

English: Unlocked Literal Bible for James

Formatted for Translators

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Bible Text: The English Unlocked Literal Bible (ULB)

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Notes: English ULB Translation Notes

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Introduction to James

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the Book of James

1. Greetings (1:1)
2. Testing and maturity (1:2-18)
3. Hearing and doing the Word of God (1:19-27)
4. True faith seen in works
 - Word of God (1:19-27)
 - Royal law of love (2:1-13)
 - Works (2:14-26)
5. Difficulties in community
 - Dangers of the tongue (3:1-12)
 - Wisdom from above (3:13-18)
 - Worldly desires (4:1-12)
6. God's perspective on your decisions
 - Boasting about tomorrow (4:13-17)
 - Warning about riches (5:1-6)
 - Suffering with patience (5:7-11)
7. Closing exhortations
 - Oaths (5:12)
 - Prayer and healing (5:13-18)
 - Care for one another (5:19-20)

Who wrote the Book of James?

The author identified himself as James. This was probably James, the half-brother of Jesus. James was a leader in the early church and was part of the Jerusalem council. The Apostle Paul also called him a "pillar" of the church.

This is not the same man as the Apostle James. The Apostle James was killed before this letter was written.

What is the Book of James about?

In this letter, James encouraged believers who were suffering. He told them know that God uses their suffering to help them become mature Christians. James also told them of the need for believers to do good deeds. He wrote much in this letter about how believers should live and treat one another. For example, he commanded them to treat one another fairly, to not fight with one another, and to use riches wisely.

James taught his readers by using many examples from nature such as in 1:6, 11 and 3:1-12. Also, many parts of this letter are similar to what Jesus wrote in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5-7).

Who were the "twelve tribes in the dispersion"?

James said he was writing to the "twelve tribes in the dispersion" (1:1). Some scholars think that James was writing to Jewish Christians. Other scholars think that James was writing to all Christians in general. This letter is known as one of the "General Epistles" since it was not written to a specific church or individual.

How should the title of this book be translated?

Translators may choose to call this book by its traditional title, "James." Or they may choose a clearer title, such as "A Letter from James" or "The Letter James Wrote."

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

Did James disagree with Paul about how a person is justified before God?

Paul taught in Romans that Christians are justified by faith and not by works. James seems to teach that Christians are justified by works. This can be confusing. But a better understanding of what Paul and James taught shows that they agree with one another. Both of them taught that a person needs faith in order to be justified. And they both taught that true faith will cause a person to do good works. Paul and James taught about these things in different ways because they had different audiences who needed to know different things about being justified. (See: justice and faith and works)

Part 3: Important Translation Issues

How should the translator signal transitions between topics in the Book of James?

The letter quickly changes topics. Sometimes James does not tell the readers that he is about to change topics. It is acceptable to allow the verses to appear disconnected from each other. It may make sense to set the passages apart by starting a new line or putting a space between topics.

What are the major issues in the text of the Book of James?

- "Do you want to know, foolish man, that faith without works is useless?" (2:20). The ULB and modern translations read this way. Some older translations read, "Do you want to know, foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" If a translation of the Bible exists in the general region, translators should consider using the reading found in those versions. If not, translators are advised to follow the modern reading.

James

1 ¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion: Greetings!²Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you experience various troubles.³You know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

⁴Let endurance complete its work so that you may become fully developed and complete, not lacking anything.

⁵But if any of you needs wisdom, let him ask for it from God, the one who gives generously and without rebuke to all who ask, and he will give it to him.

⁶But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing. For anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea that is driven by the wind and tossed around.⁷For that person must not think that he will receive anything from the Lord;⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

⁹Let the lowly brother boast of his high position,¹⁰but the rich man of his low position, because he will pass away as a wild flower in the grass.¹¹For the sun rises with burning heat and dries up the grass. The flower falls off, and its beauty perishes. In the same way, the rich man will fade away in the middle of his journey.

¹²Blessed is the man who endures testing. For after he has passed the test, he will receive the crown of life, which has been promised to those who love God.¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," because God is not tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone.

¹⁴But each person is tempted by his own desire, which drags him away and entices him.¹⁵Then after the desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and after the sin is full grown, it gives birth to death.¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. It comes down from the Father of lights. With him there is no changing or shadow because of turning.¹⁸God chose to give us birth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of firstfruits of all his creatures.

¹⁹You know this, my beloved brothers: Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.²⁰For the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God.²¹Therefore, take off all sinful filth and abundant amounts of evil. In humility receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

²²Be doers of the word and not only hearers, deceiving yourselves.²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word but not a doer, he is like a man who examines his natural face in a mirror.²⁴He examines himself and then goes away and immediately forgets what he was like.²⁵But the person who looks carefully into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do so, not just being a hearer who forgets, this man will be blessed in his actions.

²⁶If anyone thinks he is religious and does not control his tongue, he deceives his heart and his religion is worthless.²⁷Religion that is pure and unspoiled before our God and Father is to help the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James 1 General Notes

Structure and formatting

James formally introduces this letter in verse 1. Writers often began letters in this way in the ancient Near East.

Special concepts in this chapter

Testing and temptation

These two words occur together in ([James 1:12-13](#)). Both words speak of a person who is able to choose between doing something good and doing something evil. The difference between them is important. God is testing the person and wants him to do what is good. Satan is tempting the person and wants him to do what is evil.

Crowns

The crown that a man who passes the test receives is a reward, something that people who do something especially good receive. (See: reward)

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Metaphors

James uses many metaphors in this chapter, and you will need to understand the material on the metaphor page before you can translate them well.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

"To the twelve tribes in the dispersion"

It is not clear to whom James wrote this letter. He calls himself a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, so he was probably writing to Christians. But he calls his readers "the twelve tribes in the dispersion," words which usually refer to Jews. It is possible that he is using the words as a metaphor for "all people whom God has chosen" or that he wrote the letter at a time when most Christians had grown up as Jews.

Links:

- [James 1:1 Notes](#)
 - [James intro](#)
-

James 1:1

General Information:

The apostle James writes this letter to all the Christians. Many of them were Jews, and they lived in many different places.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

The phrase "this letter is from" is implied. Alternate translation: "This letter is from James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"

to the twelve tribes

Possible meanings are 1) this is a synecdoche for Jewish Christians, or 2) this is a metaphor for all Christians. Alternate translation: "to God's faithful people"

in the dispersion

The term "dispersion" normally referred to the Jews who were scattered in other countries, away from their homeland, Israel. This abstract noun can be expressed with a phrase with the verb "scattered." Alternate translation: "who are scattered around the world" or "who live in other countries"

Greetings!

This is a basic greeting, such as "Hello!" or "Good day!"

James 1:2

Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you experience various troubles

"My fellow believers, think of all your different kinds of troubles as things to celebrate"

James 1:3

the testing of your faith produces endurance

The expressions "the testing," "your faith," and "endurance" are nouns that stand for actions. God does the testing, that is, he finds out how much the believers trust and obey him. Believers

James 1:4

Let endurance complete its work

Here endurance is spoken of as if it were a person at work. Alternate translation: "Learn to endure any hardship"

fully developed

able to trust in Christ and obey him in all circumstances

not lacking anything

This can be stated in the positive. Alternate translation: "having all that you need" or "being all that you need to be"

James 1:5

ask for it from God, the one who gives

"ask God for it. He is the one who gives"

gives generously and without rebuke to all

"gives generously and does not rebuke any"

he will give it to him

"God will give it to him" or "God will answer his prayer"

James 1:6

in faith, doubting nothing

"with complete certainty that God will answer"

For anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea that is driven by the wind and tossed around

Anyone who doubts that God will help him is said to be like the water in the ocean or in a large lake, which keeps moving in different directions.

James 1:7

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

James 1:8

is a double-minded man, unstable

The word "double-minded" refers to a person's thoughts when he is unable to make a decision. Alternate translation: "cannot decide if he will follow Jesus or not and is unstable"

unstable in all his ways

Here this person is spoken of as if he cannot stay on one path but instead goes from one to another.

James 1:9

the lowly brother

"the believer who does not have much money" or "the believer whom other people consider unimportant"

boast of his high position

Someone whom God has honored is spoken of as if he were standing in a high place.

James 1:10

but the rich man of his low position

The words "let" and "boast" are understood from the previous phrase. Alternate translation: "but let the rich man boast of his low position"

but the rich man

"but the man who has a lot of money"

of his low position

A rich believer should be happy if God causes him to suffer. Alternate translation: "should be happy that God has given him difficulties"

he will pass away as a wild flower in the grass

Rich people are spoken of as being similar to wild flowers, which are alive for only a short time.

James 1:11

its beauty perishes

A flower that is becoming less beautiful because it is decaying is spoken of as if its beauty were dying. Alternate translation: "it is no longer beautiful"

the rich man will fade away in the middle of his journey

Here the flower simile is probably continued. As flowers do not die suddenly but instead fade away over a short time, so also the rich people may not die suddenly but instead take a little time to disappear.

in the middle of his journey

A rich man's activities in daily life are spoken of as if they are a journey that he is making. This metaphor implies that he is giving no thought to his coming death, and that it will take him by surprise.

James 1:12

Connecting Statement:

James reminds the believers who have fled that God does not cause temptation; he tells them how to avoid temptation.

Blessed is the man who endures testing

"The man who endures testing is fortunate" or "The man who endures testing is well off"

endures testing

remains faithful to God during hardships

passed the test

he has been approved by God

receive the crown of life

Eternal life is spoken of as if it were a wreath of leaves placed on the head of a victorious athlete. Alternate translation: "receive eternal life as his reward"

has been promised to those who love God

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "God has promised to those who love him"

James 1:13

when he is tempted

"when he desires to do something evil"

I am tempted by God

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation:
"God is trying to make me do something evil"

God is not tempted by evil

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation:
"No one can make God desire to do evil"

nor does he himself tempt anyone

"and God himself does not try to persuade anyone do evil"

James 1:14

each person is tempted by his own desire

A person's desire is spoken of as if it were someone else who was tempting him to sin.

which drags him away and entices him

Evil desire continues to be spoken of as if it were a person who could drag away someone else.

entices

attracts, persuades someone to do evil

James 1:15

Then after the desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and after the sin is full grown, it gives birth to death

Desire continues to be spoken of as a person, this time clearly as a woman who becomes pregnant with a child. The child is identified as sin. Sin is a female baby that grows up, becomes pregnant, and gives birth to death. This chain of metaphors is a picture of someone who ends up dying both spiritually and physically because of his evil desires and his sin.

James 1:16

Do not be deceived

"Do not let anyone deceive you" or "Stop deceiving yourselves"

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. James uses them to emphasize that anything good that a person has comes from God.

the Father of lights

God, the creator of all the lights in the sky

With him there is no changing or shadow because of turning

This expression pictures God as an unchanging light. This is in contrast to the sun, moon, and stars that appear to move in the sky and sometimes are darkened. Alternate translation: "God always stays the same. He does not change like shifting shadows"

James 1:18

to give us

The word "us" refers to James and his audience.

give us birth

God, who brought us eternal life, is spoken of as if he had given us birth.

the word of truth

Possible meanings are 1) "the message about the truth" or 2) "the true message."

so that we would be a kind of firstfruits

James is using the traditional Hebrew idea of firstfruits as a way to describe the value of the Christian believers to God. He implies that there will be many more believers in the future. Alternate translation: "so that we would be like an offering of firstfruits"

James 1:19

You know this

Possible meanings are 1) "Know this" is a command to pay attention to what I am about to write or 2) "You know this" is a statement saying that I am about to remind you of something that you already know.

Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak

These sayings are idioms that mean people should first listen intently, and then consider carefully what they say. Here "slow to speak" does not mean speaking slowly.

slow to anger

"not get angry quickly"

James 1:20

the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God

When a person is always angry, he cannot do God's work, which is righteous.

James 1:21

take off all sinful filth and abundant amounts of evil

Sin and evil are spoken of here as if they were clothing that could be taken off. Alternate translation: "stop doing all filthy sins and stop doing abundant amounts of evil"

take off all sinful filth and abundant amounts of evil

Here the expressions "sinful filth" and "evil" share similar meanings. James uses them to emphasize how bad sin is. Alternate translation: "stop doing every kind of sinful behavior"

sinful filth

Here "filth," that is, dirt, stands for sin and evil.

In humility

"Without pride" or "Without arrogance"

receive the implanted word

The expression "implant" means to place one thing inside of another. Here God's word is spoken of as if it

were a plant made to grow inside believers. Alternate translation: "obey the message God has spoken to you"

save your souls

What a person is saved from can be made explicit. Alternate translation: "save you from God's judgment"

your souls

Here the word "souls" refers to persons. Alternate translation: "yourselves"

James 1:22

Be doers of the word

"Be people who follow God's instructions"

deceiving yourselves

"fooling yourselves"

James 1:23

For if anyone is a hearer of the word but not a doer

In the phrase "but not a doer" the words "is" and "of the word" are understood from the previous phrase. The noun "doer" can also be expressed with the verbs "do" or "obey." Alternate translation: "For if anyone listens to God's word in the scriptures but does not obey the word"

the word

"the message"

he is like a man who examines his natural face in a mirror

A person who hears God's word is like someone who looks in the mirror.

his natural face

The word "natural" clarifies that James is using the ordinary meaning of the word "face." Alternate translation: "his face"

James 1:24

then goes away and immediately forgets what he was like

It is implied that though he may see that he needs to do something, such as wash his face or fix his hair, he walks away and forgets to do it. This what a person

who does not obey God's word is like. Alternate translation: "then goes away and immediately forgets to do what he saw he needed to do"

James 1:25

the person who looks carefully into the perfect law

This expression continues the image of the law as a mirror.

the perfect law of freedom

The relationship between the law and freedom can be expressed clearly. Here "freedom" probably refers to freedom from sin. Alternate translation: "the perfect law that gives freedom" or "the perfect law that makes those who follow it free"

this man will be blessed in his actions

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "God will bless this man as he obeys the law"

James 1:26

thinks he is religious

"thinks he worships God correctly"

his tongue

Controlling one's tongue stands for controlling one's speech. Alternate translation: "what he says"

deceives

gets someone to believe something that is not true

his heart

Here "heart" refers to his belief or thoughts. Alternate translation: "himself"

his religion is worthless

"he worships God uselessly"

James 1:27

pure and unspoiled before our God and Father

James speaks of religion, the way one worships God, as if it could be physically pure and unspoiled. These are traditional ways for Jews to say that something is acceptable to God. Alternate translation: "completely acceptable to our God and Father"

the fatherless

"the orphans"

in their affliction

The fatherless and widows are suffering because their fathers or husbands have died.

to keep oneself unstained by the world

Sin in the world is spoken of as something dirty that can stain a person. Alternate translation: "to not allow the evil in the world to cause oneself to sin"

² ¹My brothers, do not hold to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality toward certain people.² Suppose that someone enters your meeting wearing gold rings and splendid clothes, and there also enters a poor man in dirty clothes.³ If you look at the person wearing fine clothes and say, "You sit here in a good place," but you say to the poor man, "You stand over there" or "Sit by my footstool,"⁴ are you not judging among yourselves? Have you not become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, did not God choose the poor of the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?⁶ But you have dishonored the poor! Is it not the rich who oppress you? Are they not the ones who drag you to court?⁷ Do they not insult the good name by which you have been called?

⁸ If, however, you fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you do well.

⁹ But if you favor certain people, you are committing sin, and you are convicted by the law as transgressors.

¹⁰ For whoever obeys the whole law, except that he stumbles in just a single way, has become guilty of breaking the whole law.¹¹ For the one who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery, but if you do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

¹² So speak and act as those who will be judged by means of the law of freedom.¹³ For judgment comes without mercy to those who have shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

¹⁴ What profit is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

¹⁵ Suppose that a brother or sister is badly clothed and lacks food for the day.¹⁶ Suppose that one of you says to them, "Go in peace, stay warm and be filled." If you do not give them the things necessary for the body, what profit is that?¹⁷ In the same way faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ Yet someone may say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.¹⁹ You believe that there is one God; you do well. But even the demons believe that, and they tremble.²⁰ Do you want to know, foolish man, that faith without works is useless? ¹

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?²² You see that faith worked with his works, and that by works his faith was completed.²³ The scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness," and he was called a friend of God.²⁴ You see that it is by works that a man is justified, and not only by faith.

²⁵ In the same way also, was not Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them away by another road?²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.

¹ Some important and ancient Greek copies read, Do you want to know, foolish man, how it is that faith without works is dead?

James 2 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Favoritism

Some of James's readers treated rich and powerful people well and treated poor people badly. This is called favoritism, and James tells them that this is wrong. God wants his people to treat both rich people and poor people well.

Justification

Justification is what happens when God makes a person righteous. James says here that God makes righteous or justifies people who do good works along with having faith. (See: justice and righteous and faith)

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Quotation marks

The words "Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works" are hard to understand. Some people think that they are what "someone may say," like the words in the quotation marks. Most versions translate them as words that James is saying back to that "someone."

"You have ... I have"

Some people think that the words "you" and "I" are metonyms for "some people" and "other people." If they are correct, verse 18 could be translated, "Someone may say, 'Some people have faith and other people have works. Not everyone has both.'" If the next sentence is also what "someone may say," it could be translated "Some people show their faith without works, and other people show their faith by their works. Both have faith." In both cases, the reader will understand only if you add the extra sentence. It is probably best to translate as the ULB does.

Links:

- [James 2:1 Notes](#)

James 2:1	partiality
Connecting Statement:	the act of treating some people better than others
James continues to tell the scattered Jewish believers how to live by loving one another and reminds them not to favor rich people over poor people.	James 2:2
My brothers	Suppose that someone enters your meeting
James considers his audience to be Jewish believers. Alternate translation: "My fellow believers" or "My brothers and sisters in Christ"	James starts to describe a situation where the believers might give more honor to a rich person than to a poor person.
do not hold to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ... with partiality toward certain people	wearing gold rings and splendid clothes
James wanted them to hold to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but he did not want them to show partiality to people. Alternate translation: "as you hold to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ... do not show partiality toward certain people"	"dressed like a wealthy person"
hold to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ	James 2:3
Believing in Jesus Christ is spoken of as if it were an object that one could hold onto.	sit here in a good place
our Lord Jesus Christ	sit in this place of honor
The word "our" includes James and his fellow believers.	stand over there
	move to a place with less honor
	Sit by my footstool
	move to a humble place

James 2:4

are you not judging among yourselves? Have you not become judges with evil thoughts?

James is using rhetorical questions to teach and possibly scold his readers. Alternate translation: "you are making judgments among yourselves and becoming judges with evil thoughts."

James 2:5

Listen, my beloved brothers

James is exhorting his readers as if they were his family. Alternate translation: "Pay attention, my dear fellow believers"

did not God choose ... love him?

Here James uses a rhetorical question to teach his readers not to show favoritism. It can be made a statement. Alternate translation: "God has chosen ... love him"

the poor

This refers to poor people in general. Alternate translation: "poor people"

be rich in faith

Having much faith is spoken of as being wealthy or rich. The object of faith may have to be specified. Alternate translation: "have strong faith in Christ"

heirs

The people to whom God has made promises are spoken of as if they were to inherit property and wealth from a family member.

James 2:6

But you have

James is speaking to his whole audience.

have dishonored the poor

"you have shamed poor people"

Is it not the rich who oppress you?

Here James uses a rhetorical question to correct his readers. Alternate translation: "It is rich people who oppress you."

the rich

This refers to rich people in general. Alternate translation: "rich people"

who oppress you

"who treat you badly"

Are they not the ones ... to court?

Here James uses a rhetorical question to correct his readers. It can be made a statement. Alternate translation: "The rich people are the ones ... to court."

drag you to court

"forcibly take you to court to accuse you in front of judges"

James 2:7

Do they not insult ... have been called?

Here James uses a rhetorical question to correct and teach his readers. It can be made a statement. Alternate translation: "The rich people insult ... have been called."

the good name by which you have been called

Here "name" represents "Christ." This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "Christ, who called you" or "Christ, to whom you belong"

James 2:8

you fulfill

The word "you" refers to the Jewish believers.

fulfill the royal law

"obey God's law." The law is "royal" because God, the true king, is the one who gave it to people.

Love your neighbor as yourself

James is quoting from the book of Leviticus.

your neighbor	used the singular form as if he was writing to each person individually.
"all people" or "everyone"	James 2:12
you do well	So speak and act
"you are doing well" or "you are doing what is right"	"So you must speak and obey." James commands the people to do this.
James 2:9	who will be judged by means of the law of freedom
if you favor	This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "who know that God will judge them by means of the law of freedom"
"give special treatment to" or "give honor to"	by means of the law
committing sin	This passage implies that it is God who will judge according to his law.
"sinning." That is, breaking the law.	the law of freedom
you are convicted by the law as transgressors	"the law that gives true freedom"
Here the law is spoken of as if it were a human judge. This can be translated using an active verb. Alternate translation: "the law itself convicts you of transgressing it" or "you are guilty of breaking God's law"	James 2:13
James 2:10	Mercy triumphs over
For whoever obeys	"Mercy is better than" or "Mercy defeats." Here mercy and justice are spoken of as if they were persons.
"For anyone who obeys"	James 2:14
except that he stumbles ... the whole law	Connecting Statement:
Stumbling is falling down while one is trying to walk. Disobeying one point of the law is spoken of as if it were stumbling while walking.	James encourages the scattered believers to show their faith before others, just as Abraham showed others his faith by his works.
in just a single way	What profit is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works?
because of disobedience to just one requirement of the law	James is using a rhetorical question to teach his audience. Alternate translation: "Fellow believers, if someone says he has faith but he has no works, that does him no good at all." or "Fellow believers, someone who has no works is no better if he says he has faith than someone who does not say he has faith."
James 2:11	he has faith, but he has no works ... that faith
For the one who said	Here, it is implied that "works" refers to things people do because they believe in God, such as obeying God and doing good to others. The abstract nouns "faith" and "works" can be expressed with the verbs "believe"
This refers to God, who gave the law to Moses.	
Do not commit	
To "commit" is to do an action.	
If you ... but if you ... you have	
Here "you" means "each one of you." Although James was writing to many Jewish believers, in this case, he	

and "do." Alternate translation: "he believes in God but does not do anything ... what he believes" or "he believes in God but does not do anything as a result of his belief ... that belief"

Can that faith save him?

James is using a rhetorical question to teach his audience. This can be restated to remove the abstract noun "faith." Alternate translation: "That faith cannot save him." or "Just saying he believes in God will not save him."

save him

"spare him from God's judgment"

James 2:15

brother or sister

a fellow believer in Christ, whether male or female

James 2:16

stay warm

This means either "have enough clothes to wear" or "have a place to sleep."

be filled

The thing that fills them is food. This can be stated explicitly. Alternate translation: "be filled with food" or "have enough to eat"

for the body

to eat, to wear, and to live comfortably

what profit is that?

James uses a rhetorical question to teach his audience. Alternate translation: "how does that help them?" or "that does nothing good for them." or "your speech by itself does not help them."

James 2:17

faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead

Here, it is implied that "works" refers to things people do because they believe in God, such as obeying God and doing good to others. James speaks of faith as if it were alive if one does good works, and of faith as if it were dead if one does not do good deeds. This can be

restated to remove the abstract nouns "faith" and "works." Alternate translation: "a person who says he believes in God but does not do anything, does not really believe in God" or "a person who says he believes in God but does not do anything as a result of his belief, does not really believe in God"

James 2:18

Yet someone may say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Possible meanings are 1) James describes how someone might argue against his teaching and how he would respond to that person or 2) James describes how someone might support his teaching. If the speaker is supporting James, then the quotation would end at the end of the verse.

"You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works

The meanings in the abstract nouns "faith" and "works" can be expressed with "believe in God" and "do good things." Alternate translation: "'You believe in God and I do good things.' Prove to me that you can believe in God without doing anything, and I will prove to you that I believe in God by what I do"

James 2:19

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

James 2:20

Do you want to know, foolish man, that faith without works is useless?

James uses this question to introduce the next part of his teaching. Alternate translation: "Listen to me, foolish man, and I will show that faith without works is useless."

that faith without works is useless

The meanings in the abstract nouns "faith" and "works" can be expressed with "believe in God" and "do good things." Alternate translation: "that saying that you believe in God without doing good things is useless" or "that if you do not do good things, it is useless to say that you believe"

James 2:21

General Information:

Since these are Jewish believers, they know the story of Abraham, about whom God had told them long ago in his word.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works ... on the altar?

This rhetorical question is used to rebut the foolish man's arguments from [James 2:18]

Was not Abraham our father justified by works ... on the altar?

This can be restated to remove the abstract noun "works." This can also be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "Did not God justify Abraham our father because of what he did ... on the altar?" or "God certainly justified Abraham our father because of what he did ... on the altar."

father

Here "father" is used in the sense of "ancestor."

James 2:22

You see

The word "see" is a metonym. Alternate translation: "You understand"

that faith worked with his works, and that by works his faith was completed

James speaks as if "faith" and "works" were things that can work together and help each other. The meanings in the abstract nouns "faith" and "works" can be expressed with "believe God" and "do what God commanded." Alternate translation: "that because Abraham believed God, he did what God commanded him to do. And Abraham doing what God commanded showed that he truly believed"

You see

James again addresses his audience directly by using the plural form of "you."

James 2:23

The scripture was fulfilled

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "This fulfilled the scripture"

it was counted to him as righteousness

"God regarded his faith as righteousness." Abraham's faith and righteousness were treated as if they were able to be counted as having value.

James 2:24

it is by works that a man is justified, and not only by faith

Here, it is implied that "works" refers to things people do because they believe in God, such as obeying God and doing good to others. This can be restated to remove the abstract nouns "faith" and "works." This can also be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "God justifies a man because of what he does, and not just because he believes in God" or "God justifies a man because of what he does as a result of his belief, and not just because he believes in God"

James 2:25

In the same way also ... justified by works

James says that what was true of Abraham was also true of Rahab. Both were justified by works.

was not Rahab the prostitute justified by works ... another road?

James is using this rhetorical question to instruct his audience. Alternate translation: "it was what Rahab the prostitute did that justified her ... another road."

was not Rahab the prostitute justified by works ... another road?

This can be restated to remove the abstract noun "works." This can also be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "did God not justify Rahab the prostitute because of what she did ... another road?" or "God justified Rahab the prostitute because of what she did ... another road."

Rahab the prostitute

James expects his audience to know the Old Testament story about the woman Rahab.

messengers

people who bring news from another place

sent them away by another road

"then helped them escape and leave the city"

James 2:26

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead

James is speaking of faith without works as if it were a dead body without the spirit. Here, it is implied that

"works" refers to things people do because they believe in God, such as obeying God and doing good to others. This can be restated to remove the abstract nouns "faith" and "works." Alternate translation: "For just as the body is useless without the spirit, even so it is useless for a person to believe in God if he does not do anything" or "For just as the body is useless without the spirit, even so it is useless for a person to believe in God if he does not do anything as a result of his belief"

3 ¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.²For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in words, he is a perfect man, able to control even his whole body.

³Now if we put bits into horses' mouths for them to obey us, we can also direct their whole bodies.⁴Notice also that ships, although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, are steered by a very small rudder to wherever the pilot desires.

⁵In this way, the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts great things. Notice also how small a fire sets on fire a large forest.⁶The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil set among our members. The tongue defiles the whole body, sets on fire the course of life, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷For every kind of wild animal, bird, reptile, and sea creature is being tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

⁸But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹With it we praise the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.¹⁰Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things should not happen.

¹¹Does a spring pour out from its opening both sweet and bitter water?¹²Does a fig tree, my brothers, make olives? Or a grapevine, figs? Neither can salty water produce sweet water.

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let that person show a good life by his works in the humility of wisdom.¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth.

¹⁵This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. Rather, it is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.¹⁶For where there are jealousy and ambition, there is confusion and every evil practice.¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.¹⁸The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace among those who make peace.

James 3 General Notes

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Metaphors

James teaches his readers that they should live to please God by reminding them of things that they know from everyday life.

Links:

- [James 3:1 Notes](#)

James 3:1	we who teach
Not many of you	James includes himself and other teachers, but not the readers, so the word "we" is exclusive.
James is making a generalized statement.	
my brothers	James 3:2
"my fellow believers"	we all stumble
we who teach will be judged more strictly	James speaks of himself, other teachers, and the readers, so the word "we" is inclusive.
"God will judge us who teach more severely." This probably because those whom they teach trust them to know the truth and teach it correctly.	

stumble

Sinning is spoken of as if it were stumbling while walking. Alternate translation: "fail" or "sin"

does not stumble in words

"does not sin by saying wrong things"

he is a perfect man

"he is spiritually mature"

control even his whole body

James is referring to one's heart, emotions, and actions. Alternate translation: "control all his behavior" or "control all his actions"

James 3:3

General Information:

James is developing an argument that small things can control big things.

Now if we put bits into horses' mouths

James speaks about horses' bits. A bit is a small piece of metal that is placed into a horse's mouth to control where it goes.

Now if

"If" or "When"

horses

A horse is a large animal used to carry things or people.

James 3:4

Notice also that ships ... are steered by a very small rudder

A ship is like a truck that floats on water. A rudder is a flat piece of wood or metal at the back of the ship, used to control where it goes. The word "rudder" could also be translated as "tool."

are driven by strong winds,

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "strong winds push them, they"

are steered by a very small rudder to wherever the pilot desires

"have a small tool that a person can use to control where the ship goes"

James 3:5

the tongue is a small member

It can be stated explicitly what the tongue is a member of. Alternate translation: "the tongue is a small member of the body" or "the tongue is a small part of the body"

boasts great things

Here "things" is a general word for everything about which these people are proud.

Notice also

"Think about"

how small a fire sets on fire a large forest

In order to help people understand the harm that the tongue can cause, James speaks of the harm that a small flame can cause. Alternate translation: "how a small flame can start a fire that burns many trees"

James 3:6

The tongue is also a fire

The tongue is a metonym for what people say. James calls it a fire because of the great damage it can do. Alternate translation: "The tongue is like a fire"

a world of evil set among our members

The enormous effects of sinful speaking are spoken of as if they were a world by themselves.

our members

"the members of our bodies" or "the parts of our bodies"

The tongue defiles the whole body

The tongue here is a metonym for the words of the person whose tongue it is, and the body is a synecdoche for the whole person. The words defiling the person is a metaphor for God rejecting a person who speaks evil words.

sets on fire the course of life

The phrase "course of life" refers to a person's entire life. Alternate translation: "it ruins a person's entire life"

life, and is itself set on fire by hell

The word "itself" refers to the tongue. Also, here "hell" refers to the powers of evil or to the devil. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "life because the devil uses it for evil"

James 3:7

For every kind of ... mankind

The phrase "every kind" is a general statement referring to all or many kinds of wild animals. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "People have learned to control many kinds of wild animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures"

reptile

This is an animal that crawls on the ground.

sea creature

an animal that lives in the sea

James 3:8

But no human being can tame the tongue

James speaks of the tongue as if it were a wild animal. Here "tongue" represents a person's desire to speak evil thoughts.

It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison

James speaks of the harm that people can cause by what they say as if the tongue were an evil and poisonous creature that can kill people. Alternate translation: "It is like a restless and evil creature, full of deadly poison" or "It is like a restless and evil creature that can kill people with its venom"

James 3:9

With it we

"We use the tongue to say words that"

we curse men

"we ask God to harm men"

who have been made in God's likeness

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "whom God made in his likeness"

James 3:10

Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing

The nouns "blessing" and "cursing" can be translated with a verbal phrase. Alternate translation: "With the same mouth, a person blesses people and curses people"

My brothers

"Fellow Christians"

these things should not happen

"these things are wrong"

James 3:11

Connecting Statement:

After James stresses that the words of believers should not both bless and curse, he gives examples from nature to teach his readers that people who honor God by worshipping him should also live in right ways.

Does a spring pour out from its opening both sweet and bitter water?

James uses a rhetorical question to remind believers about what happens in nature. This can be expressed as a statement. Alternate translation: "You know that a spring does not pour out both sweet water and bitter water."

James 3:12

Does a fig tree, my brothers, make olives?

James uses another rhetorical question to remind the believers about what happens in nature. Alternate translation: "Brothers, you know that a fig tree cannot grow olives."

my brothers

"my fellow believers"

Or a grapevine, figs?

The word "make" is understood from the previous phrase. James uses another rhetorical question to remind the believers about what happens in nature. Alternate translation: "Or does a grapevine make figs?" or "And a grapevine cannot grow figs."

James 3:13

Who is wise and understanding among you?

James uses this question to teach his audience about proper behavior. The words "wise" and "understanding" are similar. Alternate translation: "I will tell you how a wise and understanding person is to act."

Let that person show a good life by his works in the humility of wisdom

This can be restated to remove the abstract nouns "humility" and "wisdom." Alternate translation: "That person should live a good life by doing the kind of deeds that come from being humble and wise"

James 3:14

if you have bitter jealousy and ambition in your heart

Here "heart" is a metonym for a person's emotions or thoughts. This can be restated to remove the abstract nouns "jealousy" and "ambition." Alternate translation: "if you are jealous and selfish" or "if you desire what other people have and you want to succeed even if it harms others"

do not boast and lie against the truth

The abstract noun "truth" can be stated as "true." Alternate translation: "do not boast that you are wise, because that is not true"

James 3:15

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above

Here "This" refers to the "bitter jealousy and strife" described in the previous verses. The phrase "from above" is a metonym that represents "heaven" which represents God himself. Alternate translation: "This is

not the kind of wisdom that God teaches us from heaven"

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. Rather, it is earthly, unspiritual, demonic

The abstract noun "wisdom" can be stated as "wise." Alternate translation: "Whoever acts like this is not wise according to what God in heaven teaches us. Rather, this person is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic"

earthly

The word "earthly" refers to the values and behaviors of the people who do not honor God. Alternate translation: "not honoring to God"

unspiritual

"not from the Holy Spirit" or "not spiritual"

demonic

"from demons"

James 3:16

For where there are jealousy and ambition, there is confusion and every evil practice

This can be restated to remove the abstract nouns "jealousy," "ambition," and "confusion." Alternate translation: "For when people are jealous and selfish, this causes them to act in disorderly and evil ways"

there is confusion

"there is disorder" or "there is chaos"

every evil practice

"every kind of sinful behavior" or "every kind of wicked deed"

James 3:17

But the wisdom from above is first pure

Here "from above" is metonym that represents "heaven," which represents God himself. The abstract noun "wisdom" can be stated as "wise." Alternate translation: "But when a person is wise according to what God in heaven teaches, he acts in ways that are first pure"

is first pure

"is first holy"

full of mercy and good fruits

Here "good fruits" refer to kind things that people do for others as a result of having wisdom from God.
Alternate translation: "full of mercy and good deeds"

and sincere

"and honest" or "and truthful"

James 3:18

The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace among those who make peace

Making peace is spoken of as if they were sowing seeds, and righteousness is spoken of as if it were the fruit that grows up as a result of making peace. Alternate translation: "The result of making peace is righteousness" or "Those who work peacefully to help people live in peace produce righteousness"

make peace

The abstract noun "peace" can be expressed by using the word "peacefully." Alternate translation: "cause people to live peacefully" or "help people not to be angry with each other"

⁴ ¹Where do quarrels and disputes among you come from? Do they not come from your desires that fight among your members?²You desire, and you do not have. You murder and covet, and you are not able to obtain. You fight and quarrel. You do not possess because you do not ask.³You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order that you may use it for your desires.

⁴You adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility against God? So whoever desires to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.⁵Or do you think the scripture says in vain, "The Spirit he caused to live in us is deeply envious"?

⁶But God gives more grace, so the scripture says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

⁷So submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸Come close to God, and he will come close to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded people.⁹Grieve, mourn, and cry! Let your laughter turn into mourning and your joy into gloom.

¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

¹¹Do not speak evil about another, brothers. The person who speaks evil about a brother or judges his brother speaks evil about the law and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge.¹²Only one is the lawgiver and judge. He is the one who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you, you who judge your neighbor?

¹³Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into this city, spend a year there, trade, and make a profit."¹⁴Who knows what will happen tomorrow, and what is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears.

¹⁵Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that."¹⁶But now you are boasting about your arrogant plans. All such boasting is evil.¹⁷So for anyone who knows to do good but does not do it, for him it is sin.

James 4 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Adultery

Writers in the Bible often speak of adultery as a metaphor for people who say they love God but do things that God hates. (See: and godly)

Law

James probably uses this word in [James 4:11](#) to refer to "the royal law" ([James 2:8](#)).

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Rhetorical Questions

James asks many questions because he wants his readers to think about how they are living. He wants to correct and teach them.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Humble

This word probably usually refers to people who are not proud. James uses the word here to refer to people who are not proud and who also trust in Jesus and obey him.

Links:

- [James 4:1 Notes](#)

James 4:1

General Information:

In this chapter, the words "yourselves," "your," and "you" are plural and refer to the believers to whom James writes.

Connecting Statement:

James rebukes these believers for their worldliness and their lack of humility. He again urges them to watch how they speak to and about each other.

Where do quarrels and disputes among you come from?

The abstract nouns "quarrels" and "disputes" mean basically the same thing and can be translated with verbs. Alternate translation: "Why do you quarrel and dispute among yourselves?" or "Why do you fight among yourselves?"

Do they not come from your desires that fight among your members?

James uses this question to rebuke his audience. This can be translated as a statement. Alternate translation: "They come from your evil desires for things, desires that fight among your members." or "You quarrel and have disputes because of your desires that fight among your members."

Do they not come from your desires that fight among your members

James writes of the tension or conflict that people feel because of their different desires as if those desires were fighting. Alternate translation: "Do they not come because of the conflict you feel because of your different desires?" or "You quarrel and argue because of the tension caused by your different desires."

your desires that fight among your members

Possible meanings are 1) "members" refers to the parts of a person: his body, feelings, and thoughts. Each person wants more than one thing, but he cannot have them all. Alternate translation: "your conflicting desires within you" 2) "members" refers to the individual people in the church. Different members want different

things. Alternate translation: "the conflicting desires among you all"

James 4:2

You murder and covet, and you are not able to obtain

The phrase "You murder" is probably a hyperbole. The words "murder" and "covet" are used to express how badly the people behave in order to get what they want. Alternate translation: "You do all kinds of evil things to get what you cannot have"

You fight and quarrel

The words "fight" and "quarrel" mean basically the same thing. James uses them to emphasize how much the people argue among themselves. Alternate translation: "You constantly fight"

James 4:3

you ask wrongly

Possible meanings are 1) "you ask with wrong motives" or "you ask with bad attitudes" or 2) "you are asking for wrong things" or "you are asking for bad things"

James 4:4

You adulteresses!

James speaks of believers as being like wives who sleep with men other than their husbands. Alternate translation: "You are not being faithful to God!"

Do you not know ... God?

James uses this question to teach his audience. This can be translated as a statement. Alternate translation: "You know ... God!"

friendship with the world

This phrase refers to identifying with or participating in the world's value system and behavior.

friendship with the world

Here the world's value system is spoken of as if it were a person that others could be friends with.

friendship with the world is hostility against God

One who is friends with the world is an enemy of God. Here "friendship with the world" stands for being friends with the world, and "hostility against God" stands for being hostile against God. Alternate translation: "friends of the world are enemies of God"

James 4:5

Or do you think the scripture says in vain ... envious?"

This is a rhetorical question James uses to exhort his audience. To speak in vain is to speak uselessly. Alternate translation: "There is a reason that scripture says ... envious."

The Spirit he caused to live in us

Some versions, including the ULB and UDB, understand this as a reference to the Holy Spirit. Other versions translate this as "the spirit" and mean by it the human spirit that each person has been created to have. We suggest that you use the meaning that is presented in other translations used by your readers.

James 4:6

But God gives more grace

How this phrase relates to the previous verse can be made explicit. Alternate translation: "But, even though our spirits may desire what we cannot have, God gives us even more grace if we will humble ourselves"

so the scripture

"that is why the scripture"

the proud

This refers to proud people in general. Alternate translation: "proud people"

the humble

This refers to humble people in general. Alternate translation: "humble people"

James 4:7

So submit

"Because God gives grace to the humble, submit"

submit to God

"obey God"

Resist the devil

"Oppose the devil" or "Do not do what the devil wants"

he will flee

"he will run away"

you

Here this pronoun is plural and refers to James's audience.

James 4:8

General Information:

The word "you" here is plural and refers to the scattered believers to whom James writes.

Come close to God

Here the idea of coming close stands for becoming honest and open with God.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded

These are two phrases in parallel with each other.

Cleanse your hands

This expression is a command for people to do righteous acts instead of unrighteous acts. Alternate translation: "Behave in a way that honors God"

purify your hearts

Here "hearts" refers to a person's thoughts and emotions. Alternate translation: "make your thoughts and intentions right"

you double-minded people

The word "double-minded" refers to a person who cannot make a firm decision about something. Alternate translation: "you people who cannot decide if you want to obey God or not"

James 4:9

Grieve, mourn, and cry

These three words have similar meanings. James uses them together to emphasize that the people should be truly sorry for not obeying God.

Let your laughter turn into mourning and your joy into gloom

This is saying the same thing in different ways for emphasis. The abstract nouns "laughter," "mourning," "joy," and "gloom" can be translated as verbs or adjectives. Alternate translation: "Stop laughing and mourn. Stop being joyful and be gloomy"

James 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord

"Be humble toward God." Actions done with God in mind are often spoken of as being done in his physical presence.

he will exalt you

James indicates that God will honor the humble person by saying God will pick that person up off the ground physically from where that person had prostrated himself in humility. Alternate translation: "he will honor you"

James 4:11

brothers

James speaks of the believers as if they are biological brothers. The term here includes women as well as men. Alternate translation: "fellow believers"

but a judge

"but you are acting like the person who gives the law"

James 4:12

Only one is the lawgiver and judge

This refers to God. "God is the only one who gives laws and judges people"

Who are you, you who judge your neighbor?

This is a rhetorical question James uses to scold his audience. This can be expressed as a statement.

Alternate translation: "You are just a human and cannot judge another human."

James 4:13

spend a year there

James speaks of spending time as if it were money. "stay there for a year"

James 4:14

Who knows what will happen tomorrow, and what is your life?

James uses these questions to correct his audience and to teach these believers that physical life is not that important. They can be expressed as statements. Alternate translation: "No one knows what will happen tomorrow, and your life does not last very long!"

For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears

James speaks of people as if they were a mist that appears and then quickly goes away. Alternate translation: "You live for only a short amount of time, and then you die"

James 4:15

Instead, you should say

"Instead, your attitude should be"

we will live and do this or that

"we will live long enough to do what we have planned to do." The word "we" does not directly refer to James or his audience but is part of the example of how James's audience should consider the future.

James 4:16

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

James 4:17

for anyone who knows to do good but does not do it, for him it is sin

Anyone who fails to do the good he knows he should do is guilty of sin.

5 ¹Come now, you who are rich, weep and wail because of the miseries coming on you.²Your riches have rotted, and your clothes have become moth-eaten.³Your gold and your silver have become tarnished and their rust will be a witness against you. It will consume your flesh like fire. You have stored up your treasure for the last days.

⁴Look, the wages you kept back from the laborers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.⁵You have lived in luxury on the earth and indulged yourselves. You have fattened your hearts for a day of slaughter.⁶You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not oppose you.

⁷Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit from the ground and he is patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains.⁸You, too, be patient. Strengthen your hearts because the Lord's coming is near.

⁹Do not complain, brothers, against one another, so that you will not be condemned. See, the judge is standing at the door.¹⁰Take an example, brothers, from the suffering and patience of the prophets, those who spoke in the name of the Lord.¹¹See, we regard those who endured as blessed. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you know the purpose of the Lord, how he is very compassionate and merciful.

¹²Above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by the earth, or by any other oath. Rather, let your "Yes" mean "Yes" and your "No" mean "No," so you do not fall under judgment.

¹³Is anyone among you suffering hardship? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him. Let them anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.¹⁵The prayer of faith will heal the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, God will forgive him.

¹⁶So confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very strong in its working.¹⁷Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain in the land for three years and six months.¹⁸Then Elijah prayed again. The heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

¹⁹My brothers, if anyone among you strays from the truth, and someone brings him back,²⁰that person should know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and will cover over a great number of sins.

James 5 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Eternity

This chapter contrasts living for things of this world, which will not last, with living for things that will last for eternity. It is also important to live with the expectation that Jesus will return soon. (See: eternity)

Oaths

Scholars are divided over whether this passage teaches all oaths are wrong. Most scholars believe some oaths are permissible and James instead is teaching Christians to have integrity.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Elijah

This story will be difficult to understand if the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles have not yet been translated.

"Save his soul from death"

This probably teaches that the person who stops their sinful lifestyle will not be punished with physical death as a consequence of their sin. On the other hand, some scholars believe this passage teaches about eternal salvation. (See: sin and death and save)

Links:

- [James 5:1 Notes](#)

James 5:1

already happened. Alternate translation: "Your gold and silver will become tarnished"

Connecting Statement:

gold ... silver

James warns rich people about their focus on pleasure and riches.

These things are mentioned as examples of things that are valuable to wealthy people.

you who are rich

have become tarnished ... their rust

Possible meanings are 1) James is giving a strong warning to wealthy believers or 2) James is talking about wealthy unbelievers. Alternate translation: "you who are rich and say you honor God"

Gold does not actually tarnish, and gold and silver do not actually rust. James wants to emphasize that these precious metals will be ruined. Alternate translation: "are ruined ... their ruined condition"

because of the miseries coming on you

their rust will be a witness against you. It

James states that these people will suffer terribly in the future and writes as if their sufferings were objects that were coming toward them. The abstract noun "miseries" can be translated as a verb. Alternate translation: "because you will suffer terribly in the future"

James wrote of their valuable things being ruined as if they were a person in a courtroom accusing the wicked of their crimes. Alternate translation: "and when God judges you, your ruined treasures will be like someone who accuses you in court. Their corrosion" (See: and)

will consume ... like fire

James 5:2

Your riches have rotted, and your clothes have become moth-eaten.

Here the corrosion is spoken of as if it were a fire that will burn up their owners.

your flesh

Earthly riches do not last nor do they have any eternal value. James speaks of these events as if they had already happened. Alternate translation: "Your riches will rot, and your clothes will be eaten by moths."

Here "flesh" stands for the physical body.

fire

riches ... clothes

The idea of fire here is meant to lead people to remember that fire often stands for God's punishment that will come on all the wicked.

These things are mentioned as examples of things that are valuable to wealthy people.

for the last days

James 5:3

Your gold and your silver have become tarnished

This refers to the time right before God comes to judge all people. The wicked think they are storing up riches for the future, but what they are doing is storing up judgment. Alternate translation: "for when God is about to judge you"

Earthly riches do not last nor do they have any eternal value. James speaks of these events as if they had

James 5:4

Connecting Statement:

James continues to warn rich people about their focus on pleasure and riches.

the wages you kept back from the laborers who mowed your fields are crying out against you

The money that should have been paid is spoken of as a person who is shouting because of the injustice done to him. Alternate translation: "God can see that you kept back the wages you should have given to those who mowed your fields"

The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts

The shouts of the harvesters are spoken of as if they could be heard in heaven. Alternate translation: "The Lord of hosts has heard the cries of the harvesters"

the ears of the Lord of hosts

God is spoken of as if he had ears as humans have.

James 5:5

You have fattened your hearts for a day of slaughter

Here people are viewed as if they were cattle, luxuriously fed on grain so they would become fattened to be slaughtered for a feast. However, no one will feast at the time of judgment. Alternate translation: "Your greed has only prepared you for harsh eternal judgment"

your hearts

The "heart" was considered to be the center of human desire, and here stands for the entire person.

James 5:6

You have condemned ... the righteous person

This is probably not "condemned" in the legal sense of a judge passing a sentence of death on a criminal. Instead, it probably refers to the wicked and powerful people who decide to mistreat the poor until they die.

the righteous person. He does not

"the people who do what is right. They do not." Here "the righteous person" refers to righteous people in general and not to a specific person. Alternate translation: "righteous people. They do not"

James 5:7

General Information:

In closing, James reminds the believers about the Lord's coming and gives several short lessons on how to live for the Lord.

Connecting Statement:

James changes topics from a rebuke of the rich people to an exhortation to the believers.

Be patient, then

"Because of this, wait and be calm"

until the Lord's coming

This phrase refers to the return of Jesus, when he will begin his kingdom on the earth and judge all people. Alternate translation: "until Christ's return"

the farmer

James makes an analogy using farmers and believers to teach what it means to be patient.

James 5:8

Strengthen your hearts

James is equating the believers' hearts to their will to remain committed. Alternate translation: "Stay committed" or "Keep your faith strong"

the Lord's coming is near

"the Lord will return soon"

James 5:9

Do not complain, brothers ... you

James is writing to all the scattered Jewish believers.

against one another

"about each other"

you will not be condemned

This can be stated in the active. Alternate translation: "Christ will not condemn you"

See, the judge

"Pay attention, because what I am about to say is both true and important: the judge"

the judge is standing at the door

James compares Jesus, the judge, to a person about to walk through a door to emphasize how soon Jesus will return to judge the world. Alternate translation: "the judge is coming soon"

James 5:10

the suffering and patience of the prophets, those who spoke in the name of the Lord

"how the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord suffered persecution with patience"

spoke in the name of the Lord

"Name" here is a metonym for the person of the Lord. Alternate translation: "spoke by the authority of the Lord" or "spoke for the Lord to the people"

James 5:11

See, we regard

"Pay attention, because what I am about to say is both true and important: we regard"

those who endured

"those who continued obeying God even through hardship"

James 5:12

Above all, my brothers,

"This is important, my brothers:" or "Especially, my brothers,"

my brothers

This refers to all believers including women. Alternate translation: "my fellow believers"

do not swear

To "swear" is to say that you will do something, or that something is true, and to be held accountable by a higher authority. Alternate translation: "do not make an oath" or "do not make a vow"

either by heaven or by the earth

The words "heaven" and "earth" refer to the spiritual or human authorities that are in heaven and earth.

let your "Yes" mean "Yes" and your "No" mean "No,"

James is telling people to speak the truth without making an oath. Alternate translation: "If you say "Yes" or "No," say it truthfully"

so you do not fall under judgment

Being condemned is spoken of as if one had fallen, crushed by the weight of something heavy. Alternate translation: "so God will not punish you"

James 5:13

Is anyone among you suffering hardship? Let him pray

James uses this question to cause the readers to reflect on their need. This can be translated as a statement. Alternate translation: "If anyone is enduring troubles, he should pray"

Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise

James uses this question to cause the readers to reflect on their blessings. This can be translated as a statement. Alternate translation: "If anyone is happy, he should sing songs of praise"

James 5:14

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call

James uses this question to cause the readers to reflect on their need. This can be translated as a statement. Alternate translation: "If anyone is sick, he should call"

in the name of the Lord

"Name" is a metonym for the person of Jesus Christ.
Alternate translation: "by the authority of the Lord" or
"with the authority that the Lord has given them"

James 5:15

The prayer of faith will heal the sick person

The writer speaks of God hearing believers pray for
sick people and healing those people as if the prayers
themselves healed the people. Alternate translation:
"The Lord will hear the prayer of faith and will heal the
sick person"

The prayer of faith

"The prayer made by believers" or "The prayer that
people pray believing God will do as they ask"

the Lord will raise him up

"the Lord will make him well" or "the Lord will enable
him to resume his normal life"

James 5:16

General Information:

As these are Jewish believers, James reminds them to
pray by recalling one of the prophets of old and that
prophet's practical prayers.

So confess your sins

Admit to other believers things you did wrong so that
you can be forgiven.

to one another

"to each other"

so that you may be healed

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation:
"so that God may heal you"

The prayer of a righteous person is very strong in its working

Prayer is presented as if it were an object that was
strong or powerful. Alternate translation: "When the
person who obeys God prays, God will do great things"

James 5:17

prayed earnestly

"prayed eagerly" or "prayed passionately"

in the land

There may have been rain in lands other than Israel,
but it did not rain in Israel.

three ... six

"3 ... 6"

James 5:18

The heavens gave rain

"The heavens" probably refers to the sky, which is
presented as the source of the rain. Alternate
translation: "Rain fell from the sky"

the earth produced its fruit

Here the earth is presented as the source of the crops.

fruit

Here "fruit" stands for all the crops of the farmers.

James 5:19

brothers

Here this word probably refers to both men and
women. Alternate translation: "fellow believers"

if anyone among you strays from the truth, and someone brings
him back

A believer who stops trusting in God and obeying him
is spoken of as if he were a sheep that wandered away
from the flock. The person who persuades him to trust
in God again is spoken of as if he were a shepherd who
goes to search for the lost sheep. Alternate translation:
"whenever anyone stops obeying God, and another
person helps him start obeying again"

James 5:20

whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way ... will cover over
a great number of sins

James means that God will use the actions of this
person to persuade the sinner to repent and be saved.

But James speaks as if it were this other person who actually saved the sinner's soul from death.

will save him from death and will cover over a great number of sins

Here "death" refers to spiritual death, eternal separation from God. Alternate translation: "will save him from spiritual death, and God will forgive the sinner for all of his sins"

will cover over a great number of sins

Possible meanings are 1) the person who brings back the disobedient brother will have his sins forgiven or 2) the disobedient brother, when he returns to the Lord, will have his sins forgiven. Sins are spoken of as if they were objects that God could cover so that he would not see them, so that he would forgive them.