “You have heard how Job stood firm, and you have seen how the Lord treated him in the end.” (REB) “You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.” (NIV) “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and understood the Lord’s purpose.” (NJB)

In a number of ways, Job came to be the recipient of divine compassion and mercy. He received a revelation that made it clear to him that he could not possibly comprehend God’s activity. (Job 38:1-40:2) While severely afflicted and not understanding the reason for his suffering, Job had spoken rashly. Therefore, in expression of divine mercy, he was forgiven and acknowledged as approved. Once Job came to discern from the divine revelation the great limits of his understanding, he came to have a clearer vision of God, as if actually seeing him. In his dealings with Job thereafter, God greatly blessed him. Job ceased to be alienated from his relatives, acquaintances, and friends. He came to have twice as many sheep, goats, camels, yoke of bovines, and female donkeys than he had lost. Again Job fathered seven sons and three daughters, the daughters being extraordinarily beautiful. He lived a long and contented life, having the joy of seeing the offspring of his children, both grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (5:11; Job 42:1-16)

## **5:12. Living faith exercised by avoiding oath-making**

### **Verse 12a. The warning**

In their interaction with one another, some believers may not have been altogether truthful. (Compare Ephesians 4:25.) They may have resorted to oaths

to make their words appear to be more trustworthy. Possibly for this reason, James, in keeping with Jesus' teaching, said, "But above all, my brothers, do not swear, neither by heaven nor by earth nor with any other oath. But let your "Yes" [mean] "Yes," and your "No" [mean] "No," that you may not fall under judgment." The introductory words, "but above all," indicate that this was a matter of great importance, although not signifying the most important aspect in the life of believers. Instead of swearing to assure others they were speaking the truth or excusing non-fulfillment of a promise or agreement on the basis that a particular formula used in swearing did not impose a binding obligation, believers should be completely trustworthy in their expressions. Their "Yes" should mean "Yes," and their "No" should mean "No." (5:12)

Whenever individuals frequently resorted to oaths in daily life, they exposed themselves as persons whose word could not be trusted. Their choosing to swear by heaven or by earth would have been regarded as having less binding force than swearing by God. So, when failing to live up to their word, even excusing their non-fulfillment of promises because of not having used a particular formula when swearing, believers would have come under condemnation. Others would have judged them as untrustworthy persons or liars, and they would also have become divinely disapproved. (5:12)

### **5:13-18. Living faith exercised in prayer**

#### **Verse 13. Exhortation to the suffering**

Among believers, individuals would find themselves in a variety of circumstances. Some would be experiencing distress, whereas others would be enjoying a state of well-being. James advised the believer who was burdened by difficulties to pray, which would include asking God for aid and strength to be able to endure the affliction. When believers are in good spirits on account of favourable circumstances, they should "sing psalms" or praises, expressing their gratitude to God. (5:13)

#### **Verses 14-15. Instructions for the physically ill.**

Sick believers should call the elders of the congregation, having them pray over them and anoint them "with oil in the name of the Lord." When ill, individuals are downcast and may begin to have doubts about their relationship to God. They may even find it hard to pray. Therefore, they would benefit from having elders from the community of fellow believers pray over them. The sincere prayer of the elders would be reassuring to the sick, reminding them of their being part of God's family of beloved children and strengthening their faith in divine power to sustain them. With a renewed focus on divine help and the

reassurance of divine love and care, the sick would come to have an inner peace that contributes to recovery. (5:14)

Anciently, olive oil was commonly used for medicinal purposes. (Isaiah 1:6; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34) When the elders anointed the sick with oil, this would have had a soothing or calming effect on the afflicted, contributing to the healing process. The elders would have done the anointing “in the name of the Lord” Jesus Christ, as they would have been acting as his representatives or for him as the congregation’s head who is deeply concerned about the welfare of each individual member. (5:14)

James referred to the “prayer of faith” as “saving” the afflicted one. This “saving” denotes being delivered from the illness and restored to health. In answer to the prayer of the elders who have offered their petitions as an expression of their faith in God and Christ, the holy spirit would operate freely within sick believers. This would result in their having a heightened awareness of divine love for them, producing an inner calm and a trust in divine power to sustain them in their distress. Thus God’s spirit would counteract any negative emotions that would otherwise interfere with recovery. (5:15)

Among sick believers, some may additionally have had a troubled conscience because of having sinned. Their spiritual distress could have greatly affected their physical well-being. The psalmist related how miserable he came to feel physically on account of his sin. “My body wasted away with day-long moaning. For day and night your [God’s] hand was heavy upon me; the sap in me dried up as in summer drought.” (Psalm 32:3, 4, REB) Fittingly, therefore, James included the thought that, if the individual had committed sins, it would be forgiven him. The person’s subsequent inward realization that his sins had been forgiven would free him from the emotional burden that otherwise could have seriously interfered with the recovery from sickness. (5:15)

### **Verse 16. Exhortation to persevering prayer.**

As part of the family of God’s beloved children, believers should not be living secretive lives, presenting a false front about their conduct. Concealment of sin works against healing, for it creates a troubled conscience that is destructive to spiritual and physical well-being. James admonished fellow believers to acknowledge their “sins” (“transgressions,” according to other manuscripts) to one another and to pray for one another, so that they “may be healed.” (5:16)

The essential openness that promotes healing can only exist in an environment where love and trust prevail, for only then will believers feel free to acknowledge their errors, confident that they will not be faced with hateful

rejection. In an environment where believers know that they are deeply loved and are not paralyzed by fear of negative consequences from confessing their sins, they are in a position to pray in specific ways for one another because of being aware of the personal struggles others are facing. The prayers of the upright have much power and are effective, for they are favourably heard by God. (5:16)

### **Verses 17-18. The example**

James focused attention on Elijah to illustrate the power of prayer. Although a prophet with a special commission, he was still a human subject to feelings or emotions “like ours.” As a man, he was no different than any other upright person. Therefore, godly men and women can expect that their prayers will have power and will be effective. So that God’s disapproval of Baal worship might be undeniably revealed, Elijah prayed for it not to rain. In response to this prayer of an upright man, it did not rain for “three years and six months.” (5:17; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1; see the Notes section.) After this period of drought, Elijah prayed for it to rain, and it did, providing the needed precipitation for the land to yield crops. (5:18; 1 Kings 18:42-45)

### **5:19-20. Living faith exercised by a diligent witness**

#### **Verse 19. The need for witnessing**

#### **Verse 20. The result of witnessing**

Believers should be concerned about one another. When a “brother” or a believer strays from the “truth” (the truth as it relates to Jesus Christ, including his example and teaching), he needs help. If a fellow believer succeeds in turning him back from the wrong course, the sinning or erring “brother” would have “his soul” saved from death, and a multitude of sins would be covered. The “soul” designates the person, and being saved from death would mean being delivered from the condemnation to which sin leads. In many Greek manuscripts, the wording is ambiguous so that the particular “soul” could either be the erring brother or the one who aided him to recover from straying from the truth. The more likely significance is that the “soul” designates the sinner who would be forgiven and so would regain his proper relationship with God and Christ. Likewise, the many sins that would be forgiven or “covered” would be those of the erring brother, not those of the believer who came to his assistance. (5:19, 20)

## Notes:

Instead of a form of *aphysteréo* (“withhold” or “hold back”) in verse 4, many other manuscripts contain a form of *aposteréo*. Although the original reading of fourth-century Codex Vaticanus is the same as fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus (a form of *aphysteréo*), a corrector has changed the word to a form of *aposteréo*, meaning “rob,” “withhold,” “steal,” “defraud,” or “despoil,” or “deprive.” The difference in manuscript readings, however, does not materially affect the understanding of the text.

In verse 14, a few late manuscripts identify the Lord as being Jesus Christ. Verse 15 is not to be understood that, in each case, believers would recover from illness, but (in answer to prayer) they would always be sustained and strengthened to endure their affliction. James would have known about believers who had died after a period of sickness, but he was also fully aware of the power of prayer. (Compare Acts 9:37.) He, like other believers, understood that all their petitions are governed by the request that God’s will be done. This does not minimize the important role that prayer plays in the recovery from illness. Modern studies have established that the immune system responds to positive thoughts, emotions, and actions, and that persons who come to have a positive outlook because of faith and prayer are more likely to recover from serious illness than are persons without faith.

The account in 1 Kings 17:1 does not say that Elijah prayed for it not to rain, and so James (verse 17) seemingly based his words on another source. Nevertheless, it is reasonable that Elijah would have prayed before he made his declaration to Ahab that there would be neither dew nor rain. First Kings 18:1 mentions the “third year” of the drought, whereas James 5:17 speaks of “three years and six months” without rain. One way this may be understood is that the drought set in after the end of the usual dry season. With no rains coming at the normal close of the dry season, the period without rain proved to be “three years and six months,” whereas the actual time of intense drought was shorter.



### Divine Healing

1. Does the Lord heal today?  
Of course He can and does heal today, but not always.
2. God is completely free to heal according to His will (ff. 1 John 5:13-15.)
3. His will may include physical infirmity and sickness in His plan for the testing, strengthening or chastening of His own (1 Cor.11:30-32; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). A Spirit-filled believer may be thus tested.
4. The principle of optimum benefit for the believer is the divine method.

## Questionnaire

### Chapter 1

1:1 What do you learn about the person who sent this letter? Whom did this person serve? To whom is he writing? What do you learn about the people to whom he is writing?

**1:2-8. Make a dramatic story about this and act it, as a play.**

1:2 To whom is James writing? What does James tell those people to do? What do you think about that? What will you do about that?

1:3 What would be different if you were to consider \*trials to be ‘pure joy’? What will you do?

1:4 What do you need to keep on doing? What will the results be? What do you think about that?

1:5 What is it that God can give to people? Who is it that should ask? Why might it be just those people? What will you find out when you do ask God for this? What will God not tell you when you ask for this?

1:6 What must you do when you ask God for something? What do you learn to do when you need wisdom? What must you not do? When you doubt, what are you like? What do you think about that?

1:7, 8 What happens if you doubt? What would you think about that? How would you like to be?

**1:9-18. Make up a dramatic story about this and act it, as a play. There could be three acts in your play: 1:9-11; 12-15; 16-18.**

1:9 What should the poor person do? What will God do for that person?

1:10 What should the rich person be glad about? Why is that? What do you think about that?

1:11 What happens to flowers? In what way is a rich person like a wild flower? The rich person will 'fall over and die like a wild flower'. What will the rich person be doing when that happens?

1:12 Whom does James say that God blesses? What reward will they receive? Use your own words to say or write a word picture of the reward. When will they receive that reward?

1:13-15 What do you learn about trials that tempt you? So, what tempts you? What is the order of events with temptation and \*sin? Think of a \*sin that you did. What led you to do that sin? What bad results might follow such a \*sin?

1:16, 17 What is it that we must 'not make a mistake' about? What do you learn about differences between God and the sun, moon and stars? What do you think about that?

1:18 What is it that God chose to do for us? What do you think about that?

**1:19-26. Make up a dramatic story about this and act it, as a play. There could be three acts in your play: 1:19-21; 22-25; 26-27.**

1:19-21 What do you learn about how you should listen? When should we speak? When should we not speak?

What happens when you become angry? How do you change as you get angry? How might you change the way you behave when you are angry?

What particular bad things should you stop doing?

What should you accept from God, that he has already planted like a seed? What can the word of God do for you?

1:22 What mistake should you not make? How will you avoid that mistake? What will you do in a different way today?

1:23-25 What do you learn about what some people do? What does James say that those people are like? What about the other people? In what ways are they different? What will God do for those different people? What do you think about that? What will you do about that? What will God do?

1:26-27 What do you learn about being \*religious? What connection do the things that you say have with being \*religious? How does James describe the religion that our Father, God, accepts? What kind of religion is that? Who will benefit if you have true religion? How would someone know that you have true religion?

## Chapter 2

**2:1-13. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in two acts: 2:1-7; 8-13. There might be sections in each act.**

2:1 What do you learn about the Christian family? What makes you a part of that family? What do you learn about what you think about other people?

Who is in your family? What makes you a part of that family? How should you value other people?

2:2-4 How does James say that you receive a rich man? How does James say that you receive a poor man? What is the problem with this? Why does James say that this is wrong?

2:5-7 As part of God's family, what do you find out about the way that your father looks at poor people? What will your father, God, do for them? What have you done to the poor man that you should not have done? What are the problems with rich people?

2:8 What does James say is 'the royal law'? Why do you think that he said that?

2:9 How does James say that you may break the royal law? How easy is that for you to do? How do you break the royal law in your family? How do you break it where you work?

2:10-11 What are the most important rules to obey? Is that what you think that James is saying? What do you learn about God's law? What do you learn about what God thinks about good sex? What do you learn about what God thinks about human life?

2:12 What do you learn about how God judges? How can that give you great hope? How will you be different?

2:13 What is God looking for in your behaviour towards other people? How will God reward you if you show mercy to other people? If someone shows \*mercy, what will God do about the law?

**2:14-26. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in two acts: 2:14-20; 21-26. There might be two or three sections in each act.**

2:14 Use your own words to say or write this. What do you think about that? What are you going to do about that?

2:15, 16 What do you learn about the need to help people with their practical needs? Is it enough to tell someone to 'be warmed and filled'?

2:17, 18 What do you learn about your faith? How do faith and actions belong together? What do your actions show about what you believe? If you do nothing, how can you show someone your belief?

2:19 What example does James give of belief shown by actions? James says that \*demons show what they believe. What do you learn from that?

2:20 Why were people foolish? What evidence are those people giving about their \*faith? What value is that?

2:21-23 You can read the full story of Abraham and how he offered Isaac, in Genesis chapter 22. Use your own words to say or write this. What do you think about this word picture?

2:24 How do \*faith and actions belong together? What does God look for?

2:25 You can read the full story of Rahab in Joshua 2:1-21. Use your own words to say or write this. Why was God pleased with Rahab?

2:26 How does James say what he has taught so far? Use your own words to say or write this. What are you going to do about what James taught?

### Chapter 3

**3:1-18. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in three acts: 3:1-5a; 5b-12; 13-18.**

3:1 What do you learn about teachers? Why do you think God demands more from teachers than other people?

3:2 Who makes mistakes? What do you have to achieve to be perfect?

3:3 Use your own words to say or write this word picture. What other \*word picture could you use for the same thing?

3:4 Use your own words to say or write this word picture. What other \*word picture could you use for the same thing?

3:5a What do you learn about the tongue? What do you think about what you learned? What examples do you have from your own experience?

3:5b Use your own words to say or write this word picture.

3:6 How is the tongue dangerous? What experience do you have of the danger of your own tongue? How have other people hurt you, or to use James's word picture, 'burned' you, with their tongues? People's tongues can damage relations with other people. Which examples have you heard for yourself?

3:7 What can \*human beings do? What do you think about that?

3:8 What is the difficulty with the tongue? What do you need to do because of this?

3:9, 10 What do you learn? Use your own words to say or write this. What do you think about this?

3:11, 12 Explain the meaning of these \*word pictures. Draw a picture of these examples. Why do you think that James says this to his Christian 'brothers' and 'sisters'?

3:13 What does James say to the wise person? How would you know that someone was a wise person? What do you need to do in a different way?

3:14-16 What will you discover if you do not behave as a wise person? What would make you know that you behave in a jealous, bitter and selfish way?

What are the results of jealous and selfish actions? How could someone come to deny the truth? What do you learn about wisdom that does not come from God? Write those things down.

3:17, 18 Many good things come from the wisdom that comes from heaven. What are they? What will you do in a different way when you use ‘the wisdom that comes from heaven’? What will God do for you that will help?

## Chapter 4

**4:1-17. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in three acts: 4:1-10; 11-12; 13-17 The first act might have several sections.**

4:1-3 What do you learn about fights and quarrels? Why do we want to fight? What would be a better way to get pleasure? Why do we not receive when we ask God?

4:4 Use your own words to say or write this word picture. What do you think about what James says here? What difference does this knowledge make to you?

4:5, 6 Use your own words to tell ‘what the Scripture says’. What do you learn about the help that God gives? How does God help us?

4:7, 8 What will you do? Why are those actions necessary? What will the results be? So, what are you going to do about what you have learned?

4:9 What could you do now? What could be your attitude to God? How will someone know that you are really sorry for your \*sins?

4:10 What will God do for you if you are ‘humble in front of’ him?

4:11, 12 Use your own words to say or write this. Why is it bad to say bad things about other people? What do you think about that? Where does the law really come from?

4:13-14 Why should you not make a statement about what you will do? What do you learn to do when you make a plan for your future?

4:15-16 How ought we to speak when we plan for the future? Why is that?

4:17 What do you learn about \*sin?

## Chapter 5

**5:1-20. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in three acts 5:1-6; 7-12; 13-20**

5:1-3 What will happen to us if we are rich? What will happen to stuff (clothing, gold, silver and other things) that we collect? Use your own words to say or write these \*word pictures.

5:4-6 What does James say that we have done? Use your own words to say or write these \*word pictures. Tell about those kinds of things that have happened in your own experience or in your own neighbourhood.

5:7-11 Use your own words to say or write this. Why do you need patience? What benefits come when you are patient? Where can you learn about the benefits of patience? How would you know if someone was patient? What will you do in a different way because you have studied about patience?

5:12 What do you learn here? What do you think about that? How will someone else know that you have learned this lesson?

5:13-18 How must you act when you are:

in trouble,  
cheerful,  
sick?

Who should do those actions? What do you think about that? Use your own words to say or write what James teaches about prayer.

5:19-20 What do you learn about a believer who acts on his own? What kind of responsibility do we have for other believers? What reward comes from God if you turn someone back to the truth?

### Concise Word List

**Albinus** ~ a Roman ruler. He came after \*Festus and after James, the Lord's brother, died.

**Altar** ~ the special table on which to offer gifts to God.

**Ananus II** ~ the chief priest of the Jews who was responsible for the death of James the Lord's brother.

**Angel** ~ a servant of God. He brings messages from God to people on earth.

**Anoint** ~ to put oil put on someone's head. This shows that God has chosen the person for a special task.

**Apostle** ~ one whom God sends; especially one of the 12 that Jesus chose to be his helpers.

**Baptism** ~ to put a person under water or to put water on a person to show that they want to follow Jesus.

**Barnabas** ~ one of the early church leaders who worked with the \*apostle Paul.

**Believers** ~ Christians.

**Bit** ~ a piece of metal put into the mouth of a horse so the rider can control the horse.

**Bridle** ~ attached to the ends of the bit to help the rider to control the horse.

**Covenant** ~ when people agree something together; when God and a person or people agree to a special thing.

**Demons** ~ bad or evil spirits that work for the devil.

**Disciples** ~ the 12 helpers that Jesus chose to be with him.

**Elders** ~ leaders in the church.

**Eternal** ~ what has always been and will always be.

**Faith** ~ belief that something is true; trust in someone or something; belief and trust in God and in Jesus Christ his Son.

**Faithful** ~ true and loyal to someone.

**Festus** ~ the Roman ruler in Jerusalem who died before James was killed.

**Fig** ~ kind of sweet fruit that grows on a tree. The tree is called a fig tree.

**Gehenna** ~ a valley near \*Jerusalem where the Jews burned their rubbish.

**Gentiles** ~ people who are not Jews.

**Glory** ~ everything that makes God beautiful and great. It is like a bright light that is shining round God or Jesus.

**Grape** ~ fruit of a vine (a climbing plant). You can make it into wine.

**Greek** ~ the language that James used to write this letter.

**Hebrew** ~ the language of the Jews.

**Herod** ~ a king of the Jews who killed James the son of Zebedee.

**Human being** ~ a human person.

**Humans** ~ people.

**Israel** ~ the country of the \*Jews; another name for Jacob, the first father of the Jews.

**Israelites** ~ the people of Israel.

**Jericho** ~ the city where Rahab lived.

**Jerusalem** ~ the capital city of Israel.

**Jewish** ~ people or things that are from the Jews.

**Jews** ~ people who were born from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their children.

**Josephus** ~ a Jewish man who wrote a history of the Jewish nation.

**Joses** ~ a son of Joseph and Mary and so a half-brother to Jesus.

**Judas** ~ a son of Joseph and Mary and so a half-brother to Jesus.

**Judge** ~ to judge is to do the work of a judge; to test and decide what is right or wrong.

**Justice** ~ fair and right decisions and actions.

**Kingdom** ~ the place or territory where a king rules. The Kingdom of Heaven is the people who are under God's rule.

**Lord** ~ a title for God, or Jesus, to show that he is over all people and things. The name that God gave to himself in the Old Testament. He was the One who had made a covenant with the Jews.

**Meek** ~ strong but humble.

**Mercy** ~ kindness and help to a person who does wrong, to show love to that person.

**Messiah** ~ God promised the Jews that a special person would come to save them. That person is the Messiah. Jesus is that Messiah but the Jews did not believe it. Messiah is a Hebrew word. It means an anointed person. In the Greek language, the word is Christ.

**Moths** ~ flying insects whose young eat clothes.

**New Testament** ~ the last part of the Bible, which the writers wrote after the life of Jesus. It is about the things that Jesus did and taught and about the church.

**Oath** ~ to make an oath is to use the name of a person, thing or God to witness that what someone says is true.

**Old Testament** ~ the first part of the Bible; the holy things that the writers wrote before Christ's birth.

**Olive** ~ tree or its small fruit with a stone. People make oil from olives. They use the oil to cook food.

**Orphan** ~ a child that has no parents alive.

**Pastor** ~ a church leader who cares for the believers.

**Persecute** ~ to hurt people because they believe in Christ.

**Persecution** ~ when enemies of God hurt people because they believe in Christ.

**Preach** ~ to speak out the message from God and to teach his word.

**Prophet** ~ person who speaks for God. He can sometimes say what will happen in the future.

**Psalms** ~ a song for when we are praising God; one of the books of the Old Testament.

**Rahab** ~ a woman of Jericho who trusted in God.

**Religious** ~ describes a person who believes in a god or gods. True religion is to trust in the one true God. We show it when we obey God.

**Repent** ~ to change your mind; to turn away from sin and turn to God.

**Repentance** ~ a change of mind and heart, to turn away from \*sin and turn to God. To turn one's mind and life away from sin is to repent.

**Riches** ~ the wealth that rich people have.

**Righteous** ~ a righteous person is right in what he does; or a person whom God says is right.

**Righteousness** ~ the quality of being righteous.

**Roman** ~ Rome was the capital city of the rulers at that time. That which belonged to Rome was Roman.

**Rome** ~ the capital city of the rulers at that time. They were the Romans.

**Rudder** ~ a piece of wood or an oar fixed to the back of a ship. You can turn it to change the direction that the ship is going.

**Salvation** ~ the result after God saves us from sin and its punishment; the new life that God gives to those believe in the Lord Jesus.

**Samaritan** ~ a person from the country of Samaria.

**Scripture** ~ the books of the Bible.

**Simon** ~ a son of Joseph and Mary and so a half-brother to Jesus.

**Sin** ~ to sin is to do wrong, bad or evil; not to obey God; sins are the wrong things that we do.

**Sinner** ~ a person who does sins.

**Soul** ~ the part of a person that we cannot see; or the mind.

**Stephen** ~ the first person to be killed because he believed in Jesus Christ.

**Synagogue** ~ the place where the Jews met to worship God.

**Temple** ~ the special building in Jerusalem where the Jews went to worship God.

**Temptation** ~ something that tries to make us do wrong things.

**Trials** ~ troubles and difficulties that come to us.

**Tribe** ~ family from one man. The first Jews were the twelve sons of Jacob. The family of each son became one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

**Vine** ~ a plant that climbs. Its fruits are called \*grapes.

**Word picture** ~ a description in words that helps someone to imagine a physical place or object.

**Worship** ~ show honour to God with praise, thanks and respect.

**Zebedee** ~ the father of the disciples James and John.

## **The Proto Gospel of James**

**(For information only)**

Date: 140-170 CE

Attributed to James the Just

Theme Virginity of Mary and early life of Jesus

The *Gospel of James* also sometimes known as the *Infancy Gospel of James* or the *Protevangelium of James* probably written about AD 150. It is an apocryphal gospel, that was widely read but never accepted into the New Testament Canon. The *Gospel of James* may be the earliest surviving document attesting the veneration of Mary and claiming her continuing virginity.

### **Authorship and date**

The document presents itself as written by James: "I, James, wrote this history in Jerusalem." Thus the purported author is James the Just, which the text claims to be a son of Joseph from a prior marriage, and thus a step-brother of Jesus.

Scholars have established that, based on the style of the language and the theological concerns, and the fact that the author is apparently not aware of contemporary Jewish customs, the work is pseudepigraphical (written by someone other than the person it claims to be written by). The echoes and

parallels of the Old Testament appear to derive from its Greek translation, the Septuagint, as opposed to the Hebrew Masoretic Text, which is noticeable due to several peculiarities and variations present in the Septuagint.

The Gospel of James depends on hints in the Septuagint of the Old Testament), and embellishes on what is told of events surrounding Mary, prior to, and at the moment of, Jesus' birth, in the *Gospel of Matthew*, and in the *Gospel of Luke*.

As for its estimated date, the consensus is that it was actually composed some time in the 2nd century AD. The first mention of it is by Origen, who says the text, like that of a "Gospel of Peter", was of dubious, recent appearance, and shared with that book the claim that the 'brethren of the Lord' were sons of Joseph by a former wife. In the same train of thought, though, he admits that, while the notion might seem pious, it was not unlikely that the obvious interpretation of Scripture (that Mary bore them for Joseph) was true and acceptable.

### **Manuscript tradition**

Some indication of the popularity of the *Infancy Gospel of James* may be drawn from the fact that about one hundred and thirty Greek manuscripts containing it have survived. The *Gospel of James* was translated into Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic, Georgian, Old Slavonic, Armenian, Arabic, Irish and Latin. Though no early Latin versions are known, it was relegated to the apocrypha in the Gelasian decretal, so must have been known in the West. As with the canonical gospels, the vast majority of the manuscripts come from the tenth century or later. The earliest known manuscript of the text, a papyrus dating to the 3rd or early 4th century, was found in 1958; it is kept in the Bodmer Library, Geneva (Papyrus Bodmer 5). Of the surviving Greek manuscripts, the fullest surviving text is a 10th century codex in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris (Paris 1454).

### **Genre**

The Gospel of James is one of several surviving Infancy Gospels that give an idea of the miracle literature that was created to satisfy the hunger of early Christians for more detail about the early life of their Savior. Such literature is filled with ignorance of Jewish life, unlike the many consistent details in the Bible, which is obviously a library of Jewish books. Interestingly enough, not one work of the genre under discussion is in any Bible. In Greek such an infancy gospel was termed a *protevangelion*, a "pre-Gospel" narrating events of Jesus' life before those recorded in the four canonical gospels. Such a work was intended to be "apologetic, doctrinal, or simply to satisfy one's curiosity". The literary genre that these works represent shows stylistic features that suggest dates in the second century and later. Other "infancy gospels" in this tradition include *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (based

on the Protevangelium of James, and on the Infancy Gospel of Thomas), and the so-called *Arabic Infancy Gospel*; all of which were regarded by the church as apocryphal.

## Content

The *Gospel of James* is in three equal parts, of eight chapters each -

the first contains the story of Mary's own unique birth and childhood, and assignment to the temple

the second concerns the crisis posed by Mary's becoming a woman and thus her imminent pollution of the temple, her assignment to Joseph as guardian, and the tests of her virginity,

the third relates the Nativity, with the visit of midwives, hiding of Jesus from Herod the Great in a feeding trough, and even the parallel hiding in the hills of John the Baptist and his mother (Elizabeth) from Herod Antipas.

One of the work's high points is the Lament of Anna. A primary theme is the work and grace of God in Mary's life, Mary's personal purity, and her perpetual virginity before, during, and after the birth of Jesus, as confirmed by the midwife after she gave birth, and tested by "Salome" who is perhaps intended to be Salome, later the disciple of Jesus who is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark as being at the Crucifixion.

Besides the perpetual virginity of Mary, this is also the earliest text that explicitly claims that Joseph was a widower, with children, at the time that Mary is entrusted to his care. This is the feature which appears in its earliest mention, which is in a text of Origen, who adduces it to demonstrate that the 'brethren of the Lord' were sons of Joseph by a former wife. Since the text was regarded as heresy by the time of the Gelasian Decree, its dismissal may be due in part to this reading of the *adelpoi*, which corresponded to the developed Eastern Orthodox view rather than the western, i.e. Roman Catholic, view, which treated them as cousins.

Among further traditions not present in the four canonical gospels are the birth of Jesus in a cave, and the martyrdom of John the Baptist's father Zechariah during the slaughter of the infants. The Nativity reported as taking place in a cave, with its Mithraic overtones, remained in the popular imagination; many Early Renaissance Sienese and Florentine paintings of the Nativity, as well as Byzantine, Greek and Russian icons of the Nativity, show such a chthonic setting.

## **Infancy Gospel of James**

### **The Proto-evangelium of James The Birth of Mary the Holy Mother of God, and Very Glorious Mother of Jesus Christ**

IN THE RECORDS OF THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL was Joachim, a man rich exceedingly; and he brought his offerings double, saying: There shall be of my superabundance to all the people, and there shall be the offering for my forgiveness to the Lord for a propitiation for me. For the great day of the Lord was at hand, and the sons of Israel were bringing their offerings. And there stood over against him Rubim, saying: It is not meet for thee first to bring thine offerings, because thou hast not made seed in Israel. And Joachim was exceedingly grieved, and went away to the registers of the twelve tribes of the people, saying: I shall see the registers of the twelve tribes of Israel, as to whether I alone have not made seed in Israel. And he searched, and found that all the righteous had raised up seed in Israel. And he called to mind the patriarch Abraham, that in the last day God gave him a son Isaac. And Joachim was exceedingly grieved, and did not come into the presence of his wife; but he retired to the desert, and there pitched his tent, and fasted forty days and forty nights, saying in himself: I will not go down either for food or for drink until the Lord my God shall look upon me, and prayer shall be my food and drink.

2. And his wife Anna mourned in two mournings, and lamented in two lamentations, saying: I shall bewail my widowhood; I shall bewail my childlessness. And the great day of the Lord was at hand; and Judith her maid-servant said: How long dost thou humiliate thy soul? Behold, the great day of the Lord is at hand, and it is unlawful for thee to mourn. But take this head-band, which the woman that made it gave to me; for it is not proper that I should wear it, because I am a maid-servant, and it has a royal appearance. And Anna said: Depart from me; for I have not done such things, and the Lord has brought me very low. I fear that some wicked person has given it to thee, and thou hast come to make me a sharer in thy sin. And Judith said: Why should I curse thee, seeing that the Lord hath shut thy womb, so as not to give thee fruit in Israel? And Anna was grieved exceedingly, and put off her garments of mourning, and cleaned her head, and put on her wedding garments, and about the ninth hour went down to the garden to walk. And she saw a laurel, and sat under it, and prayed to the Lord, saying: O God of our fathers, bless me and hear my prayer, as Thou didst bless the womb of Sarah, and didst give her a son Isaac.

3. And gazing towards the heaven, she saw a sparrow's nest in the laurel, and made a lamentation in herself, saying: Alas! who begot me? and what womb produced me? because I have become a curse in the presence of the sons of Israel, and I have been reproached, and they have driven me in derision out of

the temple of the Lord. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not like the fowls of the heaven, because even the fowls of the heaven are productive before Thee, O Lord. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not like the beasts of the earth, because even the beasts of the earth are productive before Thee, O Lord. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not like these waters, because even these waters are productive before Thee, O Lord. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not like this earth, because even the earth bringeth forth its fruits in season, and blesseth Thee, O Lord.

4. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by, saying: Anna, Anna, the Lord hath heard thy prayer, and thou shalt conceive, and shall bring forth; and thy seed shall be spoken of in all the world. And Anna said: As the Lord my God liveth, if I beget either male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God; and it shall minister to Him in holy things all the days of its life. And, behold, two angels came, saying to her: Behold, Joachim thy husband is coming with his flocks. For an angel of the Lord went down to him, saying: Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God hath heard thy prayer Go down hence; for, behold, thy wife Anna shall conceive. And Joachim went down and called his shepherds, saying: Bring me hither ten she-lambs without spot or blemish, and they shall be for the Lord my God; and bring me twelve tender calves, and they shall be for the priests and the elders; and a hundred goats for all the people. And, behold, Joachim came with his flocks; and Anna stood by the gate, and saw Joachim coming, and she ran and hung upon his neck, saying: Now I know that the Lord God hath blessed me exceedingly; for, behold the widow no longer a widow, and I the childless shall conceive. And Joachim rested the first day in his house.

5. And on the following day he brought his offerings, saying in himself: If the Lord God has been rendered gracious to me, the plate on the priest's forehead will make it manifest to me. And Joachim brought his offerings, and observed attentively the priest's plate when he went up to the altar of the Lord, and he saw no sin in himself. And Joachim said: Now I know that the Lord has been gracious unto me, and has remitted all my sins. And he went down from the temple of the Lord justified, and departed to his own house. And her months were fulfilled, and in the ninth month Anna brought forth. And she said to the midwife: What have I brought forth? and she said: A girl. And said Anna: My soul has been magnified this day. And she laid her down. And the days having been fulfilled, Anna was purified, and gave the breast to the child, and called her name Mary.

6. And the child grew strong day by day; and when she was six months old, her mother set her on the ground to try whether she could stand, and she walked seven steps and came into her bosom; and she snatched her up, saying: As the Lord my God liveth, thou shalt not walk on this earth until I bring thee into the

temple of the Lord. And she made a sanctuary in her bed-chamber, and allowed nothing common or unclean to pass through her. And she called the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, and they led her astray. And when she was a year old, Joachim made a great feast, and invited the priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and all the people of Israel. And Joachim brought the child to the priests; and they blessed her, saying: O God of our fathers, bless this child, and give her an everlasting name to be named in all generations. And all the people said: So be it, so be it, amen. And he brought her to the chief priests; and they blessed her, saying: O God most high, look upon this child, and bless her with the utmost blessing, which shall be for ever. And her mother snatched her up, and took her into the sanctuary of her bed-chamber, and gave her the breast. And Anna made a song to the Lord God, saying: I will sing a song to the Lord my God, for He hath looked upon me, and hath taken away the reproach of mine enemies; and the Lord hath given the the fruit of His righteousness, singular in its kind, and richly endowed before Him. Who will tell the sons of Rubim that Anna gives suck? Hear, hear, ye twelve tribes of Israel, that Anna gives suck. And she laid her to rest in the bed-chamber of her sanctuary, and went out and ministered unto them. And when the supper was ended, they went down rejoicing, and glorifying the God of Israel.

7. And her months were added to the child. And the child was two years old, and Joachim said: Let us take her up to the temple of the Lord, that we may pay the vow that we have vowed, lest perchance the Lord send to us, and our offering be not received. And Anna said: Let us wait for the third year, in order that the child may not seek for father or mother. And Joachim said: So let us wait. And the child was three years old, and Joachim said: Invite the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take each a lamp, and let them stand with the lamps burning, that the child may not turn back, and her heart be captivated from the temple of the Lord. And they did so until they went up into the temple of the Lord. And the priest received her, and kissed her, and blessed her, saying: The Lord has magnified thy name in all generations. In thee, on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest His redemption to the sons of Israel. And he set her down upon the third step of the altar, and the Lord God sent grace upon her; and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.

8. And her parents went down marvelling, and praising the Lord God, because the child had not turned back. And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there, and she received food from the hand of an angel. And when she was twelve years old there was held a council of the priests, saying: Behold, Mary has reached the age of twelve years in the temple of the Lord. What then shall we do with her, test perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord? And they said to the high priest: Thou standest by the altar of the Lord; go in, and pray concerning her; and whatever the Lord shall manifest unto

thee, that also will we do. And the high priest went in, taking the robe with the twelve bells into the holy of holies; and he prayed concerning her. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by him, saying unto him: Zacharias, Zacharias, go out and assemble the widowers of the people, and let them bring each his rod; and to whomsoever the Lord shall show a sign, his wife shall she be. And the heralds went out through all the circuit of Judaea, and the trumpet of the Lord sounded, and all ran.

9. And Joseph, throwing away his axe, went out to meet them; and when they had assembled, they went away to the high priest, taking with them their rods. And he, taking the rods of all of them, entered into the temple, and prayed; and having ended his prayer, he took the rods and came out, and gave them to them: but there was no sign in them, and Joseph took his rod last; and, behold, a dove came out of the rod, and flew upon Joseph's head. And the priest said to Joseph, Thou hast been chosen by lot to take into thy keeping the virgin of the Lord. But Joseph refused, saying: I have children, and I am an old man, and she is a young girl. I am afraid lest I become a laughing-stock to the sons of Israel. And the priest said to Joseph: Fear the Lord thy God, and remember what the Lord did to Dathan, and Abiram, and Korah; how the earth opened, and they were swallowed up on account of their contradiction. And now fear, O Joseph, lest the same things happen in thy house. And Joseph was afraid, and took her into his keeping. And Joseph said to Mary: Behold, I have received thee from the temple of the Lord; and now I leave thee in my house, and go away to build my buildings, and I shall come to thee. The Lord will protect thee.

10. And there was a council of the priests, saying: Let us make a veil for the temple of the Lord. And the priest said: Call to me the undefiled virgins of the family of David. And the officers went away, and sought, and found seven virgins. And the priest remembered the child Mary, that she was of the family of David, and undefiled before God. And the officers went away and brought her. And they brought them into the temple of the Lord. And the priest said: Choose for me by lot who shall spin the gold, and the white, and the fine linen, and the silk, and the blue, and the scarlet, and the true purple. And the true purple and the scarlet fell to the lot of Mary, and she took them, and went away to her house. And at that time Zacharias was dumb, and Samuel was in his place until the time that Zacharias spake. And Mary took the scarlet, and span it.

11. And she took the pitcher, and went out to fill it with water. And, behold, a voice saying: Hail, thou who hast received grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women! And she looked round, on the right hand and on the left, to see whence this voice came. And she went away, trembling, to her house, and put down the pitcher; and taking the purple, she sat down on her seat, and drew it out. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood before her, saying: Fear not,

Mary; for thou hast found grace before the Lord of all, and thou shalt conceive, according to His word. And she hearing, reasoned with herself, saying: Shall I conceive by the Lord, the living God? and shall I bring forth as every woman brings forth? And the angel of the Lord said: Not so, Mary; for the power of the Lord shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the Most High. And thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. And Mary said: Behold, the servant of the Lord before His face: let it be unto me according to thy word.

12. And she made the purple and the scarlet, and took them to the priest. And the priest blessed her, and said: Mary, the Lord God hath magnified thy name, and thou shall be blessed in all the generations of the earth. And Mary, with great joy, went away to Elizabeth her kinswoman, and knocked at the door. And when Elizabeth heard her, she threw away the scarlet, and ran to the door, and opened it; and seeing Mary, she blessed her, and said: Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? for, behold, that which is in me leaped and blessed thee. But Mary had forgotten the mysteries of which the archangel Gabriel had spoken, and gazed up into heaven, and said: Who am I, O Lord, that all the generations of the earth should bless me? And she remained three months with Elizabeth; and day by day she grew bigger. And Mary being afraid, went away to her own house, and hid herself from the sons of Israel. And she was sixteen years old when these mysteries happened.

13. And she was in her sixth month; and, behold, Joseph came back from his building, and, entering into his house, he discovered that she was big with child. And he smote his face, and threw himself on the ground upon the sackcloth, and wept bitterly, saying: With what face shall I look upon the Lord my God? and what prayer shall I make about this maiden? because I received her a virgin out of the temple of the Lord, and I have not watched over her. Who is it that has hunted me down? Who has done this evil thing in my house, and defiled the virgin? Has not the history of Adam been repeated in me? For just as Adam was in the hour of his singing praise, and the serpent came, and found Eve alone, and completely deceived her, so it has happened to me also. And Joseph stood up from the sackcloth, and called Mary, and said to her: O thou who hast been cared for by God, why hast thou done this and forgotten the Lord thy God? Why hast thou brought low thy soul, thou that wast brought up in the holy of holies, and that didst receive food from the hand of an angel? And she wept bitterly, saying: I am innocent, and have known no man. And Joseph said to her: Whence then is that which is in thy womb? And she said: As the Lord my God liveth, I do not know whence it is to me.

14. And Joseph was greatly afraid, and retired from her, and considered what he should do in regard to her. And Joseph said: If I conceal her sin, I find myself

fighting against the law of the Lord; and if I expose her to the sons of Israel, I am afraid lest that which is in her be from an angel, and I shall be found giving up innocent blood to the doom of death. What then shall I do with her? I will put her away from me secretly. And night came upon him; and, behold, an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream, saying: Be not afraid for this maiden, for that which is in her is of the Holy Spirit; and she will bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. And Joseph arose from sleep, and glorified the God of Israel, who had given him this grace; and he kept her.

15. And Annas the scribe came to him, and said: Why hast thou not appeared in our assembly? And Joseph said to him: Because I was weary from my journey, and rested the first day. And he turned, and saw that Mary was with child. And he ran away to the priest? and said to him: Joseph, whom thou didst vouch for, has committed a grievous crime. And the priest said: How so? And he said: He has defiled the virgin whom he received out of the temple of the Lord, and has married her by stealth, and has not revealed it to the sons of Israel. And the priest answering, said: Has Joseph done this? Then said Annas the scribe: Send officers, and thou wilt find the virgin with child. And the officers went away, and found it as he had said; and they brought her along with Joseph to the tribunal. And the priest said: Mary, why hast thou done this? and why hast thou brought thy soul low, and forgotten the Lord thy God? Thou that wast reared in the holy of holies, and that didst receive food from the hand of an angel, and didst hear the hymns, and didst dance before Him, why hast thou done this? And she wept bitterly, saying: As the Lord my God liveth, I am pure before Him, and know not a man. And the priest said to Joseph: Why hast thou done this? And Joseph said: As the Lord liveth, I am pure concerning her. Then said the priest: Bear not false witness, but speak the truth. Thou hast married her by stealth, and hast not revealed it to the sons of Israel, and hast not bowed thy head under the strong hand, that thy seed might be blessed. And Joseph was silent.

16. And the priest said: Give up the virgin whom thou didst receive out of the temple of the Lord. And Joseph burst into tears. And the priest said: I will give you to drink of the water of the ordeal of the Lord, and He shall make manifest your sins in your eyes. And the priest took the water, and gave Joseph to drink and sent him away to the hill-country; and he returned unhurt. And he gave to Mary also to drink, and sent her away to the hill-country; and she returned unhurt. And all the people wondered that sin did not appear in them. And the priest said: If the Lord God has not made manifest your sins, neither do I judge you. And he sent them away. And Joseph took Mary, and went away to his own house, rejoicing and glorifying the God of Israel.

17. And there was an order from the Emperor Augustus, that all in Bethlehem of Judaea should be enrolled. And Joseph said: I shall enrol my sons, but what shall I do with this maiden? How shall I enrol her? As my wife? I am ashamed. As my daughter then? But all the sons of Israel know that she is not my daughter. The day of the Lord shall itself bring it to pass as the Lord will. And he saddled the ass, and set her upon it; and his son led it, and Joseph followed. And when they had come within three miles, Joseph turned and saw her sorrowful; and he said to himself: Likely that which is in her distresses her. And again Joseph turned and saw her laughing. And he said to her: Mary, how is it that I see in thy face at one time laughter, at another sorrow? And Mary said to Joseph: Because I see two peoples with my eyes; the one weeping and lamenting, and the other rejoicing and exulting. And they came into the middle of the road, and Mary said to him: Take me down from off the ass, for that which is in me presses to come forth. And he took her down from off the ass, and said to her: Whither shall I lead thee, and cover thy disgrace? for the place is desert.

18. And he found a cave there, and led her into it; and leaving his two sons beside her, he went out to seek a widwife in the district of Bethlehem. And I Joseph was walking, and was not walking; and I looked up into the sky, and saw the sky astonished; and I looked up to the pole of the heavens, and saw it standing, and the birds of the air keeping still. And I looked down upon the earth, and saw a trough lying, and work-people reclining: and their hands were in the trough. And those that were eating did not eat, and those that were rising did not carry it up, and those that were conveying anything to their mouths did not convey it; but the faces of all were looking upwards. And I saw the sheep walking, and the sheep stood still; and the shepherd raised his hand to strike them, and his hand remained up. And I looked upon the current of the river, and I saw the mouths of the kids resting on the water and not drinking, and all things in a moment were driven from their course.

19. And I saw a woman coming down from the hill-country, and she said to me: O man, whither art thou going? And I said: I am seeking an Hebrew midwife. And she answered and said unto me: Art thou of Israel? And I said to her: Yes. And she said: And who is it that is bringing forth in the cave? And I said: A woman betrothed to me. And she said to me: Is she not thy wife? And I said to her: It is Mary that was reared in the temple of the Lord, and I obtained her by lot as my wife. And yet she is not my wife, but has conceived of the Holy Spirit. And the widwife said to him: Is this true? And Joseph said to her: Come and see. And the midwife went away with him. And they stood in the place of the cave, and behold a luminous cloud overshadowed the cave. And the midwife said: My soul has been magnified this day, because mine eyes have seen strange things -- because salvation has been brought forth to Israel. And immediately the cloud disappeared out of the cave, and a great light shone in the cave, so that the eyes

could not bear it. And in a little that light gradually decreased, until the infant appeared, and went and took the breast from His mother Mary. And the midwife cried out, and said: This is a great day to me, because I have seen this strange sight. And the midwife went forth out of the cave, and Salome met her. And she said to her: Salome, Salome, I have a strange sight to relate to thee: a virgin has brought forth -- a thing which her nature admits not of. Then said Salome: As the Lord my God liveth, unless I thrust in my finger, and search the parts, I will not believe that a virgin has brought forth.

20. And the midwife went in, and said to Mary: Show thyself; for no small controversy has arisen about thee. And Salome put in her finger, and cried out, and said: Woe is me for mine iniquity and mine unbelief, because I have tempted the living God; and, behold, my hand is dropping off as if burned with fire. And she bent her knees before the Lord, saying: O God of my fathers, remember that I am the seed of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; do not make a show of me to the sons of Israel, but restore me to the poor; for Thou knowest, O Lord, that in Thy name I have performed my services, and that I have received my reward at Thy hand. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by her, saying to her: Salome, Salome, the Lord hath heard thee. Put thy hand to the infant, and carry it, and thou wilt have safety and joy. And Salome went and carried it, saying: I will worship Him, because a great King has been born to Israel. And, behold, Salome was immediately cured, and she went forth out of the cave justified. And behold a voice saying: Salome, Salome, tell not the strange things thou hast seen, until the child has come into Jerusalem.

21. And, behold, Joseph was ready to go into Judaea. And there was a great commotion in Bethlehem of Judaea, for Magi came, saying: Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him. And when Herod heard, he was much disturbed, and sent officers to the Magi. And he sent for the priests, and examined them, saying: How is it written about the Christ? where is He to be born? And they said: In Bethlehem of Judaea, for so it is written. And he sent them away. And he examined the Magi, saying to them: What sign have you seen in reference to the king that has been born? And the Magi said: We have seen a star of great size shining among these stars, and obscuring their light, so that the stars did not appear; and we thus knew that a king has been born to Israel, and we have come to worship him. And Herod said: Go and seek him; and if you find him, let me know, in order that I also may go and worship him. And the Magi went out. And, behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them until they came to the cave, and it stood over the top of the cave. And the Magi saw the infant with His mother Mary; and they brought forth from their bag gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by the angel not to go into Judaea, they went into their own country by another road.

22. And when Herod knew that he had been mocked by the Magi, in a rage he sent murderers, saying to them: Slay the children from two years old and under. And Mary, having heard that the children were being killed, was afraid, and took the infant and swaddled Him, and put Him into an ox-stall. And Elizabeth, having heard that they were searching for John, took him and went up into the hill-country, and kept looking where to conceal him. And there was no place of concealment. And Elizabeth, groaning with a loud voice, says: O mountain of God, receive mother and child. And immediately the mountain was cleft, and received her. And a light shone about them, for an angel of the Lord was with them, watching over them.

23. And Herod searched for John, and sent officers to Zacharias, saying: Where hast thou hid thy son? And he, answering, said to them: I am the servant of God in holy things, and I sit constantly in the temple of the Lord: I do not know where my son is. And the officers went away, and reported all these things to Herod. And Herod was enraged, and said: His son is destined to be king over Israel. And he sent to him again, saying: Tell the truth; where is thy son? for thou knowest that thy life is in my hand. And Zacharias said: I am God's martyr, if thou sheddest my blood; for the Lord will receive my spirit, because thou sheddest innocent blood at the vestibule of the temple of the Lord. And Zacharias was murdered about daybreak. And the sons of Israel did not know that he had been murdered.

24. But at the hour of the salutation the priests went away, and Zacharias did not come forth to meet them with a blessing, according to his custom. And the priests stood waiting for Zacharias to salute him at the prayer, and to glorify the Most High. And he still delaying, they were all afraid. But one of them ventured to go in, and he saw clotted blood beside the altar; and he heard a voice saying: Zacharias has been murdered, and his blood shall not be wiped up until his avenger come. And hearing this saying, he was afraid, and went out and told it to the priests. And they ventured in, and saw what had happened; and the fretwork of the temple made a wailing noise, and they rent their clothes from the top even to the bottom. And they found not his body, but they found his blood turned into stone. And they were afraid, and went out and reported to the people that Zacharias had been murdered. And all the tribes of the people heard, and mourned, and lamented for him three days and three nights. And after the three days, the priests consulted as to whom they should put in his place; and the lot fell upon Simeon. For it was he who had been warned by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death until he should see the Christ in the flesh.

25. But I James that wrote this history in Jerusalem, a commotion having arisen when Herod died, withdrew myself to the wilderness until the commotion in Jerusalem ceased, glorifying the Lord God, who had given me the gift and the

wisdom to write this history. And grace shall be with them that fear our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory to ages of ages. Amen.

## **The Secret Book of James or The Apocryphon of James**

The Secret Book of James, also called the "Apocryphon of James," is so secretive that of the twelve apostles, only James and Peter were informed of its message. And Peter does not seem to understand the true meaning of the text, leaving only James to preserve the valuable lessons from Jesus.

Though James claims that he had to write the letter "in Hebrew letters" to make sure it did not fall into the wrong hands, our version of the text, from the Nag Hammadi collection<sup>1</sup>, is a Coptic translation of a Greek original that appears to have been lost to history.

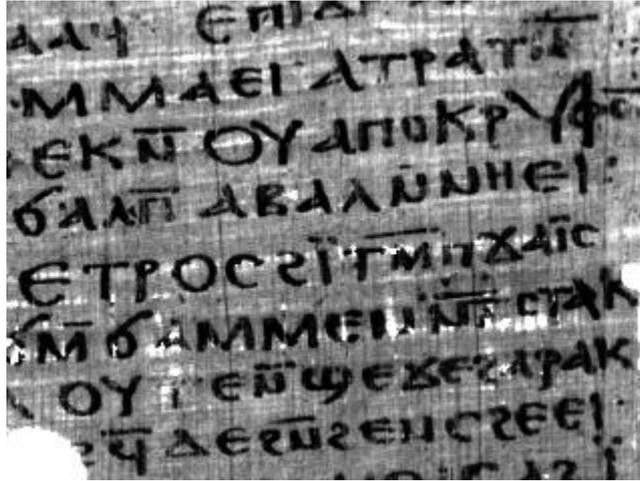
In typical Gnostic form, the text can read like a riddle. James quotes Jesus: "This is why I told you, 'Be filled,' so that you will not lack. Those who lack will not be saved. To be filled is good and to lack is bad." So far, so good. But, "since it is also good for you to lack and bad for you to be filled, if you're filled you also lack...." That's the riddle. The answer — only slightly less baffling than the question — is that people should "be filled with spirit but lack in reason, because reason belongs to the soul."

The notions of "filled," "lacking," "spirit" and "soul" are part of an intricate theological and philosophical system (which is why some English versions don't even translate them) that contrasts fullness with lack and spirit with soul.

Alongside the complex theology, James relates new parables in Jesus's name. For instance, heaven's kingdom is like a palm whose dates have dropped to the ground. Though it's difficult now to decipher the ancient text, the point seems to be that the palm produced buds which dried up after they grew and produced their own fruit. Then that fruit did the same. And so on. So, too, Jesus's kingdom comes to those who can produce new plants.

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<sup>1</sup> The Nag Hammadi Scriptures, Edited by Marvin Meyer; Advisory Board, Wolf-Peter Funk; Paul-Hubert Poirier, James M. Robinson. Introduction by Elaine H. Pagels. (Harper One).



*Digitally enhanced detail of the Coptic text of The Secret Book of James, in which the word "apocryphon"<sup>1</sup> is visible at the end of the 3rd line.*

According to the letter, this new parable complements "the Shepherds" (probably John 10:6-9), "the Seed" (Mark 4:26-29), "the Building" (Matthew 7:24-27), "the Lamps of the Young Women" (Matthew 25:1-13), "the Wage of the Workers" (Matthew 20:1-16), and so on.

As early as the 2nd century, St. Irenaeus [of Lyons] was insisting<sup>2</sup> that there had to be only four gospels because "there are four zones in the world" and "four principal winds." He condemned<sup>3</sup> those who thought there were more than four as people who wanted it to seem as though they had discovered more truth than there really is.

This sounds a lot like the people who preserved the Secret Book of James. Yet while Irenaeus and others were dismissing their endeavors, they themselves were lamenting the narrow-sightedness of the emerging power structure, represented by Peter in the text here.

With the Secret Book of James, we have more insight into the debate that was raging only a few decades after Jesus died, and into the thinking of serious early Christians whose detailed work was almost lost completely.

Finally, important messages:

“Be careful not to let many people know about this book, which the Saviour did not even want all of us, his twelve disciples, to know about.” (James)

“This is why I told you, “Be filled,” so that you will not lack. Those who lack will not be saved. To be filled is good and to lack is bad.” (Jesus)

## Text

James writes to -----thos<sup>2</sup>  
Peace be with you from peace,  
Love from love,  
Grace from grace,  
Faith from faith,  
Life from holy life.<sup>3</sup>

### James's Secret Books

You have asked me to send you a secret book revealed to Peter and me by the master, and I could not turn you down, nor could I speak to you, so I have written it in Hebrew and have sent it to you, and to you alone. But since you are a minister of the salvation of the saints, try to be careful not to reveal to many people this book that the saviour did not want to reveal even to all of us, his twelve students. Nonetheless, those who will be saved through the faith of this treatise will be blessed.

Ten months ago I sent you another secret book that the saviour revealed to me. Think of that book as revealed to me, James. But this one. . .

### Jesus addresses Peter and James

Now, the twelve students were all sitting together, recalling what the savior had said to each of them, whether in a hidden or an open manner, and organizing it in books.<sup>8</sup> I was writing what is in my book. Look, the savior appeared, after he had left us, while we were watching for him.

Five hundred fifty days after he rose from the dead, we said to him, "Did you depart and leave us?"

Jesus said, "No, but I shall return to the place from which I came. If you want to come with me, come."

They all answered and said, "If you order us, we shall come."

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<sup>2</sup> This is apparently James the just, the brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem (see Gospel of Thomas 12), though here James is also part of the apostolic circle of the twelve.

<sup>3</sup> These Lines are partially restored.

He said, "I tell you the truth, no one will ever enter the kingdom of heaven because I ordered it, but rather because you yourselves are filled. Leave James and Peter to me that I may fill them."

When he called the two of them, he took them aside and commanded the rest to keep doing what they were doing.

The saviour said, "You have been treated kindly,

... have not understood.

Do you not want to be filled?

Your hearts are drunk.

Do you not want to be sober?

You ought to be ashamed.

"From now on, awake or asleep, remember that you have seen the human son and have spoken with him and have listened to him.

"Shame on those who have seen the human son.

"Blessings will be on you who have not seen him, or associated with him, or spoken with him, or listened to anything from him. Yours is life.

"Understand that he healed you when you were sick, that you might reign.

"Shame on those who have found relief from their sickness, for they will relapse into sickness.

"Blessings on you who have not been sick, and have known relief before getting sick. The kingdom of god is yours.

"So I tell you: Be filled and leave no space in you empty, or he who is coming will mock you."

### **Being filled and lacking**

Then Peter answered, "Look, three times you have told us, 'Be filled, but we are filled.'"

The saviour answered and said, "For this reason I have told you, 'Be filled; that you may not lack. Those who lack will not be saved. To be filled is good and to lack is bad. Yet since it is also good for you to lack but bad for you to be filled, whoever is filled also lacks. One who lacks is not filled in the way another who lacks is filled, but whoever is filled is brought to an appropriate end. So you should lack when you can fill yourselves and be filled when you lack,

that you may be able to fill yourselves more. Be filled with spirit but Jack in reason, for reason is of the soul. It is soul."

### **Believe in my cross**

I answered and said to him, "Master, we can obey you if you wish, for we have forsaken our fathers and our mothers and our villages, and followed you. Give us the means not to be tempted by the evil devil."

The master answered and said, "What good is it to you if you do the father's will but you are not given your part of his bounty when you are tempted by Satan? But if you are oppressed by Satan and persecuted and do the father's will, I say he will love you, make you my equal, and consider you beloved through his forethought," and by your own choice. Won't you stop loving the flesh and fearing suffering? Don't you know that you have not yet been abused, unjustly accused, locked up in prison, unlawfully condemned, crucified without reason," or buried in the sand<sup>16</sup> as I myself was by the evil one? Do you dare to spare the flesh, O you for whom the spirit is a wall surrounding you? If you consider how long the world has existed before you and how long it will exist after you, you will see that your life is but a day and your sufferings an hour. The good will not enter the world. Disdain death, then, and care about life. Remember my cross and my death, and you will live."

I answered and said to him, "Master, do not mention to us the cross and death, for they are far from you."

The master answered and said, "I tell you the truth, none will be saved unless they believe in my cross, for the kingdom of god belongs to those who have believed in my cross. Be seekers of death, then, like the dead who seek life, for what they seek becomes apparent to them. And what is there to cause them concern? As for you, when you search out death, it will teach you about being chosen. I tell you the truth: No one afraid of death will be saved, for the kingdom of death belongs to those who are put to death.<sup>18</sup> Become better than I. Be like the child of the holy spirit."

### **Be eager for the Word**

Then I asked him, "Master, can we prophesy to those who ask us to prophesy to them? There are many who bring a request to us and look to us to hear our pronouncement."

The master answered and said, "Do you not know that the head of prophecy was cut off with John?"<sup>20</sup>

But I said, "Master, is it not impossible to remove the head of prophecy?"

The master said to me, "When you realize what 'head' means, and that prophecy comes from the head, then understand the meaning of 'its head was removed':

"First I spoke with you in parables, and you did not understand. Now I am speaking with you openly, and you do not grasp it. Nevertheless, you were for me a parable among parables and a disclosure among things revealed.

"Be eager to be saved without being urged. Rather, be fervent on your own and, if possible, outdo even me, for this is how the father will love you.

"Come to hate hypocrisy and evil intention. Intention produces hypocrisy, and hypocrisy is far from truth.

"Do not let the kingdom of heaven wither away. It is like a palm shoot whose dates dropped around it. It produced buds, and after they grew, its productivity dried up. This is also what happened with fruit that came from this single root. After it was harvested, fruit was obtained by many. It certainly was good. Is it not possible to produce the new growth now, and for you to find it?

"Since I was glorified like this once before, why do you hold me back when I am eager to go? After my labour you have made me stay with you another eighteen days because of the parables. For some people it was enough to listen to the teaching and understand "The Shepherds," "The Seed," "The Building: 'The Lamps of the Young Women," "The Wage of the Workers: and "The Silver Coins and the Woman:

"Be eager for the word. The first aspect of the word is faith, the second is love, the third is works, and from these comes life.

"The word is like a grain of wheat. When someone sowed it, he had faith in it, and when it sprouted, he loved it, because he saw many grains instead of just one. And after he worked, he was saved because he prepared it as food and he still kept some out to sow.

"This is also how you can acquire the kingdom of heaven for yourselves. Unless you acquire it through knowledge, you will not be able to find it."

### **Understand the Light**

"So I say to you, be sober. Do not go astray. And often have I said to you all together, and also to you alone, James, be saved. I have commanded you to follow me, and I have taught you how to speak before the rulers.

"See that I have come down and have spoken and have exerted myself and have won my crown when I saved you. I came down to live with you, so you might also live with me. And when I found that your houses had no roofs, I lived in houses that could receive me when I came down.

"Trust me, my brothers. Understand what the great light is. The father does not need me. A father does not need a son, but it is the son who needs the father. To him I am going, for the father of the son is not in need of you.

"Listen to the word, understand knowledge, love life, and no one will persecute you and no one will oppress you other than you yourselves."

### **Shame on you, blessings on you**

"You wretches! You losers! You pretenders to truth! You falsifiers of knowledge! You sinners against the spirit! Do you still dare to listen when from the beginning you should have been speaking? Do you still dare to sleep when from the beginning you should have been awake so that the kingdom of heaven might receive you? I tell you the truth, it is easier for a holy person to sink into defilement, and for an enlightened person to sink into darkness, than for you to reign—or not to reign.

"I remember your tears, your mourning, and your grief. They are far from us. You who are outside the father's inheritance, weep when you should, mourn, and preach what is good. As is proper, the son is ascending.

"I tell you the truth, if I had been sent to those who would listen to me and had spoken with them, I would never have come down to earth. Now be ashamed.

"Look, I shall be leaving you and go away. I do not want to stay with you any longer just as you yourselves have not wanted this. Follow me quickly. I tell you, for you I came down. You are loved ones. You will bring life to many people. Invoke the father, pray to god frequently, and he will be generous with you.

"Blessings on one who has seen you with him when he is proclaimed among the angels and glorified among the saints. Yours is life. Rejoice and be glad as children of god. Observe his will that you may be saved. Accept correction from me and save yourselves. I am mediating for you with the father, and he will forgive you many things."

### **Few find the Kingdom of Heaven**

When we heard this, we were delighted. We had become gloomy because of what we said earlier. But when he saw us happy, he said,

"Shame on you who are in need of an advocate.

"Shame on you who stand in need of grace.

"Blessings will be on those who have spoken out and acquired grace for themselves.

"Compare yourselves to foreigners. How are they viewed in your city? Why are you anxious to banish yourselves on your own and distance yourselves from your city? Why abandon your dwelling on your own and make it available for those who want to live in it? O, you exiles and runaways, shame on you. You will be captured.

"Or maybe you think that the father is a lover of people, or that he is won over by prayers, or that he is gracious to one because of another, or that he tolerates whoever is seeking?

"He knows about desire and what the flesh needs. Does it not desire the soul? The body does not sin apart from the soul just as the soul is not saved apart from the spirit. But if the soul is saved from evil and the spirit too is saved, the body becomes sinless. The spirit animates the soul but the body kills it. The soul kills itself.

"I tell you the truth, he will never forgive the sin of the soul or the guilt of the flesh, for none of those who have worn the flesh will be saved. Do you think that many have found the kingdom of heaven?

"Blessings on one who has seen oneself as a fourth one in heaven."

### **Know yourselves**

When we heard this, we became sad. But when he saw that we were sad, he said, "I say this to you that you may know yourselves."<sup>31</sup>

"The kingdom of heaven is like a head of grain that sprouted in a field. And when it was ripe, it scattered its seed, and again it filled the field with heads of grain for another year. So with you, be eager to harvest for yourselves a head of the grain of life that you may be filled with the kingdom.

"And as long as I am with you, pay attention to me and trust in me, but when I am far from you, remember me. And remember me because I was with you and you did not know me.

"Blessings will be on those who have known me.

"Shame on those who have heard and have not believed.

"Blessings will be on those who have not seen but yet have believed.

"And once again I appeal to you. I am disclosed to you as I am building a house useful to you when you find shelter in it, and it will support your neighbors' house when theirs threatens to collapse.

"I tell you the truth, shame on those for whom I was sent down here. "Blessings will be on those who are going up to the father.

"Again I warn you, you who are. Be like those who are not, that you may be with those who are not.

"Do not let the kingdom of heaven become a desert within you. Do not be proud because of the light that enlightens. Rather, act toward yourselves as I myself have toward you. I have put myself under a curse for you to save you."

### **The Last Word**

Peter responded to these comments and said, "Sometimes you urge us on toward the kingdom of heaven, but at other times you turn us away, master. Sometimes you encourage us, draw us toward faith, and promise us life, but at other times you drive us away from the kingdom of heaven."

The master answered and said to us, "I have offered you faith many times and have revealed myself to you, James—and you have not known me. Now I see you often rejoicing. And although you are delighted about the promise of life, you are sad and gloomy when you are taught about the kingdom.

"Nevertheless, you, through faith and knowledge, have received life. So disregard rejection when you hear it, but when you hear about the promise, be joyful all the more.

"I tell you the truth, whoever will receive life and believe in the kingdom will never leave it, not even if the father wants to banish him.

"This is all I shall tell you at this time. Now I shall ascend to the place from which I have come. When I was eager to go, you have driven me off, and instead of accompanying me, you have chased me away.

"Be attentive to the glory that awaits me, and when you have opened your hearts, listen to the hymns that await me up in heaven. Today I must take my place at the right hand of my father.

"I have spoken my last word to you; I shall depart from you, for a chariot of spirit has carried me up, and from now on I shall strip that I may be clothed.

"Pay attention: Blessings on those who have proclaimed the son before he came down, so that, when I did come, I might ascend.

"Blessings three times over on those who were proclaimed by the son before they came into being, so that you might share with them."

### **The messengers disperse**

When he said this, he left. We knelt down, Peter and I, and gave thanks and sent our hearts up to heaven. We heard with our ears and saw with our eyes the noise of wars, a trumpet blast, and great turmoil.

When we passed beyond that place, we sent our minds up further. We saw with our eyes and heard with our ears hymns, angelic praises and angelic rejoicing. Heavenly majesties were singing hymns, and we rejoiced too.

Again after this we wished to send our spirits up to the majesty. When we ascended, we were not allowed to see or hear anything. The other students called to us and asked us, "What did you hear from the teacher? What did he tell you? Where did he go?"

We answered them, "He ascended. He gave us his right hand, and promised all of us life. He showed us children coming after us, having commanded us to love them, since we are to be saved for their sakes:'

When they heard this, they believed the revelation, but they were angry about those who would be born. Not wishing to give them reason to take offense, I sent each of them to a different location. I myself went up to Jerusalem, praying that I might acquire a share with the loved ones who are to come.

I pray that the beginning may come from you.<sup>38</sup> This is how I can be saved. They will be enlightened through me, by my faith, and through another's that is better than mine. I wish mine to be the lesser.

Do your best to be like them, and pray that you may acquire a share with them. Beyond what I have said, the saviour did not disclose any revelation to us on their behalf. We proclaim a share with those for whom the message was proclaimed, those whom the lord has made his children.

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## **In English**

King James Version (Public Domain Version)

<http://www.allonlinebible.com/>

## **In Dutch**

<http://www.online-bijbel.nl/>

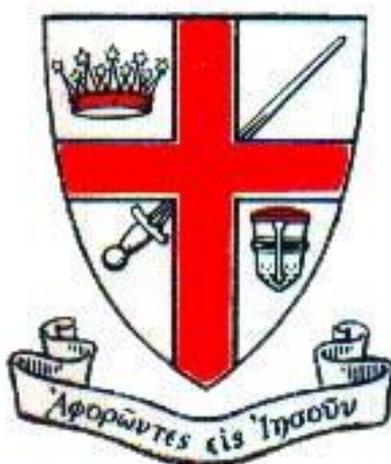
## **In French**

Version Louis Segond (Normalement Domaine Publique)

<http://www.christianevents.mu/lire-bible-francais-louis-segond.html>

# Contents

Introduction to the Epistle of James – The author	2
The date	4
The recipients; the style	5
Literary devices and techniques	6
Rhetorical questions; excellent Greek, etc. and other characteristics	7
Jewish, different from Paul, similar to Jesus	8
Its canonicity, position and survey	9
Summary	10
Remarks of historians and early Church Fathers	11
Commentary on the Book of James (James 1:1-27)	14
James 2:1-26	24
James 3:1-18	33
James 4:1-17	39
James 5:1-20	45
Divine Healing	55
Questionnaire	55
Concise word list	60
Non-canonical: The Proto Gospel of James (description and outline)	64
Infancy Gospel of James (text)	67
The Secret Book of James (description and text)	77
Read the Bible Online (English, Dutch, and French)	86
Contents	87



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