

Introduction

NOTE: The word “introduction” is a technical term used in the field of biblical studies. It refers to a consideration of such matters as authorship, date, background, setting, critical problems, etc. of the Bible document being studied. It deals with those things that might affect one’s understanding of what has been written.

Introduction to the Letters of James and Peter

- A. The Bible contains a variety of genres. God has chosen to give his word to humans in human form. Understanding the genre in which a document was written helps one to interpret the document properly. For example, historiography is not interpreted the same way as legal code or poetry. There are certain expectations with the various genres in any culture. The better one understand the genre, the more prepared he is to properly understand the text. Thus, those who study biblical documents must make an effort to understand the genre at the time the document was written.
- B. James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter are letters.
 - 1. Letters are occasional literature. What that means is that some occasion arose that required the letter to be written.
 - 2. Since there was often some previous connection between the author and the original recipients, the occasion that demanded the letter is not always clearly stated. One must infer the occasion from the kinds of things that are written in the letter. Also, elements of that previous connection may be assumed by the author. The original readers would know some background that modern readers may not know. For example, there may be some common experiences or conversations between the author and recipients of which modern readers are unaware. This requires some caution in reading and interpreting this type of literature.
 - 3. As to form, a letter in the first century usually contained the writer’s name, the recipient’s name, a greeting, and then the body of the letter. New Testament letters sometimes have an extended opening. The author might expand on his identity or the identity of the recipients or he might offer an extended greeting. For example, the greeting in the letter of James is only the simple word “greetings.” Peter gives a few more words in both his letters. For a more extended greeting, one might consult some of the letters of Paul.
 - 4. New Testament authors often included an identifying note that signaled their authority. For example, Peter identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus.
- C. There are various obstacles to continued faith and continued connection to God. These three letters address some of those obstacles.
 - 1. The Letter of James was written to those who were relatively new Christians. They still needed to learn some of the basics of Christianity in order to maintain their connection to God. Thus, this letter contains instructions about some basic beliefs and practices. My label for our study will be “Coping with Young Faith.”
 - 2. The First Letter of Peter was written to those who were beginning to suffer severe persecution for their faith. Adversity in life can cause people to abandon faith. Thus, this letter includes instructions to help Christians know how to deal with adversity and keep their faith. My label for this study will be “Coping with Adversity.”
 - 3. The Second Letter of Peter was written to those who were facing the threat of

false teaching. Wrong teachings lead people away from Jesus and his truth. This letter includes instructions on how to withstand the onslaught of wrong teachings. My label for this study will be “Coping with False Teachings.”

Introduction to James

A. Authorship

1. Of primary importance is that one remember who ultimately authored all books of the Bible. The Bible is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 2:9-14). God chose to deliver his message to humans in human terms. He chose to deliver that message through human messengers. To discuss, then, the authorship of a biblical document is to discuss the effort to uncover who the human author was – remembering that God is the ultimate author of all biblical documents.
2. The author is clearly stated in the text: it is James the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1).
 - a. James was actually a very common name in the first century. Most likely this would have been a prominent figure. An unknown man named James surely would not have written an authoritative letter without some reference of authority that would make people listen to him. It would seem from his identification of himself simply as a servant of Jesus that he would have been prominent enough that further identification was not necessary – everyone knew him.
 - b. Part of the problem is that there are four men in the New Testament named James: James the son of Zebedee, and brother of John (an apostle). James the son of Alphaeus (an apostle – see Mt. 10:1-4), James the father of Judas the apostle (not Iscariot) (Lk. 6:16), and James the half-brother of Jesus (not an apostle – see Mt. 13:55).
3. The most likely of these to be the author of our book is the brother of Jesus.
 - a. Likely it would have been a well-known man, since James was a common name and he gives no additional identifying information. He assumed the readers would know who he was. This likely would eliminate James the father of Judas, about whom we know almost nothing.
 - b. James the son of Zebedee was killed by Herod (Acts 12), likely before the book was written.
 - c. The James who wrote this book was probably NOT an apostle. If an apostle, he would have made note of that somewhere in the letter – because it related directly to authority. (E.g., Paul usually made some reference to his apostleship somewhere in his letters, usually at the beginning. Peter identified himself as an apostle in his letters). Further, consider the fact that James was a common name – the recipients could not automatically assume it was an apostle.
 - d. Also interesting is the fact that this James, the brother of Jesus, seemed to be a major figure in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13ff; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12). This fits well with the contents of the letter.

B. To Whom It Was Written

1. The twelve tribes
 - a. This is a Jewish designation referring to the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob (who was renamed Israel).
 - b. It must be remembered, however, that Jewish terms are sometimes

used figuratively and applied to the church, which is spiritual Israel.

- i. 1 Cor. 10:18 – “Israel after the flesh” implies that there must be an Israel after the spirit. Otherwise, the modifier “after the flesh” is completely unnecessary.
 - ii. Rom. 2:28-29 – Being a Jew in this passage is linked not to physical lineage, but spiritual obedience.
 - iii. Thus, the term “twelve tribes” could very well refer to the church in a figurative expression.
 - c. In fact, unbelieving Jews could hardly have been intended by James.
 - i. He presents none of the evidence that would be needed to convert them to Christ, which is a common element in other lessons in the New Testament aimed at unbelievers (e.g., consider the sermons in the book of Acts).
 - ii. This material was not written to convert people to Christ, but to give instructions to Christians on how to live the Christian life.
 - iii. References throughout the epistle indicate that Christians are the recipients (e.g., 2:1, 14).
 - d. There is a Jewish flavor to the epistle (e.g., the reference to “synagogue”). This is likely because it was written very early in the history of the church and because the recipients were those Jewish Christians who were forced to flee Jerusalem due to persecution. See the next point.
2. Scattered abroad.
- a. This is again a Jewish phrase. The Greek term is “diaspora,” and it referred in general to the dispersion of Jews across the world.
 - b. In this context, it seems to be used figuratively to refer to Christians who were scattered.
 - i. Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19 use the corresponding Greek verb to refer to the Christians who were scattered because of persecution from their fellow Jews.
 - ii. It seems likely that James may have written to these very people.
3. Some interesting observations:
- a. James, the Lord’s brother, seemed to be an elder and a major figure in the Jerusalem church.
 - b. The recipients of this letter seem to have been those Christians who had been scattered from Jerusalem due to persecution.
 - c. It seems proper that James would write a letter to them to encourage and teach them further about Christian living, since he had been their shepherd.

C. Date

1. The date of the letter cannot be set with a great deal of certainty or accuracy. Some details that we know give us a general idea.
 - a. It had to be in the lifetime of James. The secular reports of James’ death indicate that he died sometime around A.D. 62-65. This sets the limit on the latest it could have been written.
 - b. There is no reference to the Jewish-Gentile controversy.
 - i. James was involved directly with this issue, when it erupted in Antioch and involved the Jerusalem elders (Acts 15).
 - ii. He does mention respect of persons in the letter, but only

discusses rich-poor favoritism, and not Jewish-Gentile favoritism.

- c. There was persecution against Christians, but not from the Roman government. It was persecution by the rich (5:1ff). Remember that the persecution against Christians first came from other Jews. This means it had to be before the 60's, because persecution in that time came from the Roman government.
 - d. Famine and poverty perhaps are implied (1:27; 2:15-18). One famine hit about AD 44. This may be the earliest it could have been written.
- 2. A good guess would put the letter in the mid to late 40's (45-49). If so, it is likely the first of the New Testament books to be written. (Some suggest that Galatians might have been written before James).
- D. Authenticity. Doubts have been expressed by some as to whether this document ought to be included among the sacred writings. An investigation of the ancient external evidence will find some incomplete evidence that might indicate some doubt about the authenticity of this document. There can be found, however, evidence that treats the document as inspired and authoritative just as the rest of the New Testament documents.
 - 1. It is not listed in the Muratorian Canon. But, there are other documents not found there as well, and it is widely thought that the extant copies of the Muratorian Canon are incomplete.
 - 2. It is suggested that Origen expressed some doubt as to the authenticity of this letter. But, the sentence so interpreted can also be interpreted otherwise. And, there are other places in his writings where Origen cites the document as authoritative.
 - 3. Martin Luther rejected James, but that was mostly due to his theology and his conclusion that James contradicted grace as taught by Paul in Romans. The truth is that when both Romans and James are properly interpreted, they do not contradict each other at all. This shows the importance of accurate Bible interpretation. Wrong interpretation can lead to a variety of errors in judgment and application.

Outline of James

- I. True Religion (1)
 - A. Endures Life's Trials (1:2-12)
 - B. Withstands Temptation (1:13-15)
 - C. Sees the True Nature of God (1:16-18)
 - D. Controls Temper and Tongue (1:19-20, 26)
 - E. Actively Obeys God's Will (1:21-25)
 - F. Cares About Others (1:27)
 - G. Stays Pure (1:27)
- II. True Faith (2)
 - A. Faith and Prejudice (2:1-13)
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 - 2. Effects of prejudice (2:4-11)
 - 3. Solution to prejudice (2:12-13)
 - B. Faith and Obedience (2:14-26)
 - 1. Dead faith (2:14-18)
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3. Dynamic faith (2:21-26)
- III. True Speech (3:1-12)
 - A. Warning to Aspiring Teachers (3:1)
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 - C. Power of Speech (3:3-6)
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 1. Recognize God's grace (4:6)
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 5. Cleanse your hands (4:8)
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 7. Be truly sorry over sin (4:9)
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- V. True Patience (5)
 - A. Prophetic Condemnation of the Rich (5:1-6)
 - B. Lesson for Christians: Be Patient (5:7-11)
 - C. Various Admonitions (5:12-20)
 1. Do not swear (5:12)
 2. Pray when you are afflicted (5:13)
 3. Sing praises when you are happy (5:13)
 4. Call the elders when you are sick (5:14-15)
 5. Confess your sins to each other (5:16)
 6. Pray for each other (5:16)
 7. Work to restore the erring (5:19-20)

True Religion (James 1)

- I. Endures Life's Trials (1:2-12)
 - A. Joy in Trials (1:2-4)
 1. The Greek word πειρασμός can mean either temptations or trials. "Trials" would refer to the difficulties of life that come upon you from without. "Temptations" would refer to the urges to wrong behavior that arise from within.
 - a. The context will shape the meaning.
 - b. Since verse 3 refers to these things as "trying" your faith, it must be trials here.
 - c. This is why James wrote that you "meet" or "fall into" (ἐντρίβετε) these trials. You do not fall into temptations (as vv. 13-15 will show later), but you fall into troubles.

2. Why should we count it joy when we have difficulties in life?
 - a. They try our faith. "Try" comes from the Greek word for testing gold ore to see if it is gold or not (⚡⬜&)(❖○)(⬜■). It is used in the sense of putting something to the test to either approve it or disprove it. Troubles in life test our faith – to see if it is real or not. The same sun melts butter and hardens clay; the same troubles strengthen the faith of some and destroy the faith of others.
 - b. They also build endurance (◆😊⬜⬜○⬜■⚡❖ — which means to remain or stay. It is the idea of perseverance or persistence, or endurance).
 - c. We need endurance in order to be mature, full-grown, and complete in our faith. ◆ℳ❖●ℳ)(⬜✂ means mature or full grown. ⬜😊●⬜❖&●⚡⬜⬜✂ means complete in every part. Thus, we need endurance in order to be mature, complete Christians (cf 2 Pet. 1:5-7; Heb 10:36-39).
 - d. The point is that troubles in life are unpleasant, but they can have a positive impact in the development of our faith.
3. Notice the role knowledge plays in all this. We find joy in the troubles of life when we KNOW that they build us up. It is the knowledge of how these things can make us strong that allows us to see them in the right way, and thus find joy.

B. Wisdom (1:5-8)

1. If you lack the understanding of these things, ask for it. Wisdom is more than just being clever. It is knowing how to use knowledge. Wisdom has to do with how you approach life (cf 3:15-17). God will give you the wisdom you need.
2. God gives liberally and does not reproach. He will not rebuke you for asking too often for wisdom.
3. But, you must ask in faith, nothing wavering. What does this mean? It does not mean that you ask, believing without doubt that you will get it. It means that you ask, while living a faithful, unwavering life. The one who is unsure of his faith is like the boat that is tossed around in a stormy sea. This is clarified by the following statement. The double-minded man will not receive this from God. Double-minded refers to the idea that you are not completely devoted to God – i.e., you are unsure that you want to serve him.

C. Equality (1:9-11)

1. In what way is the poor exalted and the rich made low? While there is distinction in the world between the two groups, in the church they are equal. So, the rich man is brought down to the level of the poor man and the poor man is brought up to the level of the rich man (cf. Gal. 3:28).
2. The rich man is compared to the flower of the grass. In the countryside of Israel, grass and flowers spring up during the rainy season. It is a beautiful sight. But, they burn up and disappear just as quickly when the rainy season is over. The point here is that the rich man will pass his life here just as quickly as the poor man. His wealth will not exempt him from death. So, he can rejoice in his place in God's family rather than rejoicing in his money. The illustration applies to all

people, not just the rich. It is a common biblical image (Ps. 103:15; Is. 40:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:24-25).

- D. Conclusion (1:12). James pronounced blessing on the one who endures. The one who endures will receive the crown of life (cf. Rev. 2:10) which the Lord has promised it (cf. Also 2 Tim. 4:8). This is available to both rich and poor alike.

II. Withstands Temptation (1:13-15)

A. God does not tempt us.

1. “Let no one say...” This is a common thing for people to do. It began with Adam – “the woman YOU gave me...” People today blame their sins on God. Consider, for example, homosexuality – one common excuse is, “God made us this way, we cannot change.”
2. God cannot be tempted with evil. God is light and in him is no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1:5). God is so far away from evil that he is beyond being tempted with evil things.
3. So he does not tempt others with evil.
4. The point is that God is not the source of temptation.

B. The real source of temptation.

1. One is tempted when he is lured away by his own desire. No one can TAKE us away from God (Jn. 10:28-29; Mt. 12:29). But we CAN walk away from God. Do not ever allow desires to draw you away from that which you know to be right.
2. Since he cannot take us from God, Satan tries to lure us away. The image is one of fishing. The fisherman tries to lure the fish away from his safe haven to take the bait. This is the way Satan works – building on our own desires – note “his own desire.”

- C. Temptation, when one gives in to it, causes sin. The temptation is not a sin; the sin is when one gives in to the temptation and behaves in a way contrary to God’s will (cf. 1 Jn. 3:4).

- D. The result of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

- E. One major point out of this is that we are each responsible for our own actions (2 Cor. 5:10; Ezek. 18:20). American example: The doctor from Virginia who blamed her drunken attack on policemen on PMS – and was acquitted.

- G. Question for further reflection: what can you do to avoid temptation?

1. Stay away (Pr. 4:22-5:8; Gen. 39:11-12)
2. Learn the Bible (Mt. 4:1-10; Ps. 119:11)
3. Assemble with the saints to worship (Heb. 10:24-25)

III. Sees the True Nature of God (1:16-18).

- A. Do not be deceived (16). The Bible abounds with warnings about deception. The funny thing about being deceived – if you are deceived you do not know it. Many today have fallen for this deception. They blame God for their illicit desires and the temptations that result. For example, some say, “Why did God give us marijuana, alcohol, etc. if he did not want us to use it?” Or, “God made me this way.” James had just made the point that God does not tempt. Now he moves on to state that God does good.

- B. God is described as the Father of lights – this simply refers to him as creator of the sun, moon, and stars. As creator, he has from the beginning given us those things that we need – water, light, food, etc.

- C. Every good and perfect gift comes from him. God has given us all the physical things we enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17-19). God has given us all spiritual blessings in

Christ (Eph. 1:3).

- D. With him there is no changing. Planetary movements and rotations cause shadows to be constantly changing. But, with God, who created all the heavenly lights, there are no changing shadows. The point is that God is always the same (Mal. 3:6; Ps. 102:26-27; Heb. 13:8). God is always good and will always be good. He will always provide for us that which is good for us (Rom. 8:28).
- E. Herein lies the deception: God is always the giver of good things. Temptation to do evil is not good. Thus, God does not tempt us with evil. To blame him is to be deceived. Rather, God is the one who causes us to be reborn to spiritual life.
- F. God causes us to be born again (1:18). This is an example of God's goodness. We are begotten as God's children (Jn. 3; 1 Pet. 1:22-25).
 - 1. We are born again **according to God's will**. God wants us to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). We are born again by **the word of truth**. This refers to the gospel (1 Pet. 1:22-25).
 - 2. "First fruits of his creatures." This is a reference to the Old Testament practice of giving to God the first of the harvest (Lev. 23:10). Those Christians to whom James first wrote these things were the beginnings of a great harvest. The spread of the gospel is referred to by Jesus as a harvest (Jn. 4:35).

IV. Controls Temper and Tongue (1:19-20, 26).

- A. Human anger does not produce the righteousness of God (19-20)
 - 1. Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.
 - a. The old preacher used to say, "God gave us two ears and one mouth; that ought to tell us something."
 - b. We must be willing to listen to others. Listening can often help us avoid conflict. Rather than being quick to speak up, let us take the time to listen. Listening to others and trying to understand them can also help us be slow to become angry with them.
 - c. We must not be easily provoked (1 Cor. 13:5; cf. Pro. 15:18; mCol. 3:8; Eph. 4:26).
 - 2. Anger often leads to wrong action rather than right action.
 - a. Contrast the example of Moses (Num. 20:11-12) and the example of Jesus (Mt. 21:12).
 - b. What was the difference? First of all, it does not say that Jesus was angry. But there is a passage that does say it (Mk. 3:5). One did right and one disobeyed. Anger does not HAVE to cause sin. People who allow anger to control their actions often behave sinfully. American example: road rage.
 - 3. Religion that does not control the tongue is empty (1:26). More about one's speech is contained in chapter 3.

V. Actively Obeys God's Will (1:21-25).

- A. Receive God's word (21).
 - 1. First one must put away evil things. If one is busy doing evil, he has no time to do good. God told Jeremiah that he first must tear down the wrong before he could build up the right (Jer. 1:10; cf. Eph. 4:20-32, Col. 3:1-14).
 - 2. One then must be willing to accept God's word (cf. Jn. 7:17; Acts

17:11).

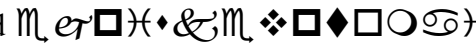
- a. This requires meekness. Meekness is not weakness. The word was used to refer to a horse that has been tamed. The horse that has been tamed is no weaker than it was before it was tamed. The difference is that its power has been brought under control. To receive God's word with meekness means that one is willing to be brought under God's control.
- b. Jesus used a parable to demonstrate the different ways people can respond to God's word (Mt.13:1-9, 18-23).
3. God's word has the power to save souls (Rom. 1:16-17). Note again verse 17, where James wrote that God causes us to be born again by the word of truth. Note also Romans 10:17, Acts 20:32, and John 8:31-32.

B. Do Gods word (22-25)

1. The principle – to be a hearer but not a doer is to deceive oneself. How can this be deceptive? Note the following statement:

“For one thing, people mistake the pleasure they have in hearing the Word of God for Christianity and worship. The mind delights in having the truth presented clearly; the imagination is gratified by its illustration; the feelings are stirred by its application. To an active mind knowledge gives pleasure” (Andrew Murray, <https://bible.org/illustration/james-122>, accessed 10-8-2020).

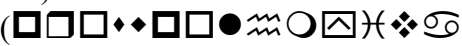
2. The illustration – the man who looks into a mirror. What good does it do to look into the mirror and not make any changes? So, to look into Scripture and not make any changes does one no good. The lessons of Scripture ought to change us. The one who allows the teachings of Scripture to change him will be blessed.

- VI. Cares About Others (1:27). The word  (visit) refers to more than a casual visit. It has to do with relieving the needs of those visited. God has always cared about the welfare of orphans and widows. So, for one's religion to be pure means that he will take care of orphans and widows.
- VII. Stays Pure (1:27). To be a Christian means that one will keep himself unstained from the world. This means that we stay away from sin. It is such a simple statement with huge impact in one's life.

True Faith (James 2)

III. Faith and Prejudice (2:1-13)

A. Definition of prejudice (1-3)

1. The Greek word () literally means “to receive the face.” It emphasizes that the reception depends on outer appearances. It refers to favoritism or prejudice or partiality.
2. This does not forbid showing honor to those who deserve it.
 - a. Elders are to be counted worthy of double honor – paid money as well as shown respect for their work (1 Tim. 5:17; Cf. 1 Th. 5:12-13).
 - b. Christians are urged to give honor to whom honor is due (Rom.

13:7).

- c. But this is a different matter than showing favoritism on the basis of external circumstances such as race, gender, financial status, political clout, etc.
 - 1) To respect those who have earned respect is a far different matter than being prejudiced.
 - 2) “Prejudice” comes from the concept of “pre-judging” people. It is the idea of judging people as worthy or unworthy based upon what they look like, or where they come from, etc. The idea of judging people is not altogether wrong. Unjust judging is wrong (Jn. 7:24); and prejudging is wrong.
- 3. James illustrated his point by making reference to the distinctions sometimes made between rich men and poor men. If a man comes in so dressed that it is obvious he is rich, do you give him a good seat? If a man comes in so dressed that it is obvious he is poor, do you try to hide him? What would YOU do if you were the usher in your local church, and this very situation happened? Would you make a difference in where you would seat the two men?

B. Effects of prejudice (4-11):

- 1. It makes you “Judges of evil thoughts.”
 - a. Consider what is meant if I refer to a jar of grape jelly.
 - 1) The phrase “of grape jelly” refers to what is in the jar.
 - 2) In this case, “of evil thoughts” refers to what is in the judges.
 - b. If you show favoritism, you are a judge full of evil thoughts.
 - c. Question for self-reflection: What kind of evil thoughts lead to prejudice? Put another way, why would one show partiality to those who are rich? Is it a good motive, or a selfish one?
- 2. It makes you opposed to God (5-7)
 - a. God chose the poor to be rich in faith (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26). God chooses through the gospel (2 Th. 2:13-14). The answer of faithful obedience is the key. More poor people respond and grow in faith than rich people. This does not exclude the rich, but it is a simple truth that rich people tend to trust in their money and not in God and his word. Thus the poor are more likely to obey and study – which creates growth.
 - b. But you have despised the poor. James went on to point out how senseless it was for them to show partiality to the rich. After all, it was the rich who were oppressing them and blaspheming the name of Christ.
- 3. It makes you a transgressor of the law (8-11)
 - a. Understand the royal law – you shall love your neighbor as yourself (v. 8; cf. Mt. 22:39). It is called “royal” or “kingly” perhaps because:
 - 1) It is the king of all laws – the summary of how we should treat others.
 - 2) It is a law of the kingdom of Christ.
 - 3) It originated with the King himself – Christ.
 - b. The sense here seems to be that those who were thus showing

favoritism toward the rich were justifying their actions by reference to this command.

- c. James noted that it is good to follow this law, but it is not what they were doing. He then taught that if you show partiality, you commit sin. The very law they were quoting to support their activity is the law that condemned them. To show partiality is NOT to love your neighbor as yourself. They had despised, not loved, the poor. And, thus, they had become transgressors of the law.
- d. Violating one point of law makes you a transgressor of the law. He illustrated this from the Law of Moses. You may keep all other laws, but if you reject one, you are a transgressor of the law as a whole.

C. Solution to prejudice – one's actions must be guided by the law of liberty – the gospel (12-13).

- 1. The law of liberty is the gospel. The gospel is law (Gal. 6:2). It is what gives liberty from sin (Rom. 8:1-2; Gal. 5:1).
- 2. One must live according to this law, or else be a lawbreaker. Partiality makes one a law breaker.
- 3. Those who show no mercy will receive no mercy (v.13).
 - a. Mercy has to do with having pity, or compassion, on others in their difficulties (Lk. 10:25-37; Mt. 18:21-35).
 - b. If we fail to have such mercy on others, neither will Jesus have mercy on us at the Judgment Day.
- 4. Mercy triumphs over judgment (13). On the great Judgment Day, receiving God's mercy is far better than receiving justice.

II. Faith and Obedience (2:14-26). Faith is central to the gospel (cf. Heb. 11:6; Eph. 2:8). But not all faith can save. James explains different kinds of faith.

A. Dead faith (vv. 14-18)

- 1. The key is on the word "say." Anyone can SAY he has faith. The thing that matters is whether one's faith leads to action.
- 2. Illustration (vv.15-16). SAYING to the hungry and cold to be warmed and filled is useless. Actually taking the steps necessary to give them food and clothes makes a difference.
- 3. Again, in verse 18, the emphasis is on what one SAYS.
- 4. Just like the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead (26).

B. Demonic faith (vv. 19-20)

- 1. It is a good thing to believe in the one God. But that such a thing is not enough is evidenced by the demons. They also believe in one God. They know that he is real. But they are lost.
- 2. One difference is that they that they are not driven to obedience by their "faith."
- 3. Faith involves more than believing God exists (cf. Heb. 11:6).

C. Dynamic faith (vv.21-26).

- 1. The kind of faith that saves is an active faith.
- 2. Two illustrations are given.
 - a. Abraham was counted righteous because of faith (v. 23; Gen. 15:6). But, Abraham's faith was not complete until it led him to obedience. The event mentioned by James was the time when

Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac (21; Gen. 22). This act by Abraham demonstrated his faith (Heb. 11:17-19). This active faith is also given as the reason that Abraham was called the friend of God (23; 2 Chr. 20:7; Is. 41:8).

- b. Rahab the harlot was also justified by works (v. 25). She expressed belief in the one true God after hearing about the things he had done for Israel. She then acted upon that faith by helping the spies (Josh. 2:1-21; Heb. 11:31).

- 3. The point is that faith that pleases God is a faith that obeys God.

III. Controversies connected to James 2:14-26

A. Faith only teaching

- 1. Some argue that people are saved by faith only. They reject that baptism is essential for salvation and argue that one is saved at the point of belief.
- 2. The only time the Bible ever mentions faith only, it says that one is NOT justified by faith only (24). In fact, the Bible nowhere says that humans are saved by any one thing.
- 3. One is saved by grace (Eph. 2), but not grace only. God's grace is extended to all, but not all are saved.
- 4. One is saved by faith (Jn. 3:16), but not faith only. James mentioned that even demons believe.

B. Conflict with Romans 4 and Ephesians 2

- 1. Paul wrote that salvation is by grace through faith, and he explicitly stated that it was not by works. How can this fit with James 2?
- 2. There are two things that must be noted in studying these three passages.
 - a. But, one cannot by obedience earn or merit salvation. It still depends upon Jesus' death upon the cross. Works mentioned by James are not meritorious works whereby one earns salvation. He defines saving faith as a faith that obeys God.
 - b. In both Romans and Ephesians, Paul is explaining that the works of the Law of Moses cannot save anyone. Both Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way – by the faith of the gospel. Paul is arguing which system saves. It is the gospel of Jesus and not the Law of Moses that saves. James is defining what the faith of the gospel looks like.
- 3. Note that even Paul went on to point out that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10).

True Speech (James 3:1-12)

I. Warning to Aspiring Teachers (3:1)

A. Not many should become teachers (1).

- 1. Those who teach will receive a stricter judgment.
 - a. Note Luke 12:48 – to whom much is given much shall be required. The position of teaching carries great responsibility (cf. also the parable of the talents).
 - b. There is the danger of misleading people. Teachers will be held accountable for what they teach. This is further explained in the

following discussion about the power of the tongue and the dangers of wrong speech.

2. This is not a prohibition against being teachers; it is simply a warning about doing it for the wrong reasons or doing it lightly.
- II. Speech and Maturity (3:2-12). Control of the tongue indicates that one is complete or mature or full grown (2). James indicates that the tongue is the hardest part of the anatomy to control. If one reaches the point where he can control his tongue, he can also control his whole body.
- III. The Power of Speech (3:3-6)
 - A. It is compared to bits in horses mouths (3) and rudders on ships (4). Each is tiny compared to the whole, but controls where they go. So is the tongue tiny compared to the whole body, but has control over the direction of one's life.
 - B. It is compared to a small spark which creates a large fire (5). The Chicago fire that destroyed vast areas of the city is rumored to have started when Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over a lantern. So, life-long reputations, or families, or entire congregations can be destroyed with one loose tongue.
 - C. The tongue is a world of unrighteousness; it defiles the whole body; it sets on fire the whole course of life (circle or cycle of life). The whole of a person, and his life, falls victim to the destruction of an uncontrolled tongue.
 - D. The comparison to fire is interesting. A raging, out of control fire does so much damage – and so does a raging, out of control tongue. (Prov. 26:18-25; Mt. 12:34-37; Rom. 1:29-30; Eph. 4:29; 5:4).
- IV. Difficulty of Taming the Tongue (3:7-8)
 - A. Man can tame all kinds of wild animals. This does not necessarily mean that man has domesticated these animals, but simply that he has dominion over them – he can control them.
 - B. But, he cannot tame the tongue. Even the most mature of Christians, who almost never lose control of their tongues, can at an unguarded moment, allow angry, hurtful, or gossiping words to slip out.
 - C. The tongue is full of deadly poison – there is no way to estimate the amount of damage and hurt the tongue can cause. Young Christians have given up because of an unkind word from older Christians.
 - D. A peasant went to the local minister to seek counsel. He had spoken a hurtful lie about another. He was ordered to take place one feather on each doorstep in the town and then return to the minister. He did this, and the minister told him to return and gather up all those feathers. The man objected that it would be impossible, for many of the feathers would have blown away in the wind already. The minister then told him that was the point. Once you say an unkind or wrong thing, you cannot take it back.
 - E. It is not only an unkind word spoken that hurts – also kind words left unspoken can do damage.
- IV. Dangers of Inconsistent Speech (3:9-12). One must not praise God and then curse people, since people are made in the image of God. For a Christian to curse people is just as out of character as a fresh water spring producing salt water or a fig tree producing olives or a grapevine producing figs or a sea producing fresh water.

True Wisdom (James 3:13-4:17)

- I. Heavenly Wisdom Versus Earthly Wisdom (3:13-18)

A. Wisdom shows up in meekness and good conduct (13). This follows the discussion of right speech partly because right speech comes from the right kind of wisdom. James then described two kinds of wisdom.

B. Earthly wisdom (14-16)

1. Earthly ($\text{M}\epsilon\text{r}\square\text{H}\diamondsuit\text{Y}\circ\text{M}\text{H}\square\text{X}$) means that it is of human origin rather than divine origin. Sensual ($\text{I}\blacklozenge\text{M}\text{H}\&\square\diamondsuit\text{X}$) means that it follows the senses rather than the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Demonic ($\text{O}\infty\text{H}\bigcirc\square\blacksquare\text{H}\blacklozenge\diamondsuit\text{O}\approx\text{X}$) means that it is the kind of wisdom followed by the demons.
2. This wisdom follows bitter jealousy. Jealousy ($\text{H}\approx\approx\diamondsuit\bullet\square\text{X}$) can be a good thing (Jn. 2:17; 2 Cor. 11:1; Ex. 34:14) or a bad thing (Acts 5:17-18; 13:44-45). Here it is modified by “bitter” indicating that it is jealousy in a bad sense.
3. This wisdom follows selfish ambition ($\text{M}\epsilon\text{r}\square\text{H}\square\text{M}\text{H}\diamondsuit\infty$). This seems to be the trait that wants to advance self above all other considerations. Thus it often leads to strife and division.
4. These two worldly characteristics (jealousy and selfish ambition) lead to disorder and all kinds of evil practices.

C. Heavenly wisdom (17-18). This wisdom from above is described with the following traits.

1. First pure. “Pure” means it is uncontaminated or unstained. It is the same word used to refer to religion that is unstained from the world (1:27). Also, it is important to note that purity is first in order of importance with heavenly wisdom. For example, one is not to sacrifice purity in order to have peace, even though peace is a desired trait.
2. Peaceable. Jesus pronounced blessing on the peacemakers (Mt. 5:9). Peter quoted Psalm 34 which urges people to pursue peace in order to have a good life (1 Pet. 3:11).
3. Gentle. This appears to refer to being mild and reasonable rather than harsh or unfair.
4. Open to reason. This seems to mean that one is approachable; that one is open-minded enough to listen to others.
5. Full of mercy. Scripture emphasizes how important it is to be merciful (Mt. 5:7; Jas. 2:13). This is not just a little mercy, however. Heavenly wisdom leads one to be full of mercy.
6. Full of good fruits. One is known by his fruit (Mt. 12:33). Heavenly wisdom leads one to be full of good fruits.
7. Without partiality. James already pointed out the sinfulness of partiality (2:1-13).
8. Sincere. The word used here ($\infty\epsilon\text{r}\blacksquare\blacklozenge\square\square\diamondsuit&\square\text{H}\blacklozenge\square\text{X}$) literally means “without hypocrisy.” One’s Christian character is to be real and genuine rather than an act.

us” (ESV). This means that God desires our human spirit which he put in us.

- c. “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously” (NKJV). This means that the Holy Spirit who dwells in us desires.
- d. “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us” (NASB). This means that God desires the Holy Spirit which he put in us.

2. Is the spirit here mentioned the human spirit or the Holy Spirit? The Greek word $\pi \nu \mu \alpha \tau \iota \varsigma$ can mean either.

3. Translation of the Greek phrase

$\pi \nu \mu \alpha \tau \iota \varsigma \tau \eta \varsigma \epsilon \rho \omega \nu \tau \alpha \varsigma \mu \epsilon \tau \epsilon \sigma \tau \epsilon \lambda \epsilon \nu$. Some take $\pi \nu \mu \alpha \tau \iota \varsigma \tau \eta \varsigma \epsilon \rho \omega \nu \tau \alpha \varsigma \mu \epsilon \tau \epsilon \sigma \tau \epsilon \lambda \epsilon \nu$ to be an adverbial phrase, meaning “jealously” (e.g., ESV, NKJV, NASB). Some take it to be an intensifier of the desire (e.g., NIV). Some take it to describe the extent reached by the desire (e.g., KJV).

- a. Desire ($\epsilon \rho \omega \nu \tau \alpha \varsigma \mu \epsilon \tau \epsilon \sigma \tau \epsilon \lambda \epsilon \nu$) is not necessarily a bad thing. It is used in the New Testament to refer to a good desire (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:2; 1 Pet. 2:2). It is when our earthly desires control us that we end up living worldly lives (cf. 1 Jn. 2:15-17).
- b. The key in this passage is the use of the word $\phi \alpha \upsilon \lambda \alpha$. This word occurs nine times in the New Testament (Mt. 27:18; Mk. 15:10; Rom. 1:29; Gal. 5:21; Php. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Tit. 3:3; Jas. 4:5; 1 Pet. 2:1). Each time it refers to a sinful trait. The cognate verb $\phi \alpha \upsilon \lambda \omega$ occurs once (Gal. 5:26), and it is also a sinful behavior. I do not believe that God would be guilty of this trait. Thus, I am convinced that James intended to write that our human spirits desire to the point of envy.
- c. The point is that when we allow our human desire to control us, it leads us to the sinful behavior of envy.

B. The point of the verse, in context, seems to be that when we allow our human desires to control us, we end up living in envy. Envy is evil, and causes a journey deeper into sinful behavior. Being thus controlled by one’s desires is worldliness (cf. 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

III. Effects of Worldliness (4:1-4)

A. Worldliness causes strife (1-2).

- 1. This strife is referred to as “quarrels” and “fights.” The terminology is from warfare. Our own lives become the battleground for this struggle (1 Pet. 2:11; Rom. 7:15-25).
- 2. This struggle, this warfare, exists because of desires out of control. The intense desire for things or pleasures drive us to unhappiness. We focus on what we do not have. We then plan and scheme to acquire those things. This leads to the mistreatment of others in order to acquire what we want.

B. Worldliness causes an abuse of prayer (2-3).

- 1. Scheming, cheating, stealing, etc., is not the way to get what you need. James told them that they did not have because they did not ask.
- 2. But, when they did ask, they still were not getting what they wanted. They were praying for things in order to satisfy their worldly passions.

These were not things they needed for survival. These were not things they wanted in order to be better servants. These were things they wanted to satisfy a lifestyle focused on earthly pleasure

(☸☺☹☐■☸❖, verses 1 and 3, cf. Lk. 8:14; Tit. 3:3).

3. God never promises to give us our petitions which have to do with envy and earthly pleasure.

C. Worldliness causes enmity with God (4).

1. Those caught up in worldliness are called adulterers. Spiritual adultery is the point. This was a concept used in the Old Testament to refer to idolatry (Ex. 34:15-16; Hosea). Worldliness is actually a form of idolatry – one is putting the satisfaction of his desires in front of his service to God.
2. To be a friend with the world (worldliness) is to be the enemy of God (cf. Jn. 15:18-20).

IV. How to Defeat Worldliness (4:6-17).

- A. Recognize God's grace (6). It is true that desire can take control of you, but God offers the way out (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13). God, by grace, sent Jesus to die on the cross to forgive you; and by grace provided the gospel message to change you (Tit. 2:11-14; Acts 20:32). God and his grace can be your strength in fighting worldliness. God will forgive you for sinning, and he will build you up in your faith.

B. Submit to God (7,10).

1. Submit (◆☺☐☐◆☸❖◆◆, v. 7) means "to arrange under." It is the idea of putting yourself under God's authority.
2. Humble self (◆☸☐☐☸☐❖◆, v. 10) means to bring yourself low – the opposite of lifting yourself up in pride. Verse 6 indicates God gives grace to those who are humble (◆☸☐☐☸☐❖☸). If you humble yourself, God will lift you up. If you lift yourself in pride, God will bring you down (cf. Mt. 23:12).

- C. Resist the Devil (7). Do not give in easily to your urges. Develop strength in saying no to temptation. Better knowledge of Scripture helps with this effort (Mt. 4:1-10; Ps. 119:11).

- D. Draw near to God (8). Seek to be close to God. Put relationship with him above all else.

- E. Cleanse your hands (8). This means you stop doing sinful things. The hands can be used symbolically for what you do with your whole body.

- F. Purify your hearts (8). Make sure your thinking and your desires are under God's control. Our behavior and our words start in the inner part of us (Prov. 23:7; Mt. 12:34-37; 15:19-20).

- G. Be truly sorry over sin (9). Paul contrasted worldly sorry and godly sorrow (1 Cor. 7:10). Worldly sorrow is when one is sorry that he got caught doing wrong. This does not cause him to stop doing wrong – it might only cause him to try to find a more effective way to hide it. Godly sorrow is when one is sorry that he did the wrong thing. This will cause him to determine to stop doing the wrong thing.

- H. Avoid slander (11-12). Speaking evil of another is the same as judging him. After all to say bad things about him means that you have judged him and found him guilty. James equated this with speaking evil of the law and judging the law. God's law requires love for one another (Jn. 13:34-35) and forbids slandering one another (Eph. 4:31; 1 Pet. 2:1). Thus, to speak against a brother

is to break the law. This, in effect, is to judge the law unworthy of obedience. If you are a judge of the law, then you are not a doer of the law. Only God is judge.

- I. Include God in all your plans (13-16). Life is uncertain. You do not know what tomorrow may bring. Life is short, like a vapor (cf. Job. 7:6-10). No one has reason to boast, since all we have is a gift from God. Some separate their religion from other aspects of life (cf. Lk. 12:16-21). When you make plans, be sure to include God in those plans. “If the Lord wills” is more than just an expression to utter; it is an attitude toward life (cf. Jn. 6:38; Lk. 22:42; Acts 18:21). Including God in everything helps one to stay away from a worldly lifestyle.
- J. Do what you know to be right (17). It is not enough to KNOW the right thing to do, one must DO that right thing. The busier you are doing what is right, the less time you have to do wrong.

True Patience (James 5)

- I. Prophetic condemnation of the rich (5:1-6)
 - A. At first, this section seems disconnected from the rest of the book. All the way through the letter, James addressed the recipients as “brethren,” but he did not do so in this section. The rest of the letter is filled with practical instruction for proper living, but this section seems to be only a strict condemnation of those addressed. An Old Testament background becomes helpful in understanding this section.
 - 1. The Old Testament prophets often addressed Israel’s enemies in their prophecies (cf. Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1; Is. 13:1).
 - 2. Those things were not intended for the ears of Israel’s enemies, but for the Israelites. The point of the prophecies was to encourage the Israelites. They were being oppressed by those enemies (or would be oppressed by them in the future). God was letting them know that their enemies would suffer for what they did in oppressing Israel. Thus, the message was intended as a comfort to the Israelites – they would not be oppressed forever.
 - 3. The rich men did oppress the Christians who were suffering for their faith – those Jewish oppressors would pay for their wrongs.
 - B. Description of the rich
 - 1. They have plenty of financial resources.
 - a. They are designated as rich (1-2).
 - b. They evidently have an abundance of clothing (2).
 - c. They are said to have gold and silver (3).
 - d. They have hired servants (4).
 - 2. They are cruel and fraudulent. They have refused to pay those who worked for them (4). Notice that the wages that were held back cry out to heaven. “Cry” here means to yell, not to weep. This is reminiscent of Abel’s blood crying out to God from the ground. Also those who had been defrauded cry out to heaven. God knows about and is sympathetic to the mistreatment of the poor. These cries have entered into the ears of the Lord. The Lord is described as the “Lord of hosts.” Hosts means armies. He has armies of angels at his disposal.

3. They are worldly. They are concerned with heaping together worldly treasures (3). They are concerned with satisfying their physical desires (5).
4. They condemned and killed the righteous one (v. 6).
 - a. Some suggest that this refers to Jesus. The wealthy, elite Jews were the ones who managed to have Jesus killed, and now they are oppressing those who follow Jesus.
 - b. Some suggest that this simply refers to righteous people in general – that the rich men hurt righteous people.

C. They will be punished.

1. They are urged to weep and howl, because their miseries will be so great (1).
2. Their riches are temporary and will cease to exist (2-3). Their garments will end up moth-eaten. Their gold and silver will rust (silver will corrode and gold will tarnish, but ultimately they will both cease to exist).
3. Also, those same riches will be their downfall (3). “Corrosion” (ⲭⲉⲣⲁⲛⲓⲛⲓ) can also mean “poison,” like the venom of a snake. Their riches have poisoned them. Money is not sinful, but one’s attitude toward money can corrupt his life (1 Tim. 6:10).
4. Let us be careful what we lay up as treasure for the last day (3, cf. Mt. 6:19-21).

- b. The prophets spoke God's message – often at great peril to themselves. They endured their suffering, patiently serving God (10).
 - c. Job, of course, is a prime example of enduring hardship and remaining faithful to God (11). From the story of Job, we can learn that God takes care of those who are his – the ultimate end is one of victory and blessing. This hope is what fuels our patience.
- C. The coming of the Judge (in such a great destruction as that which would be experienced by Jerusalem) is a great motivation for right living. Thus, the admonition to treat each other right in v. 9.

III. Various admonitions (5:12-20)

- A. Do not swear (12). This is not an absolute prohibition against swearing. It is an admonition against a system of swearing whereby some oaths are binding and others are not (Mt. 5:33-37; cf. Lev. 19:12). The truth is that God's people do not need an oath or a signed document to make them keep their word.
- B. Pray when you are afflicted (13).
- C. Sing praises when you are happy (13).
- D. Call for the elders when you are sick (14-15). This seems to be a reference to the time when miracles were in effect. These elders had the miraculous gift of healing. The pouring of the oil seems to be symbolic (cf. Mk. 6:13). It is the prayer of faith that will save the sick.
- E. Confess your sins to each other (16). There is no separate priesthood in the gospel system. Every Christian is a priest (1 Pet. 2:5). So, we are to confess to each other.
- F. Pray for each other (16). James does not say that the sickness mentioned was due to sin, but rather says that IF the sick man has sinned, he would be forgiven. For those who are Christians, prayer is powerful. Elijah and his prayers for drought and rain are given as examples of the power of prayer. The point in context is that God will listen when we ask for him to forgive the penitent brother (cf. 1 Jn. 5:16).
- G. Work to restore the erring (19-20).
 - 1. This implies that it is possible for Christians to sin so as to be lost.
 - a. The impossibility of apostasy is a major tenet of Calvinism.
 - b. Biblical teaching is abundant that one who has been saved can sin so as to be lost (e.g., Acts 8:20-24; Heb. 10:26-31).
 - 2. Other Christians then have a responsibility to try to bring such a brother to repentance (cf. Gal. 6:1-2). By converting him, we have saved a soul from death. This refers to the second death at Judgment Day (Rev. 20:11-14).