

JAMES 1:1-27

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS*

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Salutation	Greetings to the Twelve Tribes	Salutation	Salutation	Address and Greetings
1:1	1:1	1:1	1:1	1:1
Faith and Wisdom	Profiting from Trials	The Blessing of Trials	Faith and Wisdom	Trials a Privilege
1:2-8	1:2-8	1:2-4	1:2-8	1:2-4
		1:5-8		Prayer with Confidence 1:5-8
Poverty and Riches	The Perspective of Rich and Poor		Poverty and Riches	The Lot of the Rich
1:9-11	1:9-11	1:9-11	1:9-11	1:9-11
Trial and Temptation	Loving God Under Trials		Testing and Temptation	Temptation
1:12-15	1:12-18	1:12-16	1:12-15	1:12 1:13-15
				Receiving the Word and Putting It into Practice
1:16-18			1:16-18	1:16-17
		1:17-18		1:18
Hearing and Doing the Word	Qualities Needed in Trials	True Worship	Hearing and Doing	True Religion
1:19-21	1:19-20	1:19-21	1:19-21	1:19-21
	Doers - Not Hearers			
	1:21-27			
1:22-25		1:22-25	1:22-25	1:22-25
1:26-27		1:26-27	1:26-27	1:26-27

*Although not inspired, paragraph divisions are the key in understanding and following the original author's intent. Each modern translation has divided and summarized chapter one. Each version encapsulates that topic in its own distinct way. As you read the text, which translation fits your understanding of the subject and verse divisions?

In every chapter you must read the Bible first and try to identify its subjects (paragraphs). Then compare your understanding with the modern versions. Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers have no right to change or modify the message. Bible readers do have the responsibility of applying the inspired truth to their day and their lives.

Note that all technical terms and abbreviations are explained fully in Appendices One, Two and Three.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

POSSIBLE OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 1

There are several ways to outline this chapter. One is to list the characteristics of the redeemed and mature believers versus the redeemed, but weak believers:

MATURE	WEAK
1. joy amidst trials (1:2)	(no joy)
2. ask for wisdom to endure trials (1:5)	(did not ask)
3. do not doubt in prayer (1:6)	doubt
4. glory in Christ (1:9)	glory in wealth
5. persevere in temptation (1:12)	yield to temptation
6. quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (1:19)	(the opposite)
7. put off all moral evil (1:21)	(the opposite)
8. receive the word of God (1:21) do the word of God (1:22)	(the opposite)
look to and remember the word of God (1:24-25)	(the opposite)
9. careful of speech (1:20)	(the opposite)
10. help the needy (1:27)	(the opposite)
11. remain unstained by the world (1:27)	(the opposite)

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT 1:1

¹**James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.**

1:1 “James” It is the Greek form of the common Hebrew name, Jacob. He was known by both Jews and Christians in Jerusalem as “James the Just.” He became the respected leader of the Jerusalem Church (cf. Acts 15). Some traditional evidence indicates that this was because of his genealogical relationship to Jesus. This seems to have been a pattern in this church for several generations. One reason I believe this is not pseudonymous is that James does not specifically identify himself or his relationship to Jesus.

❑ **“a bond-servant”** This refers to either (1) a sense of humility or (2) an OT honorific title. It is obviously used as the opposite of “Lord” (cf. Jude v. 1).

❑ **“of God and the Lord Jesus Christ”** This GENITIVE phrase combines God and Jesus in a grammatical parallel in order to assert Jesus’ equality with God (cf. Titus 2:13; II Pet. 1:1; Jn. 20:28). It could also link the Father and the Son into one activity (cf. I Thes. 3:11; II Thes. 2:16). NT authors often use the title “Lord” to assert the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. It was a term used to translate “YHWH” from the Hebrew OT into the Greek of the Septuagint (cf. Ex. 3:14).

❑

NASB “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad”

NKJV “the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad”

NRSV “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion”

TEV “to all God’s people scattered over the whole world”

NJB “the twelve tribes of the Dispersion”

“Dispersed” is literally “diaspora,” a technical term for Jews who lived outside of Palestine (cf. Jn. 7:35). Here it refers to believers in Christ (cf. I Pet. 1:1 or Gal. 3:29). Probably most of these early congregations were made up primarily of Jewish believers.

□ **“Greetings”** This is the common form of a Greek letter, but it is rare in the NT letters. It literally means “rejoice.” James uses this same “greetings” in Acts 15:23.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT 1:2-4

2Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1:2 “Consider it” This is an AORIST MIDDLE IMPERATIVE. The TEV translates it as “consider yourselves.” The Williams translates it as “you must consider.” It is literally “add it all up!” In the ancient world sets of numbers were totaled at the top, not the bottom, as in our culture.

□ **“all joy”** “All” is placed first in the Greek text for emphasis. In James the trials are not joy, but their possible results are (cf. Matt. 5:10-12; Lk. 6:22-23; Acts 5:41; Rom. 5:3; I Thes. 5:16; I Pet. 1:6). Jesus suffered and we must share this maturing experience (cf. Rom. 8:17; II Cor. 1:5,7; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; Heb. 5:8; and especially I Pet. 4:12-16).

□ **“my brethren”** James uses the term “brethren” (*adelphos/adelphoi*) to (1) introduce a new subject and (2) to endear himself to his readers. This was necessary because of his hard-hitting prophetic style. James uses this literary technique often (cf. 1:2,9,16,19; 2:1,5,14,15; 3:1,10,12; 4:11 [thrice]; 5:7,10,12,19).

The Greek term follows the Hebrew connotation of a blood relative, close kin, neighbor, or covenant partner. The Greek term is a combination of “womb” (*delphys*) and “*a*” (i.e. one from the same womb). The people of God perceive themselves as God’s children. This led to the use of many familial metaphors in the NT: (1) child/children; (2) born again/born from above; (3) adopted; and (4) brother/brothers.



NASB “when you encounter”

NKJV “when you fall into”

NRSV “whenever you face”

TEV “when . . . comes your way”

NJB “when . . . come upon you”

This is an AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE of the compound terms “to fall” and “around.” The SUBJUNCTIVE speaks of probable future action, but with some degree of doubt. These believers were experiencing some problems but apparently not all of them. Trials and problems are common for believers in this fallen world (cf. I Pet. 4:12-16; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:29; II Tim. 3:12).

□ **“various trials”** This is literally “many colored” or “rainbowed” (cf. I Pet. 1:6). In I Peter 4:10 the same word is used to describe God’s grace. For every trial we face there is a matching grace of God! In James 1:3a trials purify faith, in 1:3b they produce patience, and in 1:4 they produce maturity. Problems happen! How believers face them is the crucial issue!

1:3 “the testing of” The Greek term *dokimos* was used of testing metals to prove their genuineness (cf. Prov. 27:21 in the Septuagint). It developed the connotation of “to test with a view toward approval” (cf. 1:12; I Pet. 1:7). God tests His children (cf. Gen. 22:1; Ex. 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2,16; Job 2:22; 13:3; II Chr. 32:31; Matt. 4:1), but it is always for strengthening, never for destruction.

❑ **“faith”** Here, the word *pistis* is used in the sense of personal trust in God through Christ, not Christian doctrine as it does in Jude vv. 3,20.

❑ **“produces”** This is a PRESENT MIDDLE (deponent) INDICATIVE. Notice that an ongoing process, not an instantaneous result, is being emphasized. A similar chain of growth stages is seen in Rom. 5:3-4; Col. 1:11-12; I Pet. 1:6-7. Salvation is a gift and a process.

❑ **“endurance”** This Greek word means a “voluntary, active, steadfast, patient endurance” (cf. v. 12; Luke 21:19). This is a recurrent theme in James (cf. 1:3,4,12; 5:11).

1:4 “And let endurance have” This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE. Of the 108 verses in the book of James there are 54 IMPERATIVES. It is a book of exhortation to practical living.

❑ **“its perfect results, so that you may be perfect and complete”** The Greek word “perfect” (*telos*) means “fully equipped,” “mature,” or “ripe.” It is often linked to love (cf. Rom. 12:2; I Cor. 13:9-13; I Jn. 4:18). Noah is described by this same word in the Septuagint of Gen. 6:9. It seems to have the connotation of a mature faith which issues in faithful, loving service. It does not imply or suggest “sinlessness” or “without fear.” It is just possible that this could have an eschatological reference. James often looks toward the culmination of the Christian hope (cf. 1:8-9,12; 5:7,8).

The second term “complete” (*holoklēria*) is used of the health and wholeness of the physical body (cf. Acts 3:16) and metaphorically of the well-being of all mankind, both physically and spiritually (cf. I Thes. 5:23 and in an eschatological sense, vv. 8-9,12).

❑ **“lacking in nothing”** Notice that a mature Christian is described in three ways: (1) perfect (*telos*); (2) with integrity or complete (*holoklēros* cf. I Thes. 5:23); and (3) lacking in nothing (NJB “not deficient in any way”). Trials are God’s means of producing maturity (cf. Heb. 5:8). Maturity is not theological insight only, but daily faithful endurance! Maturity is who we are, not what we know! Its fruit is seen and developed in crisis.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT 1:5-8

‘But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ‘But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

1:5 “if” This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which means it is assumed to be true from the author’s perspective or for his literary purposes. Believers need wisdom to live a godly life in this fallen world. James knew that trials are often taken as a sign of God’s displeasure, but they are, in reality, exactly the opposite (cf. Job and Ps. 73).

❑ **“any of you lacks wisdom”** There is a wordplay between vv. 4c and 5a. It is captured in the NASB translation “... lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom.” This theme is continued in 3:13-18.

Notice the universal offer of wisdom “if any of you . . .” God’s wisdom is available to His children, but they must sense the need, ask, and receive. Wisdom, like maturity, is not automatic.

■ **“wisdom”** In the OT wisdom/knowledge represent two aspects: (1) intellectual and (2) practical. In this context it is the practical, daily insight from God that sustains His persecuted people.

God’s gift, through sustained prayer, of wisdom is conditioned on faith without doubt, vv. 5-8. Both believing prayer and God’s wisdom are our spiritual weapons in trials and temptations (cf. Eph. 6:10-18).

■ **“let him ask of God”** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE, which is literally “let him continue to ask of the giving God.” This same form is repeated in v. 6 with the additional qualifying phrase “in faith” (cf. Matt. 7:7-8; Lk. 11:9). In Matthew it is God who gives “good things”; in Luke it is God who gives “the Holy Spirit” and in James it is God who gives “wisdom.” Wisdom can be personified, as in Prov. 8:22-31. God’s wisdom in Jn. 1:1 refers to Jesus (the *Logos*).

■ **“gives to all”** What a universal promise to all of God’s children. Notice how the context develops this universal theme: “if any ask,” “gives to all generously,” “without reproach,” “it will be given.” But, there are conditions: “ask in faith,” “without doubting.”

The universal availability for believers to know how to live in a way that is pleasing to God is a wonderful truth, especially in times of trials. It is even possible that a gracious God would answer the heartfelt prayer of the lost person in giving him/her wisdom also, a wisdom that leads to salvation (cf. II Tim. 3:15).

■

NASB, NRSV,

TEV, NJB “generously”

NKJV “liberally”

This form of the term *haplōs* is found only here in the NT. Its root form (*haploos*) means “single” or “with an undivided motive or mind” (cf. Matt. 6:22 for another possible link to the Sermon on the Mount).

It (*haplotēs*) came to be used metaphorically of sincerity, genuineness, or purity of motive (cf. Rom. 12:8; II Cor. 1:12; 11:3; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22) or liberality (cf. II Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13). James uses it here to describe God’s free gift of wisdom to those who ask and continue to ask in faith. God, then, is the opposite of the doubting man.

■ **“and without reproach”** God is not a harsh, stingy disciplinarian! He is a loving parent who wants the best for His children! He does not play favorites.

1:6 “he must ask in faith” This is the condition for all of God’s spiritual gifts and provisions. This does not refer to doubting our abilities, but doubting God’s ability and willingness (cf. 5:15; Matt. 21:21-22; Mk. 11:22-24; Heb. 11:1ff). Faith establishes fellowship with God; doubt destroys it! God has limited Himself to respond to the believing/faithful/trusting prayers of His children! The concept of unanswered prayer is discussed again in 4:1-3.

■ **“without any doubting”** In the Greek text the term “doubting” is a PRESENT MIDDLE PARTICIPLE. It is repeated twice. The term “*diakrinō*” usually means “to discern by making distinctions” (cf. 2:4), but in several passages it takes on the connotation of wavering between two decisions or opinions, which implies an unsettled mind, a lack of mature faith (cf. Matt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23; Rom. 4:20; 14:23; Jas. 1:6). It illustrates the continual struggle of the doubting Christian.

1:7 “that man” This is a Semitic idiom of contempt. This is parallel to the doubter of v. 6.



NASB	“ being a double-minded man ”
NKJV	“ he is a double-minded man ”
NRSV	“ being double-minded ”
TEV	“ unable to make up your mind ”
NJB	“ inconsistent in every activity ”

Literally this means “two-souled” (cf. 4:8). This term is unique to James in the NT and in Greek literature. Many believe James coined it. It probably comes from the OT’s “double-heart” (cf. I Chr. 12:33; Ps. 12:2). It was used early and often by the early church, first by Clement of Rome about A.D. 96. This is possibly an evidence for the early date of this letter. In Paul Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, this is seen in “Mr. Facing Both Ways.” He is described in v. 6 as a restless ocean and in v. 8 as a double-minded, unstable person. Verses 6-8 describe a person who claims to know God and is a part of the believing community. It is possible that v. 6 deals with a doubting person and vv. 7-8 deal with a double-minded person. This passage may reflect the proverbial “two ways” or the Jewish “two intents (*yetzers*)” (cf. Deut. 30:15-20; Prov. 4:10-19; Matt. 7:13-14).

SPECIAL TOPIC: EFFECTIVE PRAYER

- A. Related to one’s personal relationship with the Triune God
 - 1. Related to the Father’s will
 - a. Matt. 6:10
 - b. I Jn. 3:22
 - c. I Jn. 5:14-15
 - 2. Abiding in Jesus
 - Jn. 15:7
 - 3. Praying in Jesus’ name
 - a. Jn. 14:13,14
 - b. Jn. 15:16
 - c. Jn. 16:23-24
 - 4. Praying in the Spirit
 - a. Eph. 6:18
 - b. Jude 20
- B. Related to one’s personal motives
 - 1. Not wavering
 - a. Matt. 21:22
 - b. James 1:6-7
 - 2. Asking amiss
 - James 4:3
 - 3. Asking selfishly
 - James 4:2-3
- C. Related to one’s personal choices
 - 1. Perseverance
 - a. Luke 18:1-8

- b. Colossians 4:2
- c. James 5:16
- 2. Discord at home
 - I Peter 3:7
- 3. Sin
 - a. Psalm 66:18
 - b. Isaiah 59:1-2
 - c. Isaiah 64:7

All prayer is answered, but not all prayer is effective. Prayer is a two-way relationship. The worst thing God could do is grant believers' inappropriate requests.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VERSES 7-8 AND 9-11

- A. The conjunction used in v. 9 (*de*) signals the reader that these verses are somehow connected with what goes before. However, the link is unspecified. It is obvious that the discussion of trials, which is introduced in v. 2, begins again in vv. 12ff.
- B. The contextual connection is uncertain. Some say:
 - 1. the “all joy” of v. 2 relates to “rejoice” of v. 9
 - 2. the trials of v. 2 relate to the tests of poverty or wealth in vv. 9-11.
- C. Most commentators relate vv. 9-11 to the “trials” of v. 2. These trials are discussed again in vv. 12ff. The trials of vv. 9-11 would uniquely refer to temptations caused by poverty or wealth, not persecution.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

- 1. To whom is this letter addressed?
- 2. What is the purpose of trials according to vv. 3 and 4?
- 3. What is doubt? How does doubt affect believers' prayers?
- 4. Are there two kinds of people spoken of in vv. 6-8 or only one?

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT 1:9-11

“But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;¹⁰ and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹For the sun rises with

a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

1:9 “brother” Although James has a Jewish flavor, it is addressed to a Christian audience. This is confirmed by (1) the use of the term “brother” (cf. 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 4:11; 5:7,9,10,12,19); (2) the use of the term “Lord” (cf. 1:1,7,12; 2:1; 4:10,15; 5:4,7,8,10,11,14,15); (3) the specific mention of faith in Christ (cf. 2:1); and (4) the expectation of Jesus’ return (cf. 5:8).



NASB “**of humble circumstances**”

NKJV “**lowly**”

NRSV “**who is lowly**”

TEV “**who are poor**”

NJB “**in humble circumstances**”

This refers to physical poverty (cf. Lk. 6:20), although this same term is used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount for the “spiritually poor” (cf. Matt. 5:3).



NASB “**to glory**”

NKJV “**glory**”

NRSV “**boast**”

TEV “**must be glad**”

NJB “**should glory**”

This usage of glory (*kauchaomai*) can be seen in the Septuagint of Ps. 32:11. This is a strong Greek term and should be translated “exult” (cf. Rom. 5:2,3,11; Phil. 3:3).

□ **“in his high position”** This refers to one’s personal exaltation at being a Christian. In light of this, worldly distinctions and trials fade into insignificance.

1:10 “the rich man is to glory” The exact point of the comparison is not clear, but it becomes obvious if we assume that both are believers (cf. Matt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). The term “brother” does not appear in v. 10. This passage may be contrasting poor believers and wealthy unbelievers, like 5:1-6 and the parable of Jesus in Lk. 16:19-31.

SPECIAL TOPIC: WEALTH

I. Wealth in the OT

A. The perspective of the OT as a whole

1. God is the owner of all things
 - a. Genesis 1-2
 - b. I Chr. 29:11
 - c. Psalm 24:1; 50:12; 89:11
 - d. Isaiah 66:2
2. Humans are stewards of God’s wealth for His purposes
 - a. Deut. 8:11-20

- b. Leviticus 19:9-18
- c. Job 31:16-33
- d. Isaiah 58:6-10
- 3. Wealth is an aspect of worship
 - a. the two tithes
 - (1) Numbers 18:21-29; Deut. 12:6-7; 14:22-27
 - (2) Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-15
 - b. Proverbs 3:9
- 4. Wealth is seen as a gift from God for Covenant fidelity
 - a. Deut. 27-28
 - b. Prov. 3:10; 8:20-21; 10:22; 15:6
- 5. Warnings against personal wealth at the expense of others
 - a. Proverbs 21:6
 - b. Jeremiah 5:26-29
 - c. Hosea 12:6-8
 - d. Micah 6:9-12
- 6. Wealth is not sinful in itself unless it becomes the priority of one's life
 - a. Psalm 52:7; 62:10; 73:3-9
 - b. Proverbs 11:28; 23:4-5; 27:24; 28:20-22
 - c. Job 31:24-28

B. The unique perspective of Proverbs

- 1. Wealth is related to personal effort
 - a. slothfulness and laziness condemned (cf. Prov. 6:6-11; 10:4-5,26; 12:24,27; 13:2; 15:19; 18:9; 19:15,24; 20:4,13; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16)
 - b. Wealth is related to hard work (cf. Prov. 12:11-14; 13:11)
- 2. Poverty vs. Riches is used to illustrate righteousness vs. wickedness (cf. Prov. 10:1ff; 11:27-28; 13:7; 15:16-17; 28:6,19-20)
- 3. Wisdom (knowing God and His Word and living out this knowledge daily) is better than riches (cf. Prov. 3:13-15; 8:9-11,18-21; 13:18)
- 4. Warnings and admonitions
 - a. warnings
 - (1) beware of guarantying a neighbor's loan (surety) (cf. Prov. 6:1-5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26-27; 27:13)
 - (2) beware of getting rich through evil means (cf. Prov. 1:19; 10:2,15; 11:1; 13:11; 16:11; 20:10,23; 21:6; 22:16,22; 28:8)
 - (3) beware of borrowing (cf. Prov. 22:7)
 - (4) beware of the fleetingness of wealth (cf. Prov. 23:4-5)
 - (5) wealth will not help on judgment day (cf. Prov. 11:4)
 - (6) wealth has many "friends" (cf. Prov. 14:20; 19:4)
 - b. admonitions
 - (1) generosity advocated (cf. Prov. 11:24-26; 14:31; 17:5; 19:17; 22:9,22-23; 23:10-11; 28:27)

- (2) righteousness is better than wealth (cf. Prov. 16:8; 28:6,8,20-22)
- (3) pray for need, not abundance (cf. Prov. 30:7-9)
- (4) giving to the poor is giving to God (cf. Prov. 14:31; 19:17)

II.. Wealth in the NT

A. The perspective of Jesus

- 1. wealth creates a unique temptation to trust in ourselves and our resources instead of God and His resources
 - a. Matt. 6:24
 - b. Matt. 19:23; Mark 10:23-31
 - c. Luke 12:15-21
 - d. Luke 12:33-34
 - e. Matt. 13:22
 - f. Revelation 3:17-19
- 2. God will provide our physical needs (cf. Matt. 6:19-34; Lk. 12:29-32)
- 3. sowing is related to reaping (this is true in the spiritual realm as well as the physical)
 - a. Matt. 6:14; 18:35
 - b. Luke 6:36-38
 - c. Mark 4:24
- 4. economic exploitation condemned
 - a. Matt. 23:25
 - b. Mark 12:38-40
- 5. repentance affects wealth
 - a. Luke 19:2-10 (Lev. 5:16)
- 6. end-time judgment is related to our use of wealth
 - a. Matt. 25:31-46

B. The perspective of Paul

- 1. a practical view like Proverbs (work)
 - a. Ephesians 4:28
 - b. I Thes. 4:11-12
 - c. II Thes. 3:8,11-12
 - d. I Timothy 5:8
- 2. a spiritual view like Jesus (things are fleeting, be content)
 - a. I Timothy 6:6-10 (contentment)
 - b. Philippians 4:11-12 (Heb. 13:5, contentment)
 - c. I Timothy 6:17-19 (generosity and trust in God, not riches)
 - d. I Corinthians 7:30-31 (transitoriness of things)

C. The perspective of James

- 1. wealthy Christians, like poor Christians, must glory in their relationship to God through Christ, not worldly conditions (cf. Jas. 1:9-10)
- 2. wealth is transitory (cf. Jas. 1:10-11)
- 3. be careful of favoritism (cf. Jas. 2:1-13)

4. be careful of worldly plans (cf. Jas. 4:13-17)
5. be careful of exploitation of the poor and righteous (cf. Jas. 5:1-6)

III. Conclusions

- A. There is no systematic biblical theology concerning wealth.
 1. In the OT wealth and health were seen as blessings from God for covenant obedience (cf. Deut. 27-28). However, Job and Ps. 73 show that this simple answer does not always fit reality.
 2. In the NT wealth is neither condemned nor advocated; however, wealth is often a barrier to trust in God.
- B. There is no definitive passage on this subject. Therefore, insights must be gleaned from different passages. Take care not to read your views into these isolated proof texts.
- C. Proverbs, which was written by the wisdom teachers of Israel (sages), has a different perspective than other biblical genres. Proverbs is practical and individually focused. It balances and must be balanced by other Scripture.
- D. Our culture needs to analyze its views and practices concerning wealth in light of the Bible. Our priorities are misplaced if capitalism or communism is our only guide. Why and how one succeeds are more important questions than how much one has accumulated.
- E. Accumulation of wealth must be balanced with true worship and responsible stewardship (cf. II Cor. 8-9). Wealth is to be used for God's glory and the advancement of His Kingdom.

▣ **“like flowering grass he will pass away”** This refers to the transitory nature of all material things (cf. II Cor. 4:18). These words in vv. 10-11 are an allusion to Isa. 40:6-8 or Ps. 103:15-16 (cf. I Pet. 1:24-25). The poor needed a sense of worth and the rich needed a sense of humility. Earthly distinctions fade away in Christ and will one day fade away in the consummated kingdom of God.

1:11 “For the sun rises with a scorching wind” This refers to the desert Sirocco winds. There is probably a play in Hebrew between *ruah*, which can mean either “wind” or “spirit.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:12-18

¹²Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him. ¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ¹⁸In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

1:12 “Blessed” This reflects Hebrew usage (cf. Ps. 1:1; Prov. 3:13; 8:34; Job 5:17; Isa. 56:2; Jer. 17:7). This can be translated “happy” (cf. TEV). This is the same term used in “the Beatitudes” of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5:1-17).

▣ **“the man who perseveres under trial”** This is a PRESENT TENSE which means continuance under trial (cf. v. 3).

■ **“for once he has been approved”** “Test” is the Greek word *dokimos* (cf. v. 3). It often implies “to test with a view toward approval.” This approval comes only through testing. It was used in Greek for medical doctors taking a final practical test before graduation.

■ **“crown of life”** This is the Greek term *stephanos*, which was a wreath worn on the head as a symbol of military or athletic victory. It is the word from which we get the English name Stephen. There are several crowns referred to in the NT which faithful believers will receive from God: (1) “the crown of righteousness” (cf. II Tim. 4:8); (2) “the crown of life” (cf. Rev. 2:10; 3:11); (3) “the crown of glory” (cf. I Pet. 5:4); and (4) “an imperishable crown” (cf. I Cor. 9:25).

Because of the Jewish flavor of James, this probably does not refer to an athletic victory wreath, but follows the Septuagint where *stephanos* is used of a royal or priestly crown.

■ **“which *the Lord* has promised”** This is an AORIST MIDDLE (deponent) INDICATIVE with an unexpressed subject. The NASB, NKJV, NRSV, and NJB supply “the Lord,” while TEV and NIV supply “God.” This is typical of many later scribal changes to the original Greek texts. The scribes tried to make the text as specific as possible to remove ambiguity or supposed heretical interpretation.

Also notice this crown (1) is promised by God, but (2) comes through the believer’s victory over trials and temptations. As always God deals with mankind through covenant “if . . . then” categories. God provides, initiates, and empowers, but we must respond and continue to respond by repentance, faith, obedience, service, and perseverance.

■ **“to those who love Him”** Love is shown by obedience (cf. 2:5; Ex. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:10,32; 6:6; 7:9). There is no excuse for disobedience (cf. Lk. 6:46).

1:13 “Let no one say” This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE with the NEGATIVE PARTICLE which usually means “stop saying.” The implication is that some believers were saying this.

■ **“when he is tempted”** The context implies that one saying that he is tempted by God is attempting to make his sin God’s fault. The word tempted (*peirasmoides*) is used in v. 2 in the sense of outward trials, but here the VERBAL form is used of temptation. God provides, or allows, testing (cf. Matt. 4:1), but Satan does it. “Tempted” (*peiraz*) is a PRESENT PASSIVE PARTICIPLE, which often has the connotation of “testing with a view toward destruction.” It is the opposite connotation of the word “test” (*dokimaz*) used in 1:3,12.

■ **“I am being tempted by God”** God is not the source of evil! Please read Ecclesiasticus 15:11,15,20.

■ **“for God cannot be tempted by evil”** This means either (1) not temptable or (2) “untrained in evil” which means that God has no connection or experience with evil.

■ **“He Himself does not tempt anyone”** However, the Bible records several of God’s tests: Abraham, Gen. 22:1; Israel, Deut. 8:2; Jesus, Matt. 4:1; and believers, Matt. 6:13. This statement seems to be caught up in the differing connotations between the terms “tempt” (*peiraz*, cf. 1:13), and “test” (*dokimaz*, cf. 1:3,12). God does not tempt so as to destroy, but He does test so as to strengthen.

1:14 “when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” These two verbs were used of trapping and luring animals into captivity. We tend to blame others for our sin. We may blame God, the devil, parents, society, education, etc. We are our own worst enemy. The Bible speaks of three enemies of man: the world, the flesh, and the devil (cf. 4:1-7; Eph. 2:1-3). In this context, “the flesh,” or our Adamic nature, is the

culprit (cf. Ecclesiasticus 15:14-15). Notice that Satan is not even mentioned in this section on human sinfulness. Neither is he mentioned in Paul's section in Romans on human sin (cf. chapters 1-3). Satan is a real tempter, but he cannot force humans to sin and is, therefore, no excuse for their moral failures.

1:15 “when lust has conceived it gives birth to sin” Sin is personified and is viewed as beginning in the mind (cf. Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). Here the metaphor changes from capturing animals to “birth” used in a negative sense while in v. 18 it was used in a positive sense.

□ **“death”** The Bible speaks of three kinds of death: (1) spiritual death (cf. Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1); (2) physical death (cf. Gen. 5); and (3) eternal death (cf. Rev. 2:11; 20:6,14). Often the first two senses are combined as in Ezek. 18:4.

Death has become a theological issue in the evangelical discussion over a young earth (30,000 - 10,000 years) versus an old earth (billions of years). Is physical death (and extinction of some species) the normal order of creation or is it a result of human rebellion and sin? These kinds of questions are not specifically addressed in the Bible. Modern people try to answer these questions by an appeal to science, the Bible, or a combination of them. The Bible provides clear information about God and redemption, but not every intellectual inquiry. If one appeals to modern science, theories change; if one appeals to commentators, theology is often parochial or denominational.

1:16 “Do not be deceived” This is a PRESENT PASSIVE IMPERATIVE with a NEGATIVE PARTICLE which here means to “stop an act already in progress” with the added connotation of an ongoing outside temptation. This is a strong idiom which is used to introduce a major truth (cf. I Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; and I Jn. 1:7). God gives good gifts, not evil temptations.

□ **“beloved brethren”** See note at 1:2 and 1:9.

1:17 “every good thing given, and every perfect gift” This is the contrast to vv. 13-16. Two different words are used here which appear to be used as parallels. If they are not synonymous, then the first emphasizes the act of giving and the second the thing given. God wants to give us good things. He is not reluctant but often believers are not ready to receive and use God's gifts in healthy ways. The Bible does list some of the things God has given us: (1) Jesus (Jn. 3:16; II Cor. 9:15); (2) the Spirit (Lk. 11:13); (3) the Kingdom (Luke 12:32); (4) salvation (Jn. 1:12; Eph. 2:8); (5) eternal life (I Jn. 5:11); (6) peace (Jn. 14:27); and (7) wisdom (Jas. 1:5).

□ **“coming down from”** Phrases like this imply that heaven is above the earth. Often this is used to discredit the Bible. The Bible is written in phenomenological language, the language of description using the five senses. It is earth-centered or focused. This language is a literary way of expressing the priority of God's ultimate creation, mankind. The Bible is not a science book, but a theology book. It is not anti-scientific, but pre-scientific. In this way it relates to all cultures through time.

□ **“the Father of lights”** Light is a biblical metaphor of good, of health, of insight or truth, of purity. The first mention of light is in Genesis 1 where YHWH creates light (cf. v. 3). He also names darkness (cf. Gen. 1:4-5) which shows His control over both. This does not refer to the sun, which is not brought into being until day four (cf. Gen. 1:14-19; Ps. 136:7). Light is often associated with God (cf. Ps. 104:2; I Tim. 6:16; I Jn. 1:5 or Christ, Jn. 1:4-5; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

Mankind's destiny is not controlled by angelic or demonic influences depicted in the movement or eclipse of heavenly lights. God is the creator and controller of the heavenly bodies. He always gives good

things to His children; even trials have a positive, purposeful, intended outcome—our maturity and trust in Him.



NASB	“with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow”
NKJV	“with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”
NRSV	“with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change”
TEV	“who does not change or cause darkness by turning”
NJB	“with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow caused by change”

These terms reflect the waxing and waning of the heavenly bodies of light. God is not like them. He is unchanging (cf. Ps. 102:26-27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 1:11-12; 13:8). This is not meant to imply that He is rigid or unsympathetic to human need, but that His nature, His character of love and compassion towards humankind does not change. Believers can depend on His promises because His character is unchanging, immutable.

The ambiguity of this phrase has caused scribes to alter the text in several ways. For a full discussion see Bruce Metzger’s *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* pp. 679-680.

1:18 “In the exercise of His will” God always takes the initiative (AORIST PASSIVE [deponent] PARTICIPLE) in mankind’s situation and salvation (cf. Jn. 6:44,65; Rom. 9; Eph. 1:4; 2:8; I Pet. 1:3).

□ **“He brought us forth”** This is a common biblical familial metaphor for salvation as becoming God’s children through birth (cf. 1:12-13; Jn. 3:3; Acts 17:29; Heb. 12:5-9; I Pet. 1:3,23; I Jn. 2:29; 5:1,4). This phrase could refer to the initial creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis. If this is true then it could explain the difficulty of 1:21 where believers are to welcome the word that is already implanted in them. This then would refer to the image of God in humans by creation (cf. Gen. 1:26; 5:1,3; 9:6) and its full restoration through faith in Jesus Christ.

However, in context this seems to refer to becoming a Christian because the agency is the word of truth which implies that salvation is only through the gospel, not creation. Part of the interpretive ambiguity is the fact that the term “father” is used in several distinct ways in the Bible: (1) creator of all things; (2) begetter and sustainer of Israel (and Israel’s king); (3) begetter and sustainer of spiritual Israel (the church); and (4) relationship within the Trinity (Father - Son).

□ **“the word of truth”** In Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; and II Tim. 2:15 it is synonymous with “the gospel.”

□ **“first fruits”** This means first (1) in the sense of time as in the OT where the first-ripened part of the crop was dedicated to YHWH to show His ownership of all the crop (cf. Ex. 28:19; 34:22,26; Lev. 23:10) and (2) metaphorically first in priority and prominence. This is not to imply that God loves believers more, but that He wants to use them and their changed lives of faith to reach the others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. How do vv. 9-11 relate to the argument of chapter 1?
2. Is the rich man in v. 10 a Christian?
3. What does Matthew 6:13 mean if God does not tempt (v. 13)?
4. What is Satan's relationship to temptation?
5. List the types of trials mentioned in chapter 1.
6. Explain in your own words the three enemies which assault the children of Adam.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO 1:19-27

- A. There is an emphasis in this context on “the word.”
 1. spiritual birth comes through the word (v. 18)
 2. the word is received and implanted (v. 21)
 3. the word acts as a mirror for God’s will (v. 24)
 4. the word is the law of the new age (v. 25)
- B. There are three key IMPERATIVES which show the intended theological progress, similar to the process in Ezra 7:10
 1. hear (v. 19)
 2. receive (v. 21)
 3. do (v. 22; this is the theme of James)

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:19-25

¹⁹*This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. ²¹Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²²But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

1:19 “This you know” This is a PERFECT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE. Although this could be taken as an INDICATIVE statement (Greek morphology), the introductory IMPERATIVES of 1:16 and 2:5 clue us that this is also a command relating to our understanding of the gospel (cf. I Jn. 2:21). Believers must live appropriately! This entire section could be entitled “Results of the New Birth” or “The Life Changing Message.”

❑ “**my beloved brethren**” See note at 1:2 and 1:9.

❑ “**quick to hear, slow to speak**” This is a proverbial saying (cf. Prov. 10:19; 13:3; 16:32; 17:28; 29:20). Verses 22-25 relate to this first imperative phrase. This injunction may refer to the informality, an often

abused freedom, of the worship services of the early church (cf. 1:25; 3:1ff). This same tension among rival singers, tongue speakers, and prophets can be seen in I Cor. 14.

■ **“slow to anger”** Anger is not a sin (lest Jesus be accused of sin in the cleansing of the Temple or His harsh words to the Pharisees), but it is an emotion easily used by the evil one (cf. Prov. 14:17; 16:32; Eccl. 7:9). The anger in this context may refer to (1) the persecution, trials, temptations or (2) personal pride or jealousy related to Christian worship (cf. I Cor. 14).

1:20 Angry Christians distort the message that God is trying to communicate to others through them (cf. Matt. 5:22; Eph. 4:26).

1:21 “putting aside all filthiness” This is an AORIST MIDDLE PARTICIPLE functioning as an IMPERATIVE. This phrase emphasizes our volitional capacity and responsibility as believers. The removal of clothing is often used as a biblical metaphor for spiritual characteristics (cf. Rom. 13:12; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:22-25; Col. 3:8,10,12,14; I Pet. 2:1). Dirty clothing is an OT metaphor which is often used for “sin” (cf. Isa. 64:6; Zech. 3:4).

■ **“all filthiness”** This term often means “a wax build-up in the ear.” It is a reference to unholy living which impairs one’s hearing of God’s word. However, its primary usage was “dirty,” as in dirty clothing (cf. Jas. 2:2) which would relate to one’s lifestyle. “Vulgarity” is another possible usage of the term, which would refer to one’s speech.

■	
NASB	“all that remains of wickedness”
NKJV	“overflow of wickedness”
NRSV	“rank growth of wickedness”
TEV	“all wicked conduct”
NJB	“remnants of evil”

This term is used in the NT of “that which is left over” or an “abundance of” something (cf. Rom. 5:17; II Cor. 8:2; 10:15). Here it seems to mean to keep oneself within the appropriate God-given bounds. This term can be translated “malice” (NEB) or “vicious talk,” which would relate it to James’ continuing emphasis on the spoken word.

■ **“in humility”** This Greek term and its related forms mean “gentleness,” “meekness,” and “consideration.” It is the opposite of the harsh, selfish attitudes and actions delineated in v. 21.

Plato used this family of terms for the “golden mean,” that is a wholesome balance in life brought about by one’s control of himself. Believers are able to take off evil and put on good because of their trusting relationship with Christ and the indwelling Spirit. Humility is a word picture of Jesus (cf. Matt. 21:5) and God’s will for every believer (cf. Matt. 5:5; I Pet. 3:4). See note at 3:13.

■ **“receive”** This is an AORIST MIDDLE (deponent) IMPERATIVE. God’s word, the gospel of Jesus Christ, must be received (cf. Jn. 1:12; Acts 17:11; Rom. 10:9-13; I Thes. 2:13). This receiving is both initial repentance, faith unto salvation and continuing repentance, faith unto godliness and Christlikeness. The hearing of faith must issue in a life of faith.

■ **“the word implanted”** This is the metaphor of planting (cf. Matt. 13:8; II Pet. 1:4). The Greek text implies that humans already have the implanted word which they must receive by faith. This could be referring to the original creation of man, as could v. 18. If so it would refer to God’s image in us which was

marred by the Fall (cf. Gen. 3), but is restored by faith in Christ. Three metaphors are used to illustrate the “word of truth”: a seed (v. 21); a mirror (v. 23); and a law (v. 25). The gospel must be received and then lived out.

Verse 21 contains both prerequisites of NT salvation: repentance (laying aside) and faith (receiving, cf. Mk. 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21). This is a negative “turning from” (repentance) and a positive “turning to” (faith).

■ **“which is able to save your souls”** This implanted word is such a powerful metaphor of the believers’ new relationship with God. The term “soul” speaks of the whole person. Humans are a soul (cf. Gen. 2:7); they do not have a soul (Greek concept). Theologically, soul (*psuch*) and spirit (*pneuma*) are synonyms for the whole person.

The term “save” has an OT meaning of “physical deliverance” and a NT meaning of “eternal salvation.” The OT usage is found in Jas. 5:15,20. But here and in 2:14; 4:12 the NT connotation fits best.

The current theological discussion over “a free salvation” versus “Lordship salvation” is a good example of how modern interpreters proof-text one passage (or category of passages) to the exclusion of others and thereby develop a dogmatic theological position. However, the NT, like all ancient near eastern literature, is highly figurative and often dualistic in the sense of presenting truth in tension-filled pairs. In this context we are saved (eternal life) by God’s word, but we must also act on God’s word daily (OT saved or delivered). For joy and maturity both are necessary. This combination of faith and works is James’ central message, faith and works!

1:22 “But prove yourselves doers of the word” This is a PRESENT MIDDLE IMPERATIVE. This verse is the central message of the entire book (cf. 1:22,23,25). Christianity is a volitional decision to a faith relationship with Jesus Christ which issues in a Christlike lifestyle. It is possible that this phrase is an indirect way of referring to OT obedience as in the Ten Commandments (cf. Jas. 1:12 combined with Ex. 20:6 and Deut. 5:10).

■ **“not merely hearers”** This word was used in Greek literature for those who attended lectures but never joined the groups. Hearing the truth is not enough; believers must act on it and continue to act on it daily (cf. Luke 11:28; Rom. 2:13).

■ **“who delude themselves”** This is a PRESENT MIDDLE PARTICIPLE. Modern Christianity is guilty of supposing that church attendance or civil responsibility is equated with Christian service. Our cultural segregation of the secular and sacred only achieves self-deception. Verses 23-25 are an example of such self-deception. Life belongs to God and each of us will give an account to God as to how we have lived it.

1:23 “if” This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author’s perspective or for his literary purposes. Modern believers often attend Sunday School and preaching but it does not affect their daily lives. In a sense this is practical atheism, the irrelevancy of God! Christianity is not a building, nor a creed only, but a faith relationship with God through Christ that impacts every area of life.



NASB, NKJV	“natural face”
NRSV (margin)	“at the face of his birth”
TEV	“see themselves”
NJB	“sees what he looks like”

This metaphor, “face of birth,” is used in the sense of seeing one’s self. The whole point of vv. 23-24 is that believers must do more than hear the truth or know the truth. We must act on it. What we do not use, we lose!

▣ **“mirror”** Ancient mirrors were made of polished metal. They were very expensive and produced only a distorted reflection (cf. I Cor. 13:12). God’s word functions as a spiritual mirror of perfect clarity.

1:24 A quick, superficial look at our true self issues in a settled life of rebellious self-deception!

1:25 “looked” There are two Greek terms in vv. 23-25 for “look” or “observe.” The first is *katanoe*, used in vv. 23 and 24. The second is a stronger term, *parakupt*, which means “to look intently at” or “to closely examine” (cf. Jn. 20:5,11; I Pet. 1:12).

Believers are to observe themselves in light of God’s word, then they are to gaze intently at “the perfect law, the law of liberty,” the gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowledge of self is helpful, but knowledge of God is eternal.



NASB “at the perfect law, the *law of liberty*”

NKJV “the perfect law of liberty”

NRSV “the perfect law, the law of liberty”

TEV “the perfect law that sets people free”

NJB “the perfect law of freedom”

This phrase is parallel to “the royal law” in 2:8 and “the law of liberty” in 2:12 (also, notice Jn. 8:23; Rom. 8:2; 14:1ff; I Cor. 8:1ff; 10:23-33; Gal. 6:2). God’s word is not a barrier to our freedom, but is real freedom from our sin nature. Believers are now free to serve Him (cf. Rom. 6).

▣ **“this man will be blessed in what he does”** Notice the criteria for blessing: (1) looking intently at the perfect law; (2) abiding by it; and (3) being an effectual doer of it.

The FUTURE TENSE could refer to temporal blessing now, but because of James’ eschatological orientation (cf. 1:8-9,12; 5:7-8) it is probably end-time, Resurrection/Judgment Day blessings.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:26-27

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. **27** Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

1:26 “If anyone thinks himself to be religious” This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author’s perspective or for his literary purposes. The King James adds “seems” but the phrase refers to self-deception, not the observation and evaluation of others. Often believers substitute the human performance of rules and ritual for daily, Christlike living. Verses 25-26 are not a reference to religious hypocrites, but to sincere, unfulfilled, uninformed, unfruitful religionists. The term “religious” means “one concerned with scrupulous details.” James envisions (1) legalistic believers who trust in rules or (2) gnostic believers who trust in knowledge, neither of whom live godly lives.

▣ **“does not bridle his tongue . . . this man’s religion is worthless”** Human speech is a major issue in James (cf. 1:19; 3:2-12; Matt. 15:8-9; Col. 2:20-23; II Tim. 3:5). Self-control is a sign of Christian maturity

(cf. Gal. 5:22-23). Orthodoxy without orthopraxy is common among the people of God. This is an empty show (cf. Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8-9; Col. 2:23-25; II Tim. 3:5; Jas. 1:19; 3:2-12). Religion can be a barrier to God (cf. Rom. 9:30-32).

SPECIAL TOPIC: HUMAN SPEECH

I. Opening Thoughts From Proverbs on Human Speech

- A. Human speech enables us to communicate to others how we feel about life. Therefore, it reveals who we really are (Prov. 18:2; 4:23,20-27). Speech is the acid test of the person (Prov. 23:7).
- B. We are social creatures. We are concerned with acceptance and affirmation. We need it from God and from our fellow humans. Words have the power to meet these needs in both positive (Prov. 17:10) and negative (Prov. 12:18) ways.
- C. There is tremendous power in human speech (Prov. 19:20-21)—the power to bless and heal (Prov. 10:11,21) and the power to curse and destroy (Prov. 11:9).
- D. We reap what we sow (Prov. 12:14).

II. Principles from Proverbs on Human Speech

A. The negative and destructive potential of human speech

- 1. the words of evil men (1:11-19; 10:6; 11:9,11; 12:5-6)
- 2. the words of the adulteress (5:2-5; 6:24-35; 7:5ff; 9:13-18; 22:14)
- 3. the words of the liar (6:12-15,17,19; 10:18; 12:17-19,22; 14:5,25; 17:4; 19:5,9,28; 21:28; 24:28; 25:18; 26:23-28)
- 4. the words of the fool (10:10,14; 14:3; 15:14; 18:6-8)
- 5. the words of false witnesses (6:19; 12:17; 19:5,9,28; 21:8; 24:28; 25:18)
- 6. the words of a gossip (6:14,19; 11:13; 16:27-28; 20:19; 25:23; 26:20)
- 7. the words too quickly spoken (6:1-5; 12:18; 20:25; 29:20)
- 8. the words of flattery (29:5)
- 9. too many words (10:14,19,23; 11:13; 13:3,16; 14:23; 15:2; 17:27-28; 18:2; 21:23; 29:20)
- 10. perverted words (17:20; 19:1)

B. The positive, healing and edifying potential of human speech

- A. the words of the righteous (10:11,20-21,31-32; 12:14; 13:2; 15:23; 16:13; 18:20)
- 2. the words of the discerning (10:13; 11:12)
- 3. the words of knowledge (15:1,4,7,8; 20:15)
- 4. the words of healing (15:4)
- 5. the words of a gentle answer (15:1,4,18,23; 16:1; 25:15)
- 6. the words of a pleasant answer (12:25; 15:26,30; 16:24)
- 7. the words of the law (22:17-21)

III. Principles from the New Testament on Human Speech

- A. Human speech enables us to communicate to others how we feel about life; therefore, it reveals who we really are (Matt. 15:1-20; Mk. 7:2-23).
- B. We are social creatures. We are concerned with acceptance and affirmation. We need it from God and from our fellow man. Words have the power to meet these needs in both positive (II Tim. 3:15-17) and negative (Jas. 3:2-12) ways.

- C. There is tremendous power in human speech—the power to bless (Eph. 4:29) and the power to curse (Jas. 3:9). We are responsible for what we say (Jas. 3:2-12).
- D. We will be judged by our words (Matt. 12:33-37; Lk. 6:39-45) as well as our deeds (Matt. 25:31-46). We reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7).

1:27 “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this” This expresses true religion in terms of service, as does Deuteronomy. Also, see Micah 6:6-8 for a definition of true religion. The verse reflects Judaism’s almsgiving (cf. Matt. 6:1) which was thought of as an evidence of one’s relationship to God. Holiness is not a radical separation from society, but an involvement in the needs of the poor and socially ostracized (cf. 2:15-17).

- ❑ **“to visit orphans and widows”** This refers to the social outcasts and socially vulnerable people (cf. Deut. 27:19; Ps. 68:5; Eccl. 4:10; Matt. 25:31). The true life-changing gospel always carries with it social concerns and activism. Truly knowing God must issue in serving others made in His image.
- ❑ **“to keep oneself unstained”** This is a PRESENT INFINITIVE (cf. I Tim. 5:22). The term was associated with acceptable sacrificial animals. Faith has two practical aspects: social action and personal ethics (cf. Matt. 25:31ff).
- ❑ **“by the world”** Remember that as believers we are in the world, not of the world (cf. James 4:4; I John 2:15-17); lack of involvement and heavy involvement are both inappropriate.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. What are we to understand from James 1:19?
2. List the items in vv. 19-27 that could relate to problems in public worship.
3. Explain the two elements of salvation which are discussed in v. 21.
4. In what way do religious people deceive themselves?
5. Why is the speech of believers mentioned so often in James (1:19,21,26; 3:1ff)?
6. Explain James’ definition of true religion in vv. 26-27. What two items does he emphasize?