

11.27.18
Dr. Charles P. Baylis

The Epistle of James

Preliminary to the Epistle of James:

The Epistle of James occurs within the Biblical Story and as such one cannot truly understand it until one understands the basics of the Biblical Story. It is highly recommended to watch the 14-session Biblical Story at www.TheBiblicalStory.org as a foundation to this study.

In addition, in order to understand the “wisdom of God” from the Old Testament that underlies James’ foundational definition for this book, one is also recommended to read the article, “The Knowledge of Good and Evil” also available at the same website under “Resources” “Articles.”

One other article that would be beneficial from the same website is “Introduction to Epistles.”

The Epistle of James

חֶסֶד.¹

“He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice (מִשְׁפָּט), to love mercy (“to love *hesed*,” אֲהַבֵּת חֶסֶד), And to walk humbly (הִצְנַע) with your God?”

Micah 6:8

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice (κρίσιν) and mercy (ἔλεος) and faithfulness (πίστιν); but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”

Matthew 23:23

¹ That *hesed* (sacrificial mercy from God) is the issue in this book is plain from the example of Rahab who had faith which included “works” (i.e., “mercy”). Rahab states that her faith included *hesed* when she talked to the spies in Joshua 2:12, “since I have dealt kindly (*hesed*) with you (Joshua 2:12). She then requested that they showed *hesed* to her. In addition, James uses the word, “mercy” in 2:13 (2), 2:17, and its opposite, “(partial) judgment,” and its related words in 1:6 (2), 2:12, 4:11 (3), 4:12.

Chapter 1

THE BASIC ISSUE IN JAMES: FAITH**The Current Problem with the Study of James**

Probably no other book fosters immediate discussion like the Book of James. The quotation from James 2:26 (see also 2:14, 17), “faith without works is dead,” is frequently referenced to ascertain that if one does not have good works following their salvation then they are not truly saved.² Even if someone objects to that doctrine by quoting Romans 3:28, “a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law,” the reply would come back again with another of James’ verses, “Even the demons believe” (2:19), to show that “belief” is not enough to save. The Pauline defender would finally go silent, since these proof-text bullets appear to squash all opposition when quoted, as everyone on both sides seems to accept that commonly accepted interpretation of James 2:26 (also 2:14, 17, 19) without question.

James as a Hermeneutical Puzzle

The Book of James has provided a fascinating study since it came off the pen of the half-brother of Jesus, perhaps as early as 15 years following the resurrection. One of the reasons it is so fascinating is that it has been a perpetual puzzle for interpreters. For instance, James appears to confront, or even conflict with, some of the doctrines that are prominent in other New Testament books. Probably the most famous is the just mentioned verse of 2:26 and its apparent contradiction with Romans 3:28. James states that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone (ἐξ ἔργων δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον; James 2:24), while Paul states that man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law (δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου; Romans 3:28).

But there are many other problem verses besides the well-known, “faith without works is dead.” There is the quotation of “. . . even the demons believe . . .” (2:19), an interesting statement since neither the New or Old Testament ever refers to demons as having “faith,”³ or that a demon ever “believed,” or even could “believe.”⁴ Another

² Or in some interpreters’ views, sanctified.

³ Too often “faith” is made equivalent to “know.” “Faith” should be translated with its synonym, “trusting.” “Trust” implies a decision on the part of the actor while many think “faith” does not. Of course, that is not the case as “faith” is a synonym for “trust” and requires a decision. It is not a synonym with “knowledge.”

⁴ For an interesting examination of this concept in James 2:19, see John S. Hart, “The Faith of Demons, James 2:19,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 8:15

unique James' statement is how the anointing of a sick person with oil will heal them (5:14-15). This would seem to give a surefire method of healing, yet nowhere else does the canon advocate its use by the church.⁵ In addition, there is no study that shows that the actual practice has resulted in any increase in the rate of recovery of the anointed versus the un-anointed.

These single verse quotations seem to dominate the Book of James. Proof-texts from this book get a life of their own, forming dogmatic one-verse doctrines even though there exists little or no validation from other Biblical passages. And at times these meanings even appear to contradict other Scriptures. "Consider it all joy . . .", "ask for wisdom", "faith without works is dead . . .", "even the demons believe . . .", ". . . if God wills . . .", "anointing with oil . . .", "the prayer of a righteous man avails much . . .", among others. These verses are frequently quoted dogmatically and usually accepted at face value by all.

Some of James' one-time proof texts even form a foundational basis for fringe practices. "Confess your sins to one another that you may be healed . . ." (5:16) has been taken out of context to validate the secular practice of "transparency" in small interactive groups,⁶ which more and more dominate the churches of evangelical America.

The Book of James is clearly unique. It is like no other book in the New Testament. No other epistle appears to question one's character as probingly and directly as this book. It alone defines one's religion with a simple classification; taking care of widows and orphans (1:27). That statement by itself is intended to strike directly at the core of every reader's conscience. James' criticism of seating (or otherwise honoring) the rich with priority (2:2-4) should hit home in almost every church today, where there is always a tendency to respect parishioners on the basis of their material prosperity or secular recognition. Almost universally, James 2:14-26 is used to identify true faith by the examination of one's works, but in practice is usually applied to someone else rather

(Autumn 1995). It is also available online at www.Bible.org. Probably the main misunderstanding of interpreters is to make "faith" equivalent with "knowledge." "Faith" is better rendered as "trust." In other words, faith requires that one put something in the hands of God as opposed to himself, that is, to trust in the revelation and give up on one own ability to deliver. Demons "know," but do not "trust," since they have not been given the opportunity to "trust," since Christ did not die for the redemption of demons. It is important not to confuse "know" and "believe" as synonyms.

⁵ Mark 6:13 notes that the disciples anointed the sick with oil and healed them.

⁶ "Transparency" groups are the secular practice of revealing one's hidden sins. While there may be some benefit or liability in secular realms, it is not Biblical. This verse is telling the believer to confess the sin of self-righteousness to the affected party, a brother or sister, or the church body. It is for the purpose of reconciliation. It is certainly not advocating confession to uninvolved parties.

than the reader, or the audience rather than the preacher.⁷ Yet in actuality, this book is meant to directly strike the heart of the reader or the preacher, not his neighbor. That this is the case is evident from the massive number of second person pronouns used throughout the epistle.⁸

⁷ The difficulty with measuring one's works is always the problem of what the minimum standard is? Also, there is the question of who determines the minimum standard, since James never seems to identify how many works does one have to do? A typical answer is that of "lifestyle," which doesn't solve the problem. Typically, the preacher or reader, who addresses the audience must assume that he has reached the standard and the addressees may have not reached it.

⁸ In addition, the book is almost totally corrective. There is no mention of anyone who actually has correct behavior, only instruction in how to have correct behavior for those who are lacking. But the main issue is for the reader to examine himself.

CHAPTER II
UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT
AS A BASIS FOR JAMES

That James uses the Law, particularly Deuteronomy, is evident from the direct allusions he makes. For instance, he alludes to the Law in the following passages.

2:8	Leviticus 19:18	“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
2:9	Deuteronomy 1:17, 16:19	Partiality in judgment
2:11	Deuteronomy 5:17, 18	Committing murder, adultery

There are multiple other allusions, not to mention the illustration of Abraham (Gen. 15, 22) and Rahab (Josh. 2).

However, if there were three chapters that should be required reading to understand the basis for James’ thought (although there are multiple ones since James is referencing the whole Biblical story), they would be Deuteronomy 8—10. It is there that God established His plans and explained His righteous character. Israel was to understand how God worked out His merciful character to and through Israel. From those passages, James will tell these Jewish readers that God’s character has not changed since He revealed Himself in the Hebrew Scriptures. The major difference was, that upon Christ’s death and resurrection, God had taken that character revealed in the Law, and placed it on their hearts.

Deuteronomy in James:
This Church Age is a Period of Testing

James establishes that this post-resurrection, pre-Second Coming age, is an age of testing. Testing means that God has given a promise and that those who received the promise are to walk on the basis of that promise (i.e., by faith), without visible evidence, even when the visible seems to contradict the promise. However, the difficulty with the group was that they were using visible riches and honor to validate one's position before God and were negating those without it, that is, the poor.

Testing in James

So, James focuses on telling the believers to endure in faith during the suffering of this age, or "testing." They were to live on the basis of the Word of God that revealed the promise in Christ of the kingdom and endure suffering without visible validation until that day.

- 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials
 (πειρασμοῖς, or "testing") (1:2)

- 12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial (πειρασμόν, or "testing") (1:12)
- 13-14 Let no one say when he is tempted (πειραζόμενος, or "tested"), "I am being tempted (πειράζομαι, or "tested") by God"; for God cannot be tempted (ἀπειραστός, or "tested") by evil, and He Himself does not tempt (πειράζει, or "test") anyone. 14 But each one is tempted (πειράζεται, or "tested") when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. (1:13-14)

Further, in James 5:7-11, James details that one is called to be patient as he endures suffering until the fulness of the promise comes in the kingdom.

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. ¹⁰ As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful. (5:7-11)

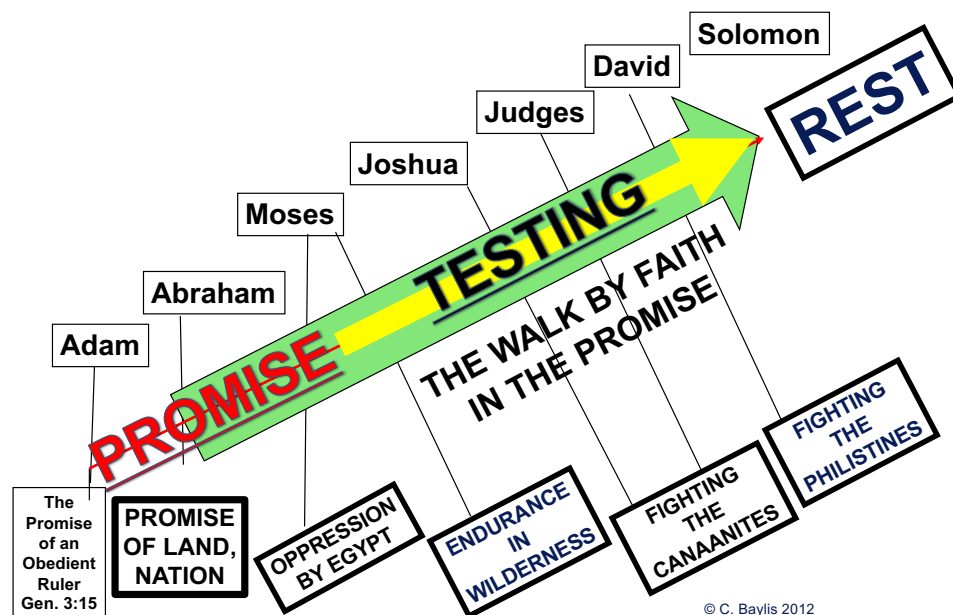
In addition, James explains that since they are in an age that is based on the evidence of the resurrection (which guaranteed the kingdom), the believer is to walk by faith until the promise of the kingdom is realized. That means that he will not see further visible validation or guaranteed results for anything that he does or doesn't do. His only means of understanding his position before God is through the word which reveals God's activity in Christ that assures him of righteous standing with God as a sinner saved by grace.

Testing in the Old Testament

Israel was given the promise of the land and the nation in Genesis 12. From that time until it was realized in the Kingdom of Solomon (1 Kings 1--11), Israel would be tested, that is, she would have to walk by faith that God would give them the kingdom eventually, but in the meantime, they would have to walk with Him without visible benefits. Visibly, it would look like they might starve, that the enemy would overcome them, that other evils would kill them, amongst other things. It would require that they trusted in Him to:

- Deliver them from oppression in Egypt (Moses)
- Deliver them through the wilderness (Moses)
- Deliver them from the Canaanites (Joshua, Judges)
- Deliver them from the Philistines (David)

They finally found the fulfillment of the promise found in 2 Kings 1--11 when Solomon assumed the reign and the nation became prosperous and bountiful.⁹ This is what is outlined in Deuteronomy 8--10, from which James will apply that preface to the times in which the church age believer finds himself.



Deuteronomy 8: Israel Was Tested Prior to Their Kingdom

Deuteronomy 8 describes that these Israelites would go through a time of “testing,” (see James 1:2, 12¹⁰). This “testing” period was established when no one could actually “see” evidence of God’s promise, and would have to walk in the basis of “faith” in God’s word of promise. This time of testing was so that God could see what was in their heart (compare Deut. 8:2-5 with James 1:2-4).

² "And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ³ "And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out

⁹ However, even in the kingdom of Solomon they would have to walk by faith since even though they had the fulness of benefits, they still had to trust in God for continuance of those benefits since it was only a partial fulfillment that indicated a future fulfillment in the ultimate kingdom of the ultimate Solomon. It is only at that time that "faith" will not be required since it will be visible that God will, and does, provide.

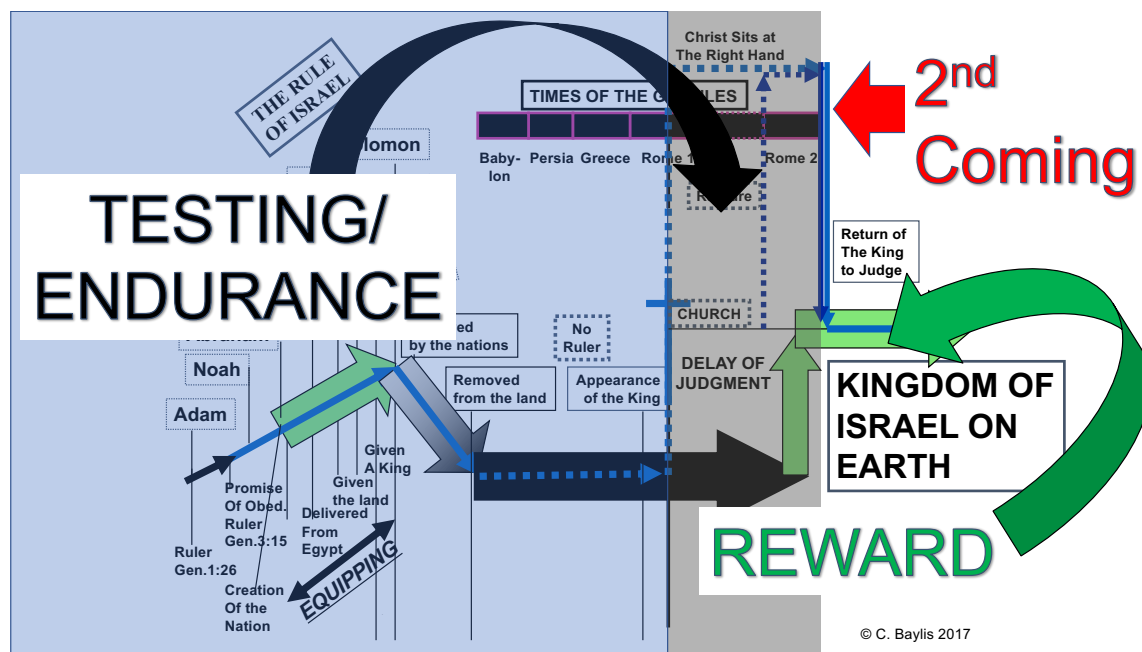
¹⁰ See the verbal form for “testing in 1:13, 14

of the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ "Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. ⁵ "Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. (Deut. 8:2-5)

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Like Israel, Church Age Believers are in Testing Period Prior to the Kingdom

Israel was in a period of testing while they were in the wilderness prior to the time they entered the kingdom. The believers of this age are also in a period of testing (i.e., walk by faith), in the period following the resurrection until they see the visible reward at the time of Jesus' return (i.e., the fulness of times, the last days) in the Kingdom on earth.



Jesus appeared and has given full mercy and righteousness to the believer. Then He was resurrected as proof that the Kingdom is guaranteed to the believer after a period of delay in which he must endure suffering and going without kingdom benefits. The believer, then, is being tested on the basis of that content of faith. James refers to this period of time as the "last days" and a "day of slaughter." The "last days" were when the fulness of everything was coming to pass. Thus, Christ had given full righteousness to endure the testing period until the Kingdom. The period of testing in the Old Testament was simply a partial indication of what would happen in the "fulness of times" or the "last days."

It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!¹¹ (Jas. 5:3)

you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.¹² (Jas. 5:5)

Deuteronomy in James:
Warning: Do not Perceive Riches as Blessing

When Israel entered the Land of Canaan, she would become prosperous and wealthy. She was instructed never to feel that she was wealthy because of her own skills and self-achievement. So also, James warns the believers that the rich are not to perceive their riches as the blessing of God for their self-achievement.

Deut. 8: Israel was not to Perceive their Riches as Self-Reward

Ultimately, they would get to the Land of Canaan and would become prosperous. The warning was that they should *never* feel that their own selfish-ambition made them wealthy for it was YHWH who gave them the *ability* to make wealth.

¹⁷ "Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' ¹⁸ "But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day. (Deut. 8:17-18)

Deuteronomy in James:
Errantly Perceiving Self-Righteousness As Godliness

Ever since Adam, man has justified himself as “good,” thus making himself righteous before God, but through his own eyes. Thus, he feels that benefits he receives are self-justified, while others who have problems and poverty are also deserving because they are unrighteous based on their lack of self-achievement.

James: Believers are not to Errantly Perceive Riches as Blessing

¹¹ This is a statement of criticism, since the Last Days are the period of time when the fullness of God’s presence is in Christ and in the believer, waiting for the Lord’s return, yet this man is putting his efforts into riches which will perish at the judgment.

¹² This is referring to the period of time following the resurrection prior to the 2nd Coming, when Christians will be under persecution. Psalm 110 describes this period as one where the Son is at the Right Hand of the Father, waiting until His return and judgment. Thus the believers are under persecution under the rule of Satan.

During this period of testing, James warns that the obtaining of riches as a purpose of blessing is wrong. The purpose during this time was to extend mercy to other suffering and needy believers, sourced from what God had given to the believer. He was never to feel that he had been ordained to make riches as the purpose of God. One was to understand that riches and the ability to make them, are a gift from God to be used to extend mercy to the believing needy.

¹⁰ and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For 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. (Jas. 1:10-11)

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and *so* lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (Jas. 3:14-16)

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. (Jas. 4:13-14)

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. ² Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. ⁵ You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. (James 5:1-5)

Deuteronomy 9: The Errant Claim of Righteousness through Self

God warned Israel as they approached the land that they should *never* feel that they have conquered the enemy because they were more righteous (i.e., better) than the nations which they were displacing. For God stated three times that it was not because of their righteousness that the nations were being judged, but because of the wickedness of the nations.

⁴ "Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD is dispossessing them before you.

⁵ "It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ⁶

"Know, then, *it is* not because of your righteousness *that* the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, (Deut. 9:3-6)

Then, in a final effort to explain their own inadequacy, God added a statement of just how bad they really were. In other words, if God destroyed everyone based on the measurement of wickedness, Israel would have been destroyed along with the nations. But for the Abrahamic Covenant, God preserved Israel.

6 "for you are a stubborn people.

7 "Remember, do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.

8 "Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, and the LORD was so angry with you that He would have destroyed you . . .

13 "The LORD spoke further to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stubborn people.

14 'Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven;

22 "Again at Taberah and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath.

23 "And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, 'Go up and possess the land which I have given you,' then you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; you neither believed Him nor listened to His voice.

24 "You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day I knew you.

(Deut. 9:6, 7, 8, 13, 22, 23 24)

James: The Errant Claim of Righteousness through Self

James warns the church of the same problem that Israel had as they entered the land. They would think that their relationship with God indicated by their riches granted them a level of righteousness that was greater than that of the poor. Thus, they errantly felt that God was rewarding them for their achievements (i.e., goodness) when He honored them as rich.

Now these rich in the church felt that they had a self-righteousness greater than others, based on their ability to pursue riches and honor. Thus, in James 2, they seat the

rich man down in the front row of the synagogue, meaning that he is more righteous before God (given a seat of honor) than the poor man who is to be seated in the rear at one's footstool. Thus, the readers in James are judging others based on their perception of their own self-righteousness.

² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (James 2:2-4)

¹¹ Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge *of it*. ¹² There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)

So, like Israel as they headed toward the land and felt that their righteousness was greater than that of the Canaanites, and that God was blessing them based on their righteousness, so also James' readers are judging others as less righteous than themselves based on their own righteousness, and not that of God's mercy to all as sinners.

Deuteronomy in James: God is Merciful and Not Partial

As God continued the warnings to Israel prior to their entry into the land, He reminded them of their relationship to Him as the God of the universe, as the God who had chosen Abraham. He pointed out that God was the God who gave to the hopeless, those who had nothing. This was His character, a merciful God. Thus, Israel and the believers to whom James wrote, were to be merciful as they gave out what God had given them.

Deuteronomy 10: The God of Israel is Merciful not Partial

Moses spoke for God, stating that Israel had no righteousness of their own and were thus warned about self-righteousness and told to understand that the Lord had given them everything.

¹⁴ "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. ¹⁵ "Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, *even* you above all peoples, as *it is* this day. (Deut. 10:14-15)

God then moved to explain His character toward Israel. It was one based on the fact that God chose to love Israel apart from any self-deserving traits.

And then God described that affection that made up His character as love that was sacrificial and pursued the hopeless, so as to give them from His bounty.

¹⁷ "For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe. ¹⁸ "He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ "So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10:17-19)

God's love is not like that of secular, emotional, or other types of love, where one acts based on their ability to gain back some benefit. God's love is based on His own character as giving, generous, and one that pursues the hopeless and the helpless (widows, orphans, aliens). God is not partial, that is, toward the rich or the poor, to the great and the small, as men are. He gives to the needy when they ask. Most of all God is self-sacrificing. He gives from His own character, one-way, requiring nothing in return.

James: God is not Partial but Merciful

These believers to whom James had written had become partial in their theology, thinking that they were righteous based on their own self-achievements, and thus they judged others based on their own perception of their own righteousness. But James pointed out that faith (perception of God and His promises) was based on God's character which was not partial, but merciful and generous. All men were hopeless sinners before His face and needed mercy, but some, as in James, were not asking for mercy because they felt they were deserving based on their own character.

But James argued that they should be merciful as God was merciful. Should they not be merciful they would be judged on the basis that they have chosen to be judged . . . self-righteousness. And their righteousness would not stand in the day of judgment as they would be measured against the righteousness of God and would fail. But since they want to be judged on the basis of mercy and they should be merciful toward others.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with partiality. (Jas. 2:1)

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (Jas. 1:5)

²⁷ This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world. (Jas. 1:27-2:1)

⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. (Jas. 2:8-9)

¹² So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas. 2:12-13)

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and *so* lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas. 3:14-18)

Summary: Deuteronomy 8—10: God is Merciful

The point of these chapters is that Israel was tested (tempted to do evil by using human wisdom to solve their lacks), so that God could see what was in their heart (i.e., faith). This temptation continues through this age as believers are tempted to self-righteousness and judging based on their own perceptions instead of on God's. As God is merciful toward all, since all are sinners, so also believers should be merciful to all. In the future kingdom there will then be a reward. During this age, however, man will not see a visible reward for his efforts as they are sacrificial and merciful, not selfish and profitable.

Walk by Faith not by Sight

The first thing that James explains is the same thing that Israel was to have done in the wilderness testing period, that is, walk on the basis of the Word of God alone, not on what one sees or on confidence in one's prosperity.

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas. 1:3-4)

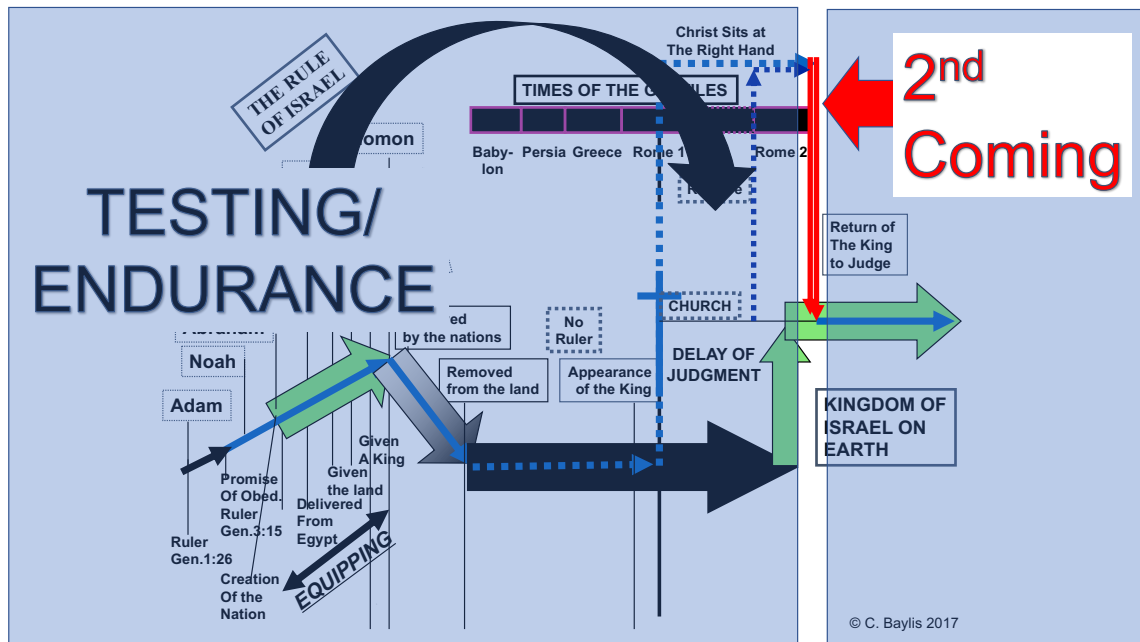
The Age of Trials will End with Christ's Return to Judge

James points out that this endurance will end at the Second Coming of Christ, and that is when He will judge believers on their use of the mercy that was given them.

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. (Jas. 5:7)

⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (Jas. 5:8)

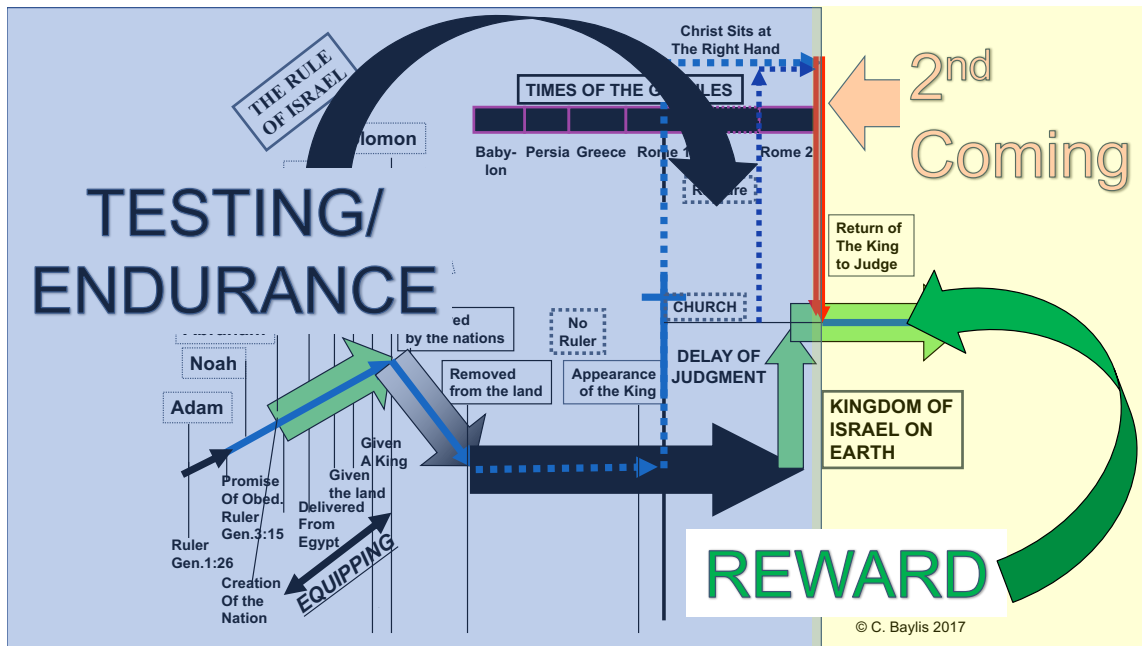
the Judge is standing right at the door. (Jas. 5:9)



The Reward is in the Kingdom on Earth following Christ's Return

It is in the Kingdom that the believer will be rewarded with the Crown of Life. This crown is the share in Christ's rule, to represent Him in the kingdom. Life is the mercy, the character of God, and it is this in which the believer will be able to participate.

¹² Blessed 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. (Jas. 1:12)



CHAPTER III

THE BIBLICAL STORY TWO SIDES: GOD VS. SATAN

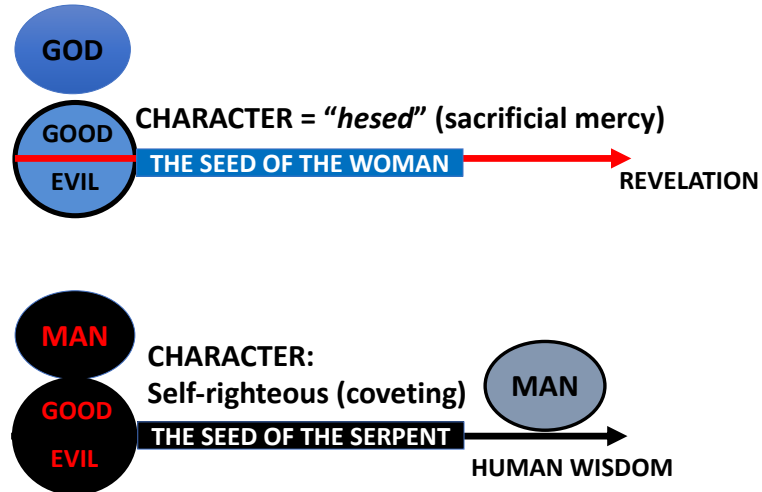
One of the difficulties of studying any book, and especially James, verse by verse is that the reader tends to try to get meaning and application from every verse as if it had a life of its own apart from the context. For instance, most can quote “faith without works is dead” from James 2:26, or the similar verse in 2:14, but few can tell what the context of the argument for that verse is, or even how the verse directly preceding 2:14 (2:13), or the verses following (3:1-2), affects its interpretation.

In order to understand the context of any book and how each verse fits that context, one must approach the book as a literary unit, understanding how that particular type of literature communicates its meaning. First of all, in every book of the Bible there are always two sides, God’s side and the other side; God’s revelation or man’s (Satan’s) reasoning.

The Old Testament: *Hesed* vs. Coveting

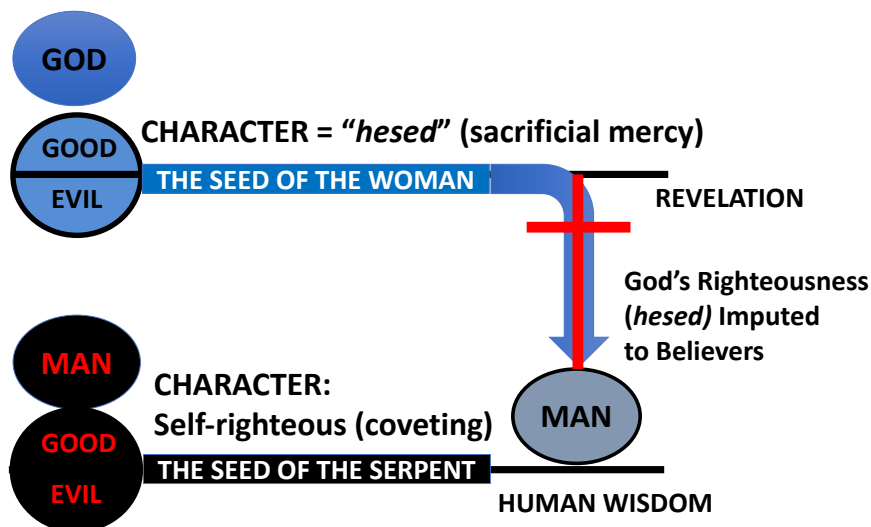
In the Old Testament God’s character was *hesed* (sacrificial mercy), which was to come (imputed) to man in the hope of Messiah and His death on the cross. The giving of God’s own Son for depraved man demonstrated the character of God (*hesed*) fully. This was represented in the Old Testament in the coming Seed of the Woman, who would sacrificially die for mankind.

On the opposite side was Satan and his philosophy, that of coveting, self-righteousness, and opposition to the hope of Messiah in the Seed of the Woman through one’s own righteous works. This was represented in the Old Testament by those who opposed the revelation of the coming Seed of the Woman, and His sacrifice for their sins. They preferred self-righteousness for their own honor, coveting what was God’s alone.



The Gospels: Jesus (*hesed*) vs. Pharisees (coveting)

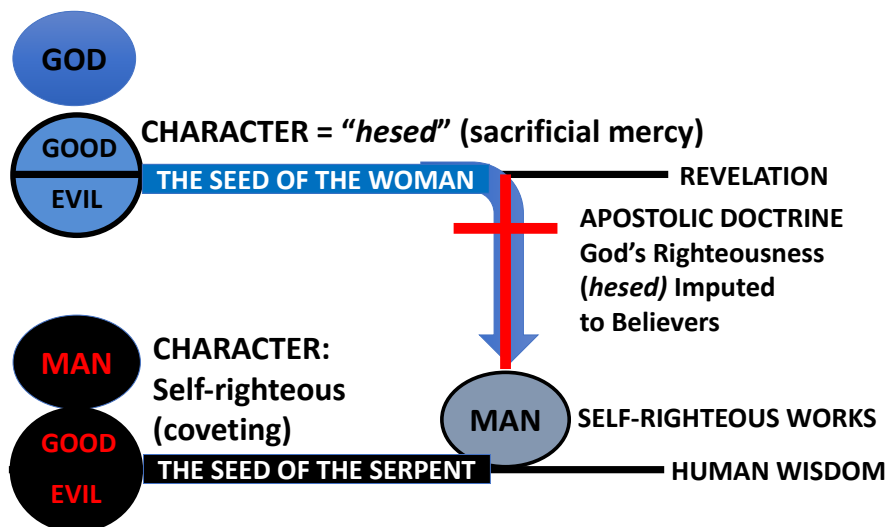
It is in the Gospels that the “Seed of the Woman” came in the flesh as Jesus. There He brought the righteousness of God (*hesed*), in order to impute it to man through His death on the cross. Jesus was on one side (God’s side, the “Seed of the Woman”), while the Scribes and Pharisees were on the other (Satan’s side, denial of Jesus as the Christ, justification through self-righteousness). There was never any middle ground, no theology that didn’t land on either Jesus or the Pharisees. The narrative then flows as the antagonists diametrically opposed Jesus and tried to kill Him on behalf of Satan. Yet Jesus was the victor as He was resurrected and sealed the doom of those who opposed Him. Every aspect, pericope, discourse, etc., is aligned with one of the two sides. There is nothing that does not interact with these two clear philosophical opposites.



The Epistles: The Apostolic Doctrine (*hesed* in the Cross) vs. False Teachers (coveting, self-righteousness)

The epistles are the same way. There are two sides and only two sides. There is no middle ground. There is the clearly good and godly side, represented by the writer (protagonist) and his philosophy (theology/faith¹³). And then there is a clearly bad, or evil side, represented by evil people, antagonists and their philosophy (theology/faith). So, there is an apostle (or inspired writer) who wrote about God and Jesus (the apostolic doctrine), and an opposing antagonist, a false teacher, who directly opposed what the apostle said (righteous standing apart from imputation in Christ).

¹³ Philosophy is the secular word as literature is secular. When one has a philosophy about God it is called "theology." Theology is what one believes in. Thus, theology and faith are not the same, but are related as theology is the content of one's faith, or in what one "trusts."

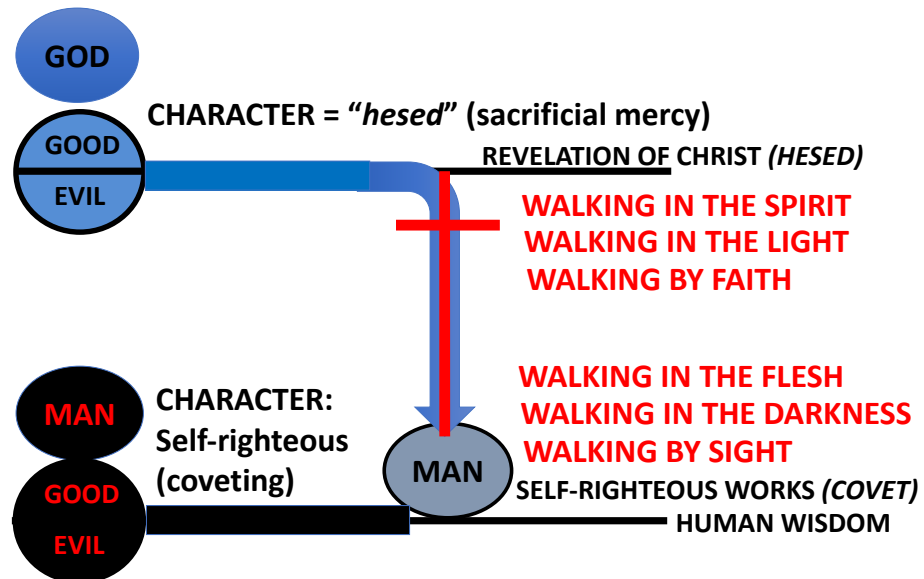


In the epistles, those two sides are represented by similar phrases. “Walking . . .¹⁴ is the word used in each of these phrases to indicate being in a constant daily relationship with God through trust in Jesus Christ alone for imputed righteousness.

Paul “Walking in the Spirit”	The Spirit <u>reveals</u> imputed righteousness through the <u>Apostolic Doctrine</u> . So one is walking in “imputed righteousness.”
“Walking in the Flesh”	The <u>Flesh</u> is human wisdom which determines that man can be self-righteous based on works. He is thus walking in his own self-efforts to be righteous.
“Walking by Faith”	“Faith” is based in the <u>revelation</u> of God through the Apostles, which is imputed righteousness through Christ.
“Walking by Sight”	“Sight” is human wisdom which determines that man can be self-righteous based on works, self-perception of “good”
John “Walking in the Light”	The “Light” in Genesis 1 is the <u>revelation</u> (expression) of the character of God, fully <u>revealed</u> in Jesus Christ (the Light).

¹⁴ These phrases are indicating one’s relationship to “believing” either in God, as opposed to trusting in one’s own works, self-efforts, or self-righteousness.

Walking in the Darkness” The “Darkness” in Genesis 1 was the absence of God’s revelation (life) and thus a rejection of Jesus Christ (the Light)



If the reader or interpreter can clearly identify these two sides then all the verses in the book will coordinate with one side or the other. Every verse must relate to one side (evil) or the other (good). There are no verses in the epistle that introduce or deal with any issue that is not part of the problem (evil side) or solution (good side) of the epistle. These two sides will form the context of the epistle by which every verse must synchronize.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOOK OF JAMES: GODS' WISDOM (*chesed*) VS. SATAN'S WISDOM (*coveting*)

Since James is part of the Biblical Story, that is, James is commenting about a particular age in the Biblical Story, the two sides of the ongoing Biblical narrative will be the same two sides in James, just as they are in the Gospels, Revelation, the Prophets, or anywhere else in the Biblical story. So, in order to see precisely what James is saying it behooves the interpreter to understand the Biblical Story and its context as it meets James in the first century.

The Readers: Believers in Christ

When one assesses a book, they should always assess the two sides based on the characters in the book. But, the question arises first as to whether the addressed are all believers, or perhaps a mixed group of believers and unbelievers. It is interesting that all the examples James gives of things going on in the church, he never gives an example of good behavior going on. He always gives an example of bad behavior and then on the positive side he implores them to good behavior. Thus, James is writing to an audience that has a bad case of evil behavior existing to some degree in the church. If, as some views advocate, these behaviors show that they are not true Christians, then James would be writing to unbelievers telling them to be better unbelievers since he never tells them to have an initial trust in Christ, but only to turn from their sinning ways and "endure." No one ever tells an unbeliever to "endure." That message is only for those who have initial faith.

Probably the prime verse to demonstrate that these are believers who have had initial faith in Christ is in 2:1. There the question is whether they have added partiality in judgment to their initial faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2:1 “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with partiality.”

Then throughout the epistle James encourages them to "endure" in their faith. This, of course, is never urged of an unbeliever since he has nothing to "endure."

1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance

1:12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; (Jas. 1:12)

5:7 Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.

- 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.
- 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.
- 10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
- 11 Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

James then addresses the man who "strays from the truth." This would indicate that one had the truth but left it.

- 5:19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back,
- 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins. (Jas. 5:19-20 NAS)

Now it should be mentioned that there are strong views (probably the majority) that hold that James is promoting a test of one's true salvation experience. This is primarily based on the section of 2:14-26 where "faith without works is dead" is being explicated by James. Those who hold this "test of salvation" view hold that "dead" indicates lack of real saving faith. It is based on 2:14 that a man "says" he has faith, thus this is testing his confession to see if it has a real saving basis.

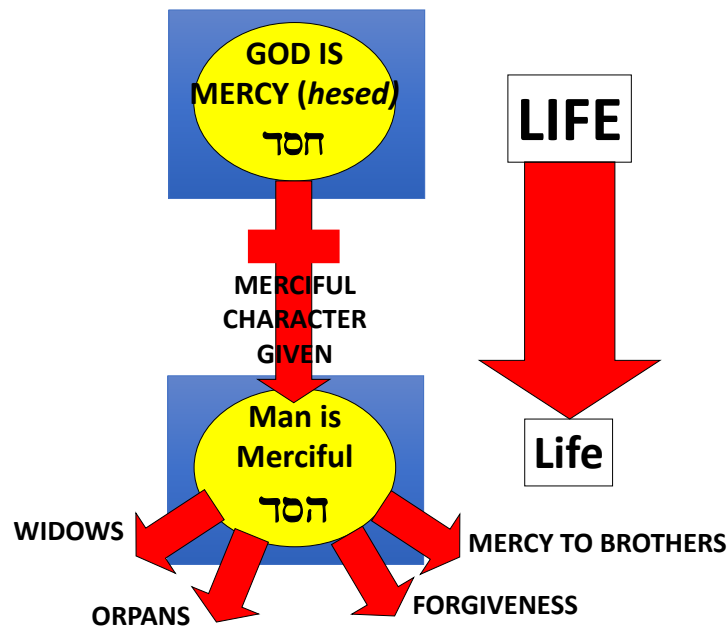
This section will be examined later, but if one holds that these verses indicate that one is being tested as to whether they are true or falsely a believer, then one has to merge it with the rest of the epistle that declares these had true faith and are now being told to endure. In the sections to follow the study will show that James is asking them to add sacrificial love (i.e., mercy, *chesed*) to their faith so as to demonstrate the sacrificial love that was given them. The antagonist is adding partiality, judging, self-righteousness, etc., to his faith and excluding mercy. One must have one or the other as they express Christ to others. It will either be self-righteous judgment or mercy. Without receiving Christ's mercy, one does not have the capability of expressing it. In fact, this is no different than what Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians 13:2,

"If I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

The Good Side: James and His Faith and *chesed*

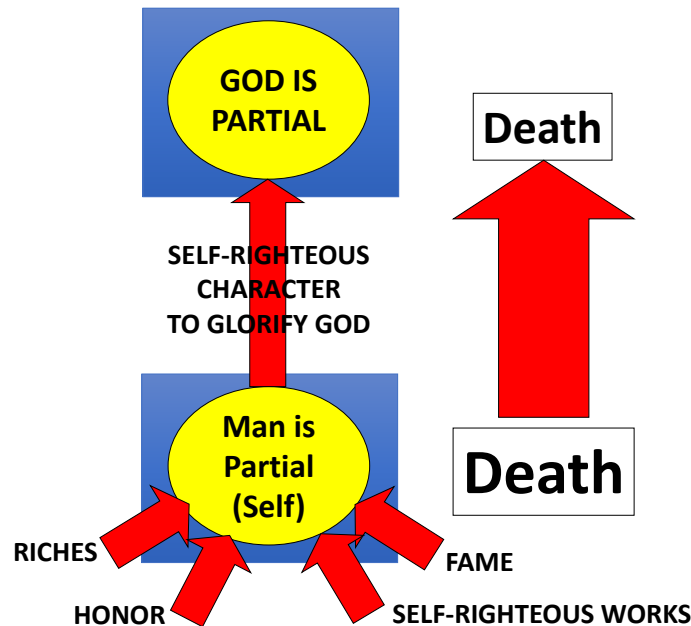
The sacrificial work of God is called *chesed*, that is, sacrificial love through His Son, Jesus. This character was brought in Jesus, and was imputed to those who believed in Him. Thus, a believer moves from the realm of "coveting" as his identity, to that of "*chesed*," or sacrificial mercy, which he has received from his Savior, Jesus.

Thus, as man has received *hesed*, so also he is to give it. Thus, the glory of giving out mercy is given to God because the giver only gave out what was given to him. But while sacrificial deeds are just that, sacrificial, they do not receive any present self-benefit. They are to be given at one's own cost (actually Jesus' cost since the believer has nothing of his own), so the giver is depleted in some way (i.e., it "costs" him, and in this case, costs Jesus). His deed goes unrecognized, unrewarded, and in fact, may result in his death (self-sacrifice for the cause of Christ in martyrdom). So, to human reasoning it would seem that this is a ridiculous endeavor, since there would be no visible, present reward. However, the reward is when Jesus comes back, resurrects the bodies of the believers into His glorious kingdom and rewards the faithful.



The Evil Side: The Antagonists and Their Faith and Coveting

Now, as the Biblical Story flows into James, he is introducing nothing that is new. He is simply reminding them of the fact that human reasoning is from Satan. Thus, a believer can live in death by subscribing to the worlds' and demons' philosophies, that of self-centered, reward-now, covetous, motivation and its resultant deeds.



Their life can be dominated by coveting and self-glorifying activities. But, Jesus died for them (sins of self-glorification) and gave new life to believers so that they could be mercy-people. But, there is the tendency for untaught believers to feel that human reasoning is the best way since it receives glory in the present time. So, they pursue riches, fame, honor, which is recognized before men, and feel that they are doing God a service by being rich and encouraging others in the same pursuits. Of course, this is Satanically sourced, and not of God, and as such is moving toward death and not the life in Christ that a believer has the opportunity to pursue.

James addresses these errant believers' problem in 2:1.

“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with partiality.”

James enlarges this error in 3:21 by stating that “partiality” is nothing more or less than Satanic.

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and *so* lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (James 3:14-16)

So, James is attacking the antagonist (the evil side) by saying that their self-serving attitude, which they are saying is “good,” and is part of their faith in God (2:1), is actually evil. And the important thing to notice is that James must inform them that it is evil, because they think it is “good.”

For instance, in 1:13, he states that they are saying their temptations (i.e., covetings) are God-given, and thus their drive to get riches, honor, etc., is of God.

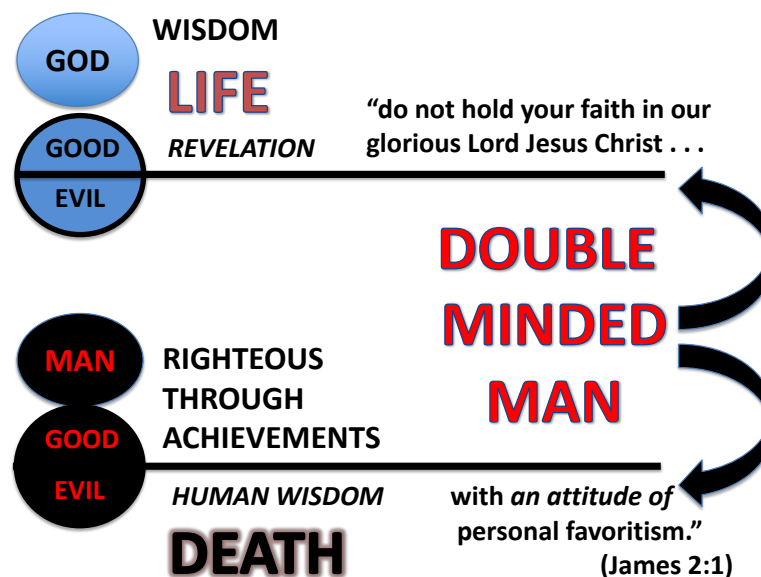
¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (James 1:13-16)

This is the problem of the antagonist(s) . . . the content of his faith is mixed. The part that is wrong is the motivation of their heart. They perceive that the God that saved them in Jesus Christ wants them to be partial, or biased, self-righteous judges of others who have not accomplished the results that they have.

The Antagonist's Faith: "Double-minded"

The revelation of God's wisdom is God's sacrificial mercy (*hesed*) expressed through Christ. This is to be the total source of truth and life for the believer. He is to see God as merciful and exercise that faith through the new character given to him. But, believers also still have access to their fleshly desires from Satan. These are self-righteous, coveting, jealous and selfishly ambitious.

In other words, what has happened to this believer who recognized God's mercy when he was saved, is that he has now forgotten that he was hopeless when he came to Christ, and has proceeded down the road, not of God's wisdom, but of the very evil philosophy from which he was delivered.



In James 1:21, he implores the believer to return to the word that he received when saved (“the word implanted”).

²¹ Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)

Then in James 1:22-25 he says that at salvation they were like those who looked in a mirror and saw the “face of their birth.” They saw themselves as depraved, needing forgiveness, and entering the new life of mercy. Yet, they left the mirror (the implanted word), and then forgot who they were in light of the word of God. They went back to their previous view of themselves, prior to salvation . . . self-righteous.

²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³ For 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; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But 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 shall be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

So, there are two value systems that are the source of a man’s faith. These saved antagonists (2:1) in James have access to God’s revelation, but they are referencing it in name only, and relying in human wisdom, and then calling it “good,” as if it was from God instead of man. What has happened is that the total content of the antagonists’ faith is in error since any mixture of Satanic wisdom and God’s wisdom is error. James calls one who judges between the two value systems a “double-minded man,”¹⁵ and thus his faith is good for nothing, dead, useless, unstable (1:8, 2:14, 17, 26). In essence, this antagonist is judging from his own value system and reconstructing God as partial, that is, he believes God prefers the rich man over the poor man.

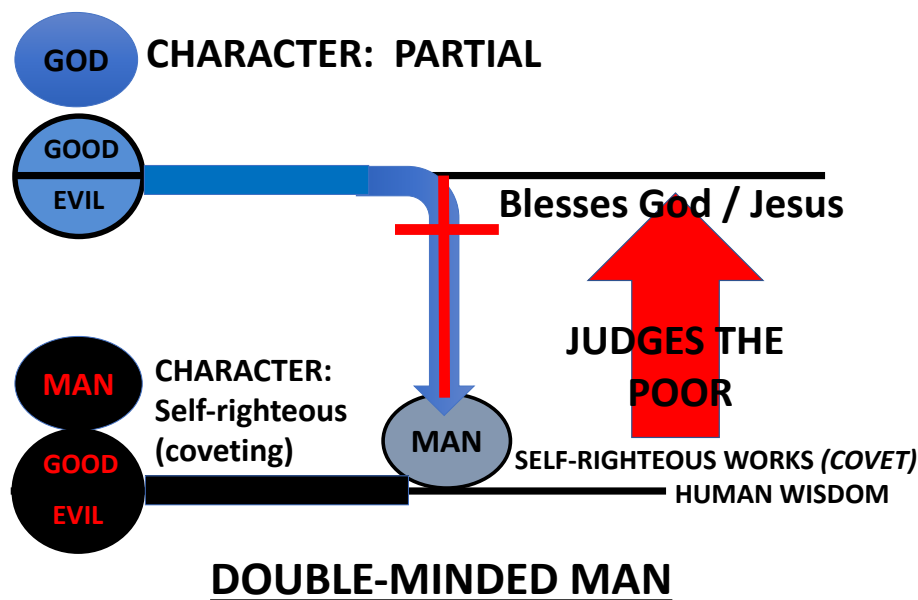
⁶ But he must ask in faith (*from God*) without any judging (*totally from the revelation and not from his perception of God*), for the one who judges (*sees God as partial*) is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8)

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8)

¹⁵ What the man “judges” is that he has modified God based on his own human wisdom and made God a partial God. In other words, he sees God as blessing the rich and cursing the poor. The example in 2:1-11 demonstrates that perception when the man puts the rich man at the front of the synagogue and places the poor at the rear at his footstool. He thinks that God loves the rich.

Thus, this “dead,” antagonistic believer is judging the poor and hopeless as worth less than he is in the sight of God. He assesses that God is partial toward the rich and famous, and thus he claims that he is of God, i.e., righteous, but is cursing and judging the poor man (as well as God from his own perspective).

⁸ But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless *our* Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰ from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. ¹¹ Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter *water*? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither *can* salt water produce fresh. (James 3:8-12)



Thus, this believer is still affected greatly by this fleshly character. It constantly offers the pleasures of this world, riches, honor, elevation. And he assesses the means to get measurable success as also righteous. Therefore, he justifies his own selfish ambition and jealousy to achieve benefits now. God’s truth offers none of this . . . only sacrifice . . . and the reward is later with the Savior.

The Antagonist Calls His Errant Faith “Good”

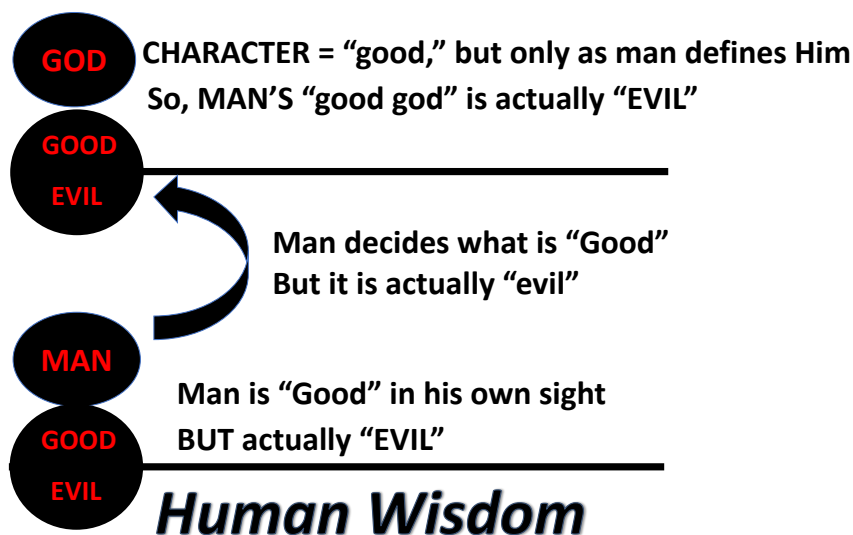
The antagonist then embraces some things about God (e.g., Jesus as Lord, 2:1). But mostly he embraces things that are soured from Satan, things that glorify himself, things that justify his pursuit of riches, honor, pleasure. But, he doesn’t acknowledge them as evil. He calls them “good” or from God.

“Do not say when you are tempted,¹⁶ that you are tempted by God . . . (for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone) . . .”

. . . but they are truly from his own lusts, his old nature, which he got from no other place than Satan himself.

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren (James 1:14-16)

In summary, this believer who trusts in God for salvation has modified his belief to incorporate selfish motives, and thus the content of his faith is in error, but he calls it “good” or “godly.”



The Antagonist:

Visible self-beneficial results demonstrate the truth of His faith

The antagonist claims he has beneficial, even Godly, results. And they are beneficial, visible, results. Everything he does gives him a visible beneficial result. If he gives money he gets a return for it. It might be honor, reward, and applause . . . something. But it is usually “profit,” riches, which then brings him the rest of the fame. And he calls it “good” or “godly.” He believes that if he is glorified, God is glorified . . . The more he is honored in the world’s eyes, the more he thinks God is honored. Thus, he pursues riches, honor and glory, and then says that it is godly. Very simply, he believes that God approves

¹⁶ “Tempted” here means that one is drawn to do what is “evil.” In other words, they are saying their evil deeds, partiality, selfish ambition, are actually “godly” or “good.”

of the rich in their pursuits.¹⁷ But he states the end of the rich and their pursuits is to “fade away” (2:8).

so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. (James 1:11)

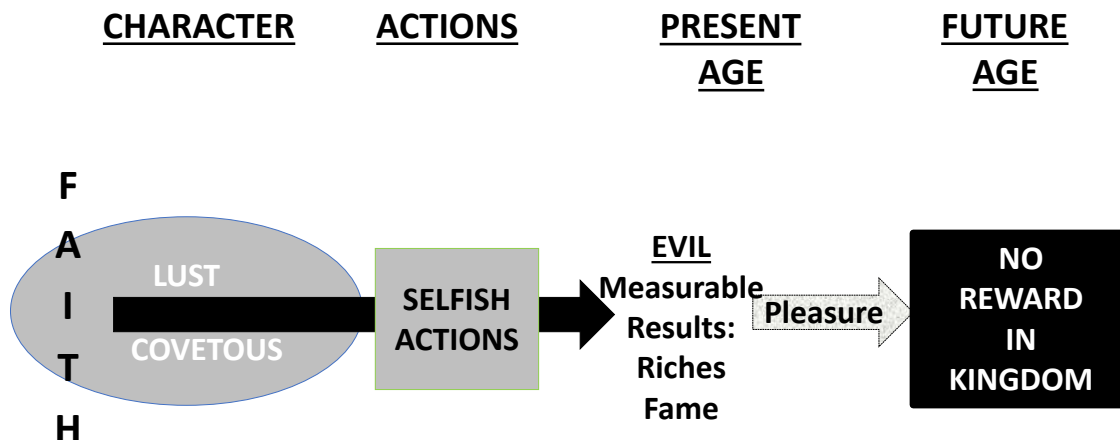
James states in 1:13-16 that this desire is not from God but from their own Satanically-sourced lusts.

¹³ Let 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. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (James 1:13-16)

He repeats a similar correction in 4:1-3, where he points out that their motivation is not from God, but from their sinful, selfish, natural lusts.

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ² You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. (James. 4:1-3)

¹⁷ Luke emphasizes this self-righteous behavior and the resultant self-glorifying works in the Elder Son in Luke 15. He felt that his deeds justified himself in the eyes of the father, since he had worked in the field and had never left home. Thus, he felt that his deeds glorified the father, yet the father did not care about the son's deeds glorifying him, he simply wanted the elder son to come into the house and receive the father's mercy. The father is glorified through the giving of mercy, and the son receiving it. See also Luke 18:9-14, where the Pharisee felt that his good deeds glorified the father and justified himself, yet it was the Tax Collector who had received mercy who was justified. Thus, also the rich man in James feels that his success in materialism renders glory to God, but in fact, God wants him to humbly manifest the mercy of God to others without measurement.



For instance, in Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus said the Pharisees claimed to be “godly” when they did things to be seen of men. There were three things Jesus lists, fasting, praying and giving alms. Note that He said they gave alms, which is giving to the poor, a seemingly commendable deed.

6:2 “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. (Matthew 6:2)

Even when they gave sacrificially it was always to receive some self-benefit in return. In this case it was honor and approval by others. Thus, the antagonist’s content of his faith (what he believes) was determined by whatever brought results that were of self-benefit. He determined his belief about God based on what gave him (and supposedly God) a self-benefit. So, he had a God who promoted the pursuit of worldly success because that glorified God. Thus, God loves the (selfishly) ambitious, those who are able to profit from everything they do.

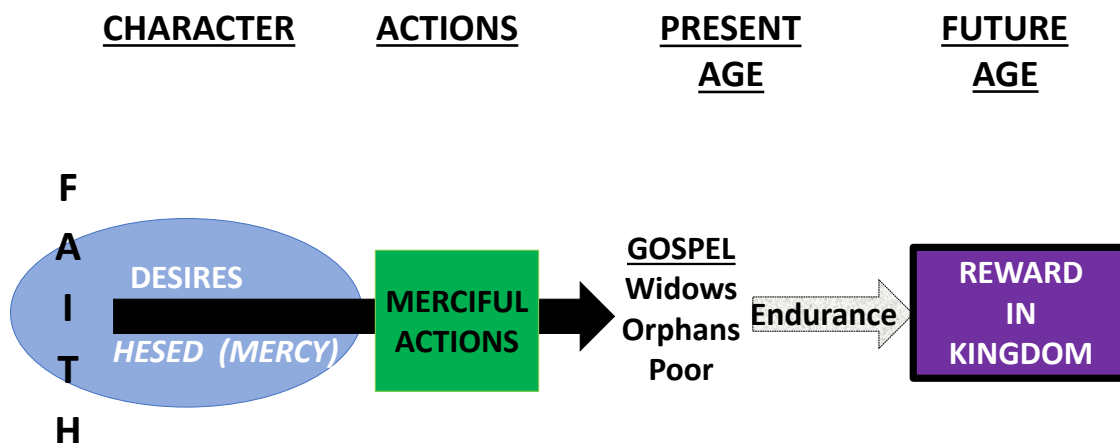
Errantly these churchmen (“you”) seated the rich man in the place of honor in the assembly, because they felt that God was honoring the rich man (2:2-7). James used another example in 4:13-16 where the man said his goal was to make a profit. James retorted that he ought to say that he will simply do God’s desires and leave the results to God.

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, "As

the Lord desires¹⁸, we will live¹⁹ and also do this or that²⁰." ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

The Good Side: James and His Faith

James will diametrically oppose the evil antagonist and explain that one's content of faith is to be based solely on the Scriptures, which includes sacrificial mercy, and nothing from human wisdom.



God's value system is demonstrated as a God who gives sacrificial mercy generously to those who are hopeless and helpless. He does not demean ("insult") them because of their low or poor status and does not expect anything in return.

¹⁸ Typically, this tends to be taken as a simple mention of the sovereignty of God over circumstances. While it is true, it actually indicates that the man should operate from the desires of God, which are to extend *hesed* (sacrificial mercy from God), and that God's sovereignty is in charge of the results.

¹⁹ "Life" in James is acting on God's character of *hesed*, or sacrificial mercy from God.

²⁰ "This or that" is a general outcome, which indicates, by contrast to the definite outcome of the antagonist ("make a profit"), that the results are not important, but the action of God's mercy being extended.

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach (i.e., “insult”), and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)

Deuteronomy 10:17-18 declares God’s character as One which helps the lowly and does not show partiality (contrasted with James 2:1 where the antagonist shows partiality). The helpless orphans, widows and aliens in Deuteronomy are those who cannot give beneficial results back to God.

¹⁷ "For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.

¹⁸ "He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.

In Matthew 6:3-4, Jesus told the Pharisee to do his deeds only for God and not to do them to be seen or credited by others. In other words, they were not to seek visible results or self-benefit, not even personally acknowledging any credit!

³ "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:3-4)

The point of the “left hand not knowing . . . “ is that the believer acts mercifully without counting it for self-credit, even to himself (e.g., does not give himself a “pat on the back”). The future tense indicates that God will reward, but it is in the future kingdom, not in the present. Thus, the godly man does not look for any positive visible benefit for himself in the present. It is meant to benefit another at one’s own cost. That is what is known as *hesed* in the Old Testament.

The True Content of Faith Results in Endurance in Suffering (Sacrifice)

James states that the only outcome of one’s (true content of) faith is “endurance” (1:3-4, 12).

³ knowing that the temptation of your faith works out (i.e., produces) endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect work, so that you²¹ may be perfect and complete, (James 1:3-4)

The point is simply that one’s correct content of faith produces, or results in, only endurance (continued sacrifice or suffering). The result is never something self-beneficial but only as it benefits God’s neighbor. James uses the same words that he used

²¹ James is not saying the man is perfect and complete, but that his faith is perfect and complete. The man is identified by his faith.

in 1:3 again in 1:12 to show that the benefit of enduring now (suffering) is a visible reward from Christ later in the kingdom.

“Blessed is a man who endures under temptation; for once he has been tempted, he will receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

In James 5:7-11, James uses Biblical examples of those who endured without immediately visible results so as to obtain visible results with Christ in the kingdom after the resurrection of the body.²²

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.

- The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.

⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

- ¹⁰ As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the **prophets** who spoke in the name of the Lord.

¹¹ We count those blessed who endured.

- You have heard of the endurance of **Job** and have seen the completion of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful.

The Antagonists' Faith: Error of Content or Degree?

Most hold that the problem of “faith” in James is that the antagonist believes correctly (content) but does not believe enough (degree), typically represented as “lack of commitment.” Thus, one might hear that “faith without works is dead” means that one was never truly saved because they did not believe (or commit) *enough*. They walked an aisle, said all the right things, said they trusted in Christ to forgive their sins and save them from hell, but apparently it was not enough faith in the sense of commitment or some other level or degree of faith. Thus, since there was not some level of results (“works”) for some period of time, it showed that the person’s original faith was “dead,” or non-existent.

²² Note that Job is not to be taken as an example of God rewarding one in this lifetime but is an example of God’s ultimate rewarding the faithful. In the Old Testament the hope was in a kingdom that could be present to some degree while they lived. Following the exile that hope was removed and thus in this age, the hope is in the kingdom, which requires one to die and be resurrected bodily to see the reward.

Yet James never questions the degree of faith, but always *what* they believe, i.e., the content of faith. For instance, in James 2:1, James acknowledges that they have saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ²³ but notes that it is errant in part (content), since they also believe that God approves partiality.

“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with partiality.” (James 2:1)

Thus, this is an additional question that must be solved in dealing with James. What is it about the content of their faith that is wrong and how does this relate to faith and works?

The Antagonist versus James: “Faith” and “Works”

Now, it is necessary to establish again both sides of the debate in the Book of James. On one side is James (Godly) and on the other side is the Antagonist (Satanic). The issue is their difference with respect to the content of their faith. In addition, it must be determined how “works” is applied to both sides with respect to the “faith.”

First of all it should be noted that they **both claim to have correct faith!**²⁴ Now it will soon be noted that they **both claim to have correct works!** Thus, the problem is that both claim to have correct faith and have correct works.

It is in the context of the book that one can see how they differentiate in their definitions of “faith” and “works.” This is summarized here.

“Faith” (Source)

James – The Scriptures only (i.e., God’s character revealed *only* in the Scriptures)

²³ That this is saving faith is noted by the fact that he calls them “my brethren.” Then the example he gives, that of placing the rich man in the front and the poor man in the rear, determines the man’s attitude or motivation, that is, his perception of righteousness in one’s riches. Since this same attitude is present almost daily in every churchman, it would not be considered as evidence that they were not saved, only that they were saved but had wrong perception or motivation of one’s heart.

²⁴ This can be seen in 2:18-19, when following James declaration of faith and works in 2:14-17, the antagonist declares that he also has both faith and works. Thus, they both claim to have both. In other words, the antagonist is not one who does not have works, as most interpreters claim, since he does claim to have works. The question then becomes how they defined faith and works differently.

“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. (James 1:5)”

“Every 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.” (James 1:17)

Antagonist: Identity with the Scriptures (God) plus Human Wisdom (Satanic), i.e., “double-minded”

“for the one who judges is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. . . *being a double-minded man*, unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:6-8)

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God” . . . But each one is tempted when **he is carried away and enticed by his own lust**.” (James 1:13-14)

“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures **that wage war in your members**?” (James 4:1)

“You adulteresses, do you not know that **friendship with the world** is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

“Faith” (Content)

James: *hesed*, the character of God, sacrificial mercy (i.e., the characteristic of God that acts toward man sacrificially through Christ in the Biblical story).²⁵ Thus, James’ faith includes mercy or *hesed*.

. . . the wisdom from above is first **pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy**.” (James 3:13, 17)

“God, who gives to all **generously** and **without insult**” (James 1:5)

“the Lord is full of compassion and *is* **merciful**.” (James 5:10-11)

²⁵ *Hesed* is the active character of God. James’ faith also includes the other characteristics of God in the Scriptures. Thus “faith” without “works” is “faith without *hesed*.”

Antagonist: self-centered ambition to gain beneficial results plus some characteristics of God (e.g, “God is One” (2:19), “faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1))

“do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with **partiality**.” (James 2:1)

“You (James) **believe that God is One**. You do well. The demons believe and tremble.” (2:19).

“But if you have **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** in your heart, do not be arrogant and so **lie against the truth**.¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.” (James 3:14-15)

Works (Results)

James: The works or “results” (not visible or realizable) are endurance in sacrificial suffering (*hesed*). The physical and observable results will be rewards that will be received later in the eschatological kingdom. Thus, the works for James are the operation of mercy, or *hesed*, in endurance or sacrificial living without visible self-benefit.

“knowing that the tempting of your faith produces (*i.e.*, “works out”) **endurance**.⁴ And let **endurance** have *its* ending work, so that you may be ending and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:3-4)

“Blessed is a man who **perseveres** under temptation; for once he has been approved, he will (*future tense*) receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12)

“Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.” (James 4:14)

“Therefore be patient, brethren, **until the coming of the Lord**. You too be **patient**; **strengthen** your hearts, **for the coming of the Lord is near**.” (James 5:7-8)

“As an example, brethren, of **suffering and patience**, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.¹¹ We count those blessed who **endured**. You have heard of the **endurance** of Job and have seen the ending of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful.” (James 5:10-11)

Antagonist: (Note that he also claims “works,” 2:18):²⁶ His results are realizable and visible in the present. They are results that are personally beneficial, such as, honor, riches, glory, profits. He feels that God is glorified when he is successful and honored. He feels that his “works” (visible results) are what identifies him in a relationship with God.

“Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." (James 4:13)

“You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure.” (James 5:5)

Example in James (2:2-3, Status before God: Rich Man)

² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool" (James 2:2-3).

Antagonist Faith (Wrong Content): He believes that a man’s faith (content) is that of a God who rewards personal ambition that brings visible success, i.e., a rich man glorifies God. God is partial toward the rich is his belief.

Antagonist Works: The self-beneficial results are the purpose of God so that He is glorified through man’s success. Thus, his works are results that are riches. It is these works that identify his relationship with God.

In this example that follows 2:1, the antagonist’s belief is that a rich man is godly while a poor man is ungodly because the rich man has operated on selfish motivation to achieve visible glory. His works are results and thus has visible personal and beneficial results, while the poor man has none. Thus since they believe that this man is godly they glorify him as they feel that God has.

²⁶ One of the major mistakes made in studying epistles is to interpret them from only one side as if it is a theology book with only the positive theology presented. But in epistles there are always two sides, and the positive theology is always presented as an attack to directly contradict the negative (antagonist’s) theology. In this case, interpreters assume wrongly that James is stating one must have works and the alternative is to have no works. But nowhere in the book does anyone, especially the antagonist, claim to have no works. What the antagonist claims is that he does have works. Thus, one must figure out the problem based on the fact that both claim to have works.

Examples in James (2:15-16, A Man in Need of Daily Food and Clothing)

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body . . ." (James 2:15-16)

Antagonist Faith (Wrong Content): One's status with God based on personal ambition and visible results (works). The poor man has not believed this and has no visible results, and thus he is told to have selfish ambition (like the rich man) so as to accomplish results (works) on his own ("be warmed of yourself and filled of yourself"). The judger's faith about God is that God is partial toward the rich based on their visible works.

Antagonist Works: One's relationship with God is validated by beneficial results (works), which the poor man does not have. Thus the antagonist assumes the poor man has incorrect content of faith (does not believe God rewards the selfishly ambitious) and thus does not have works.

In this example that follows 2:14, the "you" is again the antagonist who is acting negatively toward the poor brother. This antagonist has made a judgment about the ungodliness of the poor man since the poor man has no visible or beneficial results. Thus, he exhorts him to be like he (the rich man) is, that is to be selfishly ambitious. Thus, the poor man should be warmed of himself (middle voice) and be filled of himself (middle voice).

In addition, since he has judged this poor man as ungodly, the antagonist does not give to him. The antagonist does not believe in giving to the poor man unless there are beneficial results for himself in giving to the poor man, and in this case there are none. Thus, he has judged the poor man as unworthy of any mercy from his hand (a contradiction since the unworthy actually are the ones who are to receive mercy).

Examples in James (4:13, 15)

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, "As the Lord's desires, we will live and also do this or that."²⁷ (James 4:13, 15)

²⁷ This verse grants one's plans to the sovereignty and desires of God and is a designation of the man's humility.

Antagonist Faith (Wrong Content): One's God (faith) is based on personal selfish ambition (faith demonstrated in his concept that God wants him to go and make a profit).

Antagonist Works: Seen in beneficial results. Thus he pursues profit.

Here in 4:13 the antagonist again ("you") acts on the basis of self-beneficial, visible, results, that is, profits. In other words, the antagonist's goal for tomorrow is based on his selfish ambition to accomplish benefits. James corrects this and tells the antagonist to pursue God's desires (mercy) and thus live (i.e., extend mercy). The results will be "this or that," indicating God brings about His purposes in the results, while man is to simply act on mercy.

James vs. the Antagonists: Faith and Works

In summary, it is clear that both James and the antagonist are saying they both have faith in God. That is, they are both calling what they believe as "good." But James is saying their content is in conflict.

James' Faith: It is sourced only in the Scriptures and the content of that faith is that God is sacrificially merciful (*hesed*) and man should be sacrificially merciful.

However, it is much more in the context of James. Recall that God's wisdom is His desires. Thus the expression here is to do according to God's desires, His character ("If the Lord desires . . .") and . . . Then the "this or that" makes the success or outcome a variable thing. In other words, his goal is not to "make a profit" but will go into tomorrow according to the wisdom of God and God's provision and act "will live" and "will do" and the outcome will be "whatever" it will be (not determined by him, but by God). This goes back to James 1:2 where endurance, according to God's desire, is the issue and the believer's plan is to endure, with the outcome not being the purpose, but the representation of the *hesed* of God.

The first thing that might be granted according to God's desire is to "we will live." Now while this might be seen as simple living, according to God's wisdom, life is acting according to *hesed*, not just being alive physically.

Then the "this or that" (v. 15) is contrasted to "make a profit" or "go to such and such a town" (v. 13). The "town" and the "profit" is now gone and the "this or that" remains. In other words, one is to act on *hesed*, and the outcome will be controlled by God's desires, instead of one's arrogant goals. This is not to say man shouldn't plan, only that it is not the purpose with God and one must give all over to God's sovereignty and His desires . . . *hesed* is what God desires. God controls the outcome of the sacrificial action.

James' Works (Results): The present results of faith are endurance in suffering due to one's sacrifice for others, as God did. The visible results are going to be seen in the reward in the kingdom and will come from God, not from man's selfish ambition. In other words, the mercy in the faith is exercised in endurance, that is, mercy extended. Mercy is a quality that lives. It must be exercised as a character trait.

Antagonist's Faith: God is partial toward the selfishly ambitious, so man should pursue self-beneficial results, selfish ambition.

Antagonist's Works (Results): The works are visible beneficial results, riches, glory and honor in the present life. These things thus glorify God and prove that the faith is valid.