

LESSONS FROM THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

THE AUTHOR AND THE AUDIENCE

1:1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (*Compare the addresses of **Titus 1:1**, and **Romans 1:1***), to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion, greeting. (*See **1 Peter 1:1**, and **John 11:52***.)

COMMENTS:

The Letter of James is a portion of the New Testament that offers clear and beneficial admonition, but the authenticity of this "general" letter has been disputed by some, ever since the books of the New Testament were brought together as one volume. Part of the reason is based on the presumption that James contradicts Paul on the issue of faith and works (see **James 2** and **Romans 4**). This presumption comes from a misunderstanding of the teaching of Paul that survives today in the modern remnants of 16th century Calvinism, a system which derived much of its error from the 4th century theologian, Augustine. However, there is no conflict between Paul and James, since Paul asserts the fact that justification is by faith in Christ, not by works of the Law of Moses, and James is speaking of works that flow from and in proof of faith in the Word.

A secondary dispute is over the authorship of the letter, since there are several important New Testament men by the name of James. Two apostles wear the name, James the son of Zebedee, and James the son of Alphaeus (**Matthew 10:2-4**). There is also James the brother of Jesus (**Matthew 13:55**). Though he, and the other kin of Jesus were slow in accepting the Christhood of their brother (**John 7:1-5**), James is often identified with the man who was prominent in the church at Jerusalem (**Acts 15:13, 21:18**, etc.). There is reasonable evidence to make this connection. In **Galatians 1:18-19**, Paul mentions seeing the brother of Jesus at Jerusalem. Later, in the same context, James is mentioned as a "reputed pillar" in the Jerusalem church with Cephas (Peter) and John (**Galatians 2:9**). Still later, when Cephas came to Antioch, and ate with the Gentiles, he was influenced to separate himself from them when "certain came from James" (**Galatians 2:11-12**). The antecedent bearer of this name in the context is James the brother of the Lord (**1:19**).

Since the letter of James is addressed to "the twelve tribes of the Dispersion," the converted Jews scattered in many places in the world, it seems very likely that the author was one accustomed to dealing with such Jews, and James the brother of Jesus is a very likely candidate. However, too much time can be spent in such research, and its accompanying disputes. The effort will rob us of the great benefit of studying the content of the letter. Disputes of this kind, involving seven New Testament books, kept the apostate church from accepting the letter of James as "apostolic" until the 4th Century. The unfortunate thing about this is that Martin Luther, a believer in salvation by "faith only," seized upon these early 4th Century disputes in order to undermine the authority of the letter on the subject of faith and works during the 16th Century Reformation.

Internal evidence shows that James is compatible in every degree with the teaching of the Apostles, and of Christ. In fact, there are close connections with the doctrine of Christ which reinforce the suspicion that one like a brother of Jesus was probably the author. The egalitarian teaching of Jesus (**Luke 14:7-11**) is reflected in **James 1:9-11**. "Hearing and doing" the word (**James 1:19-25**) was emphasized by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 7:24-27**).

Jesus and James both speak of the rich, and their difficulty in finding salvation (see **Mark 10:23-27** and **James 5:1-6**). James' teaching on swearing (**5:12**) is almost identical to the teaching of Jesus (**Matthew 5:33-37**). Other internal evidence assures us that the letter of James is apostolic in authority, if not in authorship. As a prophet of God, James speaks to us "words whereby we must be saved."

QUESTIONS:

1. On what two issues was the authenticity of the book of James disputed in the early days of Christianity?_____

2. How many other New Testament books were questioned?_____

3. Show why there is no conflict between the teaching of Paul in Romans 4, and the second chapter of James:_____

4. Of the several men named James in the New Testament, which is considered by most to be the author of this letter?_____

_____ Give two reasons why it might be true that this man is the author of James:_____

5. Which is more important, debating the authorship of James, or studying the content of the letter?_____

6. What doctrine was held by Martin Luther which caused him to doubt the authenticity of James?_____

7. Name four doctrines of Jesus that are emphasized by James:_____

ENDURING TEMPTATION

1:2-4

2 Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into various temptations (*Compare 1 Peter 1:6, 4:12; Colossians 1:24, and Luke 6:22-23.*); 3 knowing that the proving of your faith produces endurance. (*Compare Romans 5:1-5.*) 4 And let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing. (*Compare 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10.*)

1:12-16

12 Blessed is the man that endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him. (*See Matthew 10:16-22, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, and Psalm 119:67, 71.*) 13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil (*1 John 1:5*), and he himself tempts no man: (*Compare Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 16; 13: 1-3.*) 4 but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. (*See 2 Timothy 4:3, and 1 Peter 2:11.*) 15 Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin (*Compare Psalm 7:14-16.*): and the sin, when it is fullgrown, brings forth death. (*See Romans 6:23, 7:7-13.*) 16 Be not deceived, my beloved brethren.

5:7-11

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. (*Compare Romans 8:24-25, and Galatians 6:9.*) Look! the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and later rain. (*Compare Joel 2:23.*) 8 You must also be patient; settle your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is near. (*Revelation 22:20, but see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4.*) 9 Do not murmur, one against another, brethren, that you be not judged; look, the Judge stands before the doors. (*See Luke 12: 41-48.*) 10 Brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as an example of suffering and patience. (*See 2 Chronicles 36:15-16, Matthew 5:11-12, and Hebrews 11:32-40.*) 11 See, we call them happy that endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job (*See Job 23:10-12*), and have seen the purpose of the Lord, how that He is full of pity, and merciful. (*See Job 42:10-13.*)

COMMENTS:

From these three small sections of James, we collect those passages that deal with patience in tribulation. In **1:2-4**, we are told that when God permits us to be tried, there are some benefits in which we can rejoice. The progressive gains we receive through the exercise of patience finally reach a stage of maturity, in which we lack nothing.

In **1:12-16**, the word temptation seems to have a different meaning from its use in vs. 2, yet the Greek word is the same in both cases. Presuming the meaning to be the same, we must wonder why it must seem joyful to be tempted. We must then distinguish between the sources of temptations. Some can come from without, and these are in the form of tribulations. The Christian must realize that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (**Acts 14:22**). Such trials could have the tendency to discourage us, and make us fall away. However, if we can develop the ability through faith and patience to endure and overcome these, we will become mature Christians, and the frequency or force of our trials can be more easily handled. It will not matter to us, after we gain such strength, whether the trials be many or few.

However, we must never accuse God of tempting us "with evil," even though some passages in the Bible seem to suggest it (**Isaiah 63:17, Romans 9:17-20**). When God *permits* trials, man may feel that He *sends* them, but an examination of such passages as **Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 16; 13:1-3** shows that God always relieved the trials of Israel, but only after he permitted them to endure the trial for a while, to "humble" and "prove" them. His purpose was to "do them good in the latter end."

Aside from these outward temptations, there is a source of temptation within, fueled by our "own lusts," through which we can be "enticed" to commit sin. In such cases, we must not permit our desires to be so strong that we are vulnerable to the enticements of Satan. The imagery used by James is that of conception and birth, which produces the offspring of sin, but the end result is spiritual death (compare **Romans 6:23**).

Finally, in **5:7-11**, we are told that our development of patience is aided by look-ing at examples. First, James says that our patience must sustain us "until the com-ing of the Lord." So, we need to imitate the farmer who must yield to his circumstances, and not fret over the timing of rains. He must remember that God has promised that "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest...shall not cease" (**Genesis 8:22**). Other examples of patience are to be seen in the suffering patience of prophets, and the fortitude of Job. The lack of patience creates spiritual dangers, such as discouragement, recriminations against God, and resentment of our "circumstances." But those who are patient, allowing God in His own time to change their circumstances, will see the "end of the Lord, how that He is full of pity, and merciful." God knows His creature man, and he knows that discipline is needed in our lives. The best way for us to be disciplined in the path of humility and submission is to receive trials, and to make use of His commandments to overcome them.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why are the "temptations" of 1:2 to be welcomed with joy (vs. 3)? _____

2. What is the "perfect work" of "endurance" (patience)? _____

3. When a man is "approved," after enduring temptation, what will he receive?

4. Why should we refrain from saying, "I am tempted of God?" _____

5. Why did God permit the Israelites in the wilderness to endure hunger and thirst, and other trials? _____

6. What causes us to be vulnerable to "enticements" to sin? _____

7. What is the final result of letting lust "conceive" to "give birth" to sin? _____

8. How long are we to be patient, according to James, and other New Testament writers?

9. For what must the farmer patiently wait? _____

10. Though the "coming of the Lord is near," what did Paul say would "come first" in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4? _____

11. List some of the things which prophets had to endure, from Hebrews 11:32-40: ___

12. Was Job more prosperous before, or after his trials? _____

13. What lesson is drawn from Job's experience? _____

TRAITS OF OBEDIENCE

1:17-27

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning. (*Compare 1 Samuel 15:29, Psalm 33:11, and Romans 11:29.*) 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth (*See 1 Corinthians 4:15.*), that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (*Revelation 14:4.*)

19 You know this, my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: (*Compare Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, Proverbs 10:19, 16:32.*) 20 for the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. (*Compare Ephesians 4:26, and Proverbs 29:22.*) 21 Wherefore, putting away all filthiness and excesses of depravity, receive with meekness the implanted word (*Compare Acts 17:11, and Romans 6:17-18.*), which is able to save your souls. (*See Acts 13:26, 20:32; and Hebrews 2:3.*) 22 But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves. (*Compare Luke 6:47-49.*) 23 For, if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking in a mirror at the face he was born with, who goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. (*Compare 2 Peter 1:9.*) 25 But he that looks into the perfect law of liberty (*See 2:12.*), and continues, not being a hearer that forgets but a doer that works, this man shall be blessed in his doing. (*Compare 2:26.*) 26 If any man thinks himself to be religious, and does not bridle his tongue, this man's religion is vain. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this--to care for the fatherless and widows in their afflictions--to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (*See 1 John 3:17-18.*)

COMMENTS:

The consistency which characterizes God, especially in the gifts He gives, is the foundation of the Christian's confidence. God invariably does what he promises. Among these promises, James says, is the fact that we have been "*brought forth by the word of the truth*" to be "*a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*," that is, an offering unto God. The Word of truth, or the message of the Gospel, is the means by which God "begets" us. Through it we come to Christ (**John 6:44-45**); through it we have our souls "purified" (**1 Peter 1:22-25**); and by it we are built up and sustained (**Acts 20:32**). We are not saved by some mystical "experience" apart from the Word.

Therefore, beginning in verse 19, James reminds his hearers that they "*know this*." But confirmation is always appropriate, in view of the fact that some hear, then forget. A properly reverent spirit will help us to be "*swift to hear, slow to speak*." Besides this, we are to be "*slow to wrath*," a trait which guards us from sins so often committed under the influence of quick anger. Verse 21 shows that a certain kind of preparation needs to be made for "*receiving...the implanted word*." A mind filled with "filthiness" and "depravity" is too "natural," or "carnal," to discern the value of the Word (compare **1 Corinthians 2:12-3:1**). With these things cleared away by repentance, we will be better equipped to display the "meekness" by which we are to receive the saving Word. After we have received it, the reception is to be validated by doing what is said, not merely hearing it. In Jesus' parable of the sower, every soil "heard" the Word, but only one brought it to the fruitbearing stage (see **Matthew 13:18-23**). This section of James prepares us for the reception of his arguments on another subject in **2:14ff**.

The "hearer" that is not a "doer" is compared by James to "*a man looking in a mirror at the face he was born with*," and forgetting later what he looked like. Can the Christian be so forgetful? If he does not take the truth seriously, he will surely be distracted from his spiritual goals, and his distraction will be counted for forgetfulness. He will be like the virgin who "*forgets her ornaments*," or the bride who "*forgets her attire*" (**Jeremiah 2:32**). Unlikely as this might seem, God said that Israel, though intimately connected with God, had forgotten Him "*days without number*." The solution to this problem is "*looking into the perfect law of liberty, and CONTINUING*." A man who does this, both hearing and doing, will be blessed. However, those who forsake the study and application of the word are encouraging this forgetfulness, and must eventually suffer the consequences.

Verse 26 may be considered a prologue of Chapter **3:1-12** on the subject of the tongue and its evils, and this topic will be discussed later in this series of lessons. However, it is tied to verse **27** here to identify some traits of "*pure and undefiled religion*." The English word "religion" is defined, in one sense: "Anything done or followed with reverence and devotion." The Greek word **ὑπόθεσις** (THRES-KEIA) means simply "religious worship, or discipline." So, James writes that if our religion is to be legitimate, and sincere, it must involve at least three traits, the binding of the tongue, benevolent works, and personal righteousness. The undisciplined mouth invalidates our religion (Compare **Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**). Secondly, the care we have of the "fatherless and widows" must be personal, individual, loving, and efficient to the need (see **2:15-16**). [Though the Law of Moses commanded kind treatment of the widows and the fatherless, Israel had a chronic shortcoming regarding this obligation in the years of their decline. The prophets warned them regarding this failure repeatedly **Isaiah 1:17**, **Ezekiel 22:7**, etc.] Thirdly, we must be unworldly in our conduct (See **1 John 2:15-17**). More on this in Chapter 4.

QUESTIONS:

1. In view of the trait of God mentioned in verse 17, can we place confidence in His promises?

2. What means does God use to save us, according to verse 18? _____

3. What three instructions are given in verse 19 to "every man?" _____

4. Is there, in your judgment, less sin resulting from slow anger than quick anger?

_____ Why do you think this is so? _____

5. What preparations are to be made for "receiving with meekness the implanted word?" _____

6. What does the hearer who is not a doer do to himself? _____

7. To what is he compared? _____

8. What sort of man will be "blessed in his doing?" _____

9. Whose religion is vain, according to verse 26? _____

10. What two things characterize "pure and undefiled religion?" _____

FAVORITISM FORBIDDEN

2:1-13

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with favoritism. (*See Jude 16; and Ephesians 6:9.*) 2 For, if there comes a man into your assembly with a gold ring, and fine clothing, and there also comes a poor man in shabby clothing; 3 and you pay special attention to him that wears the fine clothing, and say, "You sit here in a good place;" and you say to the poor man, "You stand there," or "sit under my footstool;" 4 don't you make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil reasonings? (*Compare Luke 14:7-11.*) 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: didn't God choose them that are poor in this world to be rich in faith, and

heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him? (*Compare Matthew 11:25-26; and 1 Cor-inthians 1:26-27.*) 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. (*Compare 1 Corinthians 11:22.*) Don't the rich oppress you, and drag you themselves before the courts of law? (*Compare Amos 5:10-13.*) 7 Don't they defame the honorable name by which you are called? (*See Luke 6:22.*) 8 Yet, if you fulfil the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as your-self," (*See Leviticus 19:18; and Matthew 22:36-40.*) you are doing well: 9 but if you show favoritism, you commit sin, being re-proved by the law as transgressors. (*See Leviticus 19:15; Deuter-onomy 1:17, 16:19; 2 Chronicles 19:7; and Proverbs 28:21.*) 10 For, whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, becomes guilty of all. (*See Deuteronomy 27:26; and Ga-latians 3:10.*) 11 For He that said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not kill." Now if you do not commit adultery, but kill, you have become a transgressor of the law. (*Compare Romans 2:17-24.*) 12 So, you should speak, and do, as men that are judged by a law of liberty. (*See 1:25.*) 13 For judgment is without mercy to him that has shown no mercy: mercy glories against judgment. (*Compare Judges 1:1-7; and Matthew 5:7.*)

COMMENTS:

The Lord Jesus has created a system which reflects His own character. As he is no respecter of persons (or, shows no favoritism), He therefore requires His subjects to follow His example. Human societies are nearly always "class-conscious," yet never seem to learn any lesson from observing the evils of this practice. Christianity is an inversion of the natural tendencies of mankind. The weak are to receive "more abundant honor" (*See 1 Corinthians 12:12-25*). There is to be no racial, or economic prejudice (*Colossians 3:9-11*). God is the great adjuster of these things (*Luke 1:51-53*).

It is a great fault in man that he often becomes a "*judge with evil reasonings*" (*vs. 4*). The problem with judging others often comes from the inability to look at ourselves objectively (*See Matthew 7:1-5*). The only truly objective judge is the Lord, and we should leave most of such matters in His hands (*1 Corinthians 4:5*).

James, after asserting this principle, reasons with his readers concerning the evils of favoritism, especially involving those who exert strong influence because they are rich. "Aren't the poor more rich in faith?" he asks, "And don't the rich abuse their power toward the poor?" All of us can recount our own confirmations of these well-founded truths. The cure of this evil is to love your neighbor as yourself. James calls this "*the Royal law*," in verse 8, but does not tell us why it must be considered "royal." Our best conjecture is that Jesus (our King) has selected this law as the second most important law of the Old Testament, and has authorized his Apostles and Prophets to repeat it as a rule of the New Covenant (*See Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14*). The inclusiveness of this law, involving all interpersonal relationships, and its tendency to put all men on the same level, make it one of the two most important precepts of God. On the other hand, showing partiality violates both Old and New Testament precepts.

The importance of this rule, which runs so strongly against man's natural tendency to make distinctions, is also asserted in the principle that "*stumbling*" in one law makes us "*guilty of all*." What James is emphasizing is that guiltiness is not based on a percentage of the laws of God broken, but simply on the breaking of one! In such a guilty state, we need mercy more than justice. If we are prone to be unjust, the vengeance of God will recompense our sin. Our "*law of liberty*" must govern our lives, because we will be judged by it in the "last day." But, if we are merciful as God is merciful (*Luke 6:36*), the mercy we show will "*glory against*," or mitigate the judgment of God.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why would our "master" look unfavorably on the practice of favoritism among Christians?

2. What does James say we become, when we show partiality to the rich? _____

3. What did Jesus advise men to do in Luke 14:7-11, when they attended a supper?

_____ Why? _____

4. Who are usually "rich in faith?" _____ Whom does Paul say are more responsive to God's call (1 Corinthians 1:26-27)? _____

5. Of what does James remind his readers concerning those who are rich? _____

6. What is the "Royal Law?" _____

_____ Why do you think it is called

"royal?" _____

7. What principle of Law does James affirm in verses 10-11? _____

8. By what sort of law are we to be judged? _____ In view of this, what does verse 12 command? _____

9. What happens to those who show no mercy? _____

10. In your opinion, what is meant by the statement, "Mercy glories against judgment?" _____

A WORKING FAITH

2:14-26

14 What is the profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (*Compare Luke 7:50, and Ephesians 2:8-9.*)

50 And he said unto the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. (Luke 7:50).

8 for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not of works, that no man should glory. (Ephesians 2:8-9).

15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you say to them, "Go in peace--be warmed and filled;" and yet you do not give them the things needful to the body; what is the profit? (*Compare 1 John 3:17-18.*)

17 But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? 18 My Little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth. (1 John 3:17-18).

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. (*See Vss. 20, 26.*) 18 Yes, a man will say, "You have faith; I have works." Show me your faith apart from works, and I, by my works, will show you faith. 19 You believe that God is one (*See Deuteronomy 4:35, 6:4.*) you do well: the demons also believe, and shudder. (*See Mark 5:2-9; and Luke 4:31-36.*)

35 Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that Jehovah he is God; there is none else besides him. (Deuteronomy 4:35).

4 Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah: (Deuteronomy 6:4).

2 And when he was come out of the boat, straightway there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, 3 who had his dwelling in the tombs: and no man could any more bind him, no, not with a chain; 4 because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been rent asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: and no man had strength to tame him. 5 And always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones. 6 And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him; 7 and crying out with a loud voice, he saith, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, torment me not. 8 For he said unto him, Come forth, thou unclean spirit, out of the man. 9 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he saith unto him, My name is Legion; for we are many. (Mark 5:2-9)

31 And he came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the sabbath day: 32 and they were astonished at his teaching; for his word was with authority. 33 And in the synagogue there was a man, that had a spirit of an unclean demon; and he cried out with a loud voice, 34 Ah! what have we to do with thee, Jesus thou Nazarene? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. 35 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no hurt. 36 And amazement came upon all, and they spake together, one with another, saying, What is this word? for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. (Luke 4:31-36).

20 But are you willing to know, hollow man, that faith apart from works is barren? 21 Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? (*See Genesis 22:1-18; and Hebrews 11:17-19.*)

17 By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: 19 accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back. (Hebrews 11:17-19).

22 You see that faith worked with his works, and by works was faith made perfect; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness" (*Genesis 15:1-6, but compare Psalm 106:28-31.*); and he was called "the friend of God." (*See Isaiah 41:8, and 2 Chronicles 20:7.*)

28 They (Israel) joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, And ate the sacrifices of the dead. 29 Thus they provoked him to anger with their doings; And the plague brake in upon them. 30 Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment; And so the plague was stayed. 31 And that was reckoned unto him for righteousness, Unto all generations for evermore. (Psalms 106:28-31).

24 You see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith. (*Compare Romans 3:20-22, 4:1-5, 18-22.*)

20 because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction; (Romans 3:20-22).

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, hath found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God. 3 For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. 4 Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. 5 But to him that

worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness. (Romans 4:1-5).

18 Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be. 19 And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 22 Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. (Romans 4:18-22).

25 And, in the same manner, wasn't Rahab the harlot also justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way? (See **Joshua 2:1-21**; and **Hebrews 11:31**.)

31 By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace. (Hebrews 11:31).

26 For, as the body apart from the spirit is dead (*See **Ecclesiastes 12:7**; and **Luke 23:46**.*), so also faith apart from works is dead.

7 and the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

46 And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said this, he gave up the ghost. (Luke 23:46).

COMMENTS:

In this section, James makes a vital contribution to our understanding of "salvation by faith." After the sinner becomes a believer through the word of Christ (**Romans 10:17**), he is commanded to take certain actions on which salvation is conditioned. He must "confess with the mouth Jesus as Lord" (**Romans 10:9-10**). Any unwillingness on our part to confess Jesus causes the Lord to be unwilling to confess us before God (**Matthew 10:32-33**). The action of repentance cannot be ignored, since God "commands men that they should all everywhere repent" (**Acts 17:30**), and repentance is tied to "remission of sins" by Jesus (**Luke 24:47**). Finally, baptism is essential for the same "remission of sins" (**Acts 2:38**), or to "wash away sins" (**Acts 22:16**). When one obeys this final command, he becomes a "child of God by faith," having been "baptized into Christ" (**Galatians 3:26-27**).

When one is obedient to these terms of the Gospel, and becomes a child of God "in Christ," the pattern of "obedience of faith" continues in his life (see **Romans 1:1-5, 16:25-26**). Continued faith will always need to be validated by continual obedience. We must remember that James is writing to Christians, and is exhorting them to make their faith "perfect" by works. The Christian must continue to seek "salvation" beyond his original obedience to the Gospel (compare **1 Peter 1:3-9** "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for*

you, 5 who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, 7 that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ: 8 whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

In **vss. 14-20** James sets forth his logical premise that faith without works cannot save. In his first illustration, the reader is shown the lack of profit in expressing good wishes to naked and hungry people without providing them with clothes and food. It is just as illogical to think that an isolated faith can live without its validating deeds. When men try to assert that faith can be separated from works (**vs. 18**), James challenges them to attempt to show their faith apart from works, implying that it is an impossible task. "Faith alone" is practiced by trembling Demons, who, because they fail to obey that faith, are consigned to an eternal hell (**2 Peter 2:4, Matthew 25:41**). The Jews quote **Deuteronomy 6:4** in ritual celebration of the oneness of God, but the context speaks strongly of an obedience based on that belief (**Deuteronomy 6:5-9, 17-19**) "*...thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. 6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; 7 and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. 8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. 9 And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates.....17 Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of Jehovah your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. 18 And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of Jehovah; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which Jehovah sware unto thy fathers, 19 to thrust out all thine enemies from before thee, as Jehovah hath spoken.*")..... So, "faith apart from works is barren."

In **vss. 21-25**, two examples of obedient faith are presented. First, the prime forefather of all the Jews is said to be "*justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac...*" His faith was "made perfect" (completed) through his work. When Abraham received the promise that his offspring would be as numerous as the numberless stars, he believed God, even though he had no heir, and his wife was barren (**Genesis 15:1-6, 16:1a**). He was 86 years old when his personal confidence in his powers of procreation enabled him to father Ishmael by his wife's handmaid (**Genesis 16:15-16**). God rejected this son as the "heir of the promise," since he was offered as a substitution to God's plan (**Genesis 17:15-21**). At the age of 100, Isaac was born, so more than 14 years had passed since Abraham had received the original promise. Isaac then had to grow large enough to travel with his father to the site of the offering, and to a maturity capable of conversing intelligently with Abraham about the absence of an animal for sacrifice (**Genesis 22:1-8**). So, about 20 to 25 years elapsed between the promise and the offering. Yet, James connects the two in order to illustrate that faith must continually work. Abraham's faith first worked in the birth of Ishmael, then again at the birth of Isaac, but God proved his faith once again by ordering the sacrificial death of Isaac. Abraham passed the test, having developed a faith so strong that he could trust God to fulfil his promise of a nation springing from Isaac, even though the boy might die. In order to do this, of course, God would need to raise Isaac from the dead, and the writer of Hebrews says that "*in a figure*" Abraham did "*receive him back*" from the dead (**Hebrews 11:17-19**). James' second illustration confirms the first. The "obedience" of

Rahab was based on faith in testimony about God (see **Hebrews 11:31**).

[NOTE 1: In verse 23, James says that Abraham's willingness to "believe God," in spite of so little assurance from natural reasoning, was "reckoned to him for righteousness." Yet, works can also be "reckoned for righteousness." In **Psalm 106:28-31**, the deed of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was commended in this way. His deed was the summary execution of an Israelite who, along with many others, had been seduced by an idolatrous Moabite harlot at Baal-Peor. For this righteous act, which turned away the wrath of God against Israel, Phinehas was rewarded with the promise of an "everlasting priesthood" (**Numbers 25:1-13**).]

[NOTE 2: The contention that Paul contradicts James in **Romans 4:1-5** is dismissed, when we see that the kind of works Paul had in mind were "works of the Law" (**Romans 4:13-15**). The Law he had in mind was the Law of Moses, as seen in references to it in such places as **Romans 2:17**, where he refers to Jews who "rested upon the Law," and in **Romans 7:7**, where he quotes one of the Ten Commandments. The likeness of our faith in Christ to that of Abraham is established on the fact that both operate apart from the covenant of circumcision, and the Law of Moses. Nevertheless, we are still "under law to Christ" (**1 Corinthians 9:21**), and faith in Christ must be perfected by the works of faith which he commands.]

QUESTIONS:

1. What sort of "profit" does James have in mind, when he speaks of faith and works in verse 14? _____

2. What illustration does he use to show how illogical it is to think that faith without works is profitable? _____

3. What challenge does James offer to the man who tries to separate faith from works? _____

4. Was the command to believe that "God is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4) separated from obedience to other commands? _____

5. What happens to the Devil and Demons who believe in one God, but who are disobedient to Him? _____

6. What event caused Abraham to be "justified by works?" _____

7. What promise of God caused Abraham to have a belief which was "reckoned to him for righteousness?" _____

8. Why was Rahab willing to help the spies of Israel, according to Joshua 2? _____

THE SOURCE OF WISDOM

1:5-8

5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, (*Compare Proverbs 2:2-11.*) who gives to all liberally and does not reproach (*See Acts 17:24-25; and 1 John 5:14-15.*); and it shall be given to him.

2 So as to incline thine ear unto wisdom, And apply thy heart to understanding; 3 Yea, if thou cry after discernment, And lift up thy voice for understanding; 4 If thou seek her as silver, And search for her as for hid treasures: 5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of Jehovah, And find the knowledge of God. 6 For Jehovah giveth wisdom; Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding: 7 He layeth up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to them that walk in integrity; 8 That he may guard the paths of justice, And preserve the way of his saints. 9 Then shalt thou understand righteousness and justice, And equity, yea, every good path. 10 For wisdom shall enter into thy heart, And knowledge shall be pleasant unto thy soul; 11 Discretion shall watch over thee; Understanding shall keep thee: (Proverbs 2:2-11).

24 The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25 neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; (Acts 17:24-25).

14 And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: 15 and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him. (1 John 5:14 15).

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubts is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. (*Compare Matthew 14:25-31.*)

25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came unto them, walking upon the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out for fear. 27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. 28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto the upon the waters. 29 And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. 31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? (Matthew 14:25-31).

7 For do not let that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord; 8 a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (*See 4:8, and compare 1 Kings 18:21.*)

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded. (James 4:8).

21 And Elijah came near unto all the people, and said, How long go ye limping between the two sides? if Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. (1 Kings 18:21).

3:13-18

13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom. (See **2:18**, and compare **Matthew 5:16**.)

18 Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith. (James 2:18).

16 Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16).

14 But, if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your heart, do not boast or lie against the truth. (See **Romans 13:13**; **1 Corinthians 3:3**; and **1 Corinthians 1:30-31**.)

13 Let us walk becomingly, as in the day; not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy. (Romans 13:13).

3 for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men? (1 Corinthians 3:3).

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was **made unto us wisdom** from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: 31 that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

15 This is not a wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, demon-like. (Compare **1 Timothy 4:1-2**.)

1 But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; (1 Timothy 4:1 2).

16 For where jealousy and rivalry are, there is tumult and every evil work. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easily persuaded, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy. (See **1 Timothy 3:2-3**, and **Titus 3:1-2**.)

2 The bishop therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach; 3 no brawler, no striker; but gentle, not contentious, no lover of money; (1 Timothy 3:2-3).

1 Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work, 2 to speak evil of no man, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all meekness toward all men. (Titus 3:1-2).

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace. (See **Matthew 5:9**.)
9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9).

COMMENTS:

The Christian has an advantage over those in the world, because he can gain instant wisdom from God. Of course, the Scriptures, especially the "wisdom literature" and the teachings of Christ, provide a ready source of wisdom, but to attain it we must apply ourselves to reading and study. Prayer can implement this acquisition, because we are sometimes "slow learners." If we will supplement our study of divine wisdom with earnest prayer for understanding and the ability to apply it, we will be granted our request by a God who is both liberal, and will not reproach us for asking (compare **Psalms 103:8-11** "*Jehovah is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness. 9 He will not always chide; Neither will he keep his anger for ever. 10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins, Nor rewarded us after our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is his lovingkindness toward them that fear him.*"). We cannot approach this with doubt, or an unstable faith, and expect to receive anything from God (compare **4:3**). When Peter begged Christ to permit him to walk on water, he succeeded until he let the tossing waves remind him that he was not naturally bouyant (**Matthew 14:25-31**). He realized that he was doing something incredible, and irrational, as well as contrary to human experience. It may seem that when we ask for wisdom, which eludes most men, we are also asking for the impossible, but such doubt will disable our prayer. In the contest on Mt. Carmel, Elijah rebuked the "doublemindedness" of Israel, because they gave devotion both to Jehovah and to Baal (**1 Kings 18:21**). Even their devotion to Jehovah was faulty, being based on the errors of King Jeroboam (**1 Kings 12:26-33**), and King Ahab compounded the problem by introducing the worship of Baal (**1 Kings 16:29-33**). We must gain and maintain singlemindedness (**Acts 2:46**), or a "*simplicity toward Christ*" (**2 Corinthians 11:3**). In our second section (**3:13-18**), James reveals what is better than boasting with the tongue (**3:5**). He again "challenges" the Christian to "*show his works (in meekness of wisdom) by his good life.*" The "*earthly, sensual, devilish*" conduct which grows out of jealousy and rivalry is based on a wisdom inferior to the "*wisdom that is from above.*" James warns us against "*boasting and lying against the truth*" by such conduct. However, the one who borrows wisdom from God borrows also the qualities of Godly wisdom, and is "*pure, peaceable, gentle, easily persuaded, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy.*" He reaps the righteous benefits of being a "peacemaker," rather than going down to disgrace as a "jealous rival."

QUESTIONS:

1. What things does the writer of Proverbs tell us to do, in order to obtain wisdom?

2. How generous is God, according to Paul in Acts 17:24-25? _____

3. What caused Peter to doubt, so that he could not walk on the water? _____

4. In what sense were the Israelites "doubleminded," and "unstable" in the days of Elijah?

5. What should the "wise and understanding" do, according to 3:13? _____

6. What should the "jealous rival" not do? _____

_____ What does this mean? _____

7. When we see a wisdom that seems "earthly, sensual, and demon-like," what conclusion do we draw? _____

8. What accompanies jealousy and rivalry, according to verse 16? _____

9. What are the qualities of the "wisdom that is from above?" _____

10. Name some "fruit of righteousness" that you think will benefit the peacemaker.

THE PERILS OF RICHES

1:9-11

9 But let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate: 10 and the rich, in that he is made low (*Compare Luke 1:51-52; and 1 Samuel 2:7-9.*): because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 11 For the sun arises with the scorching wind, and withers the grass; and the flower thereof falls (*Compare 1 Peter 1:24.*), and the grace of the fashion of it perishes: so also shall the rich man fade away in his business. (*See Proverbs 22:2; and Psalm 49.*)

4:13-17

13 Come now, you that say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and make a pro fit:" 14 whereas you do not know what shall be tomorrow. (*See Proverbs 27:1.*) What is your life? For you are a vapor that ap-pears for a little time, and then vanishes away. (*See Psalm 102:3-4.*) 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that." (*Compare Ecclesiastes 5:19, 6:1-2; and Deuteronomy 8:11-18.*) 16 But now you glory in your boasts: all such glorying is evil. (*Compare Hosea 12:8-9.*) 17 To him, therefore, that knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin. (*See Luke 12:47; and Romans 1:32-2:1.*)

5:1-6

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. (*Compare Luke 16:19-24.*) 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. (*See Matthew 6:19-21.*) You have laid up your treasure in the last days. 4 Look! The hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you have kept back by fraud, cries out (*Compare Leviticus 19:13; and Jeremiah 22:13.*): and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Armies. (*See Deuteronomy 24:14-15.*) 5 You have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; you have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. (*See Luke 12:16-21.*) 6 You have condemned; you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you. (*Compare 1 Kings 21:1-24.*)

COMMENTS: (next page)

Christianity is a leveller, exalting the poor, and bringing the rich low. However, It is not designed to make incomes equal. The poor are compensated by the knowledge that God had provided them with spiritual riches (**2:5; 2 Corinthians 6:10, 8:9**), and the rich who are inclined to boast about their ability to accumulate money, or about the power which money gives them, need to be made "low." When Israel grew proud of their prosperity, God would remind them of His role in the proces of getting wealth (**Deuteronomy 8:11-18**). To avoid the rebuke of God, the rich need to anticipate His command, and surrender their riches through benevolent acts, as in a crisis of famine (**Acts 4:32,34-35**), or as a test of their attitude toward riches (**Mark 10:17-22**). But the poor may also be moved by the same Spirit to "abound to the riches of liberality" out of "deep poverty" (**2 Corinthians 8:1-3**). The "*love of money is the root of all kinds of evil*" (**1 Timothy 6:6-10**, and compare **2 Timothy 3:1-2**). All Christians, rich and poor, are therefore commanded to free themselves from the love of money (**Hebrews 13:5**).

In **vs. 1:11**, James shows that the rich face the consequence of being unable to re-tain riches. As the flower "passes away," or "falls," or "perishes," and the grass "wi-thers," so shall the rich man "fade away." Many Bible passages in both the Old and New Testaments support this truth. In **vss. 4:13-17**, James demonstrates the folly of making long range plans for "getting gain," while forgetting the reign of God. Again, the warning is based on the brevity and unpredictability of life. The "will of God" needs to be considered in many of our plans. When the disciples could not persuade Paul to avoid going to Jerusalem, they left the future to the will of God (**Acts 21:10-14**). When Paul made travel plans, he considered the effect of the will of God on them (**Acts 18:19-21**), and also when he made plans to stay at a place (**1 Corinthians 16:7**). Simple plans which are made by men without the acknowledgment of the will of God is human boast-

ing, and we know what boasting caused God to do to the builders of the Tower of Babel (**Genesis 11:1-9**). But, James shows us that it is not enough to simply "*know to do good*." If we do not act on what we know, it becomes sin to us.

In **vss. 5:1-6**, we are treated to a lesson that seems purely Mosaic in character, but we must not forget that James is writing to Christians of Jewish lineage (**1:1**). The prophets warned against the abuse of the less fortunate, and announced that Israel must fall because of such abuses (**Ezekiel 22:6-16; Zechariah 7:8-14**). Then Jesus adds his warnings about the consequences of loving earthly treasure (**Matthew 6:20-21**). The gathering of wealth at the expense of the laborer was severely rebuked in the Law and the Prophets. Verse 6 seems to show that oppression is not opposed by the victim, but James is probably suggesting that resistance is often futile, as in the case of the illegal seizing of Naboth's vineyard by King Ahab and his wicked consort, Jezebel (see the reference above in the text). The poor man's only comfort comes from the support of the righteous, and the knowledge that God will execute the ultimate vengeance on those who harass them.

QUESTIONS:

1. What, in your opinion, is the "high estate" which the poor experience in Christ?

_____ How are the rich "made low?" _____

2. To what does James compare the rich in vs. 1:11? _____ In vs. 4:14? _____

What happens to each? _____

3. In the making of plans, what are we to do, in view of the fact that we do not know what shall be tomorrow? _____

4. What does James call plans made without God? _____

5. When the rich consider the "miseries" coming on them, what should they do?

6. What happens to earthly treasures, according to Jesus in Matt. 6:19-21? _____

7. What purpose will the "rust of gold and silver" serve, according to 5:3? _____

8. What fraudulent action is charged against the rich by James? _____

_____ What does the Law of Moses say about this (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)? _____

9. What five faults of the rich are stated in verses 5:5-6? _____

10. Did Naboth have much of a chance in the resistance of the rich and covetous King Ahab?
_____ What other kings were punished by the Lord for Ahab's crime (2 Kings
9:21-28)? _____

TEACHERS AND THE TONGUE

1:26

26 If any man supposes himself to be religious, and does not bridle his tongue, this man's religion is vain. (See *Psalm 39:1*, and *1 Peter 3:10*.)

3:1-12

My brethren, be not many of you teachers, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment. (Compare *1 Corinthians 4:1-5*.) 2 For we all stumble in many things (See *Ecclesiastes 7:20*). If anyone does not stumble in word, this is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. (Compare *Ecclesiastes 5:1-7*.) 3 Now if we put the horses' bridles into their mouths that they may obey us, we turn their whole body around, also. 4 Look at ships, also. Though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, yet are turned around by a very small rudder, wherever the impulse of the pilot desires. 5 So the tongue, also, is a little member, and boasts great things (Compare *Psalm 52:1-5*). See how much wood is kindled by such a small fire! (See *Proverbs 26:18-20*.) 6 And the tongue is a fire; among our members the tongue is a world of unrighteousness, which defiles the whole body (Compare *Matthew 15:11*), and sets the wheel of nature on fire, and is set on fire by hell. (Compare *Proverbs 16:27*.) 7 For, every kind of beasts and birds, of reptiles and things in the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by human nature: 8 but no man can tame the tongue, a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (See *Psalm 140:3*, and *Romans 3:13-14*.) 9 With it we bless the Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who are made after the likeness of God: 10 out of the same mouth blessing and cursing proceed. My brethren, it is not fitting that such things be. (Compare *Ecclesiastes 7:21-22*, and *Matthew 15:7-8*.) 11 Does the fountain send out of the same opening both the sweet and the bitter? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine figs? Neither can salt water make sweet! (Compare *Matthew 7:15 20, 12:33-37*.)

5:12

12 But above all things, my brethren, do not swear, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath, but let your yes be YES, and your no, NO, so that you do not fall into judgment. (Compare *Matthew 5:33-37*.)

COMMENTS:

From three separate places in the Epistle, we gather some verses that deal with proper speech. The first (**1:26**) sets forth a principle: *religion must be accompanied by a bridled tongue*. This is compatible with James' admonition in **1:19**, "*Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak...*" Medieval monks who punished their rashness of speech by a vow of silence misapprehended this instruction. Speech is not forbid-den. It is a necessary tool for righteous ends, such as preaching and teaching (See **Colossians 4:2-4**; and **1 Thessalonians 1:8**).

However, as James says in **3:1-12**, there is a strong need for teachers to guard what they say. Paul realized that a "steward" of the Word of God must be "*faithful*," and must labor under the concept that his principal judgment comes from God (**1 Cor-inthians 4:1-5**). Yet, given the fact that "*we all stumble*," especially when we are not cautious about what we say, teachers need to practice patient restraint of their flow of words. We can stumble in word through rashness, ignorance, pride, anger, and many other things, but James assures us that restraint of the tongue is helpful in "*bridling the whole body*." He offers simple examples: the use of small things, "*bridles*" and "*rudders*," which direct large things, "*horses*" and "*ships*." The small tongue can serve useful ends, also, but the uncontrolled tongue, a "*small member*," tries to boast of great things, and ignites destructive conflagrations. More wickedness is generated by the uncontrolled tongue than by any other member of our body. James says that as long as the tongue's fire is fueled, it continues to consume. The whole body can be defiled by it, and it "*sets the wheel of nature on fire, and is set on fire by hell*." This is probably one of the most passionate statements in the New Testament. It certainly reveals the strong antagonism of the Holy Spirit toward the one who uses his tongue for evil. The definition of the "*wheel of nature*," which is "*set on fire*" by the tongue, is disputed by Commentators, but probably describes the revolving evil effect of uncontrolled speech. Generations of men have been lost by false teaching repeated again and again. The source of this destroying "fire" is hell, the destined abode of Satan, his angels, and the false prophet (See **Matthew 25:41**; and **Revelation 20:10**).

Using another illustration in **vs. 7**, James shows that beasts can be tamed by human beings, but men do not seem to be able to tame the "restless, poisonous" tongue. It is a source of classic hypocrisy. We use it to "*bless God*," but also to "*curse men who are made after the likeness of God*." As Jesus showed the impossibility of reaping good fruit from a bad tree, speaking of false teaching (**Matthew 7:15-20**), James shows that it is also unnatural for our members to be used for both righteous-ness and wickedness.

Finally, in **vs. 5:12**, James echoes the teaching of the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5:33-37**). Jesus was preparing the Jews for the abrogation of the Law. Under the New Covenant, it would no longer be acceptable simply to "keep" the vows made and enjoined under the Law (See **Deuteronomy 6:13, 10:20**, and **Leviticus 19:12**). Now, a Christian is told to make his own word good, and not to bring in the "witness" of God, or "heaven," or "earth."

"Whatsoever is more than this is of the evil one."

QUESTIONS:

1. In 1:26, religion is tied to the bridled tongue. What other validation of religion is found in vs. 27?

2. Why should someone be cautious about becoming a teacher, according to 3:1?

3. What identifies a "perfect man," according to 3:2? _____
 _____ What will this enable him to do? _____

4. As ships can be directed by a small rudder, what can a small tongue do, according to vs. 5?

5. To what does James compare the tongue? _____ What does this do, according to vs. 6?

6. What qualities of the tongue make it hard to "tame," according to vs. 8? _____

7. Is it just as hypocritical to curse God and bless men as it is to bless God and curse men?

8. When men swore an oath in Old Testament times, were they obeying God? _____
 _____ Why, in your judgment, does Christ change this rule? _____

CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS

4:1-10

Where do fights and strife among you come from? Don't they come from desires that are at war in your members? (Compare *Galatians 5:16-17, 26*; and *1 Peter 2:11*.) 2 You lust, and do not have: you kill, and covet, and cannot obtain: you fight and war; you do not have, because you do not ask. (See *Matthew 7:7a, 8a*.) 3 You ask, and do not receive, because you ask improperly, so that you may spend it in your pleasures. (Compare *Isaiah 1:15*; and *Micah 3:4*.) 4 Adulteresses! Don't you know that the friendship of the world is enmity to God? Whoever, therefore, would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (Compare *1 John 2:15*.) 5 Or, do you think that the Scripture speaks vainly? Does the spirit which dwelt in us yearn toward envying? 6 But he gives more grace. Wherefore it says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (See *Proverbs 3:31-34*.) 7 Therefore, be subject to God, but resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (Compare *Ephesians 4:27*; and *1 Peter 5:8-9*.) 8 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. (Compare *2 Chronicles 15:2*, and *Hebrews 7:25*.) Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded! (Compare *Isaiah 1:16*.) 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to dejection. (Compare *Job 30:31*; and *Ecclesiastes 7:2-3*.) 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall exalt you. (See *1 Peter 5:6*.)

4:11-12

11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He that speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against law, and judges law (*See Leviticus 19:15-18.*). But if you judge law, you are not a doer of law, but a judge! 12 One is lawgiver and judge; he who is able to save and destroy (*See Matthew 10:28, and John 5:21-27.*); but who are you that judges your neighbor? (*See Matthew 7:1-5; and Romans 14:3-4, 10-13.*)

5:9

9 Do not murmur, one against another, brethren, that you be not judged; look, the Judge stand before the doors. (*Compare Exodus 16:2, 8.*)

5:19-20

19 My brethren, if any among you wanders from the truth, and anyone turns him, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a large number of errors. (*See Galatians 6:1.*)

COMMENTS:

Even the casual student of the New Testament is impressed with the fact that Jews of that day were very contentious. Though James, in **4:1-10**, is addressing Jewish Christians about their destructive passions, anyone of any race who holds the same attitudes must take heed to his divinely inspired admonition. Strife among Christians has its source in militant passions: lust, hatred of the sort that leads to murder, covetousness, a warlike spirit, lack of prayer, and misappropriated requests in prayer. None of these worldly passions have a place in the church. When James accuses them of "*killing*," it is probable that he had in mind hatred of the sort described in **1 John 3:14-15**. Nevertheless, history has recorded many instances of physical violence between those who profess to be Christians. Christians harboring these destructive traits do not obtain the spiritual sustenance they need from God, because they do not ask, or "*ask amiss*." The Lord promises often that proper prayerful petitions will be granted (**1 John 5:14-15, Luke 18:1-8**). But James calls them "adulteresses," because their love-affair with the world arouses the enmity of God, their true husband (compare **Romans 8:7**).

There is much debate among the scholars about which Scripture reference is applicable in vs. 5, but James seems to be drawing his meaning from **Proverbs 3:31-34**, which advises, "*Do not envy the man of violence*," and reveals that God "*surely scoffs at the scoffers, but he gives grace to the lowly*." So, we are commanded by the Spirit (through James) to be "*subject to God*," and to "*resist the devil*." The closer we draw to God in our spiritual attitudes and actions, the more he will draw near to us. This may require a "*cleansing*" of sinful "*hands*" and "*hearts*." It will also require, in the process, that we turn contritely from "*laughter to mourning*," and from "*joy to dejection*," because we realize that repentance comes from "*godly sorrow*" (**2 Corinthians 7:9-10**). The path to our exaltation by God lies through the valley of humility.

In **4:11-12**, and **5:9**, James turns his attention to a common fault among men, verbal criticism or complaining against others. We seldom realize that the violation of God's law in this way really amounts to speaking against that law and condemning it. We can't claim to be "*doers of the law*," if we "*judge*" it (compare **1:22**). The second problem with judging our brethren comes from the assumption that we can promote ourselves to the position of judge. When we do this, we are usurping divine powers that do not pertain to us.

In **5:19-20**, James shows us that the ultimate good we can do for brethren is to turn them from error and sin. This work requires the most sensitive and loving attitude we can develop. Love "*does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth*" (**1 Corinthians 13:6**). Therefore, by loving truth so much that we want to "convert" those who wander from it, we "*save a soul from death*" and "*cover many sins.*"

QUESTIONS:

1. James says in 4:1 that we have desires "at war in our members." What do they war against? (According to Paul in Galatians 5:16-17)?_____ (According to Peter in 1 Peter 2:11)?_____

2. Did they actually kill (vs. 2), or do you think James is using this word to emphasize the consequences of hatred?_____

3. What two reasons does James give for not receiving answers from God?_____

4. In what sense were the readers of this epistle "adultrresses"?_____

5. From what Old Testament passage does James seem to draw for his statements in 4:5-6?_____

6. What happens when we draw near to God?_____

_____ When we resist the devil?_____

7. When men have practiced worldly attitudes toward brethren, what does James command in verses 4:8-10? _____

8. What also happens when we "speak against one another," according to 4:11?_____

_____ Whose place do we usurp, when we judge others?_____

9. When we turn a brother from sinful error, what do we achieve?_____

EFFECTUAL PRAYER

5:13-18

13 Is any among you suffering? Let him pray (See **Psalm 18:6, 50:14-15**). Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise (See **Psalm 95:1-2**). 14 Is any among you weak? Let him summon the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, having anointed with oil in the name of the Lord. (Compare **1 Peter 5:5**.) 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him (See **2 Kings 20:1-5**; and **Acts 28:8**); and if he has sinned, it will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed (See **1 John 1:9**; and **Acts 8:18-24**). The strong prayer of a righteous man is very effective. (See **Psalm 34:15**.) 17 Elijah was a man of the same nature with us, and he prayed very prayerfully that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (See **1 Kings 17:1, 18:1, 41-45**.)

COMMENTS:

In this last section of James, the instructions of **verse 13** are generally taken literally, causing many interpreters to surrender to the temptation of taking **verses 14-15** in the same way. However, a key to understanding these verses is found in examining the meanings of two words. In **verse 14**, the question is asked, "Is any among you weak (KJ, sick)?" The Greek word here is **asyenew** (ASTHENEOS), a word that describes "weakness" or "feebleness" (W. E. Vine), and used by Paul to suggest that Christ was crucified through "*weakness*," not sickness (**2 Corinthians 13:4**). It would be fitting, then for Elders to be called to help the weak (compare **1 Thessalonians 5:14**), for their duties involve the "*perfecting of the saints*," and "*building (them) up*" (**Ephesians 4:11-12**). What confuses us is the reference to "*anointing with oil in the name of the Lord*." But the tense of the participle "*having anointed*" (see our text) here refers to something having been done, and must agree in tense to the word "*pray*" which is the main verb. So, the suggestion is that the "*anointing*" literally took place already in the prayer, and is therefore figurative. It is unjustified to try to use this passage to establish a priestly function for the elders, in which they administer "ceremonial unctions" to heal.

In **verse 15**, the word "*sick*" is from the Greek verb **kamnō** (KAMNO), carrying the idea of "weariness of mind" (Vine). When the "*prayer of faith*" is uttered for one with weakness and weariness of a spiritual nature, it will "save" (Gk. **sozw**, SOZO) him, not just merely heal. This is why this verse also speaks of the forgiveness of sins, and the following verse (**16**) speaks of confessing sins, praying for one another, and receiving the "*cure*" (a different Greek word). So, "healing" and "saving" are used interchangeably to emphasize the kinship of sin to "disease" (Compare **1 Peter 2:24**).

In the latter part of **verse 16**, James proclaims the efficiency of strong prayer offered by the righteous. He provides an example in Elijah, whose pointed prayers started, then ended, a drought. It is interesting to note that the record of these incidents in 1 Kings does not mention the fact that Elijah prayed. However, James says that prayers were offered, showing that one part of the Bible can supply information missing from another. (**NOTE:** The expression "prayed very prayerfully," or "prayed fervently," in **verse 17**, is derived from a repeating in the Greek of the word for prayer (**proseucomai**, proseuchomai). This is a Greek idiom used to express sincere and earnest action.)

QUESTIONS:

1. What are we to do when we "suffer?" _____ Are "cheerful?" _____
_____ Are weak? _____

2. Do you think that massaging the weak with oil is a literal function of the elders?
_____ Why? _____

3. Can we scripturally speak of "healing" the sinner? (see Hebrews 12:12-13) _____

4. James says that Elijah prayed to start and end the drought, but does the text in the Old
Testament say this? _____ Is this a contradiction? _____

5. Do the righteous need to pray "ferently," in order to obtain the things for which they pray?
_____ Why? _____

THE END