



THE BOOK OF JAMES



Mike Glover

INTRODUCTION

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Some were catering to the rich, whilst others were oppressed by the rich, and some were competing for positions in the church. Improper use of the tongue was also a problem, as was worldliness and straying from the faith. These are just some of the problems which James was addressing in his letter.

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OUTLINE

- Introduction. James 1:1
- Count temptations as joy. James 1:2-11
- Temptations are not from God. James 1:13-16
- God brings good gifts. James 1:17-18
- Consider a life of righteousness. James 1:19-27
- Do not show partiality. James 2:1-13
- Works demonstrate faith. James 2:14-26
- Beware of the tongue. James 3:1-12
- Distinguish heavenly wisdom. James 3:13-18
- God is a jealous God. James 4:1-10
- Bring your speech in line with godly views. James 4:11-17
- Warning to the rich. James 5:1-6
- Encouragement to the oppressed. James 5:7-12
- Effective prayer. James 5:13-18
- Watching out for others. James 5:19-20

CHAPTER 1

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THE TEXT

‘James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.’
 James 1:1

Although there are a few James mentioned in the New Testament, most scholars agree that the James whose name is mentioned in the letter is James, the brother of our Lord, who humbly identifies himself only as ‘a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ’.

According to **Matthew 13:55**, we know that Jesus definitely had a brother named James, and we also know that he didn’t believe in Jesus at first, **John 7:5**, but after the resurrection of Jesus and an appearance by Jesus to him, he became a disciple, **1 Corinthians 15:7**. From that point on, the Lord’s brother became a great leader amongst God’s people who were in Jerusalem, according to **Galatians 2:9**.

He must have been a deeply spiritual man to gain such importance in the church at Jerusalem. Even tradition tells us that he was a man of prayer, which might explain the emphasis on prayer in his letter. Tradition says that he prayed so much that his knees were as hard as a camel’s!

Tradition also tells us that James was martyred in 62 A.D. He was cast down from the temple, and then beaten to death with clubs, and as he was dying, he prayed, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ The Greek word for ‘servant’ used here is the word ‘doulos’, which means ‘a slave’, **Matthew 20:25-28**. James was a slave of God and of Jesus.

And when we think about the slave and master relationship, we can’t help but think of the word obedience. The slave knows no law but his master’s word; he has no rights of his own, he is the absolute possession of his master, and he is bound to give his master unquestioning obedience.

Being a slave involves the word humility because it’s only when we have a humble opinion of ourselves that we are open to the idea of complete obedience, **Luke 17:7-10** / **1 Corinthians 15:9-10**. When we think of the word slave, we also have to think of the word loyalty, **Galatians 1:10**.

James wrote to Jews living outside the land of Palestine. The ‘twelve tribes’ is probably a reference to the people of Israel, in other words, the Jewish nation. Remember when the Israelites were taken into captivity by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, many of the Jews were scattered throughout different nations, **Acts 2:5-11** / **Acts 8:1**.

James was also writing to Christian Jews, as seen from the fact that at least nineteen times he addresses them as ‘brethren or brothers’, depending on your translation. It also appears from the letter that many of these Christian Jews were poor and oppressed, **James 2:6-7**.

It appears that some people were having problems in their personal lives and having problems in the church. They were going through difficult trials, they were facing temptations to sin, and they were hearers, but not necessarily doers.

Some were catering to the rich, others were oppressed by the rich, and some were competing for positions in the church. Improper use of the tongue was a problem, as was worldliness, and some were straying from the faith.

TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’ James 1:2-4

Now notice that James doesn’t use the word, ‘if’ but ‘whenever’, **James 1:2**. In other words, we can just count on it, Christians must expect trials, **John 16:33**. Some trials come simply because we are human, and these would be things like sickness, accidents, disappointments, and death but other trials come because we are Christians, **1 Peter 4:12 / 2 Timothy 3:12**.

How are we to respond to these trials? James says, ‘Count it all joy!’ **James 1:2 / Acts 5:41**. James is saying, the first step to turning our tears of despair into tears of joy is to immediately thank God and adopt a joyful attitude.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Trials rightly faced are harmless, but wrongly met become temptations to evil.’

James says that if Christians have the right knowledge concerning the value of trials, it makes it possible to have a joyful attitude. In other words, when we finally understand that trials test our faith, **James 1:3**, then we can know that the testing of our faith actually brings the best out in us, **1 Peter 1:7**.

We can have joy in our trials because we know that testing works for us, not against us, **2 Corinthians 4:17**. When our faith is tested, it produces perseverance, **James 1:3 / Romans 5:3-4**.

In the Bible, ‘perseverance’ is not a passive acceptance of circumstances. The Greek word for ‘perseverance’ is the word ‘hupomone’, and it means the ability to exhibit steadfastness and constancy in the face of the most formidable difficulty.

But for us to really benefit from our trials, we need to let ‘perseverance’ do its work, **James 1:3**. All too often, we want to get our trials or difficulties over with quickly, don’t we?

But there are times when the best thing for us to do is to bear up to the trial patiently. And so instead of grumbling and complaining, we should patiently endure the trial, doing good despite the trial.

When perseverance has had an opportunity to work, it produces ‘maturity’, **James 1:4**. When James uses the word perfect, as some translations render it, he doesn’t mean sinlessness, but ‘completeness, wholeness, maturity’.

In the New Testament, it is used for those who have attained spiritual manhood in Christ. These are the Christians who have that maturity that comes only when patience has had time to work. Allowing perseverance to have its perfect work is not easy; if anything, it requires wisdom that enables us to see the value of our trials.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘After over a quarter century of ministry, I am convinced that spiritual immaturity is the number one problem in our churches.’

‘If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.’ James 1:5-8

James says if we lack wisdom, ask for it from God because He has promised to give it generously, **James 1:5 / 1 Kings 3:7-12**. But what exactly is this wisdom?

THE BOOK OF MORMON

When it comes to the Book of Mormon, Oh, I'm sure they will say to you, 'If you want to know if the Book of Mormon is from God, then pray about it because the only way to know if something is true is by praying about it. God will then bear witness with your spirit that it is true.'

Oh, I'm sure they will quote **James 1:5**, from the Bible and Moroni 10:3-5, in the Book of Mormon, to support this notion. But notice that the context of **James 1:5** is one of praying for God to give us 'wisdom' to endure persecution. It has nothing whatsoever to do with praying about a book to find if it's from God, **Acts 17:11**.

Notice that consistency with prior revelation is the test mentioned here; there's no mention of praying about it. As for the Moroni passage, well, we would have to first believe what the Book of Mormon says in order to believe this passage and find out if the Book of Mormon is true, that would be circular reasoning.

Every Mormon I have spoken to says the same thing: they read the book of Mormon and asked God if it was true, and they all say, when they did, although not always immediately, they received a sign from the Holy Spirit in the form of a 'burning in the bosom'.

I wonder why that is. Is it possibly because the book of Doctrine and Covenants 9:8-9 teaches that they will experience this? All in all, it all comes down to a feeling, but our feelings can be wrong, **Proverbs 14:12**. If a person does read the Book of Mormon and prays but receives no such 'burning in the bosom', what then?

I'm guessing it would leave the person feeling rejected by God! Or they come to the opposite conclusion that the Book isn't from God. I wonder what would happen if we used the same method in determining the truth of other matters. Does two plus two equal four?' 'I'll pray about it and get back to you!

The Bible teaches that knowledge involves information, facts, etc, whereas wisdom is the ability or insight to properly use those facts quickly and in the right way.

Some people seem to think that God will give them knowledge concerning His Will in answer to prayer, but knowledge comes only through His Word, and we need to carefully study it if we want to know the Will of God.

However, the wisdom to properly use His Word can be received through prayer. The wisdom to properly use trials and turn them into triumph can, in the same way, come through 'proper' prayer. And proper prayer is a prayer asked in faith and with no doubt; otherwise, the prayer will not be answered by God.

Adamson, in his commentary, says the following.

'James teaches that faith is the essential condition of prayer.'

James says that a person who doubts is like a wave of the sea being tossed around, **James 1:6 / Luke 8:24**. They won't have their prayers answered, **James 1:7**. They are double-minded and unstable in everything they do, **James 1:8**.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

'A double-minded person is one who has a divided opinion or allegiance. He is unsteady, fickle, staggering, and reeling like a drunken man.'

It's having the knowledge and viewpoint that difficulties can accomplish a lot of good for a Christian. It's being patient whilst enduring those difficulties to accomplish its work. And as we go through difficult times, it's using the wisdom God gives us in answer to prayer to help us put it all together.

'Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant;

its blossom falls, and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.’ James 1:9-11

James now speaks about the trials of being poor and being rich. Job and Solomon tell us that when we are poor we may be tempted to curse God, **Job 2:9 / Proverbs 30:7-9**. And the problem with being wealthy is that we may be tempted to forget God.

Before God gave the Israelites the Promised Land, He warned Israel that they might forget God because of their wealth, **Deuteronomy 8:10-14**, and that’s exactly what happened, **Hosea 13:5-6**.

James says if we are ‘poor’, then we can rejoice that we have been ‘lifted up’, **James 1:9**. In other words, God has chosen the ‘poor’ to be rich in faith, **Isaiah 66:1-2 / James 2:5**.

It was the poor who first had the Gospel preached to them, **Luke 4:18**. James is saying even if we are poor, we can still be ‘spiritually rich’ and on an equal par with all other Christians, **Revelation 2:8-9**.

Now, not only can the poor rejoice because God has lifted them up, but if we are ‘rich’, then we too can rejoice because we have been ‘humbled’, **James 1:10**. Now, how does God humble the rich? When they became slaves to Christ Jesus, they too were placed on an equal par with all other Christians, just like we read a moment ago, **1 Corinthians 7:21-22**.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Cross of Christ lifts up the poor and brings down the high. It is the great leveller of men.’

Why is it good that the rich are humbled? Because they need reminding that the riches that the wealthy have are only temporary, **James 1:10-11 / 1 Timothy 6:17**. Not only are riches temporary, but they are also unable to redeem our souls, **Psalms 49:6-9**.

Kidner, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Grass in many places is not very hardy, but in some parts of Palestine, it only stays green a few weeks. The term “flowering grass” evidently goes back to **Isaiah 40:6-8**. It is a combination of two thoughts, namely, that the grass withers and the flower fades. In Hebrew, mixing metaphors was a way of enriching the thought.’

When Paul writes to his young friend Timothy, he reminds the rich that the love of money is a ‘trap’ and a source of ‘self-inflicted injuries’, **1 Timothy 6:9-10**. In other words, James is telling us that it is good that people who come to Jesus Christ find these things out now.

Exalting the poor who are rich in faith, humbling the wealthy by basing their salvation not on wealth, but on that which cannot be bought. The blood of Jesus and the obedience of a humble and contrite spirit, **Philippians 4:11-13**.

‘Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.’ James 1:12-18

James now helps us understand temptations in three ways, and he tells us about a promise for those who endure temptations. He tells us that the person who remains faithful during temptations is going to be blessed, **James 1:12**. The Greek word for ‘blessed’ is the Greek word ‘makarios’, which simply means ‘happy, blessed’. And the reason for their happiness is that when they pass the test of temptation, they are going to receive the crown of life, **James 1:12**.

Test	Reason	Reference
A Crown of Righteousness	For leading a blameless life	[1 Corinthians 9:24]
A Crown of Life	For righteousness and discipline	[1 Thessalonians 2:19]
A Crown of Righteousness	For being the Lord's approved	[1 Timothy 4:8]
A Crown of Life	For enduring trials	James 1:12 / Revelation 2:26
A Crown of Glory	For obeying God's Word faithfully	[1 Peter 5:4]

In other words, the promise is the promise of eternal life. The promise given here is by Him Who cannot lie, **Titus 1:2**. God doesn't lie and when He promises eternal life. He means it, and He says that this promise is given to everyone who proves their love for God by keeping the faith through temptations, **James 1:12**.

After sharing this promise of eternal life, James goes on to share with us a warning about temptations. One of the fundamental mistakes that young Christians make is that they blame God for the temptations which come their way, **James 1:13**.

To make sure we don't miss the point, James goes on to help us understand how sin works. It starts with temptation, and notice the temptation stage involves two things.

It involves desires, **James 1:14**, that strong desire for something, and it also involves being trapped, trapped by looking for an opportunity to satisfy that desire. In other words, temptation needs a desire and an opportunity, but please note that being tempted is not sinful, **Hebrews 4:15**.

The next stage of sin, and that is the sin itself, **James 1:15**. In other words, for the temptation to lead to sin, it needs us to take action and act upon it. Or if we put it in simple terms, we need to have that desire to sin, look for an opportunity to sin and then just go for it.

Sin tempts us and when we give in to the temptation, if we were not careful that sin will crush us and take our souls, which is the final stage of sin, it leads to death, **James 1:15 / 1 John 5:16**. Sin is spiritual separation from God, **Isaiah 59:2**, and any sin which isn't forgiven will result in spiritual death, **Romans 6:23**.

In other words, James is telling us that if we are not careful with our desires, which we act out when we have the opportunity, if they are not confessed to God, **1 John 1:8-10**, and repented of, they are going to lead us into eternal punishment, **Revelation 21:8**.

Motyer, in his commentary, says the following.

'We all know only too many people who have ceased to walk with God under the pressure of trouble or tragedy.'

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning **James 1:16**.

'James wanted his readers to have no doubt about God's purposes and methods in dealing with them, His children. The same 'Do not be deceived' expression occurs in **1 Corinthians 6:9 / 1 Corinthians 15:33 / Galatians 6:7 / 1 John 3:7**. God definitely is not the author of temptation.'

We shouldn't go blaming God for our temptations. Why? Simply because God is a Holy God and He is such a Holy God that He cannot be tempted by evil, nor will He tempt anyone to do evil. God is the source of good, not evil, and every good and perfect gift comes from Him, **James 1:17**.

James tells us that it was of His own will that He brought us to the Gospel by the 'word of truth', **James 1:18**. In other words, God called us through the Gospel so that we might be a kind of 'first fruits' of His creatures, **James 1:18 / 1 Peter 1:22-23**.

Blue, in his commentary, says the following.

'James outlined the source of temptation, the steps in temptation, and the solution for temptation.'

Christians who remain faithful through temptations and don't blame God for those temptations, Christians who understand that they have been called by God through the Gospel, are the 'cream of the crop'.

Now that we have a better understanding of how temptation and sin work, we also need to look at how we can help fight these temptations we have. And since we know that the sin process begins with desires, the best place to begin for us to overcome sin is to change our desires, **Romans 12:1-2**.

One way we change our desires is by regularly reading the Bible. We don't fight the devil using his means, but God's, and we need to understand that it's only when we use God's will that we can overcome sin, **Psalm 119:11 / Matthew 4:3-10**.

The more we read His Word and read about His patient love for us, the more we should long to serve Him, **Psalm 116:12-14**. When we read the Bible, we cannot miss the message about how much God loves us, but when we read the Bible, we can also not miss the message about how much God hates sin, **Psalm 119:104**.

Remember, we are tempted only when there is both desire and opportunity, and so while we work on changing our desires, we should limit the opportunities to fulfil wrongful desires. And the only way that is going to happen is when we finally understand that we can't do that on our own, we need God's help, **Matthew 6:13 / Matthew 26:41**.

In other words, we can't do it on our own; we need to ask God to help us, but we also need to help ourselves by avoiding situations that are really going to tempt us, **Psalm 101:3-4 / Psalm 101:6-7**.

LISTENING AND DOING

“Remember this, my dear friends! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry. Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose.” **James 1:19-20**

James says when it comes to our trials, the first thing we need to remember is, ‘be quick to listen’, **James 1:19**.

Christians are to be quick to listen, in regard to us being open to the Word of God.

One of the first things immature Christians tend to do when they begin to face any trial is they stop reading the Word of God. A mature Christian will always go to the Word of God for help, encouragement, and comfort.

When we're going into the tunnel of bereavement, or the tunnel of temptation, or the tunnel of suffering, it's then that we find value and appreciate the verses that appear to be ordinary and unnecessary. In other words, when we are facing trials, we need to be ‘quick to listen’ to what God says to us in His Word, **Isaiah 43:2 / 1 Corinthians 14:3 / 2 Peter 2:9**.

The second thing that we need to learn to help us grow through our trials is that we need to be ‘slow to speak’, **James 1:19**. For us to help each other grow spiritually through our trials, there are times we all need to listen more and speak less.

Martin, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Many people have observed that we have two ears and one mouth, which ought to remind us to listen twice as much as we speak, **Proverbs 10:19 / Proverbs 17:27**. Apparently Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, is the oldest known source of this observation.’

The final thing that Christians need to do to grow through our trials is to be ‘slow to become angry’, **James 1:19**. The word ‘wrath’ is closely related to the word ‘anger.’ The Greek word for ‘anger’ is the ‘orge’, which means ‘a lingering, seething emotion’. The idea is that you're ready to take up revenge at any moment.

Whereas the Greek word for ‘wrath’ is the word ‘thumos.’ With this word, it is the idea of ‘blowing off steam’. The reason **James 1:19** is important for us to understand is that too many times when we talk about ‘wrath’ or ‘anger’, we often excuse them as minor sins. The Bible has a lot to say about both, **Psalm 37:8 / Proverbs 14:17 / Ecclesiastes 7:9 / Romans 12:19 / Ephesians 4:31 / Colossians 3:8**.

What is the difference between anger and anger? Paul doesn't seem to have a problem with a Christian becoming angry. He says, 'if you become angry', **Ephesians 4:26**. Jesus expressed anger towards the money changers in the temple, **John 2:13-17**.

We need to understand the difference between anger and anger. God's anger is always a just reaction to evil, **Psalms 78:49-51 / Romans 1:18**. Because God is divine and all-knowing, His wrath is never misguided.

In other words, He is more than capable of properly directing anger and wrath, whereas we, with our imperfections, are not so capable of doing that. In our anger, we're often misguided, whether it is through ignorance or misunderstanding.

Jesus' anger was always holy anger against unrighteousness, which is detestable to God. And when Jesus was angry, He was angry only for God's honour. When He was personally abused, He said nothing, **1 Peter 2:21-23**.

Notice James doesn't say a Christian doesn't get angry, he says a Christian should 'be slow to anger', **James 1:19**. In other words, anger itself is not the problem, but the way we deal with the emotion of anger could lead to a problem, **Ephesians 4:26**.

Our emotion of anger needs to be kept under control. In other words, don't allow it to show itself in a sinful way, like doing or saying something that is wrong, **Ephesians 4:27**.

The 'wrath and anger of God' accomplishes the 'righteousness of God,' **James 1:20**. There is a place for anger, but only if it's going to lead to the honour and will of God, and that's where we fail the test.

“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” James 1:21

We need to recognise that the Word of God has power. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, right up to the present day, mankind has been screaming out, 'Save our souls!' And God heard that cry even before the signal was screamed out, and He sent Jesus Christ to do the very thing our souls have been screaming out for.

James says that God's word, the Bible, has the power to save our souls. Peter tells us that His word has the power to make us new, **1 Peter 1:22-25**. The reason God's Word has power is that it contains God's way of salvation.

The word 'sanctify' means to 'set apart for a holy purpose', **John 17:15-17**. And so, James is telling us that for us to grow up spiritually, we need to understand that the Word of God has set us apart for His purpose.

For us to benefit from God's word, there are things that we need to get rid of in our lives. James mentions two of them, 'all filthiness and rampant wickedness.' Paul has a longer list of things we need to get rid of, **Colossians 3:5-9**.

If we truly want to grow up, if we truly want the Word of God to bear its fruit in our lives, then we first need to do some spiritual weeding; otherwise, we're not going to get anything out of any study of the Word if we continue to dwell on things which are spiritually filthy and wicked.

James says we need to receive God's word with meekness. If we want to grow spiritually, then we need to have an attitude of humility and interest, and the way to have those attitudes is by remembering two things: 1. We are also sinners and 2. We can also easily be deceived.

When we're studying, we're studying to learn God's truth not only to save our souls but also to save the souls of those people around us, **Psalms 119:18**. James says it is only the 'implanted' Word that can truly save our souls and so, we need to take the words out of the pages and implant them into our hearts, **Hebrews 8:10**.

We need to take the words written in ink from the Bible and not only read them and meditate upon them, but we also need to do all of those things so much that it becomes a permanent fixture within our hearts.

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at

once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing". James 1:22-25

Burdick, in his commentary, says the following.

'The call to 'do what it says' lies at the centre of all that James teaches. It sums up the message of the whole book: Put into practice what you profess to believe. Indeed, **James 1:22** may well be the key verse of James's epistle.' If we forget to apply the word to ourselves first, we become deceived, we end up deceiving ourselves, **James 1:22**. James says it's like looking into the mirror but forgetting what we look like, **James 1:23**. We must remember that a 'doer of the word', **James 1:22**, cannot be a 'forgetful hearer', **James 1:24**.

The reason why we should do what it says is because of the blessing which comes from doing it. There are blessings to be found not only by 'looking into the perfect law of liberty', alone, but also by 'continuing in it' and being 'a doer of the word,' **James 1:25**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning the perfect law, **James 1:25**.

'The law to which James referred is the revelation of God's will contained in Scripture, **Matthew 5:17**. It is perfect because it is the perfect will of a perfect God.'

James calls the Word of God the 'perfect law of liberty', why? Simply because of its power to provide true freedom. Freedom from the guilt and dominion of sin and the power of the message within, **Romans 1:16**.

We need to continue in God's Word; we mustn't forget what we read in God's Word, and when we do what His Word says, we will be blessed, **James 1:25**. Now that we understand the importance of God's Word in our lives, James goes on to speak about making sure we belong to a religion that are doers of God's Word.

"Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world." James 1:26-27

James here shares a strong warning about those who claim to be religious. The Greek word for religious here is 'threskos', and it's the only time it's used in the New Testament.

They need to keep a tight reign on their tongues, **James 1:26** / **James 3:1-12**. They need to be very careful about what they say and how they say it; otherwise, they are deceiving themselves, and their religion is worthless, **James 1:26**. Having a religion is meaningless unless we do something with it, **Matthew 7:21** / **Luke 6:46**.

The religion which God accepts is the religion that is pure and genuine, **James 1:27**. This is so important to James that he's going to emphasise this point a little later in **James 2:14-17**, and **James 2:26**, and talk about how our faiths have to have legs attached to them.

Not only should our religion be a practising religion, but it should also be a practical religion. God never intended our religion just to come together each Lord's Day, and although this is very important for us to do, God also intended our religion to stretch out our hands in service to others.

We're supposed to help others by doing good to others in His Name, **Hebrews 13:16** / **1 John 3:17-18**. What makes religion pure and genuine is applying the Word of God in our lives, and we do that by showing kindness and compassion for the poor and helpless.

Now again, not only should our religion be a practising religion and a practical religion, but it should also be a personal religion. Notice how James uses the words, 'anyone', 'he', 'himself', 'ones' and 'his' in **James 1:23-26**. He uses the word 'oneself' in **James 1:27**. In other words, our religion is very personal.

It never ceases to amaze me how some people think that their giving on Sunday fulfils their responsibility to the poor, the widows, and the orphans. They seem to think that their giving on a Sunday fulfils their obligation to preach the Gospel. And although this is true and right, when we give together, our giving only meets certain needs.

God still expects us to fulfil our ‘personal’ service to the poor, widows, and orphans as we have the ability and opportunity. That’s one of the principles we find within the Old Testament, and although the third-year tithe was for the widows and orphans, they were to always help them whenever they had the opportunity, [Exodus 22:22-24](#) / [Deuteronomy 14:27-29](#) / [Deuteronomy 10:18](#) / [Isaiah 1:17](#) / [Jeremiah 5:28](#) / [Ezekiel 22:7](#) / [Zechariah 7:10](#). True religion, which is pleasing to God, is always looking for an opportunity to give and serve anyone who is in need. The religion which pleases God needs not only to be genuine but also pure. The word ‘pure’ means without blemish. Some translations use the word undefiled which means ‘untainted or unspotted’.

Pearcey, in his commentary, says the following.

‘When we read James’s injunction to ‘keep oneself unstained from the world’, [James 1:27](#), we tend to interpret that in strictly moral terms-as an injunction not to sin. But it also means to keep ourselves ‘unstained’ from the world’s wrong ways of thinking, its faulty worldviews. We must learn how to identify and resist the false worldviews dominant at our moment in history.’

If we are sinners, how can we ever be pure, undefiled, and unspotted? The answer is found in the blood of Christ, and when we walk in the light with God, then the blood of Christ will cleanse us and make us pure, [1 John 1:7-9](#). It’s only the true religion of Jesus Christ that can present a person ‘pure’ in the sight of God.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

“My friends, as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, you must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance. Suppose a rich man wearing a gold ring and fine clothes comes to your meeting, and a poor man in ragged clothes also comes. If you show more respect to the well-dressed man and say to him, “Have this best seat here,” but say to the poor man, “Stand over there, or sit here on the floor by my feet,” then you are guilty of creating distinctions among yourselves and of making judgments based on evil motives”. [James 2:1-](#)

4

FAVOURITISM FORBIDDEN

In Biblical times, there were many social barriers; people were either rich or poor, slaves or free, Jew or Gentile, Greek or Barbarian. But part of the good news of the Gospel was that in Christ Jesus, social barriers lost much of their strength, [Acts 10:34-35](#) / [Galatians 3:28](#) / [Colossians 3:11](#).

James begins this chapter by dealing with the problem of partiality between the rich and the poor.

Adamson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The connection of this warning against social discrimination with the previous chapter 1 seems fairly obvious. Truckling to the rich and apathy or worse toward the poor are two sides of the same base coin rejected by the touchstone of [James 1:27](#) and of [James 2:8](#).’

He says that Jesus Christ is a ‘glorious’ Lord, [James 2:1](#). But what does our partiality have to do with the Lord of glory? As Christians, we profess to be Christ’s disciples, we profess to follow Him, and our goal as Christians is to imitate Jesus, to be like Him in all ways, [Luke 6:40](#).

In other words, all of our actions, whether they are done physically or verbally, should be a reflection of what Jesus teaches, [Matthew 7:1-2](#). If we show partiality as Christians, then we leave the impression that Jesus Himself is partial. If we’re prejudiced, then people will think that Jesus is prejudiced. If we’re biased toward people, then people will think that Jesus is biased toward people. If we’re racist, then we’re telling the world that Jesus is a racist.

If two people come into our meetings, the word meetings is synagogue, one is well dressed and the other has rugged clothes on, [James 2:2](#), if what we would call an usher, offered the well-dressed man a seat but tell the poor man to stand or sit on the floor, [James 2:3](#), then they have discriminated yourself and became a judge, [James 2:4](#) / [Matthew 7:3-5](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In its early days, the Church was predominantly poor and humble; and therefore if a rich man was converted, and did come to the Christian fellowship, there must have been a very real temptation to make a fuss of him, and to treat him as a special trophy for Christ.’

James is saying that if we are not careful, the glory of the Lord can be spoiled by our partiality. In other words, we become judges with evil thoughts, [James 2:4](#). God has always hated unjust judges, [Matthew 7:1](#) / [John 7:24](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Christian and the church should seek primarily to serve others rather than getting others to serve them, [Mark 10:45](#).’

James’ point is this: if we judge the poor due to our prejudice against them, we will find ourselves fighting against God, [Psalm 109:31](#).

“Listen, my dear friends! God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the kingdom which he promised to those who love him.” James 2:5

Not only do we find ourselves fighting against God, but we also actually end up despising the very people whom God chose to honour. God chose to honour the poor back then, and He still chooses to honour them today, [Matthew 5:3](#); [Luke 6:20](#).

The Gospel was first proclaimed to the poor, [Luke 7:22](#) / [1 Corinthians 1:26-29](#). God chose to honour all people back then, and He still chooses to honour all people today. God is not a respecter of persons, but He accepts those from every family, nation, and race who fear Him and work for His kingdom, [Acts 10:34-35](#).

When we show partiality because of a person’s race or because they are a stranger that we do not know, it is then that we despise those whom God has honoured by His offering to them salvation through the Gospel.

“But you dishonour the poor! Who are the ones who oppress you and drag you before the judges? The rich! They are the ones who speak evil of that good name which has been given to you. You will be doing the right thing if you obey the law of the Kingdom, which is found in the scripture, “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.” But if you treat people according to their outward appearance, you are guilty of sin, and the Law condemns you as a lawbreaker.

Whoever breaks one commandment is guilty of breaking them all. For the same one who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Even if you do not commit adultery, you have become a lawbreaker if you commit murder.” James 2:6-11

It was the rich who were dishonouring the poor in James’ day, [James 2:6](#), and in James’ day, some people were trying to win the majority over to their way of thinking. It was the rich who were exploiting them and taking them to court, [James 2:6](#). It was the rich who were blaspheming the noble name, [James 1:7](#) / [Acts 13:45](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘When a Christian dishonours the poor, he or she treats them exactly opposite to the way God treats them, 1 Corinthians 11:22 / 1 Peter 2:17. Instead of favouring Christians, James reminded his readers that the characteristic response of the rich to them had been to oppress them, Mark 13:9 / Acts 4:1-3 / Acts 13:50 / Acts 16:19 / Acts 19:23-41. How inconsistent it is to despise one’s friends and honour one’s foes! The oppression in view could have been physical and or legal.’

If we allow them to oppress us or influence us towards others, we all end up breaking what James calls ‘the royal law or the law of the Kingdom,’ James 1:8 / Matthew 7:12.

In other words, we break the law which says, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself,’ Leviticus 19:18. And make no mistake about it, this is one of the most fundamental laws that God has ever given, Matthew 22:36-40.

How many sins does it take to condemn a person to hell? One, it only takes one sin against God. James states that favouritism is sinful, James 2:9 / Matthew 7:6, and he says that if we even break one law, we become guilty of breaking all the Law, James 2:10.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Jew was very apt to regard the law as a series of detached injunctions. To keep one of these injunctions was to gain credit; to break one was to incur debt. Therefore, a man could add up the ones he kept and subtract the ones he broke, and, as it were, emerge with a credit or a debit balance.’

We need to remember that we are sinners just like those people who are not yet Christians, Romans 3:22-23. A sinner is a sinner, and what James is telling us is that if we show partiality to some people, Matthew 7:12, then that makes us as guilty as an adulterer, Exodus 20:14 / Deuteronomy 5:18, or a murderer, Exodus 20:13 / Deuteronomy 5:17 / James 2:11. This illustrates quite powerfully just how terrible any sin is.

“Speak and act as people who will be judged by the law that sets us free. For God will not show mercy when he judges the person who has not been merciful; but mercy triumphs over judgment”. James 2:12-13

Judgment Day is waiting for us all, and if we’re going to be judged, we all need to know and understand the standard by which we, as Christians, are going to be judged, Romans 14:10-13 / 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

Burdick, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Since he is speaking to believers, the judgment to which he refers must be the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:10.’

And that standard is found here, James 2:12, is the law that sets us free, referring to the law of Christ, or the Gospel, Matthew 7:13-14 / John 8:31-38 / Colossians 2:20-22.

James is saying if we apply man-made restrictions upon others, like showing partiality, we’re actually not showing mercy toward others, James 2:13 / Matthew 6:14-15 / Matthew 7:1. Grace is getting what we don’t deserve, mercy is not getting what we do deserve, and justice is getting what we deserve.

FAITH AND DEEDS

“My friends, what good is it for one of you to say that you have faith if your actions do not prove it? Can that faith save you? Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don’t have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, “God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!”—if you don’t give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead.” James 2:14-17

When the Bible talks about faith, we need to investigate what kind of faith it is talking about: [Romans 14:23](#) / [Ephesians 2:8](#) / [2 Corinthians 5:7](#) / [Hebrews 11:6](#). We all know the importance of faith in the life of the Christian, but James is going to talk about three different types of faith.

James is going to talk about three different types of faiths, but he is going to emphasise that only one of these faiths can actually save our souls.

A DEAD FAITH

The first kind of faith which James speaks about is called ‘dead faith’, [James 2:14](#). There are some Christians who just love to say the right things but never do anything about it.

These are the Christians who sound great and know the proper words to use when they are praying. They know the Scriptures, and when you’re talking with them, you can tell they can quote the right Scripture.

But there’s a problem, they have faith with no legs attached. In other words, they don’t practice what they preach; their walk doesn’t match up to their talk, [James 2:15-16](#). Why is it a dead faith? [James 2:17](#).

Simply because it’s what we might call an ‘intellectual’ faith. These are the people who know the right ‘words’, but they do not back up their words with their ‘works’. Their faith isn’t doing anything else; they possess a faith that hasn’t got any legs attached. James says that this kind of faith doesn’t save anyone.

Three times in this chapter, James emphasises that ‘faith without legs attached is dead’, [James 2:17](#) / [James 2:20](#) / [James 2:26](#). In other words, people can’t claim to have faith in God if their life hasn’t been changed by the Gospel.

People can’t claim to have faith in God if their faith doesn’t lead them to do good works for God. This type of faith is a counterfeit faith and leads people into a false confidence in eternal life.

What good is it to say to the homeless person, ‘I’ll be praying for you’ when they have to spend another night out in the freezing cold? What good is it to say to someone who hasn’t eaten in two days, ‘I pray that God will provide food for you?’ [James 2:15-16](#).

James is telling us that if our walk does not measure up to our talk or if our works do not measure up to our words, it could be because our faith is dead, [James 2:17](#).

A DEMONIC FAITH

“But someone will say, “One person has faith, another has actions.” My answer is, “Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions.” Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe—and tremble with fear.” [James 2:18-19](#)

The next type of faith which James describes is an interesting faith, to say the least; he calls it a ‘demonic faith’. Some have faith with no deeds, but James challenges them and says he can demonstrate his faith by his deeds, [James 2:18](#). In other words, our faith and deeds must work together; we can’t claim to have one without demonstrating the other.

James reminds us that even ‘demons’ have a kind of faith, the kind that ‘believes’, [James 2:19](#). They believe in God, and they even believe in the deity of Christ, [Mark 3:11-12](#). Not only do they believe in the deity of Christ, but they also believe in the existence of a place of condemnation, [Luke 8:31](#).

Not only do they believe in the deity of Christ and the existence of a place of condemnation, but they also believe that Jesus will be the Judge, [Matthew 8:28-29](#).

What kind of faith do ‘demons’ have? We just saw that the Christian with a ‘dead faith’ is a Christian who has been ‘touched only in his intellect,’ but the demons are ‘touched also in their emotions.’

Notice that James says that the demons ‘believe and tremble’, [James 2:19](#). This faith is one step above a ‘dead faith’ because it involves both intellect and emotions.

Can this kind of faith save us? According to James, the answer to this question is no. It can’t save because people can be enlightened in their minds and even moved in their hearts, but they can still be lost forever. True saving faith involves something more, something that can be seen and recognised. True saving faith can be seen and recognised in a changed life.

James is telling us that being a Christian involves trusting Christ and living for Christ. In other words, as someone once said, ‘you first receive the life, then you reveal the life’. The kind of faith that just believes the right things and feels the right things, but doesn’t go any further.

True saving faith does more than that; it goes beyond words and feelings and believing the right things. James is warning us that if our faith only involves intellect, then it’s a dead faith; it won’t save us. If our faith only involves intellect and emotions, then our faith is only a demonic faith; it won’t save us.

SAVING FAITH

“You fool! Do you want to be shown that faith without actions is useless? How was our ancestor Abraham put right with God? It was through his actions, when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. Can’t you see? His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions. And the scripture came true that said, “Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.” And so Abraham was called God’s friend. You see, then, that it is by our actions that we are put right with God, and not by our faith alone. It was the same with the prostitute Rahab. She was put right with God through her actions, by welcoming the Israelite spies and helping them to escape by a different road. So then, as the body without the spirit is dead, also faith without actions is dead”. [James 2:20-26](#)

James calls them food and then goes ahead to provide evidence that faith without deeds is a dead faith, [James 2:20](#) / [Matthew 7:24-27](#). If we want a real faith with real legs attached, a faith that is going to save us, James says our faith needs to be an ‘active faith’.

We know that this kind of faith is based upon the Word of God, [Romans 10:17](#). In other words, this faith is an active faith because it involves our whole being. This faith leads us to do something with our faith; it leads to action. It’s not intellectual contemplation, it’s not emotionalism, it’s a faith that leads to obedience in doing good works. To elaborate on this point, James gives us two examples from the Old Testament.

Those who are of the ‘faith only’ persuasion really need to take the time to study James’ letter because James is clearly teaching us that faith without actions won’t save us. James begins his illustration by talking about Abraham and Rahab.

Now you couldn’t find two more different people. Abraham was the father of the Jews, and Rahab was a Gentile. Abraham was a godly man; Rahab had been a sinful woman, a harlot. Abraham was the friend of God; Rahab had belonged to the enemies of God.

Abraham's faith was demonstrated in his actions; he offered Isaac up to be sacrificed in obedience to God's command, [James 2:21](#) / [Genesis 22:19](#). He believed that God could raise him back from the dead, [Hebrews 11:19](#). In other words, his faith and actions worked together, and as a result, his faith was complete, [James 2:22](#).

Hodges, in his commentary, says the following.

'The faith which justifies can have an active and vital role in the life of the obedient believer. As with Abraham, it can be the dynamic for superb acts of obedience. In the process, faith itself can be 'perfected.' The Greek word suggests development and motivation. Faith is thus nourished and strengthened by works.'

As a result of his faith and actions working together, it was credited to him as righteous, [Genesis 15:1-6](#) / [Romans 4:1-5](#), and he became God's friend, [James 2:23](#) / [2 Chronicles 20:7](#) / [Isaiah 41:8](#). Abraham is the perfect example of how a person becomes righteous, that is, right with God, his faith and actions were working together, [James 2:24](#). Rahab also demonstrated righteousness with her faith and actions working together. She gave accommodation to the twelve spies when they were sent to spy out the land, and sent them off in a different direction, [James 2:25](#) / [Joshua 2:9-13](#).

Motyer, in his commentary, says the following.

'What was the work of Abraham? He held nothing back from God. God said, 'I want your son', and Abraham 'rose early in the morning', [Genesis 22:3](#), in prompt obedience. What was the work of Rahab? She reached out and took into her own care those who were needy and helpless, regardless of the cost to herself.'

So why did James use these two people to illustrate his point about faith and actions? Well, the answer is found in what they both had in common: they both exercised saving faith in God.

In other words, Abraham demonstrated his saving faith through his works, [Hebrews 11:17](#). Abraham's faith had legs attached. Rahab also demonstrated her saving faith through her works, [Hebrews 11:31](#). Rahab's faith also had legs attached.

Notice how James emphasises his point in [James 2:26](#). How much more dead can a person be? We all know that a body without a spirit is dead, and he says that faith without deeds is dead faith.

Two times in this passage, James tells us that faith without works is a dead faith, [James 2:20](#) / [James 2:26](#). He is teaching us that 'faith only' can never justify a person before God. He does mention faith alone, but it's not the faith that saves.

James says that our faith and action or deeds need to work together. He's saying that people can know the Scriptures, they may even be moved in their hearts by the Scriptures, but if their faith doesn't work together with actions, then it's all a waste of time.

Now we might be thinking, doesn't Paul tell us in [Ephesians 2:5-8](#) that we were saved by grace alone? Isn't this a contradiction? First of all, we need to remember that Paul is writing to Christians who thought they could 'merit their way' to heaven by good works. James is writing to Christians who thought that their 'faith alone' would merit their way to heaven.

Jesus teaches us that salvation is God's gift, [John 3:16](#), but the gift must be taken hold of by man's response in obedient faith, [John 3:36](#). In other words, grace makes salvation possible, but obedient faith makes salvation actual. And so, when a person responds in Biblical faith to God's offer of salvation, they are neither earning nor deserving the gift, but only accept it on the condition on which the Lord has promised to give it.

We do not earn salvation, and we can never earn our salvation, but we must comply with the conditions laid down by the Lord in order to receive the free gift of eternal salvation.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘We are not saved by deeds; we are saved for deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life. And Paul’s whole emphasis is on the first truth, and James’s whole emphasis is on the second truth.’

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

“My friends, not many of you should become teachers. As you know, we teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others. All of us often make mistakes. But if a person never makes a mistake in what he says, he is perfect and is also able to control his whole being.” James 3:1-2

TAMING THE TONGUE

James begins this chapter with a warning for those who would like to become teachers of God’s Word, and notice that he doesn’t say, ‘not many of you should be teachers,’ he says, ‘not many of you should become teachers,’ [James 3:1](#) / [Hebrews 5:12](#).

In other words, this is not just a rebuke of those who try to be teachers before they are ready, but it’s a warning that many should not even become teachers in the future.

One of the fundamental mistakes that we can make as a body of believers is that every time a man becomes a Christian, we think he should be trained up to become a preacher or teacher; that’s wrong. Some men are gifted to preach or teach, some men aren’t, and preaching and teaching involve a lot more than just reading some text from the Bible.

The preaching and teaching need to be Bible-based, but it also needs to be presented in a manner that suits the needs of an individual congregation. A sermon also needs to be clear; it needs to have an explanation of the Bible text, and it needs to have an application.

It’s a mistake to assume that all men will automatically become preachers and teachers because we know the body of Christ doesn’t function like that, [Romans 12:4-8](#) / [1 Corinthians 12:12-31](#) / [1 Peter 4:10-11](#). The reason that ‘not many of you should become teachers’ is because ‘teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others’, [James 3:1](#).

Preaching and teaching others come with an enormous responsibility because a preacher and teacher of God’s Word have the responsibility to lead people in one of two directions. All preachers and teachers can lead people to truth, or they can lead them to error, [Hebrews 13:17](#).

Notice he also says that ‘all of us often make mistakes’, [James 3:2](#), that is, everyone has faults, but there is one major fault which most people have which James has in mind here, and that’s the fault of using our tongue for the wrong reasons. He says it takes spiritual maturity not to stumble with our words.

But his point is, if some believe that preaching and teaching are their gift from God, then use it, but use it using humility and cautiousness, [James 3:2](#) / [Titus 1:11](#).

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Teachers are necessary, but incompetent and unworthy ones do much harm.’

“We put a bit into the mouth of a horse to make it obey us, and we are able to make it go where we want. Or think of a ship: big as it is and driven by such strong winds, it can be steered by a very small rudder, and it goes wherever the pilot wants it to go”. James 3:3-4

How we use our tongue doesn’t just apply to preachers and teachers; it applies to every single Christian in the Lord’s church. And so to help us understand the dangers of our tongues, he uses illustrations, and in the first two illustrations, he uses those of a horse and a ship.

James says the bit controls a horse, and the rudder controls the ship. A bit is a piece of metal that is placed in the mouth of a horse that allows a rider to control the animal. It rests on the bars of the mouth in an area where there are no teeth.

It is held on a horse’s head by means of a bridle and has reins attached for use by a rider. It’s a very small piece of riding equipment, but you can never ride and control the horse without it, [James 3:3](#).

A rudder is another device used to steer a ship, and when you look at the size of a ship, it’s actually very small in comparison. Without the rudder, it’s impossible to steer and guide the ship, [James 3:4](#).

In other words, just like the bit for a horse and just like the rudder of a ship, it is the tongue that controls the entire body, [James 3:2](#). If we speak a lie, it won’t be long before we find ourselves living a lie. If we speak suggestively in an immoral manner, it won’t be long before we begin acting immorally.

That’s why James says, ‘not many of you should become teachers’, [James 3:1](#), because whether we like it or not, very often it’s the preacher or teacher who sets the mood of the class or congregation. And they can very easily direct the congregation in an uplifting way, or just as easily direct the congregation in a discouraging way.

“So it is with the tongue: small as it is, it can boast about great things. Just think how large a forest can be set on fire by a tiny flame! And the tongue is like a fire. It is a world of wrong, occupying its place in our bodies and spreading evil through our whole being. It sets on fire the entire course of our existence with the fire that comes to it from hell itself.” James 3:5-6

James goes on and shares another illustration, this time he uses the illustration of a little fire. What started off as a little spark goes on to become a forest fire, [James 3:5](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The tongue has as much destructive power as a spark in a forest. It is petite but powerful.’

Our tongue, which is a world of evil within our bodies, sets our lives on fire, and we will end up being destroyed in hell, [James 3:6](#).

Martin, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The tongue is the gate through which the evil influences of hell can spread like fire to inflame all the areas of life that we touch. This is the only place in the New Testament where ‘hell’ (Gr. geennes) occurs outside the Synoptic Gospels. Here, the body (Gr. soma) represents the whole person. However, it may also allude to the church as well.’

Some people with their tongues, as small as they are, have used them for deceit, and their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. In other words, their tongues are like a small fire, and they can easily cause great destruction.

A loose tongue can ruin someone’s reputation, it can destroy churches, families and friendships. This is another reason why James warns that ‘not many of us should become preachers and teachers’, [James 3:1](#).

“We humans are able to tame and have tamed all other creatures—wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish. But no one has ever been able to tame the tongue. It is evil and uncontrollable, full of deadly poison.” James 3:7-8

Having humility and caution are not the only things we need when we're thinking about becoming preachers or teachers; we also need help from God. James says that despite being able to tame wild animals, man is unable to tame the tongue, [James 3:7](#).

He describes the tongue as an unruly evil, full of deadly poison, [James 3:8](#). Now it is true that we by ourselves can't tame the tongue, but with God's help, we can tame it, [Psalm 141:3](#). But not only can we tame the tongue with God's help according to Paul we must tame it, [Ephesians 4:29](#) / [Colossians 4:6](#).

“We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father and also to curse other people, who are created in the likeness of God. Words of thanksgiving and cursing pour out from the same mouth. My friends, this should not happen!” James 3:9-10

As Christians, we must tame our tongues, but we know that's not always easy, and so, to further illustrate just how difficult it can be to tame our tongues, James uses a very common problem even for Christians today. He says we use our tongues to give thanks to God and, at the same time, to curse other people.

Adamson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘To bless God is the sublimest function of the human tongue; thrice daily the devout Jew recited ‘the Eighteen Benedictions,’ with their ending ‘Blessed art Thou, O God.’

Hiebert, in his commentary, says the following concerning cursing.

‘The reference is not to the use of profanity in vulgar speech but apparently seems to envision angry disputes and slanderous remarks in inner-church party strife, [James 4:1-2](#) / [James 4:11-12](#).’

We all come together for worship and just thank God for everything He has done for us, but then we jump in our cars and start cursing anyone who pulls out in front of us. James says Christians shouldn't be doing that.

“No spring of water pours out sweet water and bitter water from the same opening. A fig tree, my friends, cannot bear olives; a grapevine cannot bear figs, nor can a salty spring produce sweet water”. James 3:11-12

To stress his point even further, James goes on and uses the illustrations of a fig spring, a fig tree and a grapevine.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Illustrations highlight this natural inconsistency, [Matthew 7:16](#). A water source can yield only one kind of water. A tree can only produce fruit of its own kind. A salt spring cannot produce fresh water any more than a fallen human nature can naturally produce pure words. A fountain, a tree, and the tongue all have power to delight, [James 3:5](#) / [James 3:8](#).’

James knew that what comes out of our mouths is a real reflection of what is in the inside of our hearts, [Mark 7:20-23](#). It's what comes out of our mouth that counts, and so, whether we teach or not, we all need to seek God's help to control our tongue, [Psalms 19:14](#).

TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

‘Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.’ James 3:13-18

If we want to help each other grow up spiritually together, if we want to become teachers, James 3:1, then we continually need to seek wisdom from the right place. James informs us that there are two types of wisdom that we need to be aware of: heavenly wisdom and worldly wisdom.

1. They are different because of their ‘origins’, James 3:13-16.

He says that earthly wisdom doesn’t come from heaven; it’s worldly, James 3:15. In other words, this wisdom works according to the standard of the world. Paul says the world’s wisdom is foolish, 1 Corinthians 1:20, but why is it foolish?

James says it’s foolish because ‘it is un-spiritual’, James 3:15. In other words, worldly wisdom is sensual, it appeals to our senses, our emotions and our passions. It’s wisdom according to what feels right, but because something feels right, it doesn’t necessarily mean that it is right.

And not only is worldly wisdom sensual, but it’s also, according to James, demonic, James 3:15. It’s the kind of wisdom possessed by the devil and his angels, wisdom that often finds its origin in the influences of Satan.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This type of so-called ‘wisdom,’ which springs from jealousy and ambition, does not have its source in the fear of the Lord. It comes from the spirit (philosophy) of this world, James 2:1-7. It consists of only what is natural, excluding the supernatural influence of God’s Spirit. Furthermore, it is demon-like in its deception, hypocrisy, and evil.’

Look at what James says about heavenly wisdom. He says that heavenly wisdom is from above, James 3:17. In other words, it comes from God, James 1:5-8. Knowing the origin or source of each kind of wisdom ought to encourage us to select the right one.

2. They are different because of their ‘nature’, James 3:17-18.

James says earthly wisdom has some characteristics. He says earthly wisdom is full of bitterness, envy, and self-seeking in the heart, James 3:14 / James 2:16. And he says that that kind of wisdom promotes power, position, privilege, and prestige.

Now used properly, all that can be good, but we need to remember that it was this kind of wisdom that prompted the devil to rebel against God in the first place, Isaiah 14:12-15. It was this kind of wisdom that prompted the disciples to argue over who would be the greatest in the kingdom, Luke 22:24-30.

Now let’s contrast that with heavenly wisdom. Heavenly wisdom doesn’t compromise truth for the sake of peace, James 3:17. Heavenly wisdom is not only pure but it’s also peaceful, James 3:17. Heavenly wisdom holds firm to the truth, and it makes every effort to be at peace, Romans 12:18.

But not only is it pure and peaceful, but it’s also gentle, James 3:17. Heavenly wisdom is kind when its dealings with others, it’s not harsh even when it’s right and dealing with those who differ, 2 Timothy 2:24-25.

Not only is it pure, peaceful, and gentle, it’s also willing to yield, James 3:17. Heavenly wisdom will yield, not in matters of truth but in matters of opinion, Romans 14:1.

Not only is it pure, peaceful, gentle and willing to yield, it’s also full of mercy, James 3:17. Heavenly wisdom is quick to forgive the offences of others and that’s because wise people understand their own need for mercy.

Not only is it pure, peaceful, gentle, willing to yield and full of mercy, it also produces good fruits, James 3:17 / 1 Timothy 5:1-2 / 2 Timothy 2:14 / 2 Timothy 2:24-26. Heavenly wisdom is displayed in people’s lives and actions, Galatians 5:22-23.

Not only is it pure, peaceful, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and produces good fruits, it’s also without partiality, James 3:17. Heavenly wisdom also shows no respect for persons, James 2:1-13. Heavenly wisdom treats everyone fairly and on the same basis.

Not only is it pure, peaceful, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, produces good fruits and without partiality, it’s also without hypocrisy, James 3:17. Now, why would James say that heavenly wisdom is without hypocrisy?

Well, simply to let us know that everything we have looked at so far concerning heavenly wisdom is not an act, it's not a show, but it comes from a heart desiring to please God, not man.

These are all fruits that are shown from heavenly wisdom, and if we contrast the fruit with the wisdom of the world, we can see a huge difference. Worldly wisdom is seen in the fruits of confusion and every kind of evil thing, but heavenly wisdom produces the fruits of peace and righteousness, [James 3:18](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘James warns against anything that does not bear the fruit of good works: unfruitful religion, [James 1:25-26](#), unfruitful faith, [James 2:26](#), and unfruitful wisdom, [James 3:17-18](#).’

People who are happy with the wisdom they get from the world won't want to listen to God; they will just carry on boasting about how wise they think you are. But if we seek heavenly wisdom, we won't boast about it; we will show it in our lives with humility. Those who preach and teach will preach and teach wisely, using caution and humility.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

“Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your desires for pleasure, which are constantly fighting within you.” James 4:1

THE WAR WITHIN

James begins this chapter by speaking about war, and throughout this chapter, he's going to describe three types of war. However, he is also going to share with us how to stop these wars. And the first war he wants us to recognise is the war amongst ourselves.

God has been crying out in a loud voice for centuries and pointing out an important truth to all of God's people, and that is, we must live in harmony with each other, [Psalm 133:1](#).

If we look to the Old Testament, we find Lot quarrelling with Abraham, [Genesis 13:8](#), and we find Absalom created a war with his father David, [2 Samuel 15-19](#). If you look to the New Testament, we find the disciples of Jesus arguing over who would be greatest, [Luke 22:24-28](#). We find Paul and Barnabas had great contention over John Mark, [Acts 15:36-41](#).

Even within the churches in the New Testament, we see Christians fighting with each other, [Hebrews 12:14](#) / [1 Peter 1:11](#). At the church that met in Corinth, we find saints suing each other, [1 Corinthians 6:1-8](#), and competing in the public assemblies, [1 Corinthians 12:1-31](#).

At the church that met in Galatia, we find saints hurting and harming one another, [Galatians 5:15](#). Even at Philippi, we find two women having trouble getting along with each other, [Philippians 4:2-3](#).

Remember, James has already dealt with some of these wars when he spoke about church fights, [James 1:19-20](#) / [James 3:13-18](#). He spoke about favouritism between races like the rich and poor, [James 2:1-9](#).

Later in this chapter, he's going to speak about personal wars, [James 4:11-12](#). When we get to the next chapter, he tells us that wars can occur due to employment or lack of it, [James 5:1-6](#).

James begins by addressing fights and quarrels within the church. The reason there are so many church wars going on today is simply because of the war which is taking place within our hearts. It all has to do with desire and satisfying those worldly pleasures which we all have.

Desires like pride, power, possessions, money, credibility, etc., are all to blame for the fighting amongst ourselves or to put it in plain English, 'selfishness' and selfishness only lead us in the wrong direction.

“You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you strongly desire things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it.” And when you ask, you do not receive it, because your motives are bad; you ask for things to use for your own pleasures,” James 4:2-3

James says that our selfish desires lead us to do wrong actions. He says selfish desires lead you to kill, quarrel and fight, [James 4:2](#). Now, this may not be literal on our behalf, but it certainly is in God's eyes, [1 John 3:15](#).

Motyer, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In the context of forceful words such as polemoi (‘wars’) and machai (‘battles’), it seems better to take phoneuete (‘you kill’) as hyperbole for hatred. This also resolves the problem of seeming anticlimactic word order. To say ‘You hate and covet’ is a much more natural order than to say ‘You murder and covet.’ Furthermore, [Matthew 5:21-22](#) and [1 John 3:15](#) show that hatred is equal to murder.’

Not only do selfish desires lead us to kill, quarrel and fight, they also lead us to mess up our prayer life. James says that any prayer which is prayed out of selfish motives is not going to be answered by God, [James 4:3](#).

Dauids, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If prayer is no more than a formula (saying the right words, believe hard enough, confess; it will happen), then Christians are back to a type of magic: They can manipulate God or impose their will on God, for he has to answer. In contrast, New Testament prayer grows out of a trusting relationship with a father whose will is supreme.’

And this is why people are often at war with one another. Every war or angry disagreement always has people who are at war within themselves first. But why? Why does it have to be this way? Why are people continually at war with themselves?

Well, to put it simply, it's a matter of will. Every war which has taken place or is going to take place, either within ourselves or in the world, is caused by a rebellious heart. People are rebelling against God, and in some ways, those who are at war with others are also at war within themselves. Why?

Well, simply because they are at war with God first. In other words, just as we can become friends with God, we can also just as easily become His enemy. And James mentions three enemies we must not associate with if we want to be at peace with God.

“Unfaithful people! Don't you know that to be the world's friend means to be God's enemy? If you want to be the world's friend, you make yourself God's enemy. Don't think that there is no truth in the scripture that says, “The spirit that God placed in us is filled with fierce desires. But the grace that God gives is even stronger. As the scripture says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:4-6

James says if you become close friends with those who are not Christians you become an enemy of God, [James 4:4](#). Please note that he is not telling us not to have any non-Christian friends but what He is telling us is that if we engage with our friends in any conduct, belief, or thought which is anti-God or anti-Christ, those actions will make us an enemy of God, they make the Christian become a spiritual adulterer or adulteress, [James 4:4](#) / [Hosea 3:1](#).

The second way we can become enemies of God is by going after unlawful desires. Those unlawful desires that would lead us away from God, those desires that wage war within us, can lead us to become God's enemy.

In other words, these desires which we have are in direct conflict with what the Spirit of God would have us be and do, 1 Peter 2:11. Every time we give in to these desires or works of the flesh, Galatians 5:19-21, we're actually fighting against God.

And so the third way we become an enemy of God is by letting our pride take over our lives, James 4:5. We all know that ninety-nine per cent of church fights, divisions and splits are caused by pride.

And that's because pride is Satan's greatest temptation, and when we give in to pride, we become friends of the devil and enemies of God. God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble, James 4:6 / Proverbs 3:34.

Laws, in her commentary, says the following.

'In this verse, James gave scriptural support for what he just asserted, James 4:4. However, he did not quote a particular verse but evidently summarised the scriptural teaching on God's jealousy, Exodus 20:5 / Exodus 34:14 / Psalms 42:1 / Psalms 84:2 / Zechariah 8:2, in a new statement.'

SUBMIT YOURSELVES TO GOD

“So then, submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will run away from you”. “Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners! Purify your hearts, you hypocrites!” James 4:7-8

One way to prevent pride from taking hold in our lives is simply by submitting to God, James 4:7. Can you imagine being in the army and a new recruit who is just out of training starts to act like he's in charge? There will be a disaster on the way.

When we as Christians totally submit to God, then the victory is ours. Through Jesus' life, He showed us a pattern of submission for us to follow, and the pattern was, 'not my will but your will be done.'

The point is that we can't resist the devil until we have learned to resist using our own will instead of God's will. The world doesn't know this, and even some Christians are not aware of this, but everyone needs to know that behind every war, fight, division, and personal struggle is Satan.

Most of the time, people listen to him because they are scared, and they run a mile every time a conflict of any sort begins. But we don't have to run anywhere, because James says if we just resist those temptations, the devil will run away from us, James 4:7 / Matthew 4:1-11.

And while he is on the run, we can't just sit back and be thankful it's over, no! We need to come close to God, and He has promised us that as we walk closer to Him, He will meet us halfway, James 4:8. And we draw closer to God by washing our hands, James 4:8, in other words, getting our sins forgiven.

We draw closer to God by purifying our hearts, James 4:8, in other words, by getting totally devoted to God again.

We draw closer to God by stopping being hypocrites, James 4:8. In other words, stop being double-minded like those who profess to be Christians but whose lifestyles don't reflect it.

“Be sorrowful, cry, and weep; change your laughter into crying, your joy into gloom!” “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” James 4:9-10

Whether we accept this or not, it is possible to submit outwardly and not be humble inwardly, hence why James mentions there are times when we need to grieve, mourn and wail, we need to change our laughter to mourning and

our joy to gloom, [James 4:9](#). These are all signs of true humility, [Matthew 5:3-4](#). And if we would only humble ourselves like that, then we can put our trust back in God to help us, [James 4:10](#).

Stulac, in his commentary, says the following.

‘How does one love hostile and hurtful people? The answer is supernaturally, by relying on the grace that God gives to the humble.’

If people want to stop all the wars in the world, within our congregations, within ourselves, then fight those selfish desires within our hearts, and God will draw near to us, cleanse us, and forgive us.

Until we learn not to be at war with God, until we learn to control and win the war within ourselves, until we learn not to be at war with others, the wars will continue.

‘Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour?’ [James 4:11-12](#)

The person who speaks against his brother is actually making himself the judge of his brother, [James 4:11](#) / [Matthew 7:1-5](#) / [Romans 14:4](#). The evil speaking of slander is a hideous sin on the part of one who wishes to destroy the reputation of another, [James 5:9](#) / [Leviticus 19:15-18](#) / [2 Corinthians 12:20](#) / [Ephesians 4:31](#) / [1 Peter 2:1-3](#) / [3 John 10](#).

The law of liberty allowed freedom in order to carry out principles of the law, [James 4:11](#) / [James 1:25](#) / [James 2:8](#) / [James 2:12](#). If a person judges as evil that which was in the area of freedom, that is, opinion, then that person is judging the law to be insufficient.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Criticising our equals is a common sport, but it is inappropriate for mere mortals. We are all responsible to God ultimately and must leave the judgment of His servants up to Him, [Romans 14:1-13](#). We need to remember that we are on the same level as those we may wish to judge. We are brothers and neighbours, [Deuteronomy 32:39](#) / [1 Samuel 2:6-7](#) / [2 Kings 5:7](#).’

Those who judge their brothers in the areas of freedom of the law are making laws by which men are to be judged. They are binding where God has not bound, and so, they are judging the law to be insufficient and unable to furnish the man of God unto every good work, [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#) / [Matthew 16:18-19](#).

The person who would seek to be a judge concerning his own laws that he has established, where God has not established law, must remember that there is the Judge of all things before whom we must stand, [John 12:48](#) / [Romans 14:4](#).

It is this Lawgiver who will judge all men according to His law, not the religious laws and traditions of men, [John 5:37](#) / [John 12:48](#) / [Acts 17:30-31](#) / [Matthew 25:31-46](#).

A person has the right to judge according to the law that is given by Christ, [Galatians 6:1](#); however, if their motives are evil, then they have no right to judge. The person who would seek to judge out of evil motives, or judge in areas of freedom, has placed themselves in competition with Jesus, who is our only judge.

BOASTING ABOUT TOMORROW

‘Now listen to me, you that say, “Today or tomorrow we will travel to a certain city, where we will stay a year and go into business and make a lot of money.” [James 4:13](#)

James is going to share three wrong ways to make our plans, and the first obvious wrong way to make our plans is to go ahead and make them while completely ignoring God's will. He says, 'Listen to me', [Isaiah 1:18](#), making plans without God's approval is wrong because life is complicated.

The whole world runs around chasing the clock and trying to get here and get that done before a certain time. And we get caught up in time because time is very complicated. That's why James says, today, tomorrow, when? I'm not sure when!

But not only can the timing of plans be complicated, so can the activities themselves be complicated. Some translations have James saying, I'm going to buy or sell, which is it? Am I going to buy or sell?

There are so many decisions to be made, but there are also so many mistakes that might be made. In other words, if we knew God's will on any matter, that would increase our chances that our decisions and plans would be correct.

“You don't even know what your life tomorrow will be! You are like a puff of smoke, which appears for a moment and then disappears”. James 4:14

James says that making plans without God's will can be wrong because life is uncertain. None of us and no one in the world has a guarantee that there will be a tomorrow, [Luke 12:18-20](#) / [John 15:5](#). We don't know if the Lord will return tonight, we don't know if we will still be alive tomorrow, and we don't even know what will happen tomorrow.

James is telling us that it is only God who can bring about what He wills for the future without fail. We cannot do that; we cannot control tomorrow, no matter how well we have planned ahead. So if we're going to make plans, surely the wise thing to do is to make them according to the One who does control tomorrow.

Not only is life complicated and uncertain, but life is also fragile, [Psalm 39:5-6](#) / [Psalm 39:11](#) / [James 1:10](#). That was the problem in the Garden of Eden, when Adam took that fruit from Eve, he didn't just disobey God to test the boundaries, he wanted to be like God, He wanted to be in control of his own life and destiny.

Even today, people are trying to prolong life, they are searching for immortality, and all along they refuse to remember God's promise that we all will return to the dust where we came from, [Genesis 3:19](#).

We can't hide and pretend that we're going to live forever; life is fragile, and it can change or be taken in a second. Now those of us who recognise that life is complicated, uncertain and fragile also understand that our lives are short.

James says our lives are, but only a moment; other translations say, 'we appear for a little time'. The way some people go about making their plans is amazing. They take life for granted, or they presume they are going to live to at least ninety years old and make their plans accordingly, [Job 9:25-26](#). Life is short, and because it is short, it should be important to us to do God's will and not our own, [1 John 2:17](#).

“If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that.” James 4:15

James now gives us the proper way to make our plans. When we submit to God, then we're actually submitting to God's will, [James 4:7](#). And when we submit to God's will, then we're actually submitting not only our lives to God's will but also submitting our plans to the will of God.

And what James says here is that we can go ahead and make our plans, but we need to make sure they meet with God's approval, [Acts 18:21](#) / [1 Corinthians 4:19](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:7](#) / [Philippians 2:19](#) / [Philippians 2:24](#).

We need to understand two important principles concerning our faith. Saying, 'God willing and if the Lord allows', implies that we recognise that God does have a will for us even in the smallest of matters concerning our lives.

And secondly, it implies that we trust God enough to intervene if He needs to, to carry out His will in our lives. And so to find if it is God's will, we shall see over a period of time, where it will become clearer if we have done God's will or not.

“But now you are proud, and you boast; all such boasting is wrong.” James 4:16

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In these verses, James presented four arguments that show the foolishness of ignoring God's will: the complexity of life ([James 4:13](#)), the uncertainty of life, [James 4:14](#). a. the brevity of life, [James 4:14](#). b, and the frailty of man, [James 4:16](#).’

People who make plans without God actually brag about their plans, which is nothing less than arrogance. It's arrogant because they are doing what Adam did in the Garden; they are setting themselves up as if they were above God.

And to make plans that way is wrong because it is sinful. But as people full of selfish desires plot and make plans for the future, James tells us that we need to be careful about the plans we make for the future.

And making plans can be good and right, but they can just as easily be bad and wrong. James says that making plans this way is sinful because it involves arrogance and boasting, which we know is evil.

“So then, if we do not do the good we know we should do, we are guilty of sin.” James 4:17

It is more sinful for Christians to make plans without God because we who are Christians should know better. We should know what is good; we should know to make our plans with God's will in mind all the time. This includes all the plans within our personal lives and all the plans for the future of our congregation.

As Christians, we should take care of the orphans and widows, [James 1:27](#). We must be determined to do what is good; otherwise, we are guilty of sin. Doing what is right and good to everyone is something all Christians must be actively involved with, [Ephesians 2:10](#) / [Galatians 6:10](#).

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

“And now, you rich people, listen to me! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming upon you!” James 5:1

WARNING TO RICH OPPRESSORS

We all know that we come into this world with nothing and we leave this world with nothing, no matter how rich we are, [1 Timothy 6:7](#). But we need to understand a very important point about this, and that is, God does not condemn the rich for being rich.

After all, some of the godliest people in the Bible were very rich. People like Job, Abraham, Joseph, David, Solomon, Barnabas, Philemon, and Lydia, just to mention a few.

So God does not condemn the rich for being rich, but Christ does speak of the difficulty of the rich being saved, [Matthew 19:23-26](#). Who is James addressing in this passage? Are they Christians? Are these rich Christians who had been guilty of oppressing their brethren?

First of all, all the way through the letter from James, he usually addresses the people he is speaking to as brethren or brothers, but here James doesn't do that and note also that there is no call to repentance mentioned either; there is only condemnation.

I believe that James is addressing rich unbelievers, after all, who had been oppressing the Christians. It was the rich unbelievers who were causing them all the problems, [James 2:6](#).

And so this outburst of judgment upon them here appears to serve the purpose of comforting the brethren who were being oppressed by them. Later in this chapter, he tells Christians to be patient until the Lord comes, [James 5:7](#).

As Christians, as a people who believe and trust in God, we need to let God deal with it because He will deal with it, but not on our timetable, but His and not in our way, but His, [Revelation 6:10](#).

And when we have those times when we're just crying, and we think that no one is watching us or no one hears us, God is watching us and He does hear us, [James 5:4](#).

In other words, James is telling them that judgment is coming upon these rich oppressors, but in the meantime, Christians need to be patient because God will deal with it, [Revelation 6:10-11](#).

James says that all these rich oppressors have ahead of them is misery, so much misery that it will cause them to 'weep and wail'. James says that these miseries which are to come are a certainty to come.

“Your riches have rotted away, and your clothes have been eaten by moths. Your gold and silver are covered with rust, and this rust will be a witness against you and will eat up your flesh like fire.” James 5:2-3

Notice that James speaks of these miseries as already occurring; he says, their riches are rotten, their clothes are moth-eaten, and their gold and silver are corroded, [James 5:2](#). And he says that when this 'corrosion' of their riches occurs, it will serve as a witness against them and it will eat their flesh like fire, [James 5:3](#).

Did that time come for these rich oppressors? Well, the miseries spoken of here may have reference to what later occurred in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Because not long after James' letter was written, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.

And many of the rich Jews who had oppressed their Christian brethren literally 'wept and howled', because they had failed to realise that they had piled up riches.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Bible does not discourage saving, or even investing, but it does condemn hoarding.’

This is so much like the man in the parable of the rich fool who thought he was laying up riches for their last days, [Luke 12:16-21](#). Just like it did with the rich man in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, [Luke 16:19-31](#).

These rich oppressors didn't realise that Jesus and James were both talking about the 'last days' of the Jewish economy when they were so busy storing up wealth.

“You have not paid any wages to those who work in your fields. Listen to their complaints! The cries of those who gather in your crops have reached the ears of God, the Lord Almighty. Your life here on earth has been full of luxury and pleasure. You have made yourselves fat for the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent people, and they do not resist you.” James 5:4-6

Why is God so angry at these rich people? Well, simply put, it was because of how they got their wealth, it was through wicked means. These rich people were withholding wages from those who had worked for them, [James 5:4](#).

In other words, they hoarded their wealth for themselves. Notice the works cried out to God and God heard their cries, [James 5:4](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Some of James’ readers were evidently getting rich by cheating their hired workers out of their fair wages, [Deuteronomy 24:15](#). Cries for justice from these oppressed people had entered God’s ears, even though their employers were deaf to them, [Genesis 4:5](#) / [Genesis 18:20-21](#).’

James says that they spent it on themselves with pleasures and luxury and fattened themselves like cows for the slaughter, [James 5:5](#). But they didn’t stop there, they used the power that comes with wealth to oppress ‘the innocent or just,’ [James 5:6](#). In other words, the riches weren’t the problem, it was the way they got their riches.

The way they got their wealth and used it caused those who were oppressed to cry out, and the Lord heard their prayers. And so now, God, who is just, is about to bring judgment upon these rich oppressors, [Deuteronomy 24:14-15](#). It’s not riches that are wrong, but the desire to be rich that is wrought with many dangers, [1 Timothy 6:9-10](#).

So, how do we go about receiving our wealth? John says if we spend all our wealth on ourselves and just ignore those less fortunate than ourselves, then that is a sign of a lack of love for God in our lives, [1 John 3:17](#). Paul teaches the same thing, [Ephesians 4:28](#) / [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#), and practised what he preached, [Acts 20:34-35](#).

To help us deal with oppression, James tells us not to resist. These guys were being treated badly and treated unjustly, especially by the rich, but James tells us that they did not resist. I don’t know about you, but this goes against everything which is inside of me; this goes against everything the world teaches about being oppressed.

But when we become a Christian, we’re not following the world’s ways anymore, we’re following the way of Christ, and so, not only do our lives dramatically change, but our whole way of thinking is also drastically changed, [Romans 12:19-21](#).

Human nature pushes us to react like the rest of the world would react by lashing out at what we think is ‘justifiable anger.’ Human wisdom pushes us to react like the rest of the world would react by ‘standing up for our rights’. But the Christian is called upon to react differently; we are advised not to react that way. And the reason we don’t react that way is because of three things.

PATIENCE IN SUFFERING

“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord comes. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!” James 5:7-9

James gives us three examples to encourage us to be patient. The farmer, [James 5:7](#), the prophets, [James 5:10](#), and Job, [James 5:11](#).

Dauids, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The picture is that of the small farmer in Palestine. The small farmer plants his carefully saved seed and hopes for a harvest, living on short rations and suffering hunger during the last weeks. The whole livelihood, indeed the life itself, of the family depends on a good harvest: the loss of the farm, semistarvation, or death could result from a bad year. So the farmer waits for an expected future event (ekdechetai); no one but he could know now how precious the grain really is.’

1. An awareness that the Lord is coming to judge, [James 5:7](#).

We know that the Lord is coming, so we're more likely not to judge others because we know that the Lord will be the one doing the judging. We know that He is the one who will judge correctly.

He is the one who knows all things, and because He knows all things, we should leave all things in His hands. And if we know all things are in His hands, then we shouldn't need to justify our anger; we shouldn't need to stand up for our rights.

2. A willingness to let Him be our avenger, [Luke 18:7-8](#).

I know and understand that this is not always easy to leave things in God's hands, and I know and understand that resisting the temptation to lash out and stand up for your rights is not always easy. But when we were called upon to follow Christ, we were called upon to imitate Christ and His example, [1 Peter 2:21-23](#).

3. Be patient, [James 5:8](#).

Sometimes, as Christians, we want things sorted out as quickly as possible and on our timetable, but surely we should know by now that God doesn't work according to our will and timetable; He works according to His will and His timetable.

James says if we want to start trusting God, then stop the grumbling, [James 5:9](#). We need to be on our guard against such times, because James tells us that if we complain against each other, then God, who is standing at the door, will judge us.

Burdick, in his commentary, says the following.

'What is forbidden is not the loud and bitter denunciation of others but the unexpressed feeling of bitterness or the smothered resentment that may express itself in a groan or a sigh.'

'Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.' James 5:10-11

James gave us the first example of the farmer to encourage us to be patient, [James 5:7](#). Now he gives us two more examples, the prophets, [James 5:10](#), and Job, [James 5:11](#).

Now we understand the patience that a farmer needs for his crops, we understand the patience the prophets had in the Old Testament, especially when no one would listen to them.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'One could use just about any one of the Hebrew prophets as an example of patient endurance in suffering, [James 1:4](#).'

I want to focus our attention on the patience of Job for a moment, [Job 1:13-22](#).

1. He lost his wealth.

In rapid succession, three messengers came telling Job of the destruction of his property and servants by bands of robbers and by lightning.

2. He lost his family.

A fourth messenger came telling of the death of all of Job's children. Seven sons and three daughters were crushed in a moment when the house fell.

3. He lost his health.

Job was smitten from head to foot with the most disgusting ulcers. He was constrained to sit down among the ashes and scrape himself with a potsherd.

4. He lost his friends.

His servants turned their backs on him. The children in the streets despised Job and mocked him. His friends told him that his sufferings were because of his wickedness. And his wife nagged him to curse God and die.

Now, when we look at Job and his trials, I'm sure we will agree that he was going through a horrific time. Even if we were to break his trials down separately, they would be horrific, but when we view them collectively, most of us would be overwhelmed just listening to him, never mind actually going through them.

But notice that Job didn't lash out; he didn't stand up for his rights; instead, he did what James is trying to teach us all this morning, [Job 1:20](#). Job learned that the Lord is very 'compassionate and merciful', [James 5:11](#).

Job was the wealthiest man of his time before, [Job 1:3](#); now he is even more so. Job had ten children, [Job 1:2](#), and Job is given ten more children; he had ten children in heaven and ten children on earth.

Out of all the ten children, only three are named. Jemimah, which means little dove, Keziah, which means sweet-smelling, that is, the pleasure of a good life and Keren-Happuch, which means horn of pigment, that is something which is used as eyepaint to beautify.

His daughters were the most beautiful in the land. The whole idea of the naming of his children is to show that Job has gained peace, happiness and the good life again.

Job's life could equally have been doubled, too, because Job lived a hundred and forty years; this would mean that he was seventy years old when he was afflicted.

Tradition suggests that he lived to a total age of two hundred and ten. The Alexandrian Septuagint contains an addition to [Job 42:16](#), which says that Job died at the age of two hundred and forty.

The Bible does not give his specific age when he died, but says that he lived to see the fourth generation of his new descendants, and that he was 'an old man and full of years,' [Job 42:17](#). 'Full of years' simply means having lived to a considerable age, [Genesis 15:15](#) / [Genesis 25:8](#) / [Genesis 38:29](#) / [Psalms 91:16](#).

The farmers, the prophets and Job all teach us to place our trust in the Lord, that He will eventually reward us for our trust in Him. It's through constant and careful study of God's Word that our faith in God and His eventual justice is made stronger, [2 Peter 1:12](#).

Christians who struggle with patience are normally the grumblers, especially against one another. So not only do we not have to complain against each other, but James also warns us not to swear.

“Above all, my friends, do not use an oath when you make a promise. Do not swear by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Say only “Yes” when you mean yes, and “No” when you mean no, and then you will not come under God's judgment.” [James 5:12](#)

When times are tough and we're going through difficult trials, it's during those times more than any other that we're tempted to swear. In other words, we're more likely to make rash promises.

We need to be aware that any promise, whether big or small, made to God is a promise which God will hold you to, [Ecclesiastes 5:1-2](#). We need to be careful about any oath we make, either to each other or to God.

James tells us that the best way of avoiding making oaths like this is to stop making oaths altogether, stand by your word and let your 'yes' be a 'yes' and 'no' be a 'no', [Matthew 5:33-37](#).

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

“Are any among you in trouble? They should pray. Are any among you happy? They should sing praises.” James 5:13

Finally, in times of oppression, Christians need to know that they have a powerful weapon in their arsenal, it’s called prayer. One of the things that frustrates us as Christians when we’re going through trials is that we often tend to think that God is not listening to us.

However, when the Christian prays, God hears! Luke 18:7-8. Our prayers may not be answered right away, but God will take action when the time is ripe, and the oppressed will be avenged, Revelation 6:9-11.

We shouldn’t retaliate because of oppression, but be kind, don’t complain or swear, but pray. When we react this way to oppression, we’re actually following the example of Christ, 1 Peter 2:23. When we react this way to oppression, we’re actually following the example of the early disciples, 1 Peter 4:19.

James reminds us that it’s in times of suffering or trouble that we need to be praying, and when he talks about suffering, he’s talking about any kind of suffering. Whether it be suffering due to sickness, bereavement, disappointment, persecution, loss of health or property.

Wells, in his commentary, says the following.

‘James not only begins and ends his epistle with references to trials, but he also begins, James 1:5-8, and ends, James 5:13-18, with prayer as the instrumental means for managing trials.’

As Christians, we know that it’s not all about suffering; there are far greater times of happiness. Happiness is the opposite of suffering, and when we’re happy, it’s usually because we’re free from trouble.

And it’s during those times of happiness that we are more likely to express our happiness in song. And as Christians, this is something we shouldn’t be ashamed to do whenever and wherever we feel the urge to just praise God in song.

When you read through the Psalms, this is something which David did time and time again, Psalms 92:1-2. Singing praises to God actually has the power to make a good situation even better, Colossians 3:16. Singing praises to God is just as important as praying to God, and perhaps our prayers would be answered more often if we would just praise God more often.

“Are any among you sick? They should send for the church elders, who will pray for them and rub olive oil on them in the name of the Lord. This prayer made in faith will heal the sick; the Lord will restore them to health, and the sins they have committed will be forgiven.” James 5:14-15

James continues with the theme of prayer, but this time he’s a bit more specific; he says in times of sickness, pray. Some believe that the anointing with oil was symbolic, representing the influences of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, it was used for miraculous purposes. But we also see examples in the New Testament of ‘the anointing with oil’ being used for medicinal purposes, Luke 10:34 / 1 Timothy 5:23.

Some believe that this passage is talking about miraculous healing where the elders were called because they possessed the gift of healing. But there’s a problem with that, and the problem is in the assumption that every elder, in every church, possessed the gift of healing.

First of all, we have no record anywhere in the New Testament that every elder in every single church possessed the gift of healing. And secondly, according to 1 Timothy 3:1-2 and Titus 1:5-9, there is no mention that elders require the gift of healing to be an elder. I believe that the elders were called because they were likely the most mature in a congregation.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is interesting that James did not tell his readers to call for someone with the gift of healing. Evidently, such people were rare even in the very early history of the church when James wrote.’

“So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you will be healed. The prayer of a good person has a powerful effect. “Elijah was the same kind of person as we are. He prayed earnestly that there would be no rain, and no rain fell on the land for three and a half years. Once again he prayed, and the sky poured out its rain, and the earth produced its crops.” James 5:16-18

James isn’t speaking about getting together in little groups to confess our sins to each other; the emphasis here is that when Christians are willing to confess their wrongs to one another, there will be true relationships among those whom God seeks to bring together in Christ, [James 5:16](#) / [Numbers 11:2](#) / [Matthew 5:23-24](#) / [Matthew 6:12-15](#).

Mayor, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The practice of auricular confession was not made generally obligatory even by the Church of Rome till the Lateran Council of 1215 under Innocent III., which ordered that every adult person should confess to the priest at least once in the year. In all other Churches it is still optional.’

The idea here is that when we confess our sins to each other, we then have the opportunity to pray together. There is healing power when we confess our sins to others, [1 John 1:7-9](#).

What does all this mean for us today? Well, first of all, in times of physical sickness, call for the elders or spiritual leaders of the church, [James 5:14](#). I mean, who doesn’t want the prayers of the righteous working on our behalf, [James 5:16](#).

And notice an important point in all this, we are to call for them, we are not to wait for them to call on us. And after we’ve made the call, ask them to pray for us and when they pray for us in faith, [James 5:16](#).

In other words, trusting in the Lord’s power to heal, if it is His will, [John 14:13](#) / [1 John 5:14](#). And when they pray for us passionately, both know that these types of prayers are both powerful and effective, [James 5:16](#).

Constable also says in his commentary.

‘There is no basis in Scripture for the popular idea that praying in faith means praying with confidence that something will happen just because we pray, [James 1:5-6](#) / [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#). Faith always must have the person or promise of God as its object to be effective.’

When they come and visit with you, they may decide that you need some medicine, [James 5:14](#). In other words, they should help to make sure we’re getting the proper treatment for our illness.

Now, those people who do get sick should also confess their sins if they have any. Remember [James 5:15](#), which makes it clear that sickness is not always the consequence of sin, but [James 5:16](#), and other Bible passages, [1 Corinthians 11:29-32](#), suggest that illnesses may be God’s loving discipline for sin, in an effort to direct us back to Him.

But whatever the reason, sins need to be confessed and forgiveness sought if we hope to have God hear our prayers, [James 5:15](#). Those who are more mature, those who have grown up in the faith are the righteous, [James 5:16](#), hence, why he uses Elijah as a man of great faith who prayed to God and God answered his prayer, [James 5:17-18](#). God was answering Elijah’s prayer through natural means, [1 Kings 17:1](#) / [1 Kings 18:11](#) / Kings 18:41-45.

“My brothers, if one of you wanders away from the truth and somebody brings him back, you may be sure that whoever brings a sinner back from his wrong path will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins”. James 5:19-20

People who don’t pray regularly but focus on their suffering rather than praising God are more likely to fall away. Those who don’t call for help from other mature church members are more likely to fall away, and it’s those types of saints that James has in mind in the next few verses.

But the emphasis seems to be more on the church's responsibility to reconcile them back to truth, James 5:19 / Galatians 6:1-2 / 1 Thessalonians 5:14. This is not so much for our benefit but for the benefit of the one who is wandering from the truth.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

'It was easy then, and is now, to be led astray from Christ, who is the Truth.'

Anyone who wanders from truth is in danger of death, and the reason they are in danger of death is that they have wandered away from the source of forgiveness, 1 John 1:6-7.

In other words, they have separated themselves from the blood of Christ to cleanse them of their sins, 1 John 1:8-10. And it's then that they are in danger of suffering the consequences of sin, which is death, Romans 6:23.

Those who wander from the truth need to know that 'there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,' the blood of Christ is no longer available for them while they remain like that, James 5:20 / 2 Peter 2:20-22. Those who wander away from truth need to know that 'the Lord will judge His people,' and for those who despise His mercy, they will face His righteous anger.

Remember, James is writing to Christians when he tells them there is a blessing for anyone who loves their brother or sister enough to confront them concerning their sin.

It's a real blessing when they actually do turn from their sin, and it's in this way that the person who was confronted will be saved from death and cover a multitude of sins, James 5:10.

The Pulpit Commentary says the following.

'The expression used by the apostle leaves it undetermined whose sins are thus 'covered,' whether, 1. those of the man who is 'converted from the error of his way,' or 2. those of the man who wins him back, and through this good action obtains, by the grace of God, pardon for his own 'multitude of sins.'

How do we go about restoring straying saints?

1. We need saints who are spiritual.

Paul reminds us that those who are spiritually mature need to get involved with the restoration, Galatians 6:1. Those who possess a spirit of gentleness need to get involved with the restoration. Those who are constantly examining themselves need to get involved in the restoration because they realise that they too can easily fall into the same fault.

2. We need saints who are willing to carry others' burdens.

Paul reminds us that it is those who have a willingness to bear one another's burdens that need to be involved with the restoration, Galatians 6:2. Because, as we know, restoring saints takes a lot of time and a lot of energy.

3. We need saints who are humble.

Paul reminds us that our responsibility is not fulfilled by simply pointing out our brother or sister's faults, but by being humble, Galatians 6:3 / 2 Timothy 2:24-26. We all know there is nothing worse than some arrogant saint trying to help you just by throwing Scripture in your face.

4. We need saints who understand God's Word.

Those who are doing the restoring also need to have a reasonable knowledge and understanding of God's Word, 2 Timothy 2:24. The restorer must be able to teach and apply God's Word to the situation.

5. We need saints who are patient.

Those who are helping with the restoration need to be patient, 2 Timothy 2:24. The restorer needs to treat the wanderer with that same patience.

6. We need saints who know what real love is.

Those who are restorers need to be able to demonstrate their sincere love towards the wanderer. This includes when it comes to rebuking saints or simply when they are in repentance, Matthew 18:15-17.

The restoration of a wanderer brings about the covering of a multitude of sins. Sins are cleansed upon the condition that the sinning brother repents and returns to the obedient life, Psalm 32:1-2 / Romans 4:6-8 / 1 John 1:7-9 / Romans 11:14 / 1 Peter 4:8. The work of restoring or correcting saints may be unpleasant at times, but it has the potential for great joy, Luke 15:7 / 3 John 4.