

THE LETTER OF JAMES

Greeting

1 From James, a servant^a of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered throughout the world.^b Greetings!

Holding Out under Pressure

²My brothers and sisters, make up your mind to be full of joy^c whenever you face various kinds of testing. ³Because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴So^d let your endurance have its full effect. That way you'll be mature and whole, and complete in every way.^e ⁵But if one of you does lack wisdom, they should ask God, who gives generously to everyone and doesn't make fun of them for asking. And wisdom will be given to them. ⁶But they should ask in faith. They shouldn't doubt at all. After all, the person who doubts is like a wave on the ocean, that's blown and tossed around by the wind. ⁷That person shouldn't expect to get anything from the Lord. ⁸That's an undecided person^f, who's unpredictable in everything they do.^g

⁹Brothers and sisters who are poor should be proud of their high position. ¹⁰And the rich should be proud of their low position. Because they're going to disappear^h like the wildflowers: ¹¹the sun comes up, with its scorching heat, and the plant dries up. And its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance is ruined. ¹It's just like that with the rich person. They're going to suddenly wither away in the midst of all their busyness.ⁱ

^a Or "slave".

^b Lit. "the twelve tribes in the Diaspora". See "Bible Words" for these terms.

^c Lit. "consider it all joy".

^d Lit. "And".

^e Lit. "and not incomplete in any way".

^f Lit. "man". James seems to know a number of proverbs with "man" in them.

^g Lit. "unpredictable/unstable in all his ways".

^h Lit. "go away".

ⁱ Ps. 102:4,11; Isa. 40:6-7.

^j Lit. "in their ways".

¹²The person^a that holds out under testing^b is blessed. Because when they've passed the test, they're going to receive the crown of life.^c That's God's promise to people who love God.^d ¹³Nobody who's being tempted should say, "I'm being tempted by God". Because God is not tempted by anything bad,^e and God doesn't tempt anybody. ¹⁴No, each person is tempted by their own obsessions,^f and they get seduced and trapped by them. ¹⁵Then their obsession,^g which has conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it's full grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶Don't be led astray, my dear brothers and sisters.

What Real Wisdom Looks Like in Practice

¹⁷Every good act of giving, and every perfect gift, comes down from the Father of Lights. With God, there's no shifting or shadow of a change.^h ¹⁸It was God's will to give birth to us through the message of the Truth.ⁱ That way we could be a sort of first harvest of God's creations. ¹⁹Know that, my dear brothers and sisters.

²⁰Everybody should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.^j ²¹Because human^k anger doesn't bring about God's justice. So get rid of every kind of filthiness, and every kind of nasty outburst. Humbly receive the word that's planted in you, which has the power to save your lives.^l ²²Learn to be people who act on the message, and not just hearers,^m who are fooling themselves. ²³Because suppose somebody hears the message but doesn't act on it. They're like a man who notices his ownⁿ face in a mirror. ²⁴Now he's seen himself, but he goes away and forgets what he looks like right away. ²⁵But consider the person that looks deep into the perfect law of freedom, and stays with it—and doesn't become a forgetful hearer, but a person who does things. That person is going to be blessed in what they do.

²⁶Suppose somebody seems to be^o devoted to God, and they're not keeping their tongue in check. Aren't they deceiving their own heart? That person's devotion is useless.^a ²⁷Here's what healthy^b

^a Lit. "man".

^b Or "temptation". But he is mainly talking about holding to your commitment to God and Christ under the threat of persecution and violence.

^c That is, they will receive resurrection life as their prize. Crowns in those days were given out in the same way that medals are given out today.

^d Lit. "...life, which he promised to those who love him".

^e Or "tempted when it comes to bad things".

^f Or "lusts".

^g Or "lust".

^h The mss have several small variations on this slightly mysterious statement.

ⁱ Or "the word of truth". I think James means the good news.

^j Sirach 5:11; Eccl. 7:9.

^k Lit. "man's".

^l Or "souls".

^m Mt. 7:26.

ⁿ Lit. "natural".

^o Or "thinks they are".

and pure devotion to God is: looking after orphans and widows in trouble,^c and keeping yourself free from the corruption of the world.^d

Give Everyone the Same Dignity!

2 My brothers and sisters, when you regard some people as better than others, can you really be having faith in our Lord Jesus, the Christ of glory? ²I mean, suppose a man comes into your meeting with gold rings on his fingers and perfectly clean clothes, and a poor man also comes in, in dirty clothes. ³And when you see the person wearing the perfectly clean clothes, you say, “You sit here in the place of honor.” But you say to the poor man, “You, stand up!” or “Sit over there next to my footrest.” ⁴Haven’t you discriminated among yourselves, and haven’t you become judges who give evil decisions?

⁵Listen, my dear brothers and sisters. Hasn’t God chosen the world’s poor to be rich in faith, and to be inheritors of the kingdom that God promised to those who love God? ⁶Yet you’ve insulted^e the poor person. Don’t the rich oppress you? And aren’t they the ones who drag you into court? ⁷Aren’t they the ones who insult the beautiful name that has given you your identity?^f ⁸If you really fulfill the royal law, “Love your neighbor as yourself,”^g you’re doing well. ⁹But if you treat one person better than another, then you’re committing a sin. You’re convicted by the law as offenders. ¹⁰After all, whoever keeps the whole law, but slips up on one point, has become guilty of everything in it. ¹¹Because the One who said, “Don’t break your marriage vows,”^h also said, “Don’t commit murder.”ⁱ So if you don’t break your marriage vows, but you commit murder, you’ve become a lawbreaker.^j ¹²You should speak and act like people who are going to be judged by the law of freedom. ¹³Because judgment is going to be merciless on the person who doesn’t treat others with mercy.^k Mercy wins out over judgment.

Faith is Proven by Actions

¹⁴My brothers and sisters, what good is it if somebody says they have faith, but they don’t have actions to go with it? Can that faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose^l your Christian brother or sister is half naked and in need of daily food. ¹⁶And suppose some one of you says to them, “Go in peace! Keep

^a Lit. “If someone seems to be devoted, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his own heart, this person’s devotion is useless”.

^b Lit. “This is clean”.

^c Lit. “in their trouble”.

^d Lit. “keeping oneself unspotted from the world”.

^e Or “dishonored”.

^f Lit. “the good name that has been named over you,” i.e. Jesus.

^g Lev. 19:13.

^h Traditionally: “don’t commit adultery” (see “Bible Words”). Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18.

ⁱ Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17.

^j James is seeing the Law as a single, indivisible command. If you break any part of it, you break the Law as a whole.

^k Lit. “to the one not doing mercy”.

^l Lit. “If”.

warm and be well fed!" But if you don't give them the things their body needs, what good is that? 17 Faith is like that too. If it doesn't have any actions to go with it, it's dead in and of itself.

18 Somebody will object and say, "You have faith!"^a Yes, and I have actions too. Show me your faith apart from the actions that go with it, and I'll show you my faith *by* my actions. 19 You believe that God is One. Good for you.^b The demons believe too—and shudder. 20 But do you want proof,^c you shallow person, that faith without actions is useless? 21 Wasn't our father Abraham shown to be in the right^d by his actions? After all, he offered his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar. 22 You can see that faith was acting together with his actions, and his faith was completed by his actions. 23 That's how the scripture got fulfilled that says,

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as being in the right.^e

And he was known as "God's friend!"^g 24 You can see that a person is shown to be in the right by actions, and not just by faith. 25 And similarly, wasn't Rahab^h the prostitute also shown to be in the right by her actions? She took in the messengers, and sent them off by another road.ⁱ 26 Just as a body without a spirit is a corpse, so faith without actions lies dead!^j

The Challenge of Taming your Tongue

3 My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers. Because as you know, we teachers are going to receive a stricter judgment. 2 After all, we all trip up a lot. If somebody doesn't trip up in what they say, that's a mature person.^k They're also capable of keeping their whole body in line.^l 3 Now, if we put bits in horses' mouths to make them obedient to us, we can steer their whole bodies. 4 And think of^m ships, too. They're so big, and they're driven by strong winds. They're steered by a tiny rudder in whatever directionⁿ the pilot wants to go. 5 That's also how it is with the tongue. It's a small organ, but^o it makes big claims. Look what a small fire it takes to start a big forest burning! 6 And the tongue *is* a fire! It's a world of bad behavior. It sits there among the parts of our body, polluting the whole thing. It sets one's whole life^p on fire—and *it's* set

^a In other words, the person is asking, what's wrong with faith? After all, you have faith too.

^b Lit. "You're doing well".

^c Lit. "do you want to know".

^d Or "justified" (see "Bible Words"), or "found innocent," here and below.

^e Gen. 15:6; see Rom. 4:3, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6.

^f Lit. "called".

^g 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8.

^h Prn. *ray-hab*.

ⁱ See Josh. 2:4, 15; 6:17; Heb. 11:31.

^j Lit. "is a dead thing".

^k Lit. "man".

^l Lit. "bridling the whole body".

^m Lit. "And behold".

ⁿ Lit. "where".

^o Lit. "and".

^p Or "It sets the cycle of nature".

afire by Gehenna.^a 7Now, all species of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures are being tamed, and have been tamed, by the human species.^b 8But the tongue—nobody can tame that! It's an unpredictable^c pest, full of deadly poison. 9We use it to bless our Lord and Father—and we use it to curse human beings, who are made in God's likeness. 10Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth! My brothers and sisters, it shouldn't be like that! 11Does a spring ever produce fresh and salt water from the same opening? 12My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree ever produce olives? Or can a grape vine produce figs? Well, neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

The Wisdom That Comes from God

13Who are your wise and knowledgeable folks?^d 14They should demonstrate the behaviors of a good way of life through the gentleness of their wisdom.^e 15But if you have bitter jealousy and competitiveness in your hearts, don't brag at other people's expense—that's committing^f a lie against the truth. 16That's not the wisdom that comes down from above—just the opposite. It's earthly, unspiritual,^g and demonic. 17Because where there's jealousy and competitiveness, that's where there's every kind of infighting^h and bad behavior. 18But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceful, gentle,ⁱ open to persuasion, full of mercy and good fruit. It's unprejudiced and doesn't put on a pretense. 19And people who make peace quietly plant the seeds that grow into the fruit of justice.^j

Where do Conflicts Come From?

4 What causes the wars^k and conflicts among you? Aren't they actually caused by your pleasures, which are in combat in among the parts of your body? 2You crave something, but you don't have it. You murder and covet,^l and you can't get it. You fight and have wars. You don't have because you're not asking. 3You ask for something but you don't get it, because you ask with a bad attitude.^m You ask for things so that you can use them forⁿ your pleasures. 4You unfaithful people,^o don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility^p towards God? So whoever

^a See "Bible Words".

^b Or "tamed to conform to human ways".

^c Or "unstable," or "restless".

^d Lit. "Who is wise and understanding among you?"

^e Or "in the gentleness that comes from wisdom".

^f Lit. "and [so] commit".

^g Or "soulless," or "natural".

^h Or "rioting," or "[civil/community] disorder".

ⁱ Or "un-legalistic".

^j Lit. "and the fruit of justice is planted in peace by those who make peace".

^k Lit. "Whence come the wars".

^l See "Bible Words".

^m Lit. "because of the fact that you ask badly".

ⁿ Lit. "spend them on".

^o Lit. "adulterous". See "Bible Words" under "adultery".

^p Or "enmity".

wants to be friends with the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think it's for nothing that the scripture says,

The spirit that God made to live in us^a is strongly inclined towards envy.^b

⁶Yet God gives even more grace. That's why it says,

God opposes the arrogant,
But gives grace to the humble.^c

⁷So submit to God, and resist the devil. And the devil will run away from you! ⁸Get close to God, and God will get close to you. You sinners should wash your hands, and you doubters should purify your hearts. ⁹Be miserable, mourn, and cry. Turn your laughter into remorse,^d and your happiness to sorrow. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in front of the Lord, and he'll lift you up.

¹¹Don't say bad things about each other, brothers and sisters. The person that says something bad about a fellow Christian,^e or judges them, says bad things about the Law, and judges the Law. And if you're judging the Law, you're not a person that puts the Law into practice, but a *judge* of it. ¹²There's One lawgiver and judge, One who can save and destroy. But who are *you* to judge your neighbor?^f

Warnings against Arrogance and Wealth

¹³I hear you saying, "Today or tomorrow, we're going to such and such a city. And we're going to spend a year there, and do business and make money!" Come on, now!^g ¹⁴You don't know about tomorrow—how your lives will go.^h After all, you're a wisp of steam, that appears for a secondⁱ and then disappears. ¹⁵You should have been saying,^j "If the Lord wants us to, we'll stay alive and do this or that". ¹⁶But as it is,^k you're bragging and being arrogant.^l All that kind of bragging is evil. ¹⁷So if a person knows what's good to do, and doesn't do it, that's a sin for them.

5 Come on, now, you rich people: cry and wail over the miseries that are ahead for you!^m ²Your wealth has rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. ³Your gold and silver have turned to rust,

^a Some mss have, "the spirit that lives in us".

^b Lit. "craves towards envy/hatred". See Exod. 20:5. This sentence is sometimes read as saying, "God is fiercely jealous over the spirit that God has made to live in us".

^c Prov. 3:34 LXX.

^d Lit. "grieving". But it's grieving about sin, hence "remorse".

^e Lit. "brother".

^f Lit. "But *you*, who are you, who judge your neighbor?"

^g James puts these words at the head of the sentence: "Come, now, you who are saying, 'Today or tomorrow...'"

^h Some mss have "...tomorrow. After all, what are your lives?"

ⁱ Lit. "a little".

^j Lit. "Instead of you saying".

^k Lit. "But now".

^l Lit. "you're bragging in your arrogances".

^m Lit. "that are coming upon you".

and the rust that's left of them will be a testimony against you. And it's going to eat away your flesh like fire! You've hoarded things in the last days!^a 4Look! The money^b that you dishonestly withheld from your workers, who mowed your fields! It's shouting against you! And the cries of the harvest workers have come to the ears of the Sovereign One of Hosts. 5You've lived in luxury on the earth, and you've completely indulged yourselves.^c You've fattened yourselves on the day of slaughter. 6You've condemned and murdered the innocent person, who's not against you.^d

Patience and Endurance

7So then, brothers and sisters, be patient until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmers wait for the valuable harvest of the land: they work on it patiently^e until it gets the early and the late rains.^f 8You be patient too. Be courageous,^g because the Lord is near.

9Brothers and sisters, don't complain against each other, so you don't get judged. Look—the judge is standing at the door. 10Brothers and sisters, as an example of suffering and patience, consider^h the prophets who spoke in the name of the Sovereign One. 11See, we talk about people who hold out as being blessed. You've heard of Job's endurance, and you've seen the Sovereign One's conclusion to the matter.ⁱ

The Sovereign One is deeply compassionate and merciful.^j

12Above all, my brothers and sisters, don't say, "I swear it!" Don't swear by heaven, or by earth, or use any kind of oath. Just let your yes be yes, and your no be no.^k That way you won't risk judgment.^l

The Power of Prayer

13Is any of you going through a bad time? They should pray. Is anyone happy? They should sing songs of praise to God. 14Is any of you sick? They should call over the elders of the community. And they should pray over the person and anoint^m the person with oil, in the Lord's name. 15And the prayer prayed in faith will heal the sick person, and the Lord will raise them up.ⁿ And if they've

^a This expression "the last days" indicates the time of the transition between this current "age" and the glorious age to come (see Isa. 2:2ff; Acts 2:17).

^b Lit. "pay". This is the unjust wealth that turns to flesh-eating rust in the day of judgment.

^c Or "you've overindulged yourselves".

^d Or "who doesn't resist you," i.e., the person doesn't fight back.

^e Lit. "being patient over it".

^f Jer. 5:24; see Deut. 11:14; Joel 2:23.

^g Lit. "Strengthen your hearts".

^h Lit. "take".

ⁱ Job 42:10-17.

^j Exod. 34:6; Ps. 103:8; 111:4.

^k Mt. 5:34-37.

^l Lit. "fall under judgment".

^m See "Bible Words".

ⁿ Or "bring them back to health". "Raise them up" is resurrection language.

committed sins, they'll be forgiven for them.^a ¹⁶So admit your sins to each other and pray for each other. That way you'll be healed. The prayer work of a person of integrity^b has great power and effectiveness. ¹⁷Elijah^c was a man with the same experience as us, and he prayed that it wouldn't rain. And it didn't rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸And he prayed again, and the sky released its rain, and the land sprouted and produced its harvest.

¹⁹My brothers and sisters, suppose one of you gets led away^d from the truth, and somebody brings them back. ²⁰You should know that the person who returns a person who was sinning from their false path will save their life from death itself.^e And they'll make up for^f a whole lot of sins.

^a Lit. "They [the sins] will be forgiven them [the person]".

^b Traditionally, "a righteous person".

^c Prn. *ee-Iye-ja*.

^d Or, "goes astray".

^e The mss are split here. Some have "will save their life from death" or "will save a life from death". Whose life? Do you save your own life by helping someone else? I suspect James is saying that you'll save the other person's life, and bring them into forgiveness for all the mistakes they've made while they were "off the path".

^f Lit. "cover".