

- 1) **INTRODUCTION:** Verse 1:1 first identifies the author as “James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ” and then identifies the intended recipients of the letter as “the Twelve Tribes scattered among the nations.” We’ll start by understanding the identity of who this James really was and then look at the date of the epistle and the intended destination and audience.
- a. **AUTHOR:** The identity of James is not clearly indicated, but over the centuries of the Church it has been limited to three most likely possibilities:
- i. “James the brother of John and the son Zebedee” – he was of course, one of the twelve disciples who walked with Jesus. While this may be the best known James, the historical time frame does not lend much support for him as the author. We know that Jesus was crucified, resurrected and ascended in about 30 AD, and Scripture indicates that James the brother of John was martyred about 44 AD as recorded in Acts 12:2. While not impossible, most scholars given the background and historical context of the book have deemed this James an unlikely candidate to have written this epistle due to the latest date that this James could have authored it and the earliest date it was most likely written are improbable as we shall soon see.
 - ii. “James the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18)” – he was little known in the early decades when the church in Jerusalem was forming, and this James was not well enough known to have presumed his surname was sufficient to identify him. Thus, most scholars conclude that he was an unlikely candidate to have written this epistle.
 - iii. “James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus” – Eusebius (an early church father) has from a very early date contended that James the half-brother of Jesus was the author of the letter. James grew up as Jesus’ younger brother in the same household and didn’t come to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord until after the resurrection – John 7:5; 1 Corinthians 15:7. Most scholars agree James the Just to be the most likely candidate to have written this epistle. Notable for this conclusion is that James the Just was well known as the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, as well as being the famous half-brother of Jesus. He certainly had both the authority and name recognition for this epistle to have been well circulated and preserved. As we’ll see in the following time frame, for this and other reasons, this James remains the best choice as author.
- b. **DATE OF WRITING AND DESTINATION:** The date of writing is a key matter as it establishes the historical context from where the “trials” and oppression for which James is responding had come from. The oppression likely came from one of two sources – first and earliest would have been from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, the same leaders who commissioned Saul of Tarsus [later known as Paul] to root out this renegade Jewish sect. The second option would have been Roman persecution. We know the trials that Peter, John, and Paul spoke of were predominately from the Roman leaders with initial encouragement from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Roman persecution, however, had not begun in earnest under the rule of Nero (54-68 AD), and was continued under the rule of Vespasian (69-79), and Domitian (81-96) – See “Introduction to the Epistles” for more on this - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Bible%20Survey%20-%20NT%203.1%20-%20Introduction%20to%20the%20Epistles.pdf> .

It turns out there was another form of persecution that most likely was at the crux of what was going on, as we'll soon see in the information that follows:

- i. General time line of Biblical Christian events:
 1. Jesus birth – between 6 and 5 BC.
 2. Jesus death, resurrection and ascension – about 30 AD.
 3. Saul of Tarsus' conversion to become the Apostle Paul – 35 AD.
 4. Book of James written – 45-48 AD.
 5. Christian Council in Jerusalem – 50-51 AD.
 6. Nero's rein – 54-68 AD.
 7. James the Just' death – 62 AD.
 8. Destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem -70 AD.
- ii. Into this timeline it's appropriate to insert what we do know about James the Just from the known historical record. According to historian Josephus, James the Just died in Jerusalem in 62 AD, having been executed by the Sadducean High Priest Ananus II. This is important because it would tend to have placed the book's focus on persecution from Jerusalem in an earlier context than from Rome. James thus would have preceded both Paul and Peter in being martyred for their faith by about five years. Though John, Paul and Peter wrote extensively about keeping faith in light of the Roman persecution, a more reasonable context of the persecution James wrote about would be by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. We know there was an early background of persecution after the stoning of Stephen when many Messianic Jews left the city, followed by a continuance of this persecution occurring under Saul of Tarsus before his conversion.
- iii. The theological content of James, noted scholar R. W. Wall in his article on James' Epistle occurring in the book titled The Dictionary of the Latter New Testament & Its Developments, identifies James' theology as being "primitive" [or simple] in its depiction of Christian theology and church structure. This simplicity is thought by many scholars to be due to two reasons:
 1. That James was writing to well-educated Messianic Jews who knew the Scripture well and also knew the events of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. Thus there would not have been the need for extensive theological grounding as was necessary for Gentile converts.
 2. The theological simplicity of James makes sense since it was written at an earlier date before the church formed a more robust theological identity, which occurred later with the writings of Paul and Peter, Mark, Matthew and John.
- iv. Into this context, James writes less to instruct these early Messianic-Jewish Christians and more to encourage them in providing practical pastoral advice on how to remain strong and live out their faith in a hostile non-Christian environment. This was also something Jesus warned His followers would come about (John 15:18). The simplistic theological content lends weight to a date of James the Just writing to these Messianic Jews [meaning these twelve Tribes as the successors of God's covenant people outside of Palestine] in the first few decades after Jesus' resurrection. It would be nearly another ten years

before other Christian Epistles and Gospels would become main-stream in the Christian communities.

- v. R. W. Wall also identifies the content of the epistle as being primarily “religious and eschatological” rather than “ethnic and national,” indicating God’s new revelation is more personal and global than the previous Old Covenant Jewish vision of a national identity with God’s blessing primarily in the Land of Israel/Palestine. All of this is certainly in keeping with Jesus’ Messianic message and its rejection by the Jewish leaders who expected more of a national deliverer who would establish an earthly Jewish kingdom in the Land rather than a world-wide eternal Kingdom in a New Heaven and earth that the New Covenant preaches about.
 - vi. Another significant factor was the “Jewish-Gentile debate” within the faith that came to a head in 49-50 AD (Acts 15). This debate centered on how much of the Jewish Law and Tradition had to be adopted and practiced as a “Messianic Jew” and “Gentile convert” to Christianity. Since this significant event was not even mentioned by James, it is reasonable to presume that it was written prior to the debate arising.
 - vii. With this and other factors, Dr. Gary Tuck postulates a date of writing between 45 and 48 AD. Along with other factors, this timeframe best supports James the Just as author. This date would also make the epistle from James the earliest of New Testament compositions in the Bible.
- c. **PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE:** All Scripture is known to be “Occasional” – meaning it was written into a particular environment to meet the needs of God’s Covenant people in a particular occasion. Thus it is interesting that the Epistle of James contains very little doctrine, and there is little substantive theological teaching included. Martin Luther was well known to have little interest in this epistle because in his view it contained so little “proper theological content.” What the epistle does include, however, is extensive exhortation and practical information on how to maintain one’s faith in adverse circumstances. This is the sort of writing we should expect from a pastor who was shepherding his flock from a distance. Accordingly, Dr. Gary Tuck has concluded that the need of those James wrote to “was not more teaching, but exhortation to put into practice what they already knew (1:22-25).”
- i. The trials that James refers to are real but not clearly specified. R. W. Wall postulates that because this suffering congregation was a Jewish Christian Synagogue (2:1-2) who aspired to be “rich in faith as heirs of the promised Kingdom of God” (2:5). It is also pretty clear that they were likely a congregation lacking in material goods and pleasures. In essence, Wall believes they were a congregation of humble means (1:9-11; 4:6-10) and likely were more of a working-class poor (5:1-6). The question as to their oppressors is interesting; some think they were a traditional Jewish Synagogue and others a Messianic Jewish Synagogue. Either way, the oppressors are likely comprised the landed rich (5:1) and wealthy merchant middle class (4:13) who were fellow Jews (2:2-4). The conflict can be seen as between the “haves” who are wealthy and spiritually callous, and the “have nots” who are poor and abused but Spiritually rich. Note the similarity with the Book of Revelation in the second announcement to the seven churches, where the Spirit consoles the Church of Smyrna in a similar conflict on the end times – Revelation 2:8-10.

- ii. Considering this conflict, James' focus was to promote a more inward spirituality, and reframed their viewpoint in looking forward to the promised eternal Kingdom with God. James' exhortation was to put into practice what they already knew (1:22-25). James also encouraged them that God has not abandoned them, and the testing of their faith would only serve to strengthen and perfect them. We need to remember that the Old Covenant focused on God's material blessing in the land of promise – which the wealthy Jewish Synagogue had in great measure. In their view, being outside of God's material blessing meant you were not loved by God. The encouragement James provided this poor congregation, was to remind them to be grateful for what they already had in Christ and to focus more on the love of God and on eternity, and to call the wealthy synagogue into accountability.
- d. Some of the concepts developed in James sound similar to some of Paul's writings, yet James epistle predates Paul's works by nearly a decade. It is interesting that James and Paul both had rejected Jesus as Messiah and Lord only to become Messianic Jews themselves. As Christ-followers and ministry leaders it was reasonable they would have found some theological and ministerial common ground.
- e. As a result of the above, most scholars are confident in concluding that "James the Just" the half-brother of Jesus who was well known as the pastor of the Jerusalem church is the author of this epistle and was writing to encourage believers to endure their present trials and focus on the Second coming. James' message of faith in action as the imperative being demonstrated by submission and repentance was intended to console and encourage these believers in their hostile socio-economic environment. James encourages them to focus more upon the eternal and imperishable, rather than on the perishable things of the world which are passing away.

2) **LITERARY STRUCTURE** – Outlines are means scholars employ to tease out the "Author's Intended Meaning" in understanding what was written to a particular group of people within a known historical context. Different organizational structures allow us to observe and evaluate the thought development presented by the author, so we can then more effectively apply it to our life and times. Three outlines are presented here:

- a. Outline 1 – The Wisdom of James – R. W. Wall
 - i. Thematic Introduction – 1:1-21
 - ii. Wisdom of Quick to Hear – 1:22-2:26
 - iii. Wisdom of Slow to Speak – 3:1-18
 - iv. Wisdom of Slow to Anger – 4:1-5:6
 - v. Concluding Exhortations – 5:7-20
- b. Outline 2 – Roughly following the outline of Dr. Gary Tuck:
 - i. Greeting – 1:1
 - ii. Enduring Trials, Seeking Wisdom, Applying Scripture – 1:2-27
 - 1. Trials of Faith – 1:2-4
 - 2. Receiving Wisdom – 1:5-8
 - 3. Responding to Material Status – 1:9-11
 - 4. Confessing God's Goodness in the face of trials – 1:12-18

- 5. Applying the Truth of Scripture – 1:19-27
- iii. Caring for the Poor – 2:1-26
 - 1. The Sin of Discrimination – 2:1-13
 - 2. Faith Supported by Action – 2:14-26
- iv. Aspects of Wisdom – 3:1-4:12
 - 1. Control the Tongue – 3:1-12
 - 2. Cultivate Wisdom – 3:13-18
 - 3. Submit to God – 4:1-10
 - 4. Refrain from Judging – 4:11-12
- v. Addressing Financial Matters – 4:13-5:6
 - 1. The Sin of Presumption – 4:13-17
 - 2. The Sin of Profit at the Expense of Others – 5:1-6
- vi. Enduring Trials and Helping our Brothers & Sisters – 5:7-20
 - 1. Trials and Testing – 5:7-11
 - 2. Foolishness of Oaths – 5:12
 - 3. Power of Prayer – 5:13-18
 - 4. Restoring a Fallen Brother & Sister – 5:19-20
- c. Outline 3 – Zondervan's Archaeological Study Bible:
 - i. Greeting – 1:1
 - ii. Trials and Temptations – 1:2-18
 - 1. Facing Trials and Temptations – 1:2-12
 - 2. God is the giver of Good Gifts and is not the Tempter – 1:13-18
 - iii. Listening and doing – 1:19-27
 - iv. Favoritism forbidden – 2:1-13
 - v. Faith and Action – 2:14-26
 - vi. Taming the Tongue – 3:1-12
 - vii. Two Kinds of Wisdom – 3:13-18
 - viii. Warning against Worldliness – 4:1-5:6
 - 1. Selfishness – 4:1-3
 - 2. Friendship with the World – 4:4
 - 3. Pride – 4:5-10
 - 4. Slander – 4:11-12
 - 5. Boasting – 4:13-17
 - 6. Selfishness – 5:1-6
 - ix. Additional Exhortations – 5:7-20

IN SECTIONS 3 AND 4 BELOW ARE TWO COMPANION INTERPRETATIONS OF JAMES TEXT BASED UPON THE OUTLINES PROVIDED ABOVE BY DR TUCK AND R.W. WALL:

3) EXEGETICAL MESSAGE OF JAMES – Generally following Dr. Tuck's outline above:

- a. 1:1 – This is a typical epistolary greeting identifying the writer and the intended readers, though by extension it was meant for a far wider reading. Such letters were usually carefully copied and preserved in the Jewish tradition, so they could be passed on to other congregations.
- b. 1:2-1:12 – There is an interesting double opening statement with 1:2 “joy and perseverance” mirrored by 1:12 “blessing & perseverance”. The content that follows each opening statement 1:2-11 and 1:12-27 forms the crux of James’ message.
- c. 1:2-4 – The primary theme of trials in everyday life is the introductory thought James Addresses. He presents trials as actually having a beneficial purpose, not intended as such by the adversary, but in Christ they are a means to transformational life and become a blessing from God. James invites the reader not to focus on the problem of the moment, but to focus instead on the result it brings about in securing both our spiritual growth and maturity. Key words are underlined and interpreted for clarity:
 - i. 1:2 – Joy – as with many Scriptural terms, the meaning of “Joy” is quite different than modern English language utilizations.
 - 1. In the book The Love Driven Life, the distinction between joy and happiness is explained.
 - a. Happiness is created by our response to “favorable circumstances or conditions. We are happy when things are going well and life is in sync. We are unhappy when things are not going well and when our life is jumbled or messy.”
 - b. “Joy referred to in Scripture is transcendent. It is beyond [normative human] understanding or description.”
 - c. “Joy is not subject to circumstances or conditions. Even in the throes of the most severe difficulties it is possible to be joyful,” which is because joy springs out of God’s eternal love and commitment to Christ’s followers.
 - d. “Joy is transcendent because it is not dependent upon the realities of this world.”
 - e. In John 15:9-11 Jesus explains – “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; [therefore] abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.”
 - 2. Zondervan’s New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words explains:
 - a. Relationship with God is the source of a believer's joy. There is no doubt that Scripture portrays joy, like every other aspect of life on earth, as dependent on God's goodness.
 - b. Although there is a direct joy that comes from a personal relationship with the Lord (Psalm 16:11), all other joy is from Him as well.
 - c. Obedience to God led to rich harvests and to joy expressed in celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. "The LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete"

(Deuteronomy 16:15). **This passage obviously resonates with Jesus' teaching in John 15:9-11.**

- d. The memory of God's saving acts was a constant source of joy.
 - e. The believer's relationship with God was a source of joy in another way. The obedient believer finds God's Word to be a source of joy (Psalm 19:8; 119:14); likewise, the trusting believer rejoices in God's faithfulness in His promises (Psalm 119:162).
 - f. Thus, it is in commitment to God that the believer finds an inner and hidden spring of joy bubbling up within the heart.
- ii. **1:2-3 – Temptations/Trials** – A temptation or trial are often used to describe a difficult situation, a pressure that brings about a reaction through our endurance of it, through which the character or commitment of the believer is demonstrated. While often thought in terms of proving ourselves to God, God already knows our hearts and is the perfecter of our faith. This is more about proving our faith and commitment to ourselves so that we can stand confidently in God before the world.
- Most instances of the verb "to test" or the noun "test" in the NIV and the NASB are translations of the Greek verb *Peirazo* or the noun *Peirasmos*. Although believers may experience painful trials (1 Peter 4:12), they can live with confidence: "The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials" – either by removing them, or walking with us through it.*
- iii. **1:3-4 – Perseverance** – The Greek word *Hypomeno* means "to patiently endure." In the Bible, it usually has an active sense as we stand confidently in our faith before God. Perseverance is overcoming difficulties: it is facing pressures and trials that call for a steadfast commitment to doing what we know to be right and thereby maintaining a godly life. The NT encourages us to value trials and difficulties, which when taken in the right way, they can enable us to develop perseverance (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:3-4).
- When we are under intense pressure, it is all too easy to either give in to the trials and therefore become discouraged. At such times, we need to remember the words in the epistle of Hebrews 10:35-36 – "Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."*
- iv. **1:4 – Maturity** – [*Teleios*] The thought being conveyed is that a mature individual has reached the goal of the process of growth as a person. The New Testament gives us insight into the process by which a Christian becomes mature. Maturity should come as a natural process of our being among a group of believers who are functioning properly (Ephesians 4:12-13), as we face trials and persevere (James 1:4), and through the constant exercise of our faculties by applying God's Word to guide our daily choices (Hebrews 5:14). Why is maturity important? Because those who are mature Christians are able to grasp and apply spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:6), establish right priorities in life (Phillipians 3:15), and stand confident and firm in the will of God (Colossians 4:12).*
- d. **1:5-8 – The Second Theme is about wisdom which may be acquired by the asking. These themes of trials, blessing, and wisdom flow throughout the epistle. Key words include:**

- i. **1:6 – Doubt** – Rather than the quiet confidence that rests completely in God's Word and thus responds with an obedience capable of giving focus and direction to life, *Diakrino* suggests a defective faith--a faith that believes and yet cannot bring itself to trust.* This religious doubt is not expressed in some intellectual quest for logical certainty. It invades experience, hindering prayer (Matthew 21:21; James 1:6) and trapping us in actions about which our consciences are unsure (Romans 14:22-23).*
- ii. **1:8 – Double Minded** – When the NT speaks of being double-minded (James 1:8; 4:8), it uses the word *Dipsychos* ("of two minds"). This word describes one who wavers uncertainly rather than making a commitment. The uncommitted person, holding back uncertainly, "should not think he will receive anything from the Lord" (1:7).*
- e. **1:9-11 – The Third Theme is about material status, and the difference between the worldly view being inverted to the heavenly view. In James view, humble circumstance in Christ is a high position to be taken with pride. Note that verse 10a is irony – it's about this reversal of fortunes. Key words include:**
 - i. **Humility/Humble** – In Greek culture, the word translated as "Humble" is *Tapeinos* and along with its derivatives were generally words of contempt. *
 1. The Greeks saw man as the measure of all things... meaning humanity was the pinnacle of all things. Thus, to be low on the social scale, to know poverty, or to be socially powerless was seen by Greeks as shameful. Only seldom in classical Greek do these words have a positive tone, commending an unassuming or obedient attitude. *
 2. Scripture, however, generally sees the universe as measurable only against God. Compared to God, human beings are rightly viewed as humble. Thus, in Scripture *Tapeinos* and its derivatives are nearly always used in a positive sense (exceptions are in 2 Corinthians 10:1; Colossians 2:18, 23). In this context, *Tapeinos* represents a person's proper estimate of themselves in relation to God and to others. In this sense, Jesus himself lived a humble life, depending completely on God and relating appropriately to all around him (Matthew 11:29). It is the humble, Jesus says, whom God will exalt in his good time (Luke 14:11; 18:14). Moses was revered as one who was characterized by humility in his relationship with God. While the thought of the Old Testament about humility infuses the New Testament, we learn more about humility in the Gospels and the Epistles. *
 - ii. **Brother** – "Jesus introduced the pivotal shift of meaning that shapes the concept of the 'Family of God' as it developed within the church when He asked, 'Who are my mother and brothers?' Jesus explained that, 'My mother and brothers/sisters are those who hear God's word and put it into practice' (Luke 8:21; cf. Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:32-34). This link between "Knowing-Hearing-Doing" is critical with James, and within the faith community a sharp distinction was being drawn... It was not one's race but one's response to God that was the criterion of identity and relationship." *
 1. **The "Humble verses Rich brothers" – it should be generally understood that the church James wrote to was a "working class" Messianic Jewish congregation, who were being oppressed by a rich Gentile Christian congregation in the neighboring**

- community. This humble/rich dichotomy may be appropriate in the Greek culture, but not in proper Christian culture.
2. James' point to the humble is to rejoice because you are like our Lord Jesus who was characterized by humility and poverty. James point to the rich is that they have an obligation to use their resources wisely in being a blessing to others and not thinking too highly of themselves.
- f. 1:12-18 – Closing out the opening, James returns to his primary theme regarding trials, not only about how they are transformed by faith, but specifically for believers receiving God's reward for obedience... blessed in the one who perseveres. Key words include:
- i. **Blessed** – this is a different aspect but not unrelated to joy – and both have a temporal and an eternal experience.
 1. Ephesians 1:3 announces that God has "blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Because our blessing is found in personal relationship with Jesus and because that relationship is so intimate and real, we have in Jesus himself the abundant life for which we yearn and which God has ever yearned to give straying mankind.
 2. John 16:33 – takes this concept of blessing to a whole different level - "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."
 - ii. **Crown of Life** – which is understood as the ultimate blessing from God, which results from a believer's persevering through trials which are allowed by a Good God whose priorities are different from that of the world.
 1. When Paul speaks of believers' rewards as crowns, he picks up the symbol from both pagan and Jewish cultures. For the Jew, the word *Stephanos* recalled the OT *Atarah*. For the pagan, it brought to mind the garland of leaves awarded to the victor in Greek athletic games. In both cultures, it is receiving an expressed honor and blessing.
 2. God intends to honor his faithful saints and to bless them with:
 - a. Crowns of life (1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 2:5; James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).
 - b. Crowns of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8).
 - c. Crowns of glory (1 Peter 5:4).
 3. Paul, in looking ahead to his appearance before Christ in Glory, says that the believers he has won to Jesus in his missionary efforts will themselves be his crown of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19). There can be no greater honor for Paul than to meet Jesus in the company of those his efforts had won to the Lord.*
 4. **When we consider pain and suffering, we should think in terms of the book of Job which is a great reminder of the problem of pain and suffering for God's favored people who learn to endure faithfully in a broken world order as a result of the Fall. When a sinful response occurs, God cannot be blamed; only the individual can be blamed for how they have dealt with their trials.**

- iii. **First Fruit** – People in the ancient Near East considered local or national deities to be owners of the land. These deities were responsible for the health and sustenance the land offered. In Israel, it was known that God created the universe and therefore owned and cared for everything. In recognition of God’s many blessings, a portion of the initial harvest was given as an offering to God. These first-fruits (*bikkur*) were of a particular blessing to God.*

In the Christian community, the revelation that we are born again through God’s Living Word [Jesus] and have become the “First Fruit” – meaning the best of the best of creation.

- g. **1:19-27 – The Theme that Scripture is the Ultimate Truth** closes out the introduction as James integrates all of the above listed themes as he develops his epistle with focused pastoral counseling to this congregation. Key words include:
 - i. **1:19-20** – “Quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” – the difference between the children of God and the worldly is believer’s desire to honor God in the entirety of our lives. A Christian’s perspective reflects Christ’s Character being formed within each believer, which separates believers from the world – John 15:19, 17:14-16.
 - ii. **1:21** – **Word planted in you which can save you** – The preeminence of the Word of God is on full display and sets up the entire passage. The Word planted within will grow into righteousness and bring about salvation.
 - iii. **1:22** is key because it focuses upon James’ concept of **Obedience** – be a *doer* of the Word, not merely a *hearer* of it. This is not advocating a works based theology, but rather realizing our actions should align with God’s eternal purpose. Thus, the goal of living out our actions should correspond as our *personally internalized* and *outwardly expressed* response to God’s Word. It is important to understand that we will continue to exhibit this imperfectly because of our sin-nature, which will finally be put to death when we are resurrected as pure and complete in Christ in eternity.
 - 1. James establishes obedience as the **goal of discipleship** in relationship to the **permanence of God and His Word** and the resultant impact it has on our faith. **Note the similarity of James use of obedience with 1 Peter 1:22-25 (which is a restatement of Isaiah 40:6-8):**

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,
for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.
For,
“ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS,
AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS.
THE GRASS WITHERS,
AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,
BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.”
And this is the word which was preached to you.

2. Translated both as “Obey” and “Obedience” are several words both in the Hebrew and Greek that are commonly used. Unique in Scripture is the relational connection of Listening-Hearing-Obedience-Acting. Zondervan’s New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words explains:

- a. In Hebrew, the root word translated as both "hear" and "listen" is *sama`*. The verb occurs some 1,050 times in the OT, in addition to many occurrences of its derivatives. The basic thought is that of “effective hearing.” In most contexts, the act of effective hearing includes: *
 - i. The physical act of hearing
 - ii. Processing what has been heard so that it is understood
 - iii. Responding to what is heard
- b. In Greek *akouo* is not as inclusive as the Hebrew *sama`*. In Greek culture, *akouo* involved the act of hearing and was extended to include processing and understanding what was heard and its implications. But the further extension of response expressed in Greek is the compound word *hypakouo*, which means "to listen" and "to obey." *
- c. In both Testaments, obedience is also closely linked with relationship. It was God's intention to guide his OT people to blessing by speaking to them in statute and commandment. If they obeyed, they would find the blessing he yearned to give. If they disobeyed, they would find only tragedy and necessary discipline. Thus, the call to obedience in the OT is God's loving invitation to blessing and not some cold, impersonal command. *
 - i. In the NT, obedience is further demonstrated and analyzed. Jesus lived a life of obedience and in so doing demonstrated the exaltation that comes at last to the person who obeys God. Jesus' teaching linked obedience to love; meaning that only the person who loves God will obey him. The NT goes on to link obedience with faith; only the person who trusts God will obey him. Thus, biblically speaking, there is a definite and vital connection between faith in God, love for God, and obedience to God, and all are a result of God's work in a person's life.
 - ii. So, obedience properly understood is never a cold or impersonal thing. God's call to obedience is a loving invitation to experience his best. Our response flows from a growing love for God and expresses our confidence that God is living and able. Only in a deep and loving relationship can the biblical import of obedience be understood.
- d. **It is important to understand that this relationship of hearing and obeying is due to the sanctifying work of Scripture employed through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The implications are important:**
 - i. **Humanity are Fallen creatures now living in a broken world order, thus our hearing and obedience will always be flawed and imperfect.**

- ii. **Humanity will never be what we are meant to be this side of eternity. In eternity with God we will become what He always intended us to be... perfect and complete sons and daughters living in the New Creation of a perfected heaven-earth.**
- iii. **This is what Paul was getting at in 1st Corinthians 13:9-13:**

For we know in part and we prophesy in part,
but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.
When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.
Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.
And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
- iv. **Spiritual Understanding requires the foundation of Scriptural knowledge. When God's Word is embedded in our mind, the Spirit works it out in our heart and through our life. This is what Jesus taught in the Gospel of John 14:15-26...**

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."
- e. **This understanding of "listening-hearing-obeying" is what John was saying in both his Gospel and Revelations:**
 - i. **In John's Gospel, Jesus is quoted in confronting the faithless Jewish leaders – 8:43-47:** "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the

words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God.” As a result they refused to obey God.

- ii. Revelations 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22 – “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
- iv. 1:26-27 – Maintaining a “Tight rein on the tongue” – completes James thought developed in 1:19-20. Careless thoughts and words can create great harm. The worldly react without thought of consequence, the Godly pause and reflect on the potential consequences of their words and actions, aligning them with God.
- h. 2:1-13 – Here James is dealing with the contentious “Problem of Discrimination” within the church – this is essentially a social-cultural issue between the “haves and the have-nots” or the “materially connected and the materially disadvantaged.”
 - i. 2:1-4 – James as a pastor launches a short sermon on the problem of “favoritism,” meaning having a personal bias in accepting some folks and dismissing others based upon their material or social status. James sees this as an opportunity to realign the spiritual perspective of the church where both the well off and the needy are equals in the Kingdom of God. The point James makes in employing the concept of “evil thoughts” in this context is that a person’s character not their position, wealth or social status is the important criteria to consider in the Kingdom of God.
 - ii. 2:5 – James again employs a “role reversal” argument as he teaches here that “the poor means rich” when it comes to faith, along with the priority of undeserving humanity as believers becoming heirs of the Kingdom because of the poverty of their spirit. This contrast is definitely not about socio-economic wealth, but rather understanding that our poverty of spirit in Christ is a recognition of our inherent wealth in God. When reading this, think about the Beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5:1-12 especially verse 3.
 - iii. 2:6-7 – James logic plays off the fact that we all have personal preferences, and will cozy up to those who we prefer to identify with or think they may help us personally. As such, James presents a world view turned around:
 - 1. James is reprograming this church to understand that being wealthy was not inherently good, nor was being poor inherently bad.
 - 2. “Rich” being the most desirable condition was the worldly approach – however those that became wealthy were generally self-satisfied, and as unbelievers they remained enemies of God, meaning they remained the ultimate of the impoverished.
 - 3. “Poor” in this contrast is the church – this congregation was disadvantaged and impoverished and had been lorded over by the wealthy. However, as committed believers they were “Rich” because they were friends of God and of great value to Him. This is an invitation to see things through God’s eternal perspective rather than through our temporal-worldly perspective.
 - 4. Scripture clearly teaches that God has no favorites – See Romans 2:11-13 and Colossians 3:25... God loves all people equally and will also judge people equally.

But those who are “In Christ” according to Romans 8:1-2 pass beyond condemnation and are set free from the Law of sin and death.

Salvation Theology – Jesus first mission to earth was to save the world. His success is reflected in assertions such as this: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Because of Jesus, God's attitude toward believers is not one of condemnation. What God still condemns is the sin in sinners (Ro 8:3). We who respond to the gospel message in faith have the assurance that no one can successfully charge us under the Law. Even when we fail to meet the Law's requirements, we are promised that Jesus is "at the right hand of God," where He is "also interceding for us" (Ro 8:34).

5. **Paul taught a similar no favorites ideal in contrasting “masters and slaves” as recorded in Ephesians 6:9.**
- iv. **2:8-11 – James here frames the correct standard of conduct as being God’s Law – which these Messianic Jews would certainly have known well. The Law was considered the ultimate arbiter of right or wrong. In light of this:**
 1. **Vs 8-9 – “love your neighbor as yourself” is contrasted with the sin of favoritism. If you love your neighbor, you do not denigrate them.**
 2. **Vs 10 – It is obedience to God’s Heart as expressed in the Law which God commends, not merely the outward action taken. This means both having and expressing the desire to do the right thing as my personal act of worship to God, regardless of how things may play out for me in the world. In other words, it is the demonstration of “Christ likeness” in reflecting Jesus’ character as the ultimate expression of Law and Grace that is commendable.**
 3. **Vs 11 – James reminds his Messianic Jewish community that breaking any aspect of the Law is the same as breaking all of the Law. The worldly approach is self-serving and entails approaching life as a means to achieve my own end, rather than in furthering God’s plan even at your own expense. God approves of our doing the right thing for the right reason, trusting that God will work out the details – see Romans 8:28.**
- v. **2:12-13 – James here joins this sermon with the well-known “Mercy not Sacrifice” arguments of Micah 6:6-8; and Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. The hyperbole of this passage in Micah is truly stunning.**
 1. **First Micah ratchets up the extent of an offering to please God to exorbitant and unbelievable proportions in 6:6-7 – What can we bring to the LORD to make up for what we’ve done? Should we bow before God with offerings of yearling calves? Should we offer him thousands of rams and tens of thousands of rivers of olive oil? Would that please the LORD? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for the sins of our souls? Would that make him glad?**
 2. **Then Micah focuses upon the believer’s character as what really matters to God in 6:8 – No, O people, the LORD has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.**

These requirements are the result of inner-life character transformation. This is an effective introduction to the point James now drives home.

- i. **2:14-26 – James recasts his argument in terms of the fundamental connection between faith and action... what we believe and how it plays out in my life in action as a direct result. The text below is from the New Living Translation:**
 - i. **2:14 – James states the main point he seeks to drive home in this passage –** Dear brothers and sisters, what’s the use of saying you have faith if you don’t prove it by your actions? That kind of faith is not “saving faith.”
 - ii. **2:15-17 – James gives the first argument for his point –** Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, “Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well” — but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, it isn’t enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.
 - iii. **2:18-20 – James gives his second argument for his point –** Now someone may argue, Some people have faith; others have good deeds. I say, I can’t see your faith if you don’t have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds. Do you still think it’s enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?
 - iv. **2:21-24 – First Old Testament validation –** Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was declared right with God because of what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to do. His faith was made complete by what he did—by his actions. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous.” He was even called “the friend of God.” So you see, we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.
 - v. **2:25-26 – Second Old Testament validation –** Rahab the prostitute is another example of this. She was made right with God by her actions—when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also faith is dead without good deeds.
 - vi. **James main point is exposing the inadequacy of Intellectual faith – meaning that possessing knowledge without the exhibition of personal character transformation, is a dead faith. James is not saying that “you are saved by your works.” What he is saying is that “saving faith will result in character transformation and result of that transformation is doing the things Jesus did such as ministering to the helpless and disadvantaged.”**
 - 1. Believing means knowing God’s Truth and what God wants from His people, and acting accordingly.
 - 2. The application in this context is understanding the responsibility of the rich believers who know and love God, to be fair and loving to all and also to be generous to the poor.

3. Faith necessarily realigns the believer with God's interest, which is to grow spiritually. Spiritual life within seeks to benefit others wherever God has placed us.
 4. The problem James is addressing those who profess faith yet mistreat the poor to make themselves rich. This is sin and as such it denigrates Jesus' sacrifice.
 5. James uses the well-known Old Testament examples of Abraham and Rahab to punctuate this point.
- j. 3:1-12 – Verse 3:1 is key here, evidently everyone wanted to be a 'teacher' because it was seen to bring them prestige in the community. James warns not to "presume" to be a teacher. James point was that teaching is a calling based upon the discipline and perseverance of a believer as empowered by the Holy Spirit. James punctuated his advice with a warning – you will be judged according to your obedience to God. This passage is from the New International Version:
- i. 3:1 – It is a part of human nature to be seen as one who is valued in the community, What others may think of you will not be of value when we stand before God's Holy judgment, therefore – Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
 1. The Greek word translated as "Judge, Judged, and Judgement" according to Zondervan's New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words – *Krino* (verb) means one or more of the following in a given usage: to judge, evaluate, decide, assess, distinguish between, pronounce judgment, select, or prefer. The whole process of evaluation is thus expressed by this one word, with the context helping to determine if the focus is on process or product.
 2. The use of this word in this context has to do with believers being evaluated by our Lord for the things we have done in advancing the Kingdom of God. This is not necessarily about punishment, but rather about our reward.
 - ii. 3:2 – Presents the reality that all will "stumble" which has different meaning in the Old Testament and the New – Generally speaking, in the Old Testament to stumble is to fail or to be ruined. But "stumble" in the New Testament is generally associated with falling into sin as in James 3:2 – "We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check."
 - iii. 3:3-4 – James understands that no one is perfect because we all have a sin-nature inherited from the Fall. But James demonstrates that it is possible to discipline oneself much as we would discipline an animal or master a ship – "When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go."
 - iv. 3:5-8 – James provides a means of measure for those who are becoming mature disciples in how they control their speech – "Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds,

reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

- v. **3:9-12 – James presents the irony that with the same mouth we can praise God and offend each other** – “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.”
 - k. **3:13-18 – Cultivating Wisdom – the issue of self-control joins the themes of testing and wisdom, which on one hand if mishandled would result in sin and on the other hand would result in mutual benefit and blessing to the faith community. The theme of wisdom is tied to the theme of application. The difference between worldly and heavenly is borne out by the quality of the results it produces, with the leading characteristic being the experience of peace and joy... “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Sons [and Daughters] of God.”**
 - i. **3:13-14 – James now links wisdom and understanding with character and a life well lived** – “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.”
 - ii. **3:15-16 – Speaks to the person who is focused on earthly things rather than heavenly things, in other words this is a person controlled by their “animal nature” rather than their Spiritual nature in Christ** – “Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” (See description of the “Soulish” person below)
 - iii. **3:17-18 – Speaks to the person who is focused on Heavenly things and the Kingdom of God rather than earthly things** – “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (See descriptions of the “Spirit” and “Spiritual person” below)
- Zondervan’s Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible explains three key ideas presented here in James:
1. **The “Soulish person” - *psychikos*** – Human beings in our natural unredeemed state are called the “natural man.” This describes humanity dependent upon earthly wisdom, and following ‘false teachers’ who lack the Spirit are all described by this term. This word appears only six times in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 2:14; 15:44, 46; James 3:15; Jude 19). It is an adjective that characterizes someone as being dominated by an unredeemed state. The life force is only that which can be provided by one’s natural bodily life.*
 2. **The “Spirit” - *pneuma*** – this word occurs nearly four hundred times in the New Testament, with most of the uses referring to God the Holy Spirit. This word in Greek can also mean ‘breath’ or ‘wind’ in reference to the ethereal nature of the Holy Spirit:*

- a. Although the NT word *pneuma* also derives its basic meaning from its Old Testament counterpart, *ruah*, the New Testament provides greater definition. The word can be used idiomatically (as "I am with you in spirit"), but it is also used of human interaction with the spiritual realm. Such a person is aware of and responsive to God (e.g., Matthew 5:3; Mark 2:8; 8:12; Luke 1:47; John 11:33; 13:21; Acts 17:16; Romans 1:9; 8:16; 2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:13; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 4:23; 2 Timothy 4:22; Philemon 25; Hebrews 4:12; James 4:5; 1 Peter 3:4).
 - b. While there is much overlap in the New Testament uses of *psyche* and *pneuma*, there seems to be some areas of distinction as well. Often the focus of contexts in which these terms appear overlaps. Thus, both are used in speaking of personal existence, of life after death, emotions, purpose, and the self. But *psyche* is also used of one's physical life and of spiritual growth, while *pneuma* is associated distinctively with breath, worship, understanding, one's attitude or disposition, and spiritual power.
3. **The "Spiritual person" - *pneumatikos*** – "This word meaning 'Spiritual' is the counterpart of *psychikos* (soulish). This significant word is found twenty-six times in the New Testament (Romans 1:11; 7:14; 15:27; 1 Corinthians 2:13, 15; 3:1; 9:11; 10:3; 10:4; 12:1; 14:1, 37; 15:44, 46; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 1:3; 5:19; 6:12; Colossians 1:9; 3:16; 1 Peter 2:5):*
- a. This term is used to describe Spirit derived characteristics including gifts, the law, the resurrection body, understanding, the community of faith, and even contrasting "wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12, King James Version). Its basic function is to identify the thing described as belonging to the realm of the Spirit. Spiritual things, such as gifts and the law, are so described because they originate in or are derived from the Holy Spirit. When the adjective is used as a noun, it may be translated "that which is spiritual" or, as in Ephesians 6:12, it may be understood as referring to that which pertains to the realm of spirits beyond the material world.
 - b. Spiritual persons are those who not only possess the Holy Spirit but also live in obedience to the Word that He inspired. His transforming work enables believers to live transformed lives.
- I. **4:1-10 – Submission to God is key in "Biblical Discipleship":**
- i. **Vs 1-3 – "Your desires" come into play when we seek what the world offers as part of our rightful spiritual inheritance. This section sounds reminiscent of the OT prophets who condemned those wealthy leaders who abused the people. God will vindicate the poor and retribution would be harsh against the rich oppressors and false leaders of God's people (Ezekiel 34).**
 - 1. The word used here is *Epithymeō* which conveys "pleasure, desire, enjoyment, but usually with a negative sense." The text presumes that humanity has the right to choose what we want, and that we bear the responsibility for those choices. In the New Testament, *Epithymia* and *Epithymeō*, are used in a positive or neutral

sense only in Luke 15:16; Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:17; 1 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 6:11. In other passages, the words are used in its ethically bad sense.

2. Zondervan's New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words in translating the word interprets that "It is not wrong for us to have desires. The capacity to feel pleasure and delight has been given to us by God, a reflection of his own rich emotional capacity. But both Testaments indicate that we may desire the wrong things. The NT helps us realize that we cannot explain away our actions by an appeal to the desirability of the thing that motivated them. Our desire for what is desirable is often tainted, for we are flawed by sin. The flaw includes those desires that lead us to many wrong evaluations. Thus, the desires of sinful human beings are shaped by the sin nature and all too often impel us toward what is both evil and bad for us. But there is release for those who are in Christ. We can let the Holy Spirit shape our desires. We can reject the old and choose those things that God holds to be of value, and so we ourselves may in this way be purified and cleansed."

ii. Vs 4-6 – The New Testament repeatedly confirms that "The World" & "The Kingdom of God" are in conflict and are mutually exclusive:

1. Friendship with the world necessarily means hostility with God. To be a friend with the world is to be an enemy of God.
2. To have a Kingdom of God mindset in Christ is to be friends with God. Being friends with God necessarily makes us enemies of the world, and as the world's enemies we should expect their hostility toward us.
3. This doesn't mean that Christians can't have pleasures and luxury. Some have mistakenly labeled Christians who enjoy physical pleasures as "carnal Christians." God created humanity's capacity for enjoyment of physical pleasures. It is true however, that sin has corrupted our normal healthy desires and when we choose to enjoy life in un-Biblical ways we sin.

iii. Vs 7-10 – James clearly identifies the conflict of the world and the Kingdom of God as a Spiritual battle. There is an advocate that stands for us – namely Christ Jesus; and we have an adversary that stands against us – namely Satan and those aligned with him. Jesus also provides us with the Holy Spirit who leads us and guides from within.

Zondervan's Expository Bible Commentary explains that James issues a series of "ten commandments" in verses 7-10. In each one the specific Greek form used calls for an immediate response from the believers. This New Covenant reflection of the Old Covenant ten commandments is a clever pointed and forceful way to demand action:

1. The command to "submit" to God is the logical response to the quotation from Proverbs 3:34 (cf. "then," which has the inferential meaning of "therefore"). Since "God opposes the proud" but helps "the humble," believers should submit to him. Submission is not the same as obedience. Instead, it is the surrender of one's will, which in turn leads to obedience.
2. Rather than resisting God's will for us, James provides the command to "resist the devil." James appears to suggest that the spiritual unfaithfulness of verse 4 was the result of the devil's influence. The promise "he will flee from you" gives assurance

that, as powerful as he may be, Satan can be resisted. This command should be seen in the context of the affirmation in 1 John 4:4 – “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them [the false prophets and evil spirits in conflict with God]; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

3. The series of imperatives continues with the command to "come near to God." In setting their hearts on pleasure, James's readers had drifted away from God. Though still his people, they had become estranged from him. But the assurance that God will welcome them back accompanies the command to return. God jealously yearns for their devotion (verse 5).
 4. The command to "wash your hands" is a command to make one's conduct pure.
 5. Similarly, the command to "purify your hearts" insists on purity in the inner-man, meaning our character expressed in our thoughts and motives. The eager quest for pleasure (vv.1-5) had resulted in sins of heart and hand. So James bluntly addresses them as "you sinners," a strong term, showing the extent of their involvement in worldly attitudes and actions. The designation "double-minded" is used somewhat differently than in 1:8. Here it describes the attempt of the readers to love God and the pleasures of the world at the same time.
 6. Four of the ten imperatives of verses 7-10 occur in this verse, and all four are calls to repentance. The command to "Grieve" is a strong word meaning "to be miserable or wretched." In contrast to the worldly pleasures they had sought so eagerly, James's readers are to repent in misery.
 7. The command to "mourn" is a verb depicting passionate grief that cannot be hidden.
 8. Similar outward grief is called for in the command to "wail." In the past, when the readers had pursued pleasure, their lives had been marked by "laughter" and "joy."
 9. The command to change their "laughter to mourning" and their "joy to gloom." Some have imagined that the attitude expressed in this verse is to be the constant characteristic of the Christian. Such an interpretation, however, overlooks the situation that gave rise to these commands. It was the church's burning desire for wealth and pleasures that led James to issue this powerful call to all-out repentance, with an internal realignment to true Godly life.
 10. Finally, the command to "humble yourselves". God graciously gives aid to the humble. Here the specific form of humbling is that of repentance for the sin of transferring affections from God to the pleasures of the world. However, the principle stated is much more comprehensive in its application. That God lifts up those who humble themselves is a consistent biblical principle (cf. Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14; Philippians 2:5-11; 1Peter 5:6).
- m. **4:11-12 – When personal gain is placed above one's duty to care for God's people, one risks the vengeance of God's judgment.**
- n. **4:13-17 – The error of disregarding God and worse disobeying God in our financial decisions is obviously foolishness because we have no control over worldly and circumstantial events, therefore our focus is to trust and obey God.**

- i. Vs 13-16 – James warns of the arrogance of those who boast of what they will do. Such boasting is sin.
 - ii. Vs 17 – Knowing the good that you ought to do and not doing it is a sign of faithlessness, and is sin.
- o. 5:1-6 – Now James turns to the wealthy oppressors calling them into accountability.
 - i. James warns his congregation that the error of the wealthy in disregarding the rights of the working-class poor men and women in their pursuit of their own wealth is foolishness; and worse their condemnation will result as being judged as enemies of God.
 - ii. James' condemnation lumps these oppressors who put their trust in the worldly institutions because of their preference for worldly comfort, with the Jewish leadership who put Jesus to death having refused Jesus' offer of peace with God because they preferred worldly comforts and pleasures.
 - iii. The twin errors of relying on wealth and relying on worldly institutions deny God's Sovereignty. The faithful know that God is in control and will ultimately sort it all out and make things right for His people. This passage should be seen in context of Jesus' teaching about Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31.
- p. 5:7-12 – James begins his concluding statements with a reiteration of the main theme of the patient endurance of trials. God is eternal and the Fallen world order will be destroyed when Jesus returns. The coming "Judgment Day" will ultimately vindicate the faithful who are dependent upon God and condemn the faithless who are self-sufficient.
 - i. Comparing the New Covenant faithful with the Old Covenant prophets was something the Jews James wrote to could understand. They knew God's prophets through the ages suffered for the message they brought because the worldly leaders didn't want to hear what they had to say. Silencing God's messengers does not equate to silencing God; it only adds to the guilt of the faithless.
 - ii. In James' view "Swearing" or "making oaths" is a reference presumably made of standing before the Roman magistrate in public Roman court to prove one's case. The context here is again one of misaligned truth and responsibility, and of the wealthy manipulating the legal system in benefiting these wealthy individuals by cleverly speaking half-truths or otherwise abusing the system that should otherwise be fair and impartial.
 - 1. It was common practice for the wealthy to bribe public judges and to hire clever lawyers to make the simple seem foolish. The poor were at a disadvantage in these situations and had no recourse.
 - 2. James argues it is wiser to come before the elders of the Church and allow them to adjudicate the matter before God rather than rely upon the Roman magistrates. When they came before the elders, each side should make their case truthfully and expect a just result. This was a better course of action than to publicly malign Christ and His Church with corrupt proceedings in the public courts.
- q. 5:13-20 – Helping one another is at the heart of community life in the Kingdom of God.
 - i. Vs 13 – James provides insight for individuals to walk in faith with God as individuals – when troubled we should pray; when joyful we should sing praise. Both place the matter in God's hands and not the world's.

- ii. Vs 14-20 – James provides insight for the faith community to heal and restore their brothers. Coming together as a faith community is the preferable way to respond to the oppressions of the Fallen world.
 - 1. Vs 14-15b – Together in the Church, we can secure divine aid and thrive both physically and spiritually.
 - 2. Vs 15c-16a – Together in the Church, we can stay aligned on the true path of God and free of the effects of sin.
 - 3. Vs 16b-18 – James teaches on the power of prayer as demonstrated by Elijah.
 - 4. Vs 19-20 – James encourages believers to work to restore those who stumble or fall in their faith. Coming alongside those who have stumbled, we can help to restore them which benefits the community as a whole.
- r. Conclusion – There were many problems manifest in the early church:
 - i. First and foremost, they were distracted from focusing on Jesus' second coming.
 - ii. As a result they showed favoritism to the wealthy and socially important:
 - 1. They neglected the poor and ministering to their needs as equal brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - 2. The wealthy abused their position to gain more wealth at the expense of the poor. It was the deliberate and manipulative misuse of their power and authority.
 - 3. James didn't mean you couldn't have money, wealth or influence, or that wealth was inherently evil or wicked. Rather he meant that wealth shouldn't be your priority, and also if you were blessed with it, you had a responsibility before God to use it wisely – consider the story of Ruth and Boaz – Ruth 2:1ff.
 - iii. The Promise for those who endure in the Church is first and foremost in eternity where our hope and future are secure.

4) THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT – J.W. Wall

- a. The Main Goal of the Epistle – Is to Develop Genuine Faith within a troubled faith community:
 - i. Note there is a cool “double opening statement” – the author reinforced this concept with the concluding exhortations, which are framed by the closing exhortations. Obviously, the author wants to make sure his readers don't miss this:
 - 1. 1:2-11 – “Consider it Pure Joy” – key words of “trial” and “testing” promote endurance which leads to becoming perfect... meaning complete and lacking nothing... and accepted by God.
 - 2. 1:12-27 – “Blessed is the one who perseveres” – perseverance under trial promotes faith that is approved by God... meaning made perfect.
 - 3. 1:12 – “Crown of Life” - meaning faith leading to heavenly reward this is the reward for genuine faith.
 - ii. 1:2 – A “Joyful response to trials” may seem out of place as a means of encouragement and consolation, and it makes absolutely no sense apart from the hope of resurrection and eternity as God's beloved children.

- iii. The only possible way to experience this Joy and Blessing is spiritually, those who focus on the material world will never find it because they cannot understand it.
- b. **Main Point of the Epistle** – Is the oppositional contrast of what it really means to be “rich” or “poor.” We all know that it is the natural human condition to desire or worry about what we don’t have, rather than appreciating what we do have. James is reminding his community of what they already have... they possess now great riches in Christ; therefore, don’t worry about what you don’t have, meaning the niceties of material wealth. James is realigning his readers with spiritual formation thinking in terms we are familiar with in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5:3-12:
 - Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
 - Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.
 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
 - Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
 - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
 - Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.
 - Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- c. **Thematic Development of the Epistle** – The Literary Structure of J. W. Wall in Outline # 1 presented above on page 4, offers a nice view into the theology presented in James. In this outline we find some very practical spiritual formation advice. [While, I really liked the main points, I found some of Wall’s interpretative conclusions and resultant applications to be a little extreme. I have taken the liberty to present what I found to be useful in his outline organization with a more moderated application approach in keeping with the exegetical message presented above.]
 - i. **Introduction – 1:1-21**
 - 1. The Christian community’s decision to obey God or resist Him is based upon their moral and ethical freedom and responsibility to choose.
 - a. The wise person believes and loves God and trusts that He is inherently Good even though we don’t always understand it.
 - i. The Scripture [Word of Truth] will consistently guide each believer’s personal pilgrimage through the “wilderness trials” into the “promised land” of eternal life – 1:16-18.
 - ii. Wisdom developed from Scripture and relational intimacy with God provides an increased ability to remain faithful during testing – 1:19-20.
 - iii. The wise believer will enter into the coming age where God’s faithful will enjoy the riches of Heaven – 1:9-11.

- b. The foolish person doubts that God can be trusted, and presumes that they must take care of themselves here and now. They also believe that God may actually be responsible for the hardships inflicted to those beneath their social status – 1:13-16.
 - i. This doubt results from refusing the merits of God's will in obedience as presented in Scripture – 1:21.
 - ii. The result of this present spiritual failure is their forfeiture of the "Crown of Life" that God has promised to all who endure – 1:12.
 - c. Other aspects of this "have versus have-not" scenario is that of the "Carnal-Christian" – the believer that wants the world and eternity as well. The "Lazy-Christian" – the believer who is not willing to work diligently expecting others to take care of them. The moral-ethical imperative presented is the individual responsibility to do what pleases God where both the carnal and lazy Christian fall short of God's standard.
- ii. Wisdom of Quick to Hear – 1:22-2:26
- 1. To be quick to hear is to listen well and measure the words we hear before we respond. Since God's Word is planted in the believer, we have an obligation to understand what hear and then respond in a Godly manner – 1:19-21.
 - 2. To hear implies the expectation to act appropriately, meaning to obey God's commands revealed in Scripture – 1:22.
 - 3. James likens properly hearing the Word as similar to observing our face in a mirror. The wise person would observe their face and remember it, they wouldn't walk away and forget what they look like any more than you should forget what God reveals to you – 1:23-25.
 - 4. To obey includes fulfilling your obligations within the faith community including the merciful treatment of your neighbors, especially the needs of the poorest and most marginalized of the community – 1:26-27. This also means not showing favoritism to the rich and powerful or denigrating the poor and outcast – 2:1-9.
 - 5. Showing favoritism through our words and actions demonstrates that God's Word has not done its work in us in rendering His purpose through us – 2:10-11.
 - 6. The wise community hears and acts upon what God's Word commands, knowing that all believers will be blessed or judged accordingly in the coming Kingdom of God – 2:12-13.
 - 7. "True faith" is thus both an ethical and moral faith in action, and not a mere "confessional orthodoxy." For James, faith is lived out in your actions, not merely by your words. Real vital faith necessitates a fundamental shift in values, ethics, and morals. In other words, you live out your faith on a daily basis with Christ-likeness demonstrated in all aspects of your life – 2:14-17.
 - 8. To shame his audience, James makes the logical point that the demons and Satan know God, but neither love Him or serve Him. Thus faith is not demonstrated by knowledge or words alone, but by the actions we take that result out of the change of heart God has made within us – 2:18-20.

9. James goes on to explain through the actions of Abraham and Rahab that their faith was proved by their actions. Thus, to profess devotion to God without a Kingdom of God Heart of Mercy, or without demonstrations of kindness and care for God's people who are in need is foolish. Such faith does not honor God and is deficient – 2:21-26.

iii. Wisdom of Slow to Speak – 3:1-18

1. Particularly for teachers – living in the “wilderness” as Christians in a predominantly non-Christian environment, presents many challenges – 3:1-2. The simile of a horse with a bridle – 3:3, or a boat on a sea – 3:4, both would be understood to be a potentially hazardous place to be, but with the skillful use of the bit for the horse or a rudder for a boat you can safely navigate to your destination. Similarly, the tongue allows us to safely navigate our daily course in social contexts, but it also has the potential for great evil – 3:5-6.
2. Like the horse-bit or boat-rudder simile, the tongue can be tamed with thoughtful diligent work in applying God's Word as a standard for life. The fact that we can tame various animals to submit to our will is obvious – 3:7; but it is also obvious that no one can consistently tame our tongue to submit to God's will – 3:8-10.
3. James uses the example of the character of a natural resource (a water source or of a tree) which determines its use and merit, to explain how our Christian character determines our use and merit – 3:10-12.
4. Wisdom should be a goal of all of God's people who are wise enough to discern the differences between:
 - a. Heavenly wisdom – 3:13-15a, 17-18
 - b. Earthly wisdom – 3:15b-16

iv. Wisdom of Slow to Anger – 4:1-5:6

1. God's people have been angered through the ages by a variety of things, and the laments of Psalms and prophecy provide many examples of unbelievers blaspheming God and the prevalence of evil in the world as two common themes. In this passage James is identifying the cause linked to a comparison of a wealthy congregation and a humble one as the source of anger for the latter group – 4:1-3.
2. James chides the wealthy that their motives for wealth to be spent on pleasures is not heavenly, instead it is friendship with the world which places them at odds with God – 4:4.
3. Grace is received through the indwelling Spirit and plays out through humility and submission – 4:5-7a.
4. James sees their problem as being primarily Spiritual, and reminds them that we have an enemy that seeks to mislead us and derail our faith – 4:7b-10. For more on Spiritual Warfare and Spiritual Oppression, see the AD article on Ephesians - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Bible%20Survey%20-%20NT%203.5%20-%20Epistles%20-%20Ephesians.pdf>
5. To slander is to commit defamation of character, as it is a means of isolating and

marginalizing someone in a way that breaks relational intimacy by falsely characterizing them – 4:11.

6. Christians should know that God alone is Judge and He can be trusted to make things right in the end. Committing our works to God in humility and trusting God for the result is to be righteous. Those who continue in a self-centered desire for wealth, who proclaim in arrogance what they want or can do is to be unrighteousness. Those who choose wealth over people are guilty of choosing wealth over God – 4:12-17.
7. James then turns his attention to the wealthy oppressors who denigrate and mistreat others for their own gain. He writes that they have swindled [cheated the innocent] making themselves wealthier on what was promised to others. God reminds them that swindlers and slanderers are evil in His sight and condemned by the Law – Cross Reference 1 Corinthians 6:8-10. Those who swindle and slander will be called into accountability for their greed and hardness of heart. Scripture says the misery they have caused will be visited back upon them in the last days – 5:1-6.

v. Concluding Exhortations – 5:7-20

1. The exhortation to “Be patient” – has an added urgency because the Lord is coming soon, and God’s promise is to reward the faithful and true. To patiently endure is repeated from the opening thoughts of the epistle – effectively framing the three wisdom elements of being quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.
2. Rather than be complaining, the community is encouraged to exercise patience. James illustrates his concluding exhortation with 3 examples:
 - a. The farmer – 5:7-9
 - b. The prophets – 5:10
 - c. Job – 5:11
3. To be vigilant:
 - a. Abstaining from oaths – 5:12
 - b. Endure suffering with prayer – 5:13a.
 - c. Enjoy blessings by singing praise – 5:13b.
 - d. The sick should seek healing from the elders – 5:14-15.
 - e. Confess your sins so they won’t fester – 5:16.
 - f. The case for the effectiveness of prayer is Elijah – 5:17-18.
 - g. Those who have strayed from faith, should pray for restoration – 5:19-20.

- 5) CONCLUSION – James paints a picture of faith that calls for transformational action in a church community that has lost its counter cultural focus. All knowledge and resultant action is based upon a transformed internal nature of mind and heart displaying the character of Jesus in our everyday life where God’s values and priorities are displayed. Christian character is probably the most understated component of Christian life, but it is also the most foundational for James. For more information on Christian character go to this link on the AD web site:

<http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/3-leadership-dev/LD%20-%204.4%20-%20Coaching%20for%20Character%20Development.pdf>

This article is respectfully dedicated to my friend Owen Nielsen who loved James' Epistle and spent the last year of his life teaching it. I miss our long conversations on the nature and character of God.