

James

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Summary: *James 1 opens with a greeting to 'the twelve tribes in the Dispersion' and immediately addresses the paradox of joy in trials: testing produces endurance, and endurance leads to maturity. The chapter then introduces several key themes that the letter will develop: asking God for wisdom without doubting, the reversal of rich and poor, the nature of temptation (which comes from one's own desires, not from God), God as the giver of every good gift, and the call to be 'doers of the word and not hearers only.' The chapter closes with a definition of true religion: caring for orphans and widows and keeping oneself unstained by the world.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *James's letter is the most practically oriented writing in the New Testament. The opening greeting to 'the twelve tribes in the Dispersion' is the broadest address in the NT epistles and may be literal (Jewish Christians abroad) or metaphorical (the church as renewed Israel). The theology of temptation in verses 13-15 is psychologically sophisticated, tracing sin from desire through conception to death using a birth metaphor. The 'perfect law of liberty' (v. 25) is a striking paradox that unites freedom and law — anticipating the letter's argument that genuine faith expresses itself in obedient action.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between James and Paul on faith and works has been debated since the Reformation. James's emphasis on works as evidence of faith is not a contradiction of Paul's emphasis on justification by faith but addresses a different problem: people who claim faith without any corresponding action. The phrase 'twelve tribes in the Dispersion' (v. 1) may indicate the letter was written to Jewish Christians, but the Greek is too polished for a simple pastoral letter to a single community.*

Connections: *The testing-produces-endurance theme connects to Romans 5:3-5. The wisdom request echoes Proverbs 2:1-6 and the wisdom tradition broadly. The reversal of rich and poor echoes the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-26). The mirror metaphor (v. 23) anticipates Paul's mirror image in 1 Corinthians 13:12. The 'pure and undefiled religion' definition (v. 27) echoes Isaiah 1:17 and Micah 6:8.*

¶James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: greetings. ¶Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you fall into various trials, ¶Being aware this, that the trying of your faith works patience. ¶And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. ¶If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to 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. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸Such a person is divided in loyalty and unreliable in everything they do. ⁹Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰However, the rich, in that he is made low — because as the flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹For the sun rises with its scorching heat and dries up the grass; its flower falls and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich person fade away in the midst of his pursuits. ¹²Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters. ¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation. ¹⁹Know this, my beloved brothers and sisters: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, ²⁰Because the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. ²¹Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²²Deceiving your own selves, but be you doers of the word, and not hearers only. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴For he looks at himself and goes away and immediately forgets what he was like. ²⁵But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, being not a forgetful hearer but a doer who acts — this person will be blessed in his doing. ²⁶If anyone considers himself religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Greek *Iakobos* is the same name as the Hebrew *Ya'akov* (Jacob). The author identifies himself simply as *doulos* ('servant, slave') — not as an apostle or brother of the Lord, though tradition identifies him as the brother of Jesus who led the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13). The address to the 'twelve tribes in the Dispersion' (diaspora) uses Israel's covenant identity language for the Christian community scattered across the Roman world.
2. The Greek *pasan charan* ('all joy, complete joy') is emphatic — not partial or reluctant joy but total joy. The word *peirasmois* can mean 'trials' (external hardships) or 'temptations' (internal enticements); here the context of 'falling into' (*peripesete*) suggests external trials. The adjective *poikilois* ('various, diverse, many-colored') indicates the trials come in multiple forms. James wastes no time on pleasantries — the very first command after the greeting is to rejoice in suffering.
3. The Greek *dokimion* ('testing, proving, means of testing') is related to the assaying of metals — faith is refined through trials like gold through fire (cf. 1 Peter 1:7). The verb *katergazetai* ('produces, works out, accomplishes') indicates an active process, not passive experience. The result is *hypomone* ('endurance, steadfastness, patient perseverance') — a quality that can only be forged through difficulty.
4. The Greek *teleion* ('perfect, complete, mature') and *holokleroi* ('complete, whole, entire') are near-synonyms reinforcing the idea of full spiritual development. James's use of *teleios* is not moral perfection but maturity — the fully developed character that results from endurance under trial. The phrase 'lacking in nothing' (*en meedeni leipomenoi*) is the positive flip side of the trials — what begins as loss ends as fullness.
5. The link to verse 4 is the word 'lacks' (*leipetai*) — if you lack nothing through endurance, but find you lack wisdom, simply ask. The Greek *haplos* ('generously, simply, without reserve') describes God's giving nature. The phrase *me oneidizontos* ('not reproaching, not finding fault') assures the asker that God does not shame those who come in need. This is one of the NT's most direct promises regarding prayer.
6. The Greek *diakrinomenos* ('doubting, wavering, being divided') literally means 'judging between two options' — the doubter is pulled in two directions. The sea-wave image (*klydoni thalasses*) captures the instability of a mind that trusts God one moment and fears the next. The verbs *anemizomeno* ('driven by wind') and *rhipizomeno* ('tossed, blown about') pile up to emphasize the chaotic motion of doubt.
7. The demonstrative 'that person' (*ho anthropos ekeinos*) creates distance — the doubter is held at arm's length as a cautionary example. The Greek *leempsetai* ('will receive') is emphatic in its negation: there is no expectation of receiving when the asking is halfhearted.
8. The Greek *dipsychos* ('double-souled, double-minded') may be a coinage of James — it does not appear in earlier Greek literature. It describes someone with two competing allegiances or belief systems. The instability (*akatastatos*, 'unsettled, disordered') is not limited to prayer but pervades 'all his ways' — the doubting mind produces an unstable life.
9. The Greek *tapeinos* ('lowly, humble, of low social standing') describes economic and social position, not merely a spiritual attitude. The verb *kauchasthoo* ('let him boast, let him glory') is surprising — the poor person is told to boast because in God's kingdom, their status is reversed. This is the first of James's strong statements about wealth and poverty.

10. The rich person is told to boast in being brought low (tapeinosei, 'humiliation') — a bitter irony. The flower-grass image comes from Isaiah 40:6-8, which James will develop in the next verse. Whether the 'rich brother' is a believer who should see wealth correctly or an unbeliever who will be judged is debated; the text is deliberately ambiguous.
10. [TCR Cross-Reference] This verse quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 — see the TCR rendering of that passage for the Hebrew source text and translation decisions.
11. James expands Isaiah 40:6-7, adding vivid agricultural detail: the kausoni ('scorching wind' or 'burning heat') is the sirocco, the hot desert wind that withers vegetation in hours. The rich person will 'fade' (marantheesetai, 'wither, decay') in the very midst of their business activities (poreiais, 'journeys, pursuits, enterprises'). The point is not that wealth is inherently evil but that it provides no lasting security.
11. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Isaiah 40:6-8. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
12. The beatitude form (makarios, 'blessed, happy, fortunate') echoes Jesus's beatitudes. The 'crown of life' (stephanon tees zoos) is the victor's wreath — the stephanos of the athletic games, not the royal diadema. The promise is to those who 'love him' (agaposin auton), connecting endurance under trial to love for God. The SBLGNT does not specify 'the Lord' as the subject of the promise; the context implies God.
13. The word peirazomenos shifts from 'trial' (v. 12) to 'temptation' — the same Greek root covers both external hardship and internal enticement to sin. James categorically rejects the idea that God is the source of temptation. The Greek apeirastos ('untestable, unable to be tempted') means God has no vulnerability to evil and therefore cannot be its source.
14. The Greek exelkomenos ('being dragged out, being lured') and delezomenos ('being baited, being enticed') use fishing or hunting imagery — desire is the bait that hooks the person. The emphasis on 'his own' (idias) desire places responsibility squarely on the individual, not on external circumstances or divine testing.
15. James traces a genealogy of death using a birth metaphor: desire conceives (syllabousa), gives birth (tiktei) to sin, and sin when fully mature (apotelesthetai, 'brought to completion') produces (apokuei, 'gives birth to') death. The metaphor is darkly ironic — what appears to be life-giving (conception, birth) leads inexorably to death. This is one of the most psychologically penetrating analyses of sin in the NT.
16. The imperative me planasthe ('do not be led astray, do not be deceived') is a common NT warning formula (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9, 15:33, Galatians 6:7). It serves as a hinge between the analysis of temptation (vv. 13-15) and the declaration of God's goodness (vv. 17-18).
17. The Greek has a rhythmic, almost poetic quality: pasa dosis agathees kai pan doorema teleion. The title 'Father of lights' (patros toon phoatoon) identifies God as creator of the heavenly luminaries (Genesis 1:14-18). Unlike the sun, moon, and stars that cast shifting shadows, God has no parallagee ('variation, change') or tropes aposkiasma ('shadow cast by turning'). The astronomical metaphor declares God's absolute constancy — he does not shift like celestial bodies.
17. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Genesis 1:14-18. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
18. The verb apekueesen ('brought forth, gave birth to') is the same used in verse 15 for sin producing death — but here God 'gives birth' to new life. The 'word of truth' (logo aletheias) is the gospel. The 'firstfruits' (aparcheen) image comes from the OT offering of the first portion of the harvest (Leviticus 23:10), signifying that believers are the first installment of a larger redemption that will encompass all creation.
18. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Leviticus 23:10 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
19. The triple command — quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger — has the form of a wisdom proverb (cf. Proverbs 10:19, 14:29, 17:27, Ecclesiastes 5:1-2). The Greek iste may be indicative ('you know this') or imperative ('know this!'); either way it introduces practical wisdom. This verse anticipates the extended discussion of the tongue in chapter 3.
19. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Proverbs 10:19. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
19. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Ecclesiastes 5:1-2. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
20. The statement is categorical: human anger (orgee andros) is incapable of producing (ouk ergazetai) God's righteousness (dikaiosyneen theou). The 'righteousness of God' here likely means the righteous conduct that God requires, not God's own attribute of righteousness. James does not deny that anger exists or even that it can be justified, but insists it cannot generate the godly life.
21. The Greek rhyparian ('filthiness, moral uncleanness') and perisseian kakias ('abundance of wickedness, overflow of evil') describe the moral debris that must be cleared away before the word can take root. The 'implanted word' (emphyton logon) is a horticultural metaphor — the word is like a seed planted in the soil of the heart. The verb dexasthe ('receive, welcome') is an active choice, not passive absorption.
22. This is the programmatic statement of the entire letter. The Greek poietai logou ('doers of the word') is the antithesis of akroatai ('hearers, listeners') — a distinction drawn from the synagogue practice of hearing Scripture read aloud. The verb paralogizomenoi ('deceiving, deluding by false reasoning') suggests that hearing without doing creates a dangerous illusion of spiritual health.
23. The Greek esoptro ('mirror') in the ancient world was polished bronze or silver — the reflection was real but imperfect. The phrase 'the face of his birth' (to prosopon tees geneseoos autou) means his natural, God-given face. The mirror reveals the person's true condition, but without action the

revelation is useless.

24. The sequence is pointed: he 'looked at himself' (katenoesen heauton), 'went away' (apeelythen), and 'immediately forgot' (eutheos epelatheto). The problem is not the looking but the failure to act on what was seen. The speed of forgetting — 'immediately' — satirizes the superficiality of hearing without doing.
25. The Greek parakupsas ('having stooped to look, having peered intently') describes a deliberate, focused examination — far more attentive than the casual glance of the mirror-gazer. The 'perfect law of freedom' (nomon teleion ton tees eleutherias) is a remarkable phrase that unites what many thought contradictory: law and liberty. For James, God's instruction (nomos) leads to freedom, not bondage. The promise of blessing is conditional on doing, not merely on looking.
26. The Greek threeskos ('religious, pious, devout') and threeskeia ('religion, worship, religious practice') refer to outward religious observance. The horse-bridling metaphor (chalinagagoon, 'putting a bridle on') anticipates the tongue imagery of chapter 3. James's point is devastating: uncontrolled speech invalidates all religious practice.
27. James defines true religion with two components: active mercy (visiting orphans and widows) and personal holiness (remaining unstained by the world). The Greek episkeptesthai ('to visit, to look after, to care for') means more than a social call — it implies providing practical help. Orphans and widows were the most vulnerable members of ancient society, and their care was a covenant obligation (Deuteronomy 14:29, 24:17-21, Isaiah 1:17). The word aspilon ('unstained, spotless') is a purity term — the believer is to remain uncontaminated by the world's values.
27. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Deuteronomy 14:29. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
27. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Isaiah 1:17. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.

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Summary: *James 2 develops two interconnected arguments. The first (vv. 1-13) condemns partiality in the assembly: when believers honor the rich and dishonor the poor, they violate the 'royal law' of neighbor-love and stand condemned by the law of liberty. The second (vv. 14-26) is the letter's theological climax — the argument that faith without works is dead. James uses Abraham's offering of Isaac and Rahab's sheltering of the spies to demonstrate that genuine faith always produces corresponding action. The chapter's final verdict is stark: 'As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains the most direct engagement with Pauline theology in the New Testament. James and Paul both cite Genesis 15:6 ('Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness') but draw different conclusions — Paul to demonstrate justification apart from law-works, James to demonstrate that the faith credited to Abraham was a living, acting faith. The two are addressing different errors: Paul confronts legalism, James confronts antinomianism. The pairing of Abraham and Rahab is striking — the patriarch of the covenant and a Gentile prostitute stand together as models of living faith.*

Translation Friction: *The apparent tension between James 2:24 ('a person is justified by works and not by faith alone') and Romans 3:28 ('a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law') has generated centuries of debate. We render both texts straightforwardly from the Greek without harmonizing. The word 'justify' (dikaioō) may carry different nuances in each context: Paul uses it for God's initial declaration of righteousness, while James uses it for the visible vindication of faith before others. The phrase 'faith alone' (pistis monon, v. 24) is the only place in the New Testament where these words appear together — and James denies it.*

Connections: *The partiality prohibition echoes Leviticus 19:15 and Deuteronomy 1:17. The 'royal law' (v. 8) quotes Leviticus 19:18, the same text Jesus identified as the second greatest commandment (Matthew 22:39). Genesis 15:6 (v. 23) is cited also in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6. The Abraham-and-Isaac narrative (v. 21) draws on Genesis 22. Rahab's story (v. 25) comes from Joshua 2. The faith-and-works argument anticipates the pastoral concern of 1 John 3:17-18.*

¹My brothers and sisters, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. ²For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³Indeed,

you have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say to him, Sit you here in a good location. And say to the poor, Stand you there, or sit here under my footstool: 4Are you not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of wickedness thoughts? 5Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters: has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him? 6But you have dishonored the poor. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and are they not the ones who drag you into court? 7Are they not the ones who blaspheme the noble name by which you were called? 8If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. 9But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10For whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles at one point has become guilty of all of it. 11For the one who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. 14What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacking daily food, 16One of you say to them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled. Even so you give them not those things which are needful to the body. What does it profit? 17So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself. 18But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19You believe that God is one. You do well — even the demons believe that, and shudder. 20Do you want to be shown, you empty person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22You see that faith was working together with his works, and faith was completed by works. 23Indeed, the scripture came to fulfillment which says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness — then he was called the Friend of God. 24You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25And in the same way, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another route? 26For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Greek *prosōpolēmpsiais* ('acts of partiality, favoritism') is a compound word literally meaning 'face-receiving' — judging by outward appearance. The genitive *tēs doxēs* ('of glory') is in apposition to Jesus Christ: he is 'the Lord of glory,' an exalted title that makes human status distinctions absurd. The plural 'acts of partiality' suggests a pattern of behavior, not an isolated incident.
2. The word *synagōgēn* ('assembly, synagogue') is used here for a Christian gathering — suggesting either a very early date for the letter or a Jewish-Christian audience that still used synagogue terminology. The compound *chrysodaktylios* ('gold-ringed') appears only here in the New Testament and describes someone conspicuously displaying wealth. The contrast between *lampra* ('bright, splendid') and *rhypara* ('dirty, shabby') clothing is vivid and immediate.
3. The directive seating — 'sit here in a good place' versus 'stand over there or sit at my feet' — reflects actual social stratification in ancient assemblies. The Greek *hypo to hypopodion mou* ('under my footstool') is a position of extreme social inferiority. James paints the scene with sharp specificity to expose the absurdity.
4. The verb *diekrithēte* ('made distinctions, were divided') carries a double meaning: they have both discriminated between people and become internally divided. The phrase *kritai dialogismōn ponērōn* ('judges of evil reasonings') means they have become judges whose criteria are corrupt — wealth rather than character.
5. The imperative *akousate* ('listen!') signals a major theological point. God's election reverses worldly valuations: those poor 'in the world' (*tō kosmō*, dative of reference) are rich 'in faith.' The phrase 'heirs of the kingdom' echoes Jesus's beatitude in Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20. The kingdom is promised specifically to 'those who love him' — a covenantal condition.
6. The verb *ētimasate* ('dishonored, treated with contempt') is the opposite of the honor God bestows. The irony is biting: the rich whom believers fawn over are the very ones who *katadynasteuousin* ('exercise power against, oppress') them and physically *helkousin* ('drag') them to legal proceedings. James exposes the absurdity of honoring one's own oppressors.
7. The 'noble name' (*to kalon onoma*) is the name of Christ, invoked over believers at baptism. The phrase to *epiklēthen eph' hymas* ('that was called upon you') echoes the Old Testament formula for God's name being placed upon his people (cf. 2 Chronicles 7:14, Amos 9:12 LXX). To dishonor the poor while honoring those who blaspheme Christ's name is a profound contradiction.
7. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on 2 Chronicles 7:14. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.

7. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Amos 9:12. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
8. The 'royal law' (nomon basilikon) may be called royal because it comes from the King (God), governs the kingdom, or is the supreme law that rules over all others. The quotation is from Leviticus 19:18, which Jesus identified as the second greatest commandment (Mark 12:31). The adverb mentoi ('really, indeed') adds a conditional edge — 'if you truly do this.'
8. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Leviticus 19:18 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
9. The verb prosōpolēmpteite ('show partiality') is the verbal form of the noun in verse 1. Showing favoritism is not a minor social error — it is hamartian ('sin') and makes one a parabatēs ('transgressor, lawbreaker'). The law that convicts is not merely the Mosaic code but the 'royal law' of love.
10. The logic is not that every sin is equally severe but that the law is a unified whole — violating any part ruptures the entire relationship of obedience. The verb ptaisē ('stumbles') is gentler than 'transgresses,' suggesting that even a misstep brings full liability. This principle was recognized in rabbinic teaching as well.
11. James grounds the unity of the law in the unity of the lawgiver — 'the one who said' (ho eipōn) both commandments is the same God. The examples come from the Decalogue (Exodus 20:13-14). Selective obedience is no obedience at all.
11. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Exodus 20:13-14. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
12. The 'law of liberty' (nomou eleutherias) reprises 1:25 — the paradoxical idea that true freedom comes through obedience to God's law. Believers should live in awareness that their future judgment will be measured by this standard. Both speech (laleite) and action (poieite) are included — anticipating chapter 3's focus on the tongue.
13. The first clause warns: those who show no mercy (eleos) will face merciless judgment. The second clause is one of the great one-line summaries in the New Testament — katakauchātai eleos kriseōs, 'mercy boasts against / triumphs over judgment.' The verb katakauchaomai means to boast triumphantly over a defeated opponent. Mercy does not ignore judgment but overcomes it.
14. The pivotal section begins with a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer. Note carefully: James does not say 'if someone has faith' but 'if someone says he has faith' (legē tis echein) — the issue is claimed faith without evidence. The article hē pistis ('that faith,' 'the faith in question') is crucial: James asks not whether faith in general saves but whether this particular kind of faith — faith that produces no works — can save. The expected answer is no.
15. The illustration is deliberately simple and urgent — not a hypothetical but a scenario the audience would recognize. The phrase tēs ephēmerou trophēs ('of daily food') echoes the Lord's Prayer's petition for daily bread (Matthew 6:11). The need is not exotic but elemental: clothing and food.
16. The dismissal 'go in peace' (hypagete en eirēnē) uses pious language — the standard Hebrew farewell blessing — while withholding practical help. The passive imperatives 'be warmed and filled' (thermainesthē kai chortazesthē) are either middle ('warm and feed yourselves') or divine passives ('may God warm and fill you'). Either way, the speaker passes responsibility to someone else. James exposes religious language used as a substitute for action.
17. The first occurrence of the chapter's verdict: faith without works is nekra ('dead'). The phrase kath' heautēn ('by itself, on its own') clarifies that such faith is not merely incomplete but lifeless — it has no animating principle. This is not an attack on faith itself but on a counterfeit version of faith that exists only as verbal claim.
18. This is one of the most debated verses in James due to the difficulty of identifying the objector's position. The most natural reading is that James is addressing a hypothetical person who tries to separate faith and works as independent spiritual gifts. James's response is a challenge: demonstrate faith without works — it cannot be done. Faith is invisible apart from its expression in action. The verb deixon ('show') demands visible, demonstrable evidence.
19. James quotes the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), the most fundamental confession of Jewish faith: 'God is one' (heis estin ho theos). The devastating comparison follows: demons possess orthodox theology — they believe the correct proposition — yet their belief produces not obedience but phrissoousin ('shudder, tremble with horror'). Mere intellectual assent to truth, even the highest truth, is not saving faith.
19. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Deuteronomy 6:4. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
20. The address ō anthrōpe kene ('O empty person') is sharp — kenos means hollow, lacking substance, like the faith being described. Some manuscripts read nekra ('dead') instead of argē ('useless, idle, barren'), but argē is the better-attested reading in critical editions and creates a wordplay: a-rgē means 'without work,' matching the 'without works' (chōris tōn ergōn) that James condemns.
21. James appeals to the Aqedah, the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22). The verb edikaiōthē ('was justified, was shown righteous') in James's usage means 'was demonstrated to be righteous' — Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac was the visible proof that his faith (confessed in Genesis 15:6) was genuine. Paul cites Genesis 15:6 for the moment of faith; James cites Genesis 22 for the demonstration of that same faith in action.
21. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Genesis 22. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.

21. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Genesis 15:6. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
22. The verb *synēgei* ('was working together with, cooperated with') presents faith and works as collaborative, not competitive. The verb *eteleiōthē* ('was completed, was brought to its goal, was perfected') means that Abraham's faith reached its intended maturity through action. Faith without works is not merely deficient — it is unfinished, like a seed that never germinates.
23. The quotation is Genesis 15:6 (LXX), the same text Paul cites in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6. James's argument is that Genesis 22 (the offering of Isaac) 'fulfilled' (*eplērōthē*) what Genesis 15 declared — Abraham's faith was genuine and was proven so by his obedience decades later. The title 'friend of God' (*philos theou*) is not found in Genesis but appears in Isaiah 41:8, 2 Chronicles 20:7, and Jewish tradition. It represents the highest intimacy between a human and God.
23. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Genesis 15:6 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
23. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Genesis 22 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
23. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Isaiah 41:8 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
23. [TCR Cross-Reference] References 2 Chronicles 20:7 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
24. This is the only verse in the New Testament that contains the phrase 'faith alone' (*pisteōs monon*) — and it denies its sufficiency. The statement must be read in context: James is not contradicting Paul but addressing a different problem. Paul argues against those who add law-observance as a requirement for initial acceptance by God; James argues against those who claim saving faith while producing no evidence of transformed life. The word *dikaïoutai* here means 'is shown to be righteous' in the visible, evidentiary sense.
25. The pairing of Abraham and Rahab is extraordinary: the father of the nation and a Canaanite prostitute. If Abraham represents the highest pedigree of faith, Rahab represents the most unlikely. Her 'work' was sheltering the Israelite spies (Joshua 2) and sending them away safely — an act of faith expressed in concrete, risky action. She appears in Matthew's genealogy (1:5) and Hebrews 11:31. The word *pornē* ('prostitute') is not softened; James retains it to emphasize that works-producing faith is available to anyone.
25. [TCR Cross-Reference] This verse quotes Joshua 2 — see the TCR rendering of that passage for the Hebrew source text and translation decisions.
26. The chapter's closing analogy is devastating in its clarity. The Greek *pneumatōs* ('spirit, breath') refers to the animating life-force — without it, a body is a corpse. Works are to faith what breath is to the body: not an addition but the evidence of life. A faith that produces no works is not weak faith or immature faith — it is dead faith, a spiritual corpse. This is the third and final declaration of faith's death in the chapter (cf. vv. 17, 20), forming the definitive verdict.

3

Summary: James 3 addresses two related themes: the destructive power of the tongue (vv. 1-12) and the nature of true versus false wisdom (vv. 13-18). The tongue section uses a cascade of vivid metaphors — a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, a small fire, a restless evil, a spring, a fig tree — to demonstrate that the tongue, though small, wields disproportionate power for both blessing and destruction. James declares that no human being can tame the tongue and that using it to both praise God and curse people made in God's image is a fundamental contradiction. The wisdom section contrasts earthly wisdom (characterized by jealousy and selfish ambition) with wisdom from above (characterized by purity, peaceableness, gentleness, and mercy).

*What Makes This Remarkable: The density of metaphor in verses 3-8 is unmatched in the New Testament epistles. James piles image upon image — bit, rudder, fire, world of unrighteousness, animal kingdom, poison, spring, fig tree, vine — creating an overwhelming sense of the tongue's danger. The theological grounding in verse 9 is striking: cursing people is wrong not merely because it is unkind but because humans are made 'in the likeness of God' (*kath' homoiōsin theou*) — an appeal to Genesis 1:26-27. The wisdom passage (vv. 13-18) anticipates modern psychology's recognition that speech reveals character.*

Translation Friction: James's statement that 'no human being can tame the tongue' (v. 8) raises the question of whether he is describing an impossibility or an extreme difficulty. The context suggests that while human effort alone cannot master the tongue, the wisdom 'from above' (v. 17) provides the transformation needed. The relationship between this chapter's practical ethics and Paul's theology of Spirit-empowered transformation (Galatians 5:22-23) is complementary rather than contradictory.

Connections: The tongue's fire connects to Proverbs 16:27 and 26:20-21. The image of God in verse 9 echoes Genesis 1:26-27 and 9:6. The wisdom from above parallels the wisdom tradition of Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24. The 'fruit of righteousness sown in peace' (v. 18) echoes Isaiah 32:17 and Hosea 10:12. The list of wisdom's qualities anticipates the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature person, able to bridle the whole body as well. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole body as well. ⁴Look at ships too: though they are so large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and itself set on fire by hell. ⁷For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, is tamed and has been tamed by humankind, ⁸However, the tongue can no man tame. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour out from the same opening both fresh water and bitter? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt spring yield fresh water. ¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵This is not the wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The warning targets the role of didaskaloi ('teachers'), not 'masters' as the KJV has it. In the early church, teachers held significant authority (cf. Acts 13:1, 1 Corinthians 12:28). James includes himself in the warning — 'we will receive' (lēmposmetha) — acknowledging that greater responsibility brings greater accountability. The word krima here means 'judgment' or 'verdict,' not necessarily 'condemnation.'
2. The universal admission — 'we all stumble' (ptaiomen hapantes) — includes James himself. The logic is that speech is the hardest arena of self-control; mastering it means mastering everything. The metaphor chalinagōgēsai ('to bridle, to lead with a bridle') introduces the horse imagery that verse 3 will develop. The word teleios ('perfect, mature, complete') reprises its use in 1:4.
3. The first analogy: a small bit (chalinous) in a horse's mouth controls the entire animal. The parallel to the tongue is implicit — a small member directing the whole person. The verb metagomen ('we guide, we direct') emphasizes deliberate control over something much larger than the instrument.
4. The second analogy scales up: from a horse to a ship. The adjective tēlikauta ('so great, so large') emphasizes the disproportion between vessel and rudder (elachistou pēdaliou, 'smallest rudder'). Even fierce winds (anemōn sklērōn) cannot override the rudder's direction. The pilot's hormē ('impulse, will, intention') determines the ship's course — just as the intention behind speech determines its effect.
5. James now makes the application explicit: the tongue (glōssa) is mikron melos ('a small member') with disproportionate effect. The verb auchei ('boasts') can be positive or negative — the tongue claims great power, and the claim is true. The fire metaphor shifts to pure danger: hēlikon pyr hēlikēn hylēn anaptēi — a tiny spark ignites a vast forest (hylē can mean 'forest' or 'wood/matter').
6. This is the most concentrated verse in the chapter. The tongue is identified flatly as pyr ('fire') and as ho kosmos tēs adikias ('the world of unrighteousness') — it is a microcosm of all that is wrong. The phrase ton trochon tēs geneseōs ('the wheel/course of birth/existence') is notoriously difficult; it likely means the entire cycle of human life from birth to death. The tongue is set on fire hypo tēs geennēs ('by Gehenna/hell') — its destructive power has a demonic origin. The progression moves from human body to the whole of life to hell itself.

7. The four categories — thēriōn ('beasts'), peteinōn ('birds'), herpetōn ('reptiles'), and enaliōn ('sea creatures') — echo the four domains of Genesis 1:26, where God gives humanity dominion over all living things. The double verb damazetai kai dedamastai ('is being tamed and has been tamed') covers both present and past — humanity has a comprehensive track record of subduing the animal kingdom.
7. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Genesis 1:26. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
8. The contrast is stark: humanity tames every creature but cannot tame its own tongue. The adjective akatastaton ('restless, unstable, uncontrollable') appeared in 1:8 to describe the double-minded person. The tongue is mestos iou thanatēphorou ('full of death-bearing poison') — the image shifts from fire to venom, suggesting the tongue kills like a serpent. The echoes of Genesis 3 (the serpent's lethal speech) may be intentional.
8. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Genesis 3 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
9. The theological core of the passage: cursing a human being is an assault on the divine image they bear. The phrase kath' homoiōsin theou ('according to the likeness of God') quotes Genesis 1:26 (LXX). The repetition of en autē ('with it... with it') hammers the contradiction: the same tongue performs worship and destruction. The verb katarōmetha ('we curse') is strong — it means to invoke harm or judgment on someone.
9. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Genesis 1:26. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
10. The verdict is simple and direct: ou chrē ('it is not fitting, it must not be'). Blessing (eulogia) and cursing (katara) from the same mouth is a moral impossibility that believers routinely commit. The understated 'ought not to be so' carries the weight of divine expectation, not mere social etiquette.
11. The rhetorical question expects the answer 'no.' A spring (pēgē) produces water according to its nature — it cannot produce both sweet (glyky) and bitter (pikron) water from the same source (opēs, 'opening'). The implication is that a person whose tongue produces both blessing and cursing has a divided nature that needs transformation at the source.
12. Three rapid-fire examples from nature — fig tree, grapevine, salt spring — all making the same point: nature is consistent; each thing produces according to its kind. The application to speech is unstated but clear: if your tongue consistently produces cursing, the problem is not the tongue but the heart that drives it. Jesus made the same argument with similar botanical imagery (Matthew 7:16-20, 12:33-37).
13. The transition to the wisdom section echoes the faith-works argument of chapter 2: true wisdom, like true faith, is demonstrated by visible evidence. The word anastrophēs ('conduct, manner of life') is far broader than 'conversation' (KJV). The phrase en praytēti sophias ('in the gentleness/meekness of wisdom') defines what wise conduct looks like — not assertive self-promotion but humble, gentle action.
14. The opposite of gentle wisdom is zēlon pikron ('bitter jealousy') and eritheian ('selfish ambition, factious rivalry'). The word eritheia originally referred to a hired laborer and came to mean self-seeking partisanship. To claim wisdom while harboring these is to pseudesthe kata tēs alētheias ('lie against the truth') — not merely to be wrong but to actively oppose truth itself.
15. False wisdom receives a devastating three-word diagnosis: epigeios ('earthly, belonging to this world'), psychikē ('natural, unspiritual, of the soul rather than the Spirit'), and daimoniōdēs ('demonic, characteristic of demons'). The progression descends from merely human to actively evil. The term psychikē is the same word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 2:14 for the 'natural person' who cannot receive the things of the Spirit.
16. Jealousy and selfish ambition produce akatastasia ('disorder, instability, chaos') — the same word family as the 'restless' (akatastaton) tongue in verse 8 and the 'unstable' (akatastatos) double-minded person in 1:8. James uses this word group as a signature marker of uncontrolled human nature. The result is pan phaulon pragma ('every worthless/vile deed').
17. The seven qualities of heavenly wisdom form one of the most beautiful ethical lists in the New Testament. The order is significant: purity (hagnē) comes first because it is foundational. Then follow: eirēnikē ('peaceable'), epieikēs ('gentle, fair, yielding'), eupeithēs ('open to reason, willing to yield, compliant'), mestē eleous kai karpōn agathōn ('full of mercy and good fruits'), adiakritos ('impartial, without favoritism' — connecting back to chapter 2), and anypokritos ('sincere, without pretense, unhypocritical'). This is James's portrait of the transformed life.
18. The chapter closes with an agricultural metaphor: the 'fruit of righteousness' (karpos dikaiosynēs) is both the seed and the harvest — peacemakers sow peace and reap righteousness. The echo of Jesus's beatitude is unmistakable: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Matthew 5:9). The phrase also echoes Isaiah 32:17: 'The fruit of righteousness will be peace.' Peace is both the method and the result.
18. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Isaiah 32:17: — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.

4

Summary: *James 4 diagnoses the root cause of conflict among believers: disordered desires that produce wars, quarrels, and unanswered prayer. The solution is radical humility before God. The chapter builds to its central command — 'Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you' (v. 8) — and frames the choice between God and the world as one of spiritual adultery. James then warns against speaking evil of one another (placing oneself as judge over the law) and against presumptuous planning that ignores the sovereignty of God. Life is a vapor, and all human plans should be held under the phrase 'If the Lord wills.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The metaphor of spiritual adultery (v. 4) draws on the prophetic tradition of Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, where Israel's unfaithfulness to God is portrayed as marital infidelity. The ten imperatives in verses 7-10 (submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, purify, lament, mourn, weep, let laughter be turned, humble yourselves) form the most concentrated call to repentance in the New Testament epistles. The quotation in verse 5 ('the spirit that he made to dwell in us yearns jealously') has no exact Old Testament source, making it one of the most debated citations in James.*

Translation Friction: *The quotation in verse 5 does not match any known Old Testament text exactly. It may be a free paraphrase of passages like Exodus 20:5 or a reference to a text now lost. We render the Greek as given without attempting to identify a specific source. The address 'adulteresses' (moichalides, v. 4) in some manuscripts reads 'adulterers and adulteresses' — the SBLGNT follows the shorter reading, understanding the feminine as a metaphorical address to the unfaithful community.*

Connections: *The 'wars and fights' language (v. 1) connects to the disorder of 3:16. The friendship-with-the-world theme echoes 1 John 2:15-17. 'Draw near to God' recalls Psalm 73:28 and Hebrews 10:22. 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble' (v. 6) quotes Proverbs 3:34 (LXX). The 'vapor' metaphor for life (v. 14) echoes Ecclesiastes and Psalm 39:5-6. The presumptuous planning warning parallels Proverbs 27:1 and Luke 12:16-21.*

¹What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this — your passions that are at war within your members? ²You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend it on your passions. ⁴**Y**ou adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us'? ⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' ⁷So place yourselves under God's authority. Stand firm against the devil, and he will run from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰**H**umble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. ¹¹Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are **NOT** a doer of the law but a judge. ¹²There is only one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? ¹³Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit' — ¹⁴Whereas you know not what will be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is indeed a vapour, that appeareth for a little occasion, and then vanisheth away. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' ¹⁶As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Greek polemoi ('wars') and machai ('battles, fights') may refer to literal conflicts within the community or to fierce interpersonal disputes. The cause is identified as hēdonōn ('pleasures, desires') — the English word 'hedonism' comes from this root. These desires are strateuomenōn ('warring, campaigning like soldiers') inside the person — an internal civil war that spills over into communal conflict.

2. The escalation is shocking: desire leads to murder (phoneuete). Some commentators take this metaphorically (cf. Matthew 5:21-22, 1 John 3:15), but James may intend the full force of the word. The cycle is: desire frustration violence more frustration. The solution shifts abruptly: 'you do not have because you do not ask' — the failure is not merely moral but prayerful. They grasp instead of asking.
3. Even when they do pray, the problem is motive: kakōs aiteisthe ('you ask badly, wrongly'). Prayer driven by hēdonais ('pleasures') — the same word as verse 1 — is prayer that treats God as a supplier for self-indulgence. The verb dapanēsēte ('spend, squander') suggests wasteful consumption, the same verb used for the prodigal son's squandering (Luke 15:14).
4. The address moichalides ('adulteresses') uses the prophetic metaphor of Israel as God's unfaithful spouse (Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16). The SBLGNT reads only the feminine form, treating the community corporately as God's betrothed who has gone after other lovers. The stark binary — friendship with the world (philia tou kosmou) equals hostility toward God (echthra tou theou) — allows no middle ground. The verb kathistatai ('is established as, constitutes himself') indicates a deliberate stance, not an accidental drift.
4. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Hosea 1-3. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
4. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Jeremiah 3. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
4. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Ezekiel 16. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
5. This is one of the most debated verses in James. No Old Testament text matches the quotation exactly. The grammar is ambiguous: the subject could be 'the spirit' (our human spirit yearns enviously) or God (who yearns jealously for the spirit he placed in us). The rendering follows the interpretation that God is the subject — he jealously desires the complete loyalty of the spirit he gave to humanity. This reading fits the context of spiritual adultery and connects to the jealous God of Exodus 20:5 and 34:14.
5. [TCR Cross-Reference] This verse quotes Exodus 20:5 — see the TCR rendering of that passage for the Hebrew source text and translation decisions.
6. The quotation is from Proverbs 3:34 (LXX). The verb antitassetai ('opposes, sets himself in battle array against') is a military term — God actively resists the proud. By contrast, he 'gives grace' (didōsin charin) to the humble. The opening phrase 'he gives more grace' (meizona didōsin charin) assures that God's grace is sufficient to overcome the jealous yearning described in verse 5. Grace exceeds the pull of worldly desire.
6. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Proverbs 3:34. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
7. The first two of ten rapid-fire imperatives. The structure is chiasmic: submit to God (positive), resist the devil (negative). The verb hypotagēte ('submit, place yourself under') is the same word used for military subordination. The promise that the devil will 'flee' (pheuxetai) from those who resist is a remarkable assurance — the enemy's power is real but breakable. The KJV rendering is retained here as it accurately captures the Greek.
8. The chapter's central verse contains the letter's most famous promise: eggisate tō theō, kai engiei hymin — 'draw near to God and he will draw near to you.' The promise is conditional but certain: the initiative is human, but God's response is guaranteed. The following commands use temple purification language: 'cleanse your hands' (katharisate cheiras) echoes the priestly handwashing of Exodus 30:19-21, while 'purify your hearts' (hagnisate kardias) goes deeper than ritual to moral transformation. The terms 'sinners' (hamartōloi) and 'double-minded' (dipsychoi) are not insults but pastoral diagnoses — the hands represent external conduct, the heart represents internal loyalty.
8. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Exodus 30:19-21 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
9. Three imperatives of grief: talaipōrēsate ('be miserable, feel your wretchedness'), penthēsate ('mourn'), klausate ('weep'). These are not calls to perpetual sadness but to genuine repentance — feeling the weight of the spiritual adultery just described. The reversal of laughter to mourning and joy to gloom (katēpheian, 'downcast eyes, dejection') echoes the prophetic call of Joel 2:12-13 and Jesus's 'woe to you who laugh now' (Luke 6:25).
9. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Joel 2:12-13. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
10. The final imperative and the climax of the ten commands: tapeinōthēte ('humble yourselves, make yourselves low'). The promise mirrors the Proverbs 3:34 quotation in verse 6 — God gives grace to the humble. The verb hypsōsei ('will lift up, will exalt') is the same word used for Christ's exaltation (Acts 2:33, Philippians 2:9). The pattern is consistently biblical: the way up is down.
10. [TCR Cross-Reference] This verse quotes Proverbs 3:34 — see the TCR rendering of that passage for the Hebrew source text and translation decisions.
11. The verb katalaleite ('speak against, slander, badmouth') connects to the tongue teaching of chapter 3. James's logic: the law commands love of neighbor (2:8); speaking against a brother violates that law; but instead of submitting to the law as a doer (poiētēs, cf. 1:22), the slanderer sets himself above it as its judge (kritēs). Only God is qualified for that role (v. 12).
12. The argument reaches its conclusion: God alone is nomothētēs ('lawgiver') and kritēs ('judge'), and he alone has the power to sōsai ('save') and apolesai ('destroy'). The rhetorical question su de tis ei ('but who are you?') is deliberately deflating — it reduces the self-appointed judge to insignificance before the one true Judge.
13. The phrase age nyn ('come now') is a sharp attention-getter, introducing a new audience: traveling merchants who plan their itineraries with confident self-sufficiency. The specificity of the plan — city, duration (a year), activity (trade), result (profit) — makes the presumption vivid. There is nothing wrong with planning; the problem is planning without acknowledging God's sovereignty over the outcome.

14. The metaphor *atmis* ('mist, vapor, steam') captures life's brevity and fragility with devastating economy. The verb *phainomenē* ('appearing') and *aphanizomenē* ('disappearing, vanishing') describe a vapor's entire existence — briefly visible, then gone. The echo of Ecclesiastes and Psalm 39:5 ('my days are a few handbreadths') is unmistakable. James does not sentimentalize this but states it as fact.
14. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Psalm 39:5. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
15. The corrective is not to stop planning but to hold all plans under divine sovereignty: *ean ho kyrios thelēō* ('if the Lord wills'). This phrase (Latin: *Deo volente*, abbreviated D.V.) became a standard Christian expression of dependence on God. Note the order: 'we will live' comes before 'and do this or that' — even continued existence is subject to God's will, not just the success of business ventures.
16. The word *alazoneia* ('arrogance, pretension, braggadocio') describes the false confidence of those who plan without God. It appears also in 1 John 2:16 ('the pride of life'). Such boasting (*kauchēsis*) is not merely foolish but *ponēra* ('evil, wicked') — it usurps God's place as sovereign over the future.
17. The chapter's closing sentence is a principle of universal application: sins of omission are real sins. The participle *eidoti* ('knowing') establishes that knowledge creates moral obligation. This is not a new category of sin but a summary of the entire letter's argument — faith that knows but does not act is dead (2:17), planning that knows God's sovereignty but ignores it is arrogant (4:13-16), and knowing the good but not doing it is *hamartia* ('sin'). James's ethics consistently demand action, not merely assent.

5

Summary: *James 5 opens with a thundering prophetic denunciation of the rich who have hoarded wealth, defrauded workers, and lived in self-indulgent luxury (vv. 1-6). The tone then shifts to pastoral encouragement: believers are called to patience until the Lord's coming, following the example of the prophets and Job (vv. 7-11). The chapter addresses oath-taking (v. 12), prayer in suffering, singing in cheerfulness, and the anointing of the sick by elders (vv. 13-15). It closes with the confession of sins, the power of Elijah-like prayer, and the restoration of wandering believers (vv. 16-20).*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The denunciation of the rich (vv. 1-6) is among the most ferocious social criticism in the New Testament, rivaling the prophetic oracles of Amos and Isaiah. The rust on hoarded gold and silver will 'testify against you' and 'eat your flesh like fire' — wealth itself becomes the instrument of judgment. The prayer-and-anointing passage (vv. 14-15) has shaped Christian practice for two millennia, from Catholic last rites to Protestant healing ministries. The closing verses (19-20) contain no formal farewell — the letter simply ends with the urgency of rescuing the wanderer, as if James cannot be bothered with epistolary conventions when souls are at stake.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between James's denunciation of the rich (vv. 1-6) and his audience is debated — are these rich people within the church or outsiders? The shift to 'brothers and sisters' in verse 7 suggests the rich of verses 1-6 may be outside the community, but the warning still functions for believers. The anointing with oil (v. 14) may be medicinal (olive oil was used therapeutically), sacramental, or both — the text does not separate the physical from the spiritual. The phrase 'the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick' (v. 15) must be read alongside the letter's emphasis on God's sovereignty (4:15).*

Connections: *The condemnation of the rich echoes Amos 2:6-7, 5:11-12, and Isaiah 5:8-9. 'The Lord of hosts' (v. 4) is a rare NT use of the title *Kyrios Sabaōth*, drawn from Isaiah 5:9 (LXX). The farmer's patience (v. 7) echoes Deuteronomy 11:14. Job's endurance (v. 11) connects to the book of Job and the 'compassion of the Lord' echoes Exodus 34:6. The Elijah prayer passage (vv. 17-18) draws on 1 Kings 17-18. The restoration of wanderers (vv. 19-20) echoes Ezekiel 34 and Jesus's parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7).*

1Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5You have lived on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. 7Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9Do not grumble against one

another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Behold, we consider blessed those who remained steadfast. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. ¹²But above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no, so that you may not fall under judgment. ¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴Is any sick in the midst of you? let him call for the elders of the church. And let them pray over him, anointing him with oil by the authority of the Lord: ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. ¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰Indeed, let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death, and will hide a crowd of sins.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening age nyn ('come now') echoes 4:13 but now addresses the rich directly. The verb *ololyzontes* ('howling, wailing') is an onomatopoeic word used in the prophets for the shrieking of those under divine judgment (Isaiah 13:6, 14:31 LXX). The *miserias* (*talaipōriais*) are not present but *eperchomenais* ('coming, approaching') — eschatological judgment is on the way.
1. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Isaiah 13:6. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
2. The perfect tenses *sesēpen* ('have rotted') and *gegonen* ('have become') present the decay as already accomplished — from God's perspective, the judgment is already underway. Hoarded wealth is not merely useless but actively decomposing. Garments were a primary form of stored wealth in the ancient world (cf. Acts 20:33), making moth damage a vivid image of wealth's impermanence.
3. Gold and silver do not literally rust, but James uses *katiōtai* ('has corroded') to make a theological point: hoarded wealth self-destructs. The corrosion (*ios*) serves double duty — it testifies against the hoarders at judgment (*martyrion*) and consumes their flesh like fire (*phageai tas sarkas*). The final phrase is devastating: *ethēsaurisate en eschatais hēmerais* — 'you have treasured up in the last days.' With judgment imminent, hoarding is not merely foolish but insane.
4. The personification is extraordinary: the withheld wages themselves *krazei* ('cry out') — echoing the blood of Abel crying from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Wage theft violates Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:14-15. The title *Kyrios Sabaōth* ('Lord of hosts/armies') appears only here and in Romans 9:29 in the New Testament (both quoting Isaiah). It emphasizes God's power to act on behalf of the oppressed. The defrauded workers have an advocate who commands armies.
4. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Genesis 4:10. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
4. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Leviticus 19:13. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
4. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Deuteronomy 24:14-15. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
5. The verbs *etryphēsate* ('lived in luxury') and *espatalēsate* ('lived self-indulgently, lived wantonly') describe extravagant consumption. The image shifts to cattle: *ethrepsate tas kardias hymōn* ('you fattened your hearts') pictures the rich as livestock being fattened for *hēmera sphagēs* ('a day of slaughter'). The day of slaughter is the day of judgment — and the rich have been preparing themselves for it through their own indulgence. The irony is brutal: they think they are feasting; they are actually being fattened for the kill.
6. The climax of the indictment: the rich have used the legal system (*katedikasate*, 'condemned in court') to destroy (*ephoneusate*, 'murdered') the righteous person (*ton dikaion*). The singular 'the righteous one' may refer to a specific person (possibly Jesus, or James the Just himself), or to a type — the vulnerable righteous person who cannot fight back. The final clause *ouk antitassetai hymin* ('he does not resist you') underscores the victim's helplessness and, by implication, the gravity of the crime. The same verb (*antitassetai*) was used in verse 4:6 of God opposing the proud — the righteous does not resist, but God will.
7. The tone shifts dramatically from judgment oracle to pastoral encouragement. The verb *makrothymēsate* ('be patient, be long-tempered') is the chapter's keyword, appearing four times (vv. 7, 8, 10). The *parousia* ('coming, arrival, presence') of the Lord is the hoped-for event that makes present suffering endurable. The farmer analogy is drawn from Palestinian agriculture: the 'early rain' (*proimon*) comes in October-November to soften the ground for plowing, and the 'late rain' (*opsimon*) comes in March-April to mature the grain before harvest.

8. The command *stērixate tas kardias hymōn* ('strengthen, establish, make firm your hearts') calls for inner resolve. The assurance that the *parousia ēggiken* ('has drawn near, is at hand') uses the same verb Jesus used in Mark 1:15: 'The kingdom of God has drawn near.' The nearness of the Lord's coming provides both urgency and comfort.
9. The verb *stenazete* ('grumble, groan, sigh') refers to complaining against fellow believers under the pressure of suffering — blaming each other rather than enduring together. The image of the Judge standing *pro tōn thyrōn* ('before the doors') is vivid and immediate: Christ the judge is not distant but at the threshold, about to enter. The urgency makes petty mutual grievances absurd.
10. The prophets serve as a *hypodeigma* ('example, model, pattern') of both *kakopatheia* ('suffering, enduring hardship') and *makrothymia* ('patience, long-suffering'). The prophets suffered not despite speaking God's word but because of it — their faithfulness to the divine message brought them persecution. The audience is to see their own suffering in this prophetic lineage.
11. Job is the supreme Old Testament example of endurance (*hypomonē*) under suffering whose cause is hidden. The phrase *to telos kyriou* ('the end/purpose of the Lord') means the outcome that God brought about — Job's restoration (Job 42:10-17). The final description of God as *polysplanchnos* ('deeply compassionate,' literally 'of many intestines/feelings') is found only here in the New Testament. The companion word *oiktirmōn* ('merciful, pitying') echoes the great self-description of God in Exodus 34:6.
11. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Job 42:10-17. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
11. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Exodus 34:6. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
12. The phrase *pro pantōn* ('above all, before everything') marks this as a matter of supreme importance. The prohibition against oath-taking closely parallels Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5:33-37. The point is not that oaths are inherently evil but that a community of truth-tellers should need no oaths — their simple word should be sufficient. The warning *hypo krisin pesēte* ('fall under judgment') connects oath-breaking to the eschatological judgment theme that runs through the chapter.
13. Two terse instructions covering the full range of human experience: suffering (*kakopatheia*) calls for prayer (*proseuchesthō*), and cheerfulness (*euthymei*) calls for praise-singing (*psalletō*). The verb *psalletō* ('sing praise, make music') originally meant to pluck a stringed instrument and came to mean singing psalms or hymns. Every emotional state has an appropriate spiritual response.
14. The instruction is specific and communal: the sick person (*asthenei*, 'is weak/ill') initiates by calling (*proskalesasthō*) the elders (*presbyterous*), who pray and anoint with olive oil (*elaion*). The anointing is done *en tō onomati tou kyriou* ('in the name of the Lord'), indicating that the oil is not merely medicinal but functions as a sign of the Lord's healing power. Olive oil was widely used medicinally in antiquity (cf. Luke 10:34), so the action may be both therapeutic and sacramental.
15. The 'prayer of faith' (*euchē tēs pisteōs*) — not the oil — is the operative element. The verb *sōsei* ('will save') can mean physical healing or spiritual salvation; both may be intended. The Lord (not the elders) is the one who *egerei* ('will raise up') the sick person. The conditional clause about sin (*kan hamartias ē pepoiēkōs*, 'even if he has committed sins') acknowledges a possible connection between sickness and sin without making it automatic — 'if' (*kan*) leaves the connection open, not assumed.
16. The instruction is mutual — *allēlois* ('to one another') — not hierarchical. Confession is to fellow believers, not exclusively to clergy. The purpose is healing (*iathēte*), which may be physical, spiritual, or both. The final sentence is often quoted in isolation: *deēsis dikaiou energoumenē poly ischyei*. The participle *energoumenē* can be middle ('effective, at work') or passive ('energized by God'). Either way, the point is that righteous prayer is not passive wishing but a powerful force.
17. James emphasizes that Elijah was *homoioopathēs hēmin* ('of like nature/feelings with us') — not a superhuman figure but an ordinary person whose prayer had extraordinary power. The phrase *proseuchē prosēuxato* ('he prayed with prayer') is a Hebraism (cognate dative) meaning 'he prayed earnestly/fervently.' The three-and-a-half-year drought is drawn from 1 Kings 17-18, though the Old Testament does not specify the exact duration. Luke 4:25 gives the same timeframe.
17. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on 1 Kings 17-18. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
18. The simplicity is the point: Elijah prayed, and heaven responded. The sequence — rain from heaven, fruit from earth — echoes the farmer analogy of verse 7 and completes the chapter's agricultural imagery. Prayer is the means by which heaven's resources reach earth's needs.
19. The letter closes without a formal farewell, turning instead to the urgent matter of reclaiming the straying. The verb *planēthē* ('wanders, goes astray, is deceived') is the root of the English 'planet' (wandering star). The 'truth' (*alētheias*) here encompasses both correct doctrine and faithful living — James makes no separation between the two.
20. The letter's final sentence is not about personal salvation but about the rescue of others. The one who turns a sinner back *sōsei psychēn autou ek thanatou* ('will save his soul from death') — the 'his' most naturally refers to the sinner being rescued, though some take it as the rescuer's own soul. The phrase *kalyptsei plēthos hamartiōn* ('will cover a multitude of sins') echoes Proverbs 10:12 and 1 Peter 4:8. To 'cover' sins is to secure their forgiveness. The letter ends as it began — with practical, community-oriented faith that acts.

20. [TCR Cross-Reference] This verse quotes Proverbs 10:12 — see the TCR rendering of that passage for the Hebrew source text and translation decisions.