



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 4
James 1:9-12
“Inspiration and Blessing”

Study By
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Greek NT

9 Καυχάσθω δὲ ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινὸς ἐν τῷ ὕψει αὐτοῦ, 10 ὁ δὲ πλούσιος ἐντῆι ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου παρελεύσεται. 11 ἀνέτειλεν γὰρ ὁ ἥλιος σὺν τῷ καύσωνι καὶ ἐξήρανεν τὸν χόρτον, καὶ τὸ ἄνθος αὐτοῦ ἐξέπεσεν καὶ ἡ εὐπρέπεια τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἀπώλετο· οὕτως καὶ ὁ πλούσιος ἐν ταῖς πορείαις αὐτοῦ μαρανθήσεται.

12 Μακάριος ἀνὴρ ὃς ὑπομένει πειρασμόν, ὅτι δοκιμὸς γενόμενος λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς, ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

9 Pero que el hermano de condición humilde se gloríe en su alta posición, 10 y el rico en su humillación, pues él pasará como la flor de la hierba. 11 Porque el sol sale con calor abrasador y seca la hierba, y su flor se cae y la hermosura de su apariencia perece; así también se marchitará el rico en medio de sus empresas. 12 Bienvenido el hombre que persevera bajo la prueba, porque una vez que ha sido aprobado, recibirá la corona de la vida que el Señor ha prometido a los que le aman.

NRSV

9 Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, 10 and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.

12 Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

NLT

9 Christians who are poor should be glad, for God has honored them. 10 And those who are rich should be glad, for God has humbled them. They will fade away like a flower in the field. 11 The hot sun rises and dries up the grass; the flower withers, and its beauty fades away. So also, wealthy people will fade away with all of their achievements.

12 God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

The Study of the Text:¹

How did Christians suffer trials in the first century world? Our typical modern answer would most likely be, From persecution. And in that answer we would have mental images of Christians in the Roman arena with wild animals being turned loose on them. Or the image of someone being whipped with a whip and blood spirting out of the person's back from the wounds. People living in the first century world were familiar with such situations of individuals being tortured for one reason or another. But these were the extremes that most folks did not fear happening to them.

Trials that were closer to home and likely possibilities, even for Christians, were of a different kind completely. When James desired to give a pair of illustrations of suffering trials to his Jewish Christian audience

¹With each study we will ask two basic questions. First, what was the most likely meaning that the first readers of this text understood? This is called the ‘historical meaning’ of the text. That must be determined, because it becomes the foundation for the second question, “What does the text mean to us today?” For any applicational meaning of the text for modern life to be valid it must grow out of the historical meaning of the text. Otherwise, the perceived meaning becomes false and easily leads to wrong belief.

both in Jerusalem with his preaching and in the Diaspora through the writing, he chose some examples his audience was much more familiar with, and much more likely to happen to them. Poverty with its tribulations and the catastrophic loss of possessions were his choices. Thus in the third segment in vv. 9-11 of the four part emphasis on facing trials (vv. 2-12), James illustrates how to rejoice in trials out of economic loss. Then he wraps up this broad emphasis with the climatic invoking of divine blessing upon the individual who remains faithful in the midst of trials with the beatitude in verse 12. This will prepare the way for the next pericope that narrows the focus to when these trials tempt us to rebel against God (vv. 13-18).

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Background:

What lies in the background of this passage is the challenging emphasis on wealth and poverty along with the biblical stance toward both experiences. A prosperity religion was popular among Jewish aristocrats in Judea during the first century. Jesus condemned such thinking repeatedly in His teaching, along with many other Jewish teachers of that time. Could a person be wealthy and genuinely religious at the same time? Among the Jews many scribes believed it to be very difficult to be both of these at the same time. Jesus and the apostles raise serious questions about this issue as well.

Given the current, highly questionable thinking that prevails in western societies that assumes such is not only possible but easily so, we need to step back from our world and look closely at James' teaching in light of current trends in his day.

Historical Setting.

External History. In the eight or nine centuries of copying this passage of scripture among Christians, only one place of variation in wording surfaces that the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) considered sufficiently important to merit listing in the text apparatus of this printed Greek text of the New Testament. It is found in verse twelve and centers on the implied subject of the verb ἐπηγγείλατο, **he promised**.² Is the subject ὁ θεός or ὁ κύριος, **God or the Lord**? The original reading found in the earlier and better manuscripts did not contain a stated subject of the third person singular verb. Later copyists added one or the other stated subjects for clarification.³

In the other major printed Greek text of the New Testament, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev ed.), seven places are listed which contain variation of wording.⁴ This text apparatus contains a



² {A} ἐπηγγείλατο P²³ κ A B Ψ 81 2344 it^{ff} cop^{sa, bo} arm geo Didymus^{2/4} // ἐπηγγείλατο ὁ θεός 33^{vid} 322 323 945 1175 1241 1243 1735 1739 1852 2298 2464 / 596 it^{ar, s, t} vg syr^{p, pal} Athanasius Didymus^{2/4} Cyril John-Damascus; Chromatius // ἐπηγγείλατο ὁ κύριος (C omit ὁ) 0246 436 1067 1292 1409 1505 1611 2138 Byz [K L P] *Lect* (l 593 l 680 omit ὁ) syr^h (slav)

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

³“The variant readings will not be very significant for some translations. The earlier and better manuscripts have the verb ἐπηγγείλατο without an explicit subject. Later manuscripts, however, supply the subject by adding either κύριος, ὁ κύριος (the Lord), or ὁ θεός (God). NRSV states in a footnote that the subject of the verb in Greek is ‘he,’ but NRSV adds the noun ‘the Lord’ in the text in order to clarify the meaning. But since the implicit subject of this verb is almost certainly the Lord God and not the Lord Jesus, translators may wish to make the subject clear by adding the noun ‘God’ (so REB and TEV).” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament : An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 468.]

⁴Jakobus 1,9

* 2-4 B Ψ (The words ὁ ἀδελφός ὁ ταπεινός show up in different sequences in several manuscripts)

| 1 4 2 720 pc

* P⁷⁴ (the preposition ἐν is omitted in this manuscript)

Jakobus 1,11

* 614. 630. /505 pc vg^{ms} (The possessive αὐτοῦ is omitted by these manuscripts)

* B pc (The possessive αὐτοῦ is omitted by these manuscripts)

Jakobus 1,12

* ἀνθρώπος A Ψ 1448 pc; Cyr (ἀνὴρ is replaced with ἄνθρωπος)

* –μενεῖ K L 049. 6. 69. 1735 al ff (ὑπομένει is replaced with ὑπομενεῖ, the indicative is replaced with the subjunctive)

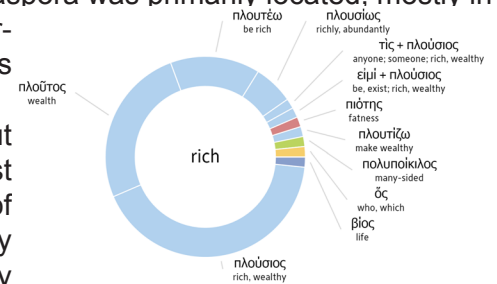
| txt B² Ψ 1739 m (sine acc. P²³ κ A B* C(*) P)

more complete listing of all the variations found in the different existing manuscripts. Once examined it becomes clear that none of these variations alter the meaning of the text. They represent efforts to either update the Greek expression more common at the time of copying, or else they are insertions to clarify the meaning of the earlier manuscripts being used for copying purposes.

Consequently, we can exegete the adopted Greek text with high certainty that it represents the exact wording of the original manuscript.

Internal History. The time and place markers in this text are not extensive. But looming in the background of at least vv. 9-11 is the issue of wealth and poverty in James' world. This would have a two pronged aspect touching both Judea in Palestine and the empire where the Diaspora was primarily located, mostly in ancient Anatolia and in Egypt. An additional angle needing some understanding is the Jewish issue of wealth and poverty in both those regions of the first century world.

One very important background issue behind not only 1:9-11 but 2:2-7 and 5:1-6 pertains to the issue of wealth and poverty in the first century world. One important point of clarification is the distinction of material wealth from spiritual wealth, since the same core terminology in the Bible is used in reference to both⁵ Similarly the terms for poverty



* ο (-C) κυριος C P 0246 m sy^h (Either ὁ θεός or ὁ κύριος is inserted)
 | ο θεός 4. 33^{vid}. 323. 945. 1241. 1739 al vg sy^p; Ath Did^{pt} Cyr
 | txt P²³ κ A B Ψ 81 pc ff co; Did^{pt}

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 588-89.]

⁵The OT uses a variety of terms to describe the rich or wealthy person. Some of these terms may also be used to describe powerful nations and fertile fields. The major Hebrew terms are:

(1) *ʿAšar* (“be/become rich”), *·ōšer* (“riches”), *·āšîr* (“rich”). These related terms are all used to describe persons gaining or possessing wealth (e.g., Gen. 14:23; 26:13; Ps. 49:2 [MT 3]; Prov. 18:11; 22:7). They sometimes describe wealth that is the result of God’s blessing (e.g., Prov. 10:22) or of industrious efforts (e.g., 10:4); in other V 4, p 186 instances they are used of riches resulting from ill-gotten gain (e.g., Jer. 17:11; Mic. 6:12).

(2) *Ḥayil* (“power,” “capacity,” “wealth”). Since power is often related to wealth, *ḥayil* is used about thirty times to refer to the wealth of an individual (e.g., Job 5:5; 31:25) or of a city or nation (e.g., Gen. 34:29; Isa. 8:4; Ezk. 26:12; 28:4f).

(3) *Hôn* (“wealth,” “rich,” “riches”). This term is used frequently in poetic passages. Sometimes it designates legitimate wealth (e.g., Ps. 112:3; 119:14; cf. Prov. 8:18), at other times wealth improperly gained (e.g., Prov. 13:11).

(4) *Šāmēn* (“rich”). This term is used often of fields or food; the AV renders it “fat,” while the NEB often uses “fertile” (e.g., Gen. 49:20; Nu. 13:20; Neh. 9:25, 35; Isa. 28:1, 4; 30:23). Cf. Ugar, *smn* (t) and Akk. *samanu*, which are frequently used for fertile fields or well-fed cattle.

(5) *Gādāl* (“become great,” “become rich,” “become wealthy”), *gādōl* (“great,” “rich,” “wealthy”). These terms literally mean “(become) great” and are so rendered by the AV (e.g., Gen. 26:13 [NEB “become powerful”]; 1 S. 25:2 [NEB “great influence”]).

[Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002), 185-86.]

Several Greek terms denote riches, wealth, and prosperity.

(1) *Plōitos* (“riches,” “wealth”; e.g., Mt. 13:22; Rom. 11:12; Eph. 2:7; 3:16; 1 Tim. 6:17), *plousios* (“rich”; e.g., Mt. 27:57; Jas. 1:10; 5:1), *plousiōs* (“richly”; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 6:17; Tit. 3:6; 2 Pet. 1:11), *ploutéō* (“be/become rich,” “gain wealth”; e.g., 1 Cor. 4:8; Rev. 18:15), *ploutizō* (“make rich”; 2 Cor. 6:10). This is the most common word-group for riches and wealth. It derives from the root *pel*, “flow,” hence “be filled, satiated.”

(2) *Chrēma* (“riches”; Mk. 10:23; Lk. 18:24). This term is used in the NT exclusively for material possessions.

(3) *Thesaurōs* (“treasure”). This term is used in the sense of a deposit (e.g., Mt. 2:11; 6:19–12; 19:21).

(4) *Mammōnās* (“mammon”; Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:9, 11, 13). See MAMMON.

(5) *Euporia* (“wealth”; Acts 19:25). This term denotes prosperity (cf. NEB “high standard of living”).

(6) *Piōtēs* (“riches”; Rom. 11:17). The term refers to fatness or wealth.

(7) *Dynamis* (“wealth”; Rev. 18:3). The term literally denotes power.

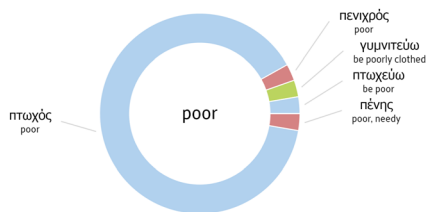
(8) *Timiōtēs* (“wealth”; Rev. 18:19). This term signifies costliness.

(9) *Hypárchō* (“possession”; Mt. 24:47; Lk. 12:15, 33f), *hýparxis* (“possession”; He. 10:34). Both the substantive part of *hypárchō* (“exist,” “be at one’s disposal”) and the cognate noun *hýparxis* denote that which belongs to someone, i.e., property.

(10) *Ktēma* (“possession”; Mt. 19:22; Mk. 10:22; Acts 2:45), *ktētōr* (“possessor”; Acts 4:34).

[Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002), 188.]

have this same double usage. Also, the two spheres of wealth and poverty are never equated, nor is one uniformly bad while the other is uniformly good. The more dominant pattern, however, is that material wealth is typically viewed as evil, while spiritual wealth is uniformly positive. The other situations of spiritual or material poverty can be either good or bad depending on the situation.⁶



Poverty as a Bad Thing.

At times the Bible gives a very simple explanation of why people are rich or poor. If a man delights in the Law of the Lord, “wealth and riches are in his house”; “in all that he does, he prospers” (Ps 1:3; 112:3). With regard to Israel in OT days, these ideas are not quite so naive as they might seem. There is indeed a connection between sin and poverty. Israelite society was built on rules laid down by God, and if there was poverty in it, that must mean that somewhere the rules were being broken. The prophets often denounce those sins of men which impoverish their neighbors (Is 10:1, 2; Jer 22:13; Ez 22:29; Am 2:6; 5:11, 12; 8:4–6; Mi 2:2).

Whether a man’s poverty was due to his own sin or to someone else’s, the OT saw it as an evil to be combated, and the law made many provisions for the relief of it (e.g., Ex 22:21–27; Lv 19:9, 10; Dt 15:1–15; 24:10–22). God cared for the needy, and expected his people to do the same.

During the period between the Testaments, that care continued to be exercised within Jewish communities scattered round the Mediterranean, and it was in due course taken up as a practical responsibility by the Christian church (Acts 11:29; 24:17; Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1; Gal 2:10; Jas 2:15, 16; 1 Jn 3:17); for Christians also, the giving of alms was a duty plainly expected by their Lord (Mt 6:2–4; Lk 12:33). It was not really a primitive communism that the early church practiced, for had they renounced personal possessions, they could not have done what they in fact did—namely, to give in cash or in kind “as any had need” (Acts 2:45; 4:35; emphasis added).

Poverty, then, although it provides the wealthy with a chance to show the virtue of generosity, is in itself (in the NT as in the OT) a bad thing. It is therefore quite appropriate for Scripture to use wealth, its opposite, as a metaphor for something good—in fact, for the supreme good—“the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8; see 2 Cor 6:10; 8:9).

Poverty as a Good Thing.

As we can see, there is a certain sense in which righteousness will make a man prosperous and sin will make him poor. But ordinary life is more complicated than that. Psalms 1 and 112, referred to above, show only one side of the matter. What about “the prosperity of the wicked” (Ps 73:3) and its corollary, the man who is righteous yet poor? The answer of Scripture (e.g., Ps 37, 49, 73; see Jb 21) is of course that the wealth of bad men is a fleeting thing, and that the righteous, though poor in worldly goods, have spiritual riches.

This thought—that so far from being prosperous, the good man may often be poor—is sometimes curiously inverted. The righteous may be poor, but Scripture sometimes appears to reckon that to be poor is to be righteous. Of course it is not automatically so (Prv 30:8, 9), but such references are frequent enough, especially in the psalms (e.g., 9:18; 10:14; 12:5; 34:6; 35:10; 74:19), to deserve careful consideration. And on reflection they are not so strange. As God is specially concerned about the poor, so the poor may be specially concerned about God, for two good reasons. If there is poverty in Israel, it is because those with power are misusing it; so the poor will claim God’s help first because it is his rule which is being flouted, and he must vindicate himself, and secondly, because in the circumstances there is no one else to turn to. In this way “poor” becomes almost a technical term. “The poor” are the humble, and the humble are the godly (Ps 10:17; 14:5, 6; 37:11; Zep 3:12, 13). Just as being rich can foster self-indulgence, self-confidence, pride, and the despising and oppression of one’s fellows, so being poor should encourage the opposite virtues.

Instead of being an evil to be shunned, poverty thus becomes an ideal to be sought. Following the OT use of “the poor” and “the pious” as almost interchangeable terms, personal property was renounced by many Jews during the period between the Testaments. Among them were the sect of the Essenes, and the related community which was set up at Qumran near the Dead Sea. The latter actually called themselves “The Poor.” This tradition continued into NT times. Possibly “the poor” at Jerusalem means a definite group within the church there (or even the Jerusalem church as a whole; Rom 15:26; Gal 2:10). Certainly there emerged later a Jewish-Christian sect called the “Ebionites” (from a Hebrew word for “poor”).

The NT teaches clearly, of course, that what really matters is the attitude of the heart. It is quite possible to be poor yet grasping, or rich yet generous. Even so, with the OT background outlined above, the general sense of these words in the Gospels is that rich = bad, poor = good. On the one hand, the Sadducees are rich in worldly wealth and the Pharisees in spiritual pride, and men of property are selfish, foolish, and in grave spiritual peril (Mk 10:23; Lk 12:13–21; 16:19–31). On the other hand, it is devout and simple folk like Jesus’s own family and friends who generally represent the poor.

In truth, therefore, the two versions of the first beatitude amount to the same thing. Matthew’s has the depth: “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (5:3). But Luke’s has the breadth. When he says simply “Blessed are you poor” (6:20), he means those who in their need—in any kind of need—turn to the Lord (6:17–20). It is to bring the gospel to such people that Christ has come into the world (Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18).

Christ himself embodies the same ideal, showing in his earthly life what it means to have nothing to fall back on except his Father’s loving care (Mt 8:20), and finally allowing himself to be deprived even of life (Phil 2:5–8). In this way both lines of teaching converge on a passage mentioned earlier: “Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you

In this text James clearly refers to material poverty and material wealth. And this is true in chapters two and five also. James' terminology is ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινὸς and ὁ πλούσιος (1:9), ἀνὴρ χρυσοδακτύλιος ἐν ἐσθῆτι λαμπρᾷ, and πτωχὸς ἐν ῥυπαρᾷ ἐσθῆτι (2:2-3), οἱ πλούσιοι and τὸν πτωχόν (2:5-6), and οἱ πλούσιοι (5:1).⁷ Thus it is this angle that we need to explore in terms of attitudes in the Greco-Roman world and the Jewish world of the first century.⁸ The growing consensus among scholars is that during the first century world, extreme poverty and starvation were not widespread and constant universally across the empire. But the situation did deteriorate dramatically about three centuries later. The economic situation of those on the bottom end of the economic ladder at the beginning of the Roman empire could be extreme on occasion due to wars and drought, but it somewhat depended on where the individuals lived in the empire at a given point in time.⁹ To be clear, experiencing poverty at an extreme level and ongoing social attitudes toward being poor or rich are two different issues.¹⁰ Our primary concern is with the latter of these.

Massive numbers of people lived on the bottom end of the economic ladder in first century Rome, and only a small elite segment enjoyed extensive wealth. The economy of the ancient Roman empire was largely focused on the powerfully wealthy, living mainly in Rome, accumulating and enjoying the benefits of massive wealth. The economy was driven primarily by warfare which brought continually fresh supplies of goods and slaves into Rome. Economic benefit came to slaves and peasants through the patronage system that deeply tied them to the wealthy. Elsewhere in the empire wealth on a smaller scale would be present, but it functioned generally along similar lines as in Rome with occasional culturally based variations. For example, in the eastern Mediterranean world a royal monarchy with absolute power over its citizens was much more deeply entrenched into most of those cultures. The monarchs typically claimed to be gods or else divine representatives of the gods, and thus with the full expectation that the rest of the people existed solely to make their lives more pleasurable and enjoyable. When the coffers of the rich and powerful were full, everyone enjoyed to some extent from this abundance.

The attitudes toward wealth and poverty in this climate tended to reflect the feeling that those who possessed wealth did so because they deserved it and had full rights to it by birth and lineage. Everyone else sensed obligation to cultivate favorable attitudes from these wealthy so that through the patronage system they could enjoy a small measure of that affluence. One would need to remember that the social stratification

might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). Our helpless poverty is an evil from which he comes to rescue us; his deliberately chosen poverty is the glorious means by which he does so.

[Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 1732-33.]

⁷ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός, humble brother

πτωχὸς ἐν ῥυπαρᾷ ἐσθῆτι, a beggar in filthy clothes

ὁ πλούσιος, rich (? , man or brother)

ἀνὴρ χρυσοδακτύλιος ἐν ἐσθῆτι λαμπρᾷ, a man with gold rings on his fingers and in shining clothes

οἱ πλούσιοι, the wealthy

⁸The difficulty of precise evaluation of poverty and wealth in the Greco-Roman world is the lack of intense scholarly examination of this theme until recently. Two newer, more definitive studies on this topic are: Scheidel, Walter, Morris, Ian, Saller, Richard P., eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: University Press, 2007) and Atkins, Margaret, Osborne, Robin, eds., *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006).

⁹The challenge of assessing both economic issues and societal attitudes toward poverty and wealth is that most of the written literature from the ancient world was written by the wealthy elite and reflects their viewpoint, often with obviously biased and questionable exaggeration. Archaeological activity over the past fifty years has begun uncovering a more extensive and inclusive picture that provides substantially greater potential insight into what took place both economically and in attitudes across Roman society at this period of time.

¹⁰The modern research has largely shifted from preoccupation with economic structure to economic performance in its study of the ancient world. The future of research is posed to move in these directions:

The cultural achievements of classical Mediterranean civilization rested on a remarkable economic efflorescence. We see the main challenges facing Greco-Roman economic historians in the early twenty-first century as being (i) to find ways to document performance more accurately; (ii) to build on twentieth-century advances in understanding institutions and ideology by clarifying the relationships between structures and performance; and (iii) to pursue comparative analyses of why the Greco-Roman economy broke down.

[Ian Morris, Richard P. Saller and Walter Scheidel, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 7.]

of society was deep and rigidly established with small opportunity to advance. Some economic movement out of poverty was possible through the patronage system, but slaves with training and education had a better opportunity than did the peasants. The vast majority of people would live out their lives in the same social status that they were born into.

Attitudes toward wealth and poverty in the first century Greco-Roman world reflected the elitist postures of the wealthy who felt they were far superior individuals to the masses. For most of the poverty level peasants, just gaining enough food to get by day to day through using the patronage system was the common objective. Little if any thought would be given to one day becoming wealthy themselves. Being poor meant that you were inferior human beings to the wealthy, and coming to terms with that was important for survival.

Among the Jewish people things were somewhat different. Their history from being Egyptian slaves prior to the Exodus shaped a lot of their thinking, although by the beginning of the Christian era surrounding influences were playing a dominant role in their attitudes. The heritage of the kingship of David and Solomon gave some sense of elitism to the Jewish aristocracy both in the Promised Land and in the Diaspora. By the beginning of the Christian era Jewish attitudes took on both secular and religious tones. The Jewish aristocracy, vested at Jerusalem in the Sadducees who controlled the temple, were heavily influenced by Greco-Roman attitudes, since large numbers of their children had actually been educated in Rome. This was true both among aristocratic Jews in Jerusalem and also in the Diaspora. Their religious perspective tended to take some biblical statements especially in the Psalms and Proverbs that link God's blessings with material prosperity to an extreme. If you are rich, then means that God has made you rich, and God only blesses the righteous. Conversely, if you are poor then you must be a sinner because God curses sinners with poverty.

Of course, the biblical perspective in the Old Testament never reduces itself to such simplistic reasoning.¹¹ Wealth can be either a blessing or a curse, depending on how the individual utilizes it.¹² Wealth properly acquired carries with it heavy responsibility from God to be used for the benefit of others, especially the poverty stricken. God requires this! Wealth has built into it great danger toward self-sufficiency and irreligion. But wealth immorally acquired brings down the wrath of God. Wealth used for immoral living incurs divine punishment both now and in eternity. Life is not to be based on the accumulating and possessing of things; they

¹¹“The OT describes God as the creator and giver of all gifts. All His gifts are good (cf. Gen. 1:31), but human beings often pervert their use. After commissioning Adam and Even as His vassals (1:28), God immediately bestowed on them the things necessary to make vassalhood a rich and meaningful experience. Likewise, God promised Abraham that He would bless him (12:2), and Genesis states that Abraham was ‘very rich in cattle’ (13:2). In turn, Abraham seems to have recognized that the Lord was the source of his riches, for he refused to accept the booty he captured in rescuing Lot and the citizens of Sodom (14:23). The land was a central element in God’s covenant promise to Abraham (17:8). The Promised Land was likewise central to the Mosaic covenant. This land was described as being very rich (Ex. 3:8f). (See also LAND II.)

“The fair and proper distribution of wealth was an essential feature of the theocratic kingdom established by the Mosaic legal code. Slavery, although not eliminated, was controlled and tempered (Lev. 25:39–46). (See SLAVE.) The code prescribed means to curb the accumulation of extreme wealth by some with resulting poverty for others (Lev. 25:35f). (See SABBATICAL YEAR.) An individual’s spiritual stature was measured in terms of that person’s beneficence to the poor (Prov. 14:31).”

[Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002), 186.]

¹²“The Bible seems to speak with two voices on the subject of riches, sometimes describing material wealth as a sign of God’s blessing and approval (e.g., Gn 24:35), at other times virtually identifying the rich with the wicked (e.g., Ps 37:7, 16). Jesus, in particular, is very stern in his denunciations of the wealthy.’ “How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mk 10:23)....

“The OT is particularly positive in its attitude to wealth. ‘All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty’ (Prv 14:23). But the Book of Proverbs also paints in the darker side of the biblical picture. Riches may be a blessing, say the wise, but they can also lead to broken relationships and personal disaster (Prv 18:23; 22:16).

“These practical warnings anticipate Jesus’ teaching about the dangers of becoming rich. Affluence, he taught, can destroy peace (Mt 6:24–34), blind people to the needs of others (Lk 16:19–31), stand between individuals and the gateway to eternal life (Mk 10:17–27), and even bring God’s judgment (Lk 12:16–21). He told his disciples not to accumulate personal wealth (Mt 6:19), and praised those who gave up their possessions (Mt 19:29).”

[Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 1858-59.]

are momentary and undependable. Poverty is no sign of sinfulness. It can become a great blessing through creating dependency on God. The poor should live with the dignity of being God's children because their spiritual status is far different than their material status. God stands as the eternal advocate of the poor.

Early Christian teaching incorporated the heart of the Hebrew Bible's teaching on wealth and poverty.¹³ Both Jesus and the apostles continue the major themes found in the Old Testament. The Louw-Nida Greek lexicon lists ten separate word groups denoting wealth and being rich, topics 57.25-57.35.¹⁴ These listings

¹³**D. Riches and the Rich in the NT.**

1. The Attitude of Jesus to Wealth in Mark and Matthew.

a. In Matthew Jesus abandons the traditional view of riches in favor of one that is wholly theocentric and eschatological. Neither wealth nor poverty is significant in itself (cf. 27:57). The delight in riches (13:22) and the difficulty of salvation for the rich (19:22ff.) simply typify the human situation in which nothing is gained even by winning the world if the soul is lost (6:25ff.), and the anxiety of pagan life stands in marked contrast to seeking righteousness and the kingdom (6:25ff.).

b. The problem of wealth has greater independence in Mark, e.g., in the explanation of the parable of the sower (4:19) and the story of the widow's mite (12:41ff.). Wealth is an obstacle to hearing the message of the kingdom.

2. In Luke. The question of the rich occupies more space in Luke. The setting of the story of the rich young ruler shortly after the parable of the publican (cf. 18:8ff., 18ff.) shows that more than wealth is at issue (cf. the setting of the story of the poor widow, the parable of Dives, and the story of Zacchaeus; 20–21; 16:14ff.; 19:1ff.). The rich, collectively, are opponents of Jesus, for the gospel involves a total reversal of the earthly order (1:53; 14:11, 24). The rich rely on their possessions; riches are thus an obstacle to discipleship (12:19ff.; 18:22–23). The rich should restore what is wrongfully gained (19:8) and give freely with no hope of return (14:12ff.). Separation from riches in discipleship results in much gain in both time and eternity.

3. The Group in Paul. Paul redefines wealth, going back to the basic sense of “fullness of goods.” Christ and his work are the true wealth of the community. Christ himself is rich (2 Cor. 8:9). He grants his riches to those who call upon him (Rom. 10:12). God is rich in kindness and glory (Rom. 2:4; 9:23). Christ's word dwells richly in the community (Col. 3:16), which is rich through Christ's poverty (2 Cor. 8:9) and to which God has declared the riches of the glory of the mystery (Col. 1:26). God is rich in mercy and grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:4). The community knows the riches of his glorious inheritance by the Spirit (1:18). The apostle proclaims the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8). This wealth is poverty to the world (1 Cor. 1:23). The way to it is that of Christ, who, though rich, becomes poor to make the world rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Thus the apostles, being poor, make many rich (6:10). True wealth consists of the love that self-sacrificially follows Jesus, not seeking its own (1 Cor. 13:4ff.), nor bragging about its riches, but trusting the God who supplies all needs according to his riches in glory (Phil. 4:19), and thus ready to give freely to others (2 Cor. 8:1ff.). Material wealth is simply an instrument in the ministry of love; one is to deal with it as though having no dealings with it, for it has no dignity of its own (1 Cor. 7:31).

4. The Other NT Writings. Warnings are given against coveting riches in 1 Tim. 6:9 and against trusting in riches in 6:17ff. Regard for wealth and estate is condemned in Jms. 2:1 ff. The rich should boast of their low estate (1:10–11); they are prone to violence (2:6–7), fraud (5:4), and voluptuous living (5:5), and their gold and silver, which rust, will witness against them at the judgment (5:3). The usage of Revelation is similar to that of Paul. The Lamb is worthy to receive riches (5:12). The church at Smyrna is truly rich (2:9), but that at Laodicea, though rich, is really poor and should seek its true wealth by repentance (3:17ff.). The rich of Babylon, who have gained their wealth by wickedness, will fall with their city (18:3ff.). In Heb. 11:25–26 Moses regards abuse for Christ's sake greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

[Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 875.]

¹⁴**57.25 πλουτέωα:** to have considerably more than what would be regarded as the norm in a society—‘to be rich, to be wealthy, well-to-do.’ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς ‘he has sent away empty those who are rich’ Lk 1:53.

57.26 πλούσιοςα, α, ον: pertaining to being rich—‘rich, wealthy, well-to-do.’ ὄψιας δὲ γενομένης ἦλθεν ἄνθρωπος πλούσιος ἀπὸ Αριμαθαίας ‘when it was evening, a rich man from Arimathea arrived’ Mt 27:57.

57.27 εὐπορέομαι: to be financially well off—‘to have plenty, to be rich, to be well off.’ τῶν δὲ μαθητῶν καθὼς εὐπορεῖτό τις ὥρισαν ἕκαστος αὐτῶν εἰς διακονίαν πέμψαι τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἀδελφοῖς ‘so the disciples agreed to make a contribution for the relief of their Christian brothers in Judea, each one to do this in accordance with how well off he was’ Ac 11:29. It may be useful in some languages to translate εὐπορέομαι in Ac 11:29 as ‘each one was to do this in proportion as he had more than he needed’ or ‘... in proportion to the amount of possessions which he owned.’

57.28 πλουτέωβ: to prosper to the point of being rich—‘to become rich, to become wealthy, to prosper.’ οἱ ἐμποροὶ τούτων, οἱ πλουτήσαντες ἀπ’ αὐτῆς ‘the businessmen (literally ‘the traders in these (wares) ...’) who became rich from doing business in that (city)’ Re 18:15. In some instances it may be useful to translate ‘to become wealthy’ as ‘he soon possessed much’ or even ‘he was no longer poor, but rich.’ By introducing ‘poor’ in contrast with ‘rich,’ one may identify a change of state.

57.29 πλουτίζωα: to cause someone to become rich—‘to enrich, to make rich, to cause to become rich.’ ἐν παντὶ πλουτιζόμενοι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα ‘he will always make you rich enough to be generous at all times’ 2 Cor 9:11. The causative in πλουτίζω may sometimes be expressed by a verb meaning ‘to help,’ for example, ‘will help you become rich.’

57.30 πλοῦτοςα, ου m and n: an abundance of possessions exceeding the norm of a particular society and often with a nega-

are but a part of the larger category of topic 57, “Possess, Transfer, Exchange.”¹⁵ All of this highlights the interest that exists in the pages of the New Testament regarding wealth. The topics dealing with poverty cover 57.49-57.54.¹⁶ The New Testament writers adopt the general attitudes found in the Old Testament in regard

tive connotation—‘wealth, riches, abundance.’ ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλοῦτου καὶ αἱ περὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἐπιθυμίας εἰσπορευόμενα συμπνίγουσιν τὸν λόγον ‘the deception of riches and all other kinds of desires crowd in and choke the message’ Mk 4:19; ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν ‘your riches have rotted away’ Jas 5:2. ‘Your riches’ may be expressed by means of a descriptive phrase, for example, ‘all the many things you possess.’

57.31 χρῆμα, τος n: economic resources, usually implying an abundance of such assets—‘riches, wealth, abundance.’ πῶς δυσκόλως οἱ τὰ χρήματα ἔχοντες εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελεύσονται ‘how hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God’ Mk 10:23.

57.32 εὐπορία, ας f: the result of having acquired wealth—‘prosperity.’ ἄνδρες, ἐπίστασθε ὅτι ἐκ ταύτης τῆς ἐργασίας ἡ εὐπορία ἡμῖν ἐστίν ‘men, you know our prosperity comes from this work’ Ac 19:25. It may also be convenient to translate this clause in Ac 19:25 as ‘you know that this work we do makes us rich.’ For another interpretation of εὐπορία in Ac 19:25, see 57.201.

57.33 τὰ ἀγαθὰ (occurring only in the plural): possessions which provide material benefits, usually used with reference to movable or storable possessions rather than real estate—‘goods, possessions.’ καὶ ἐρῶ τῇ ψυχῇ μου, Ψυχῇ, ἔχεις πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ κείμενα εἰς ἔτη πολλά ‘then I will say to myself, Self, you have all the goods you need for many years’ Lk 12:19. It may also be possible to translate Lk 12:19 as ‘you have all you need to live well for many years.’

57.34 μαμωνᾶς, ᾱ m (an Aramaic word): wealth and riches, with a strongly negative connotation—‘worldly wealth, riches.’ ἐγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω, ἑαυτοῖς ποιήσατε φίλους ἐκ τοῦ μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας ‘so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with unrighteous worldly wealth’ Lk 16:9; οὐ δύνασθε θεῷ δουλεῦν καὶ μαμωνᾶ ‘you cannot serve God and riches’ Lk 16:13.

57.35 τιμιότης, ητος f: (derivative of τίμοσα ‘valuable, precious,’ 65.2) a large quantity of costly, valuable possessions—‘wealth, riches.’ ἐν ἧ ἐπλούτησαν πάντες οἱ ἔχοντες τὰ πλοῖα ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ ἐκ τῆς τιμιότητος αὐτῆς ‘(she is a city) where all who have ships sailing the seas became rich on her wealth’ Re 18:19. ‘Wealth’ may usually be rendered by ‘the many valuable possessions.’

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 560-61.]

¹⁵ **Outline of Subdomains**

A Have, Possess, Property, Owner (57.1–57.21)	L Pay, Price, Cost (57.152–57.171)
B Have Sufficient (57.22–57.24)	M Hire, Rent Out (57.172–57.177)
C Be Rich, Be Wealthy (57.25–57.35)	N Tax, Tribute (57.178–57.185)
D Treasure (57.36)	O Sell, Buy, Price (57.186–57.188)
E Need, Lack (57.37–57.48)	P Earn, Gain, Do Business (57.189–57.208)
F Be Poor, Be Needy, Poverty (57.49–57.54)	Q Lend, Loan, Interest, Borrow, Bank (57.209–57.218)
G Take, Obtain, Gain, Lose (57.55–57.70)	R Owe, Debt, Cancel (57.219–57.223)
H Give (57.71–57.124)	S Be a Financial Burden (57.224–57.225)
I Receive (57.125–57.141)	T Keep Records (57.226–57.231)
J Exchange (57.142–57.145)	U Steal, Rob (57.232–57.248)
K Spend, Waste (57.146–57.151)	

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 557.]

¹⁶ **F Be Poor, Be Needy, Poverty**¹⁵ (57.49–57.54)

57.49 πενιχρός, ἄ, ὄν: pertaining to the lack of the essential means of livelihood—‘poor, needy.’¹⁶ εἶδεν δὲ τινα χήραν πενιχρὰν βάλλουσαν ἐκεῖ λεπτὰ δύο ‘he also saw a very poor widow dropping in two little copper coins’ Lk 21:2.

57.50 πένης, ητος m: a person who is poor and must live sparingly, but probably not as destitute as a person spoken of as πτωχός^a (57.53)—‘poor, needy.’ ἔδωκεν τοῖς πένησιν ‘he gave to the poor’ 2 Cor 9:9.

57.51 ἐνδεής, ἔς: pertaining to lacking what is needed or necessary for existence—‘poor, needy.’ οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς ‘there was no one in the group who was in need’ Ac 4:34. ἐνδεής is similar in meaning to πτωχός^a (57.53), but the focus seems to be more upon a severe lack of needed resources rather than upon a state of poverty and destitution.

57.52 πτωχεία, ας f: a state of having insufficient possessions—‘poverty, destitution.’ ἡ περισσεια τῆς χαρᾶς αὐτῶν καὶ ἡ κατὰ βάθους πτωχεία αὐτῶν ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀπλότητος αὐτῶν ‘the abundance of their joy and the depths of their poverty resulted in an outpouring of extreme generosity’ 2 Cor 8:2.

57.53 πτωχός^a, ἦ, ὄν: pertaining to being poor and destitute, implying a continuous state—‘poor, destitute.’ εἰσέλθη δὲ καὶ πτωχὸς ἐν ῥυπαρᾷ ἐσθῆτι ‘but there comes in also a poor man in ragged clothing’ Jas 2:2. See comments at 57.51.

Since in all societies there are poor people, there is no difficulty involved in finding a suitable expression to designate such persons, but in some languages idiomatic phrases are used, for example, ‘those who walk in rags’ or ‘those whose ribs are always

to being poor or poverty stricken.¹⁷ Poverty is not a reflection of God's punishment for sinful living, except in showing.⁷

57.54 πτωχέω: to change to a state of poverty—'to become poor.' 17 δι' ἡμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὢν 'although (Christ) was rich, he became poor for your sake' 2 Cor 8:9. In some languages it may be inappropriate to translate literally 'rich' and 'poor,' since these may have highly specific meanings and inappropriate connotations for the context of 2 Cor 8:9. Therefore, it may be necessary to translate 'although Christ had previously possessed very much, he became one who possessed nothing and he did this for your sake.'

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 563.]

¹⁷D. The NT.

I. The Gospels.

1. Mark. In the NT *ptōchós*, not *pénēs*, is the usual term for the poor. Of 31–35 instances, 14–15 are in the Synoptics, and 4–5 in Mark. The use in Mark is literal. Mt. 12:41ff. states that the tiny gift of the poor widow is of more value than the large gifts of the wealthy. In 10:17ff. Jesus challenges the rich landowner to sell his property and give to the poor. In Mk. 14:5,7 the special circumstances explain what might seem to be a strange rejection of the valid concern of the group around Jesus.

2. Matthew. Mt. 19:21 associates the giving of the ruler's property to the poor with being *τέλειος*. 26:11 tightens the formulation in Mark but with no change of sense. 11:5 gives special emphasis to the preaching of the gospel to the poor; it stands in correlation to the mission of ch. 10, on which the Baptist must have had information. 5:3 (cf. 5:5)—the first beatitude—lifts the stress from the material to the spiritual sphere.

3. Luke. Lk. 18:22 adds a *pánta* to the demand that the rich young ruler should sell his possessions, and the context implies that a whole class fails to fulfil it. The saying in 7:22 is incorporated into the story. 6:20 might derive from a different source from Mt. 5:3, although the question of priority cannot be settled. The theme of rich and poor plays a role in the Lucan infancy stories. In 4:18 preaching the gospel to the poor has thematic significance. In 14:21, which refers to the eschatological banquet, the poor are invited along with the maimed and blind, and in 14:13 it is these that one should invite to a feast. In 16:19ff. the poor man is the recipient of divine grace and the rich man, by his self-centeredness, is ineluctably alienated from God. In contrast, the rich Zacchaeus, when he meets Jesus, displays extraordinary generosity to the poor. Other passages (6:24–25; 8:14; 12:15ff.; 14:33; 16:10ff.) stress the perils of wealth. There is no primary interest here in the poor as such, but in the salvation of the rich, whom their wealth rivets to this world.

4. John. Jn. 12:5–6 ascribes impure motives to Judas' concern for the poor, and this gives a special slant to the reply of Jesus in v. 8. In 13:29 the disciples assume that Judas, who keeps the purse, has been sent out to give the customary Passover alms to the poor.

II. Luke 14ff., Jesus, and the Baptist. Lk. 14ff. refers often to the theme of the rich and the poor and implies a special identification with the poor, widows, sinners, and little people. Lk. 4:18 is to much the same effect, and in Lk. 7:22 (cf. Mt. 11:5) there is emphasis on the fact that the gospel is especially for the poor. Jesus sets himself among the tired and lowly in Mt. 11:28 but will not let himself be tied down to a social principle (Mk. 14:7) or nourish the expectation of fulfilling material expectations. Although *ptōchós* does not occur in the preaching of the Baptist, we find related terms; his message is rich in social overtones, so that a theology of poverty is to some extent present.

III. Paul. Although Paul rarely uses *ptōchos*, and not at all in the context of the removal of distinctions by Christ, the passages in which he does use the term are central. Thus in Gal. 2:10 and Rom. 15:26 he energetically promotes the collection for the poor, or the poor among the Jerusalem saints. This is a voluntary offering, not a tax, but Paul regards it as particularly important. The phrase in Rom. 15:26 may be a term that the Jerusalem church uses for itself. In Gal. 4:9 Paul calls the elemental spirits weak and *ptōchá*, i.e., beggarly. In 2 Cor. 6:3ff., in a series of paradoxes, he points out that the apostles, while materially poor, make many spiritually rich. In 1 Cor. 15:10 *ptōché* is a possible and not implausible reading to describe God's grace to Paul; it was not beggarly. Paul usually seems to have taken over the term *ptōchós* from prior tradition or from an actual situation. He knows the problem of poverty and takes steps to deal with it, but his orientation is too strongly eschatological to let it be a major concern or a subject of theological transvaluation. Thus Paul does not use *ptōchós* as a title for Christians, nor is *ptōcheia* a figurative term for the Christian life.

IV. James. James attacks the rich both inside and outside the church, and opposes to them the humble or the poor. God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith (2:5). The church no longer feels solidarity with the oppressed now that wealthier people are coming into it, and the author protests against dishonoring the poor (2:6).

V. Revelation. In 2:9 the spiritual wealth of the Smyrna church stands in contrast to its material poverty. In 3:17 the supposed spiritual wealth of Laodicea is unmasked as poverty. In 13:16 the rich and poor are the two classes of the materially rich and the materially poor.

VI. The Primitive Community. Rather strangely Acts does not use *ptōchós* when describing the sharing of goods in the Jerusalem church. If Rom. 15:26 contains a title for this church, it suggests the development of a structure that does away with social distinctions, as Acts records. The common meals and the handing over of personal property for administration by the apostles and later by the seven give evidence of a care for the poor that goes far beyond normal synagogue practice, although it is in accord with much Palestinian thinking.

isolated instances. It can be a great blessing that draws us closer to God and enables His resources to be supplied to us for obedient living to Christ. The criticisms of the wealthy found in the New Testament reflect the heritage of the Old Testament prophets who severely criticized the wealthy in ancient Israel.¹⁸

A related question pertains to the presence or absence of both extreme poverty and wealth inside the Christian communities of the first Christian century. James' mentioning of the wealthy in chapters two and five clearly indicate that on those occasions the wealthy were not a part of the Christian communities in his targeted audiences. He saw these wealthy individuals as persecutors of Christianity and of Christians. On the basis of this clear outsider designation of the wealthy in these two chapters some try to argue that the wealthy person in view in 1:9-11 is also an outsider. But the grammar and the immediate context strongly argue against such an understanding (see exegesis below for details). Instead, James uses a rich Christian who has suffered the loss of his wealth as an example of rejoicing in trials. This makes the point that some wealthy people in the first century world had become Christians, and were actively participating in the life of a local church. Demographically Christianity in the first century was overwhelmingly made up of peasants and slaves, with only a few wealthy individuals being a part of the churches. In passages like 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19, instructions are given to wealthy members of the church at Ephesus in the early 60s. Thus Christianity in the Gentile world began reaching out to wealthy people in the first century world. About the same period of time or possibly just earlier than First Timothy, James also assumes the presence of wealthy individuals inside the Christian communities that his letter targets.

Thus in summary, wealth is not inherently sinful, but how one acquires it and uses it can be. Always it poses a certain danger to spiritual health by fostering pseudo-feelings of self-sufficiency. As one expression of divine favor, it always remains a gift with heavy stewardship responsibilities and divine accountability for its use. It is against this general backdrop that James 1:9-11 alludes to wealth and poverty among his targeted readers.

Literary:

Genre: This passage continues the *paraenesis*, i.e., moral admonitions, begun in 1:2. Verses 9 - 11 contain no particular genre tone apart from serving as illustrations that reenforce a previous point made by the writer. But verse twelve introduces a new literary form known as a beatitude, from the Latin *beatitudo* or blessing.¹⁹ Among the Greeks who made extensive use of both the beatitude form with μακάριος and some use of the verb μακαρίζειν, *to bless*, the beatitude was an acknowledgement that the individual was enjoying a higher quality of life and happiness than the average person.²⁰ Sometimes the source of this better life was

[Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 971-73.]

¹⁸**b. The Prophetic Criticism of Wealth.** The prophetic criticism of wealth presupposes sociological and social relations very different from those of the earlier period. Jerusalem and Samaria were now royal cities, and alongside a great host of poor and deprived there had arisen a relatively small stratum of plutocrats and aristocrats, cf. Is. 3:2 f.; 10:1 ff.; Jer. 5:4 f., 25-31; Ez. 22:25-29; Am. 2:6 ff.; 3:10; 5:7-12; Mi. 2:1 ff.; 3:9 ff.⁵⁵ The core of the criticism is the theologically based repudiation of this process (cf. Ju. 8:22, 23; 1 S. 10:18 f.) because of such social consequences as forced labour (Am. 5:7-12), the enslaving of fellow-countrymen (Jer. 34:8-11), and the depriving of widows, orphans and the poor of their rights (Is. 5:8-24 etc.). Behind this repudiation is the conviction that the existence of a rich⁵⁶ upper stratum runs contrary to God's will, since it destroys the people which God has created in salvation history, cf. Jer. 2:6 f.; 31:31 f.; Ez. 20:5-26; Da. 9:15; Am. 2:10; Mi. 6:3 ff. In Jer. 5:26 f. members of the upper class are called ἄσεβεις who have grown great and rich because they have amassed wealth by cunning and transgressed the right. In Mi. 6:11 f. they are charged with graft, falsehood and violence. In Is. 53:9 the ungodly and the rich are identical. But these charges constantly made by the prophets against the upper class (Jer. 5:26-31; Ez. 22:6-13; Am. 3:10; 5:7-12) are stereotyped. They are directed against the class as such rather than individuals. The prophecies of disaster are also addressed against the whole group rather than individuals (cf. Is. 3:1 ff.; 3:16-4:1; Jer. 5:26-31; Ez. 22:24-31; Am. 5:7-12; Mi. 2:1-11). The rich are expressly mentioned. With the pomp and glory of Jerusalem they will go down into the underworld, Is. 5:14. Their wealth will be scattered like chaff, Is. 29:5. The rich city will stand waste and empty, Is. 32:12 ff. The wives of the nobility will be deprived of their social standing, Is. 32:9-14.

[*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 6: 324.]

¹⁹For a more detailed discussion see my "Literary Forms of Beatitudes," cranfordville.com.

²⁰From mere statements there obviously developed in Gk. a specific genre of beatitude to extol the fortune accruing to some-

the gods, but not always. Inside the Jewish religious heritage, however, the state of μακάριος is only possible from God who graciously favors the individual with a blessed life. The particular aspect of blessedness is defined by the third person form through the ὅτι - clause attached as a basis for the blessing -- something not always found in the form. The subject specification of the beatitude lays out the condition for divine blessing upon the individual. Thus from the Jewish view, the beatitude is a prayer expression that invokes God's blessings upon the individual meeting the required condition for the blessing. The precise nature of that blessing will be specified in the attached ὅτι - clause.

The form elements in James' beatitude, which is a standard Jewish third person form, are:

- 1) **Blessing:** Μακάριος
- 2) **Subject defining the required condition for blessing:** ἀνὴρ ὃς ὑπομένει πειρασμόν,
- 3) **Basis for the blessing that defines its content:** ὅτι δόκιμος γενόμενος λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν.

Thus a blessing is invoked from God on the individual who endures trial. The heart of the blessing is the receiving of the crown, that is, the eternal life promised by God to those loving Him.

What James does here is to use this highly religious expression to bring to a climax his discussion of facing trials with joy. The shift to the third person singular comes out of the axiomatic nature of the beatitude itself and alludes back to both the poverty stricken Christian brother and the wealthy Christian brother who in their individual trials have found occasion to rejoice. God in their trials has shown them a higher quality of living, and one that has eternal consequences attached to it.²¹ As an incentive to enduring trials, James reminds his readers of the divine blessing awaiting them both now and especially in the future.²²

Context:

As is reflected in the outline below, James 1:9-12 is a part of the larger unit of vv. 2-12. This unit has close connections to the one following it in vv. 13-18.

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT

Of James²³

PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
BODY	1-194	1.2-5.20
Facing Trials	1-15	1.2-12
God and Temptation	16-24	1.13-18
The Word and Piety	25-37	1.19-27
Faith and Partiality	38-55	2.1-13
Faith and Works	56-72	2.14-26
Controlling the Tongue	73-93	3.1-12
True and False Wisdom	94-102	3.13-18
Solving Divisions	103-133	4.1-10
Criticism	134-140	4.11-12

one and to exalt this person on the basis or condition of the good fortune.¹⁰⁷ [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 4:363.]

²¹This understanding of the climatic role of the beatitude at the end of verses 2-12 makes much more sense than to see it as the beginning of vv. 13-21. Although many translations and commentators understand it this way, the necessary shift in the meaning of πειρασμόν from its clear meaning in verse 2, πειρασμοῖς, has no basis in the text and explanations in defense of it are weak and clearly artificial. The major topic shift in this discussion of James is much more clearly seen with the shift from the noun πειρασμόν (v. 12) to the verbal πειραζόμενος (v. 13). James' discussion in vv. 13-21 has the cohesive links around what God doesn't do and what He does. He doesn't use a trial to tempt us to do evil; rather He seeks to give good things to His people.

²²The use of the future tense verb λήμψεται, **he will receive**, turns the beatitude toward the Jewish apocalyptic form that sees the blessedness primarily in connection with the coming of the Messiah at the close of the age.

²³Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, *A Study Manual of James: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285. **Statements** indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual and also at the James Study internet site.

Leaving God Out	141-146	4.13-17
Danger in Wealth	147-161	5.1-6
Persevering under Trial	162-171	5.7-11
Swearing	172-174	5.12
Reaching Out to God	175-193	5.13-18
Reclaiming the Wayward	194	5.19-20

The contextual links of this passage start with vv. 2-12 as the most immediate connection. This pericope is composed of four units: vv. 2-4, 5-8, 9-11, and 12. The thought progression moves from encouragement to adopt a joyous stance toward trials in vv. 2-4. This is based upon understanding that God is working in those trials for our good. James then reminds his readers that God's insight into our trials, σοφία, is available as divine wisdom through prayer, prayed properly (vv. 5-8). He illustrates the potential of rejoicing in trials with two examples on opposite ends of the economic scale: the beggar living in poverty and the rich man who has suffered the loss of his riches. Both are fellow Christians who find God's wisdom in their trials to be essential for rejoicing (vv. 9-11). Then in climax James invokes God's blessing on those holding up under trials (v. 12).

As also illustrated in the above outline, vv. 2-12 possesses a close relationship with vv. 13-18. This is clearly marked by James' shifting from the noun πειρασμός in vv. 2-12 to the verb πειράζω in vv. 13-18. Although the entire pericope of vv. 13-18 holds together around the central theme of God (what He doesn't do, vv. 13-16) and what He does do (vv. 17-18), James in the first segment stresses that in no way does God use our trials in order to tempt us to do evil. God is not the source of temptation, neither the trials themselves. Instead, our own passions, τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας, form the source of the pressure to sin in the midst of trials. Thus, in vv. 13-18 James narrows the focus to stress that even though trials may tempt us to sin, we cannot say that God is behind this temptation. Rather, He is seeking to bring good into our lives, not evil.

James 1:2-12

Stance: vv. 2-4

Wisdom: vv. 5-8

Examples: vv. 9-11

Blessing: v. 12

Structure:

The block diagram of the scripture text below in English represents a very literalistic English expression of the original language Greek text in order to preserve as far a possible the grammar structure of the Greek expression, rather than the grammar of the English translation which will always differ from the Greek at certain points.

```

1:9      Now
8      let the brother in humble circumstances take pride
        in his high position,
1:10     and
9      let the rich (brother) take pride
        in being humbled
        |
        |           as the flower of the grass
        because...he will vanish.

1:11     For
10     the sun rises
        with its burning heat
        and
11     --- --- withers the grass
        and
12     its flower falls off
        and
13     its lovely appearance perishes;

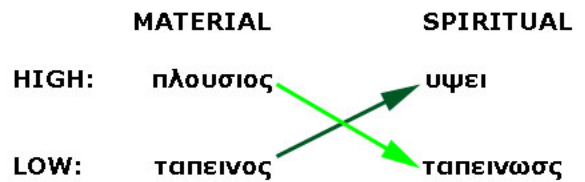
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so also
14 the rich man will fade away
 in the midst of his pursuits.

15 ^{1:12} **Blessed is the man**
 | who endures trial,
 |
 | when he has stood the test
 because...he shall receive the crown
 which is life
 which He promised to those loving Him.

The internal thought structure becomes clear from the above diagram. The two fold admonition (#s 8 & 9) define the two examples of suffering trials. The chart on the right illustrates in diagram the inner dynamics of the examples. The poor man has few things but is spiritually rich. The wealthy man suffers the loss of his wealth and is brought down, which is also an occasion for rejoicing (Καυχάσθω) because it forces him to see the transitory nature of his material wealth. In a manner typical of James, he will give a preliminary reason for his admonition in a ὅτι-clause (“because”), and then proceed to elaborate on it in much greater detail with another causal statement (γάρ, “for”) in #s 10-13. Then, to be certain that his readers understand his point, he specifically applies his reason to the rich man (οὕτως και) in statement 14.

The Reversal in 1:9-11



The beatitude in statement 15 stands distinct from the illustration (#s 8-14) and functions to bring the larger discussion in vv. 2-12 to a climatic conclusion that invokes God’s blessings on the individual enduring trials in the manner described in this passage.

Exegesis of the Text.

As is explained above this text divides into two natural units of material, vv. 9-11 and v. 12. This will form the organizing structure for our exegesis of the passage.

1) Examples of facing trials, vv. 9-11.

9 Καυχάσθω δὲ ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινὸς ἐν τῷ ὕψει αὐτοῦ, 10 ὁ δὲ πλούσιος ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου παρελεύσεται. 11 ἀνέτειλεν γὰρ ὁ ἥλιος σὺν τῷ καύσωνι καὶ ἐξήρανε τὸν χόρτον, καὶ τὸ ἄνθος αὐτοῦ ἐξέπεσεν καὶ ἡ εὐπρέπεια τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἀπώλετο· οὕτως καὶ ὁ πλούσιος ἐν ταῖς πορείαις αὐτοῦ μαρανθήσεται.

9 Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, 10 and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.

In elliptical expression in the first sentence (vv. 9-10), James puts two illustrations on the table:

ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινὸς ἐν τῷ ὕψει αὐτοῦ, the brother lowly in his high position

ὁ δὲ πλούσιος ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ, the rich in his humiliation

Both individuals are encouraged to rejoice, Καυχάσθω, in their respective situation. The Aorist imperative form of the verb intensifies the admonition with a strong emphasis to actively rejoice in regard to the respective situation of each person. The idea contained in the verb καυχάομαι is that of inwardly deep satisfaction that expresses itself in joyous affirmation. Though often translated as ‘boast’, it defines something far deeper and more positive.²⁴ Thus it is linked to χαρὰν in v. 2, and especially with the modifier combination, Πᾶσαν

²⁴At the heart of καυχάομαι is an inward sense of profound accomplishment that is then expressed outwardly. How to best express this in English is difficult. The verb can move in a negative direction with the outward expression verbalizing a feeling of superiority to others. Thus “bragging” and “boasting” may work to capture this second phase of the verb in such instances. But the verb often connotes a very positive tone rather than a negative one. This is where the translation difficulty deepens. English, as well as most modern western languages, do not possess a single verb that can capture both the inward sense of accomplishment and a

χαρὰν, *pure joy*.²⁵ With the use of this verbal expression to complement the reference to pure joy, James gives

clearly positive outward expression of it. Most translators settle for something like “be proud of.” Yet this is much too passive a concept for that of *καυχάομαι*.

²⁵**καυχάομαι** (s. two next entries; Pind., Hdt.+) mid. dep.; 2 sing. *καυχᾶσαι* Ro 2:17, 23; 1 Cor 4:7 (s. Mayser 328; JWacker-nagel, TLZ 33, 1908, 639; Thackeray 218; Mlt-H. 198); fut. *καυχήσομαι*; 1 aor. *ἐκαυχήσαμην*; pf. *κεκαύχημαι*. In our lit. restricted to Paul, except for two pass. each in Js and Ign., and one in 1 Cl (a quot. fr. the OT).

1. to take pride in someth., boast, glory, pride oneself, brag, intr. (Sappho, Fgm. 26, 10 D.2) ἐν τινι in or about a person or thing (schol. on Apollon. Rhod. 3, 976 οἱ *καυχόμενοι* ἐν ἑτέρων διαβολαῖς; LXX; TestJud 13:2; ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς Theoph. Ant. 1, 1 [p. 58, 6].—B-D-F §196; s. Rob. 532) ἐν θεῷ **Ro 2:17**. ἐν τῷ θεῷ **5:11**. ἐν κυρίῳ **1 Cor 1:31b**; **2 Cor 10:17b**; 1 Cl 13:1 (cp. on the three Jer 9:23). ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ **Phil 3:3**. ἐν ἀνθρώποις **1 Cor 3:21**.—ἐν νόμῳ (cp. Sir 39:8) **Ro 2:23**; in afflictions **5:3**; in the work of others **2 Cor 10:15**; in weaknesses **12:9**; in high position **Js 1:9**; in wisdom, etc. 1 Cl 13:1 (Jer 9:22f). ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκί **Gal 6:13**. ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ vs. **14**. ἐν τῷ προσώπῳ κ., opp. ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ *pride oneself on externals ... on the heart* **2 Cor 5:12**. ἐν ᾧ *καυχῶνται* **11:12**. On **2 Th 1:4** v.l. see *ἐγκαυχάομαι*.—The ἐν is to be taken somewhat differently **Js 4:16** (s. *ἀλαζονεία*).—εἰς τι *boast with regard to someth.* **2 Cor 10:16**. Differently εἰς τὰ ἄμετρα κ. *boast beyond limit* (s. *ἄμετρος*) vss. **13, 15**.—ἐπί τινι based on someth., in someth. (Cratinus Com. [V B.C.] 95; Diod S 15, 6, 2 ἐπὶ τοῖς ποιήμασιν; 16, 70, 2; iambic poet in Ps.-Callisth. 2, 20, 11 ἐπὶ τέκνοις; SIG 1268, 23 ἐπὶ ῥώμῃ; Ps 48:7) **Ro 5:2** (JBover, *Biblica* 22, '41, 41–45). ὑπὲρ τινος on behalf of someone **2 Cor 12:5ab**. κατὰ τι in accordance with someth. **2 Cor 11:18a**.—ἐνώπιον τ. θεοῦ before God **1 Cor 1:29**.—W. ὅτι foll. (Strabo 13, 1, 27) IPhd 6:3. (W. inf. TestJob 41:3; Just., D. 101, 1).—Abs. (TestReub 3:5) **1 Cor 1:31a**; **4:7**; **2 Cor 10:17a**; **11:18b, 30a**; **12:1, 6, 11 v.l.**; **Eph 2:9**; IPol 5:2.—**1 Cor 13:3**, a variety of witnesses have *καυχήσομαι* (read by N. and defended e.g. by Harnack, SBBerlAk 1911, 139ff; Goodsp., *Probs.* 162–65; KClark, *Studia Paulina* [deZwaan *Festschr.*] '53, 61f) instead of the v.l. *καυθήσομαι*, which is preferred by others (e.g., EPreuschen, ZNW 16, 1915, 127ff; JKelliott, ZNW 62, '71, 297f; et al.).—S. καίω 2.

2. to make a boast about someth., boast about, mention in order to boast of, be proud of, trans. τὶ someth. (Philemon Com. [IV–III B.C.], Fgm. 141 p. 521; Diod S 20, 63, 4) τὰ τῆς ἀσθενείας μου *boast about my weaknesses* **2 Cor 11:30b** (cp. Pr 27:1 κ. τὰ εἰς αὔριον). τὶ περὶ τινος **10:8**. τί τινι ὑπὲρ τινος *say someth. boastingly (or in pride) to someone concerning someone* **7:14**; **9:2** (here a ὅτι-clause defines τὶ more closely). μικρόν τι **11:16**.—For Gr-Rom. cultural background on Paul's theme of boasting in 2 Cor s. Plut., *Mor.* 539–547 ‘On Inoffensive Self-Praise’; FDanker, *Augsburg Comm. on the NT: II Cor* '89, esp. 147–214; idem, *Paul's Debt to Demosthenes* ‘De Corona’, in *Persuasive Artistry* [GKennedy *Festschr.*], ed. DWatson, '91, 262–80; JLambrecht, *Dangerous Boasting, Paul's Self-Commendation in 2 Cor 10–13*, in RBieringer, ed., *The Corinthian Correspondence* '96, 325–46.—JBo-sch, ‘Gloriarise’ según San Pablo, *Sentido y teología de καυχάομαι*, '70. BDowdy, *The Meaning of καυχᾶσθαι in the NT*, diss. Vanderbilt '55.—B. 1281. DELG. M-M. EDNT. TW. Spicq.

καύχημα, ατος, τό (s. prec. and next entry; Pind., I. 5, 51 [65]; LXX; TestJob; Tat. 2, 1). On Gr-Rom. perspectives s. *καυχάομαι* 2.

1. act of taking pride in someth. or that which constitutes a source of pride, boast (Ael. Aristid. 32, 5 K.=12 p. 135 D.), then also used when the boast is not made in words, to denote the thing of which one is proud, in this sense *pride* (Dt 33:29; Pr 17:6) κ. ἔχει he has someth. to boast about **Ro 4:2**. οὐκ ἔστιν μοι κ. I have no right to boast **1 Cor 9:16**. εἰς ἑαυτὸν τὸ κ. ἔχειν have a reason for boasting on one's own account **Gal 6:4** (Phaeuser, BZ 12, 1914, 45–56). With gen. (Ps.-Callisth. 2, 22, 7 and 11 Περσῶν κ.) τὸ κ. μου οὐδεὶς κενώσει **1 Cor 9:15**. κ. τινος εἶναι be someone's pride **2 Cor 1:14**. εἰς κ. ἐμοὶ εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ as my pride (and joy) in the day of Christ **Phil 2:16**. τὸ κ. ἡμῶν what we are proud of 1 Cl 34:5. τὸ κ. ὑμῶν what you can be proud of **Phil 1:26**. οὐ καλὸν τὸ κ. ὑμῶν what you are (so) proud of **1 Cor 5:6**. τὸ κ. τῆς ἐλπίδος that for which we are proud to hope (cp. Ro 5:2) Hb 3:6.

2. expression of pride, boast, what is said in boasting ἵνα μὴ τὸ κ. ἡμῶν τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κενωθῇ so that what we say in praise of you may not prove to be empty words **2 Cor 9:3**.—In effect=boasting (cp. Pind., I. 5, 51 *καύχημα*=act. ‘boasting’) ἀφορμὴν διδόναι τινὶ *καυχήματος ὑπὲρ τινος* give someone an occasion to be proud of someone **5:12**.—PGenths, D. Begriff des *καύχημα* b. Pls: NKZ 38, 1927, 501–21.—DELG s.v. *καυχάομαι*. TW. Spicq.

καύχησις, εως, ἡ (Epicurus Fgm. 93; Philod., περὶ κακιῶν p. 27 J.; Philo, *Congr. Erud. Gr.* 107; LXX; Just., D. 141, 3). On Gr-Rom. perspectives s. *καυχάομαι* 2.

1. act of taking pride in someth., boasting (Jer 12:13) **Ro 3:27**; **2 Cor 9:4 v.l.**; **11:10, 17**; **Js 4:16**; IEph 18:1. In a list of vices Hm 8:3. στέφανος *καυχήσεως* crown of pride, i.e. to be proud of (Ezk 16:12; Pr 16:31) **1 Th 2:19**. κ. ὑπὲρ τινος *pride that one has in someone* **2 Cor 7:4**; **8:24**. ἡ *καύχησις* ἡμῶν ἢ ἐπὶ Τίτου our boasting in the presence of Titus **7:14**. ἐν κ. ἀπολέσθαι be lost because of bragging ITr 4:1. ἔχω τὴν κ. ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν I may boast in Christ of my relation to God **Ro 15:17**; νῆ τὴν ὑμετέραν κ. as surely as I may boast of you **1 Cor 15:31**.

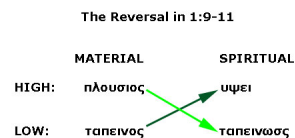
2. that which constitutes a source of pride, object of boasting, reason for boasting **2 Cor 1:12**.—RAsting, *Kauchesis*: NorTT 26, 1925, 129–203; AFridrichsen, *SymbOsl* 7, 1928, 25–29; 8, 1929, 78–82.—DELG s.v. *καυχάομαι*. TW. Spicq. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 536–37.]

us greater insight into what he believes is the appropriate position for everyone facing trials.²⁶ The verb covers both individuals in the example thus signaling equal responsibility for adopting the same stance to their individual trials.

Who is it that suffers trials as an example? James gives two examples, both taken from an economic scale as extremes on either end of the scale. One the bottom side is ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός, *the lowly brother*. And on the opposite end of the economic ladder is ὁ πλούσιος, *the rich ?*. It is the ellipsis that James uses here that has caused most of the debate surrounding this text.²⁷ Does James imply ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ πλούσιος, *the rich brother*? Or, ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ πλούσιος, *the rich man*? If the former, then both individuals reflect Christian. But if the latter, then the rich man is probably not a believer. The literary context strongly argues for the understood ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός. The rich man is also a brother in the faith. The arguments to the contrary are unconvincing and strain to make a credible point. Inside the Christian communities both in Jerusalem and in the Diaspora were individuals of wealth, although they represented a small segment of those communities. Their wealth combined with their Christian faith made them vulnerable to economic persecution from local authorities. This merely added to the risks already present in a world with much more chaos than stability.

What was their trial? For the poor Christian, it was his poverty that was his challenge. The example alludes to one living in deep poverty.²⁸ In the rural countryside and small villages poverty would have some challenges, but in urbanized Jerusalem and the large cities of the Diaspora such as Alexandria Egypt where most Diaspora Jews lived, being poor presented substantially greater challenges to survival on a day to day basis. Add to these difficulties adherence to a religious tradition that had no legal status inside the Roman empire and one was increasing those difficulties. The disapproval of Christianity from within the Jewish synagogue communities of the Diaspora could easy contribute to making life much harder for Jewish believers.



On the other hand, for the rich brother his trial, τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ, was ironic; it was both his trial and

²⁶“It is significant that he uses καυχόμεθα in Rom. 5:3 (having just used it in 5:2) parallel to James’s Πάσαν χαρὰν ἠγήσασθε and Peter’s ἀγαλλιᾶσθε (1 Pet. 1:6); a similar parallel use appears in Ps. 32[31]:11, for there it indicates an eschatological joy that transcends the present suffering, which is viewed as an indication of coming blessedness. Here in James the poor person is called upon to exult because God has chosen him for an exalted position (cf. 2:5; Mt. 5:3, 5).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 76.]

²⁷“First, who is this wealthy person? Is ὁ πλούσιος a modifier of an understood ὁ ἀδελφός in parallel with v 9, or does one encounter a poor/humble brother and a rich non-Christian? Structurally the former alternative appears most likely, for the sentence demands that καυχᾶσθω be understood as the verb of v 10. In this case the wealthy Christian is instructed to take no pride in possessions or position, but rather to think on his self-abasement in identifying with Christ (i.e. repenting) and Christ’s poor people. This is how most scholars have interpreted the phrase (e.g. Adamson, Cantinat, Mayor, Mussner, Ropes).

“On the other hand, some scholars looking at the form of James’s thought believe the passage speaks of non-Christians. In this case ὁ ταπεινός is virtually a synonym for ὁ ἀδελφός, and together these words stand in contrast to ὁ πλούσιος. Dibelius, 87, points out the similarities to Jewish thought, where the rich are often contrasted with the poor remnant of Israel. Michl, 29, reminds us that the one indisputable use of πλούσιος in James (i.e. 2:7) presents the rich as non-Christian (cf. Laws, 63–64; Windisch, 7; Spitta, 26). Perhaps, then, this may be an originally Jewish saying (similar to Sir. 10:21–11:1) which James has modified by placing it in the context of his work. In the original version both are members of the same community, but in the setting of the polemic use of πλούσιος in the epistle (cf. Introduction, 45–47) we doubt that the πλούσιος was considered by the writer truly Christian, for he is given no future hope. This rich person is called with a sharp ironic twist to understand the humiliation in which he lives, existing like the rich fool (Lk. 12:13 – 21) in luxury in this age only to discover the true system of values in the coming age, which will be unexpectedly thrust upon him. There may also be the suggestion that if the rich would really embrace humiliation (i.e. the outward situation of the followers of Jesus), he would really have something to boast about.”

[Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 76-77.]

²⁸“The term ταπεινός by itself does not necessarily mean ‘poor,’ for it usually means ‘low,’ ‘humble,’ ‘unimportant’ (in the social sense), as in 2 Cor. 7:6 and 10:1, but in this context its meaning ‘poor’ is clear, for it stands in parallel to πλούσιος. Both these meanings are well attested in the LXX; the meaning ‘low’ is found repeatedly in Leviticus 13 as well as elsewhere (e.g. Jdg. 1:15; Ezk. 17:24), but the word also translates six Hebrew terms meaning ‘poor,’ ‘crushed,’ or ‘oppressed’ (e.g. Jdg. 6:15; Pss. 10:18 [9:39]; 18:27 [17:28]; 34:18 [33:19]; 82[81]:3; Pr. 3:34; Am 8:6; Is. 11:4; 49:13). That Pr. 3:34 occurs in this list is especially significant, for James quotes this verse in 4:6, indicating that it is precisely such folk whom God receives.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 76.]

his potential blessing. What James describes here with ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ is not the precise opposite of ἐν τῷ ὑψει αὐτοῦ. ταπεινώσις is not an antonym of ὑψις, i.e., low versus high. Instead, ταπεινώσις refers to some circumstance that has severely humbled us. Here the context implies the rich man has suffered the loss of his wealth.²⁹ This could have been due to normal life circumstances such as famine etc. Or, it could imply economic persecution because of his Christian faith. Whatever the reason for the loss, the situation presents him with the opportunity to re-assess the ultimate worthlessness of material things. He has the chance to re-focus his life in this trial on the values that are eternal and can never be lost, as the lengthy causal statements in verse eleven make clear.

The opportunity from the trial of poverty for the poor Christian is the challenge to likewise refocus his values on the spiritual things that are lasting and not subject to having to have money and power in order to obtain them. James calls this ἐν τῷ ὑψει αὐτοῦ, **his high position**.³⁰ He may be helpless and highly ‘de-valued’ by the world he lives in. But spiritually he enjoys the spiritual status of being a child of God with Heaven as his permanent home.³¹ He now stands in the divine Presence of God with full acceptance and esteem from the God of this university, no matter what the world around him thinks.

The call to rejoice in the loss of one’s wealth is reinforced by the γὰρ clause in verse eleven. The shorter secondary ὅτι-clause at the end of verse ten sets up the amplification in verse eleven.

The ὅτι-clause compares either the rich man or -- more likely -- his wealth to a blade of grass: ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου παρελεύσεται, **because like the blade of grass he will pass away**.³² Upon comparing the different transla-

²⁹One of the interpretive ‘mistakes’ of many commentators is to see this suffering of loss as eschatological and connected only to end times, e.g., Peter Davids in the NIGTC. James is not so much focused on the future as he is on coping with day to day realities. These include events that bring us suffering and becomes trials to us. The verb ὑψώω can mean to exalt, but its use is mostly in the axiom “humble yourself and I will lift you up” which has the meaning of acceptance into the divine Presence both in this life and at final judgment for eternity. The only noun in the NT with the possible meaning of a reversal of status from low to high is ἀνάστασις in one of its secondary meanings off the root idea of ‘a raising up.’

³⁰Some interpreters attempt to see in τῷ ὑψει αὐτοῦ the idea of exaltation, thus suggesting an eschatological day of victory in final judgment. This view has little to commend it, and thus should be rejected as being in James’ view here.

³¹“ὑψος, οὐς, τό (Aeschyl., Hdt.+; ins, pap, LXX, pseudepigr.; Philo; Jos., C. Ap. 2, 119 ὑψ., πλάτος al.; Just., D. 39, 5; Mel., P. [edd. and mss. fluctuate in use of the pl. ὑψη or ὑψηλα]) ‘height’.

1. extent or distance upward, height

a. of dimension 1 Cl 49:4 (perh. sense b). W. other dimensions (τὸ μήκος καὶ τὸ πλάτος) Rv 21:16. (πλάτος καὶ μήκος καὶ βάθος) **Eph 3:18** (βάθος 1).—Pl. ἀναφέρεσθαι εἰς τὰ ὕψη IEph 9:1.

b. of locale height=high place (SibOr 8, 235), mostly=heaven (Ps 17:17 ἐξ ὕψους; 101:20; TestJob 15:1 τῶν ἐν ὑψει; Just., D. 39, 5; Stephan. Byz. s.v. Λαοδικεῖα: ἀφ’ ὕψους ὁ θεός) **Lk 1:78** (ἀνατολή 3); **24:49**; **Eph 4:8** (**Ps 67:19**). τὰ ὕψη τῶν οὐρανῶν 1 Cl 36:2 (Diod S 4, 7, 4 ὕψος οὐράνιον; Aesop, Fab. 397b H. τὰ οὐράνια ὕψη).—τὰ ἐν ὑψει as someth. different from τὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς Dg 7:2 (opp. τὰ ἐν βάθει).

2. a position of high status, high position (of rank Herodian 1, 13, 6; 1 Macc 1:40; 10:24.—Of degree: Pla., Ep. 7, 351e ὕψος ἀμαθίας the ‘height’ of ignorance; Ps.-Aristot., De Mundo 6; Plut., Publ. 100 [6, 5]; Jos., Ant. 8, 126 ὕψος εὐδαιμονίας) **Js 1:9** (opp. ταπεινός and ταπεινώσις as TestAbr B 7 p. 111, 21 [Stone p. 70]) τὸν ποιῶντα ταπεινοῦς εἰς ὕψος who exalts the humble (unless εἰς ὕψ. means ‘upright’, as Apollod. [II B.C.]: 244 Fgm. 107d [=107e] Jac.) 1 Cl 59:3 (Job 5:11).

3. a lofty opinion of oneself, pride, arrogance (PsSol 17:6) D 5:1. ὕψος δυνάμεως arrogance in an influential position B 20:1.—JKühn, ὕψος ‘41.—DELG s.v. ὑψη. M-M. TW. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1045.]

³²Note the translation patterns for ὅτι ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου παρελεύσεται:

English: NRSV, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field; NLT, they will fade away like a flower in the field; KJV, ASV, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away; BBE, because like the flower of the grass he will come to his end; CEB, because they will die off like wildflowers; D-R, because as the flower of the grass shall he pass away; TEV, For the rich will pass away like the flower of a wild plant; RSV, ESV, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away; ESVUK, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away; HCSB, because he will pass away like a flower of the field; LEB, because he will pass away like a flower of the grass; NASB, because like flowering grass he will pass away; NKJV, because as a flower of the field he will pass away; CEV, The rich will die like a wild flower in the grass; NIV, NIV 1984, because he will pass away like a wild flower; NIrV, That’s because he will fade away like a wild flower; TNIV, NIVUK, since they will pass away like a wild flower; Message, Prosperity is as short-lived as a wildflower, so don’t ever count on it; Wey, for like flowers among the herbage rich men will pass away; WEB, because like the flower in the grass, he will pass away; Wycliffe, for as the flower of grass he shall pass; YLT, because as a flower of grass he shall pass away; CEV, Rich people will disappear like wild flowers; Philips, For the rich man, as such, will

tions, the question arises as to exactly what the rich man is compared to by James. ἄνθος χόρτου is translated as “a flower in the field,” “the flower of the grass,” or “a wild flower.” The word ἄνθος can mean either ‘blossom,’ ‘flower,’ or the ‘fragrance of a flower.’³³ And this genitive case form χόρτου from χόρτος typically refers to either grass or hay.³⁴ Add to this the reality that James is alluding to either Isaiah 40:6-8 or Psalm 103:15-16, or both.

Isa. 40:6-8

- 6 A voice says, “Cry out!”
And I said, “What shall I cry?”
All people are grass,
their constancy is **like the flower of the field**.
7 The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
8 The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah 40:6-8 LXX

- 6 φωνὴ λέγοντος Βόησον·
καὶ εἶπα Τί βοήσω;
Πᾶσα σὰρξ χόρτος,
καὶ πᾶσα δόξα ἀνθρώπου **ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου**.
7 ἐξηράνθη ὁ χόρτος,
καὶ τὸ ἄνθος ἐξέπεσεν,
8 τὸ δὲ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

The NRSV English translation is based on the Hebrew text which differs slightly in verse seven from the Septuagintal text.

Psalm 103:15-16

- 15 As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;†
16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.†

Psalm 102:15-16 LXX

- 15 ἀνθρωπος, ὡσεὶ χόρτος αἱ ἡμέραι αὐτοῦ·
ὡσεὶ ἄνθος τοῦ ἀγροῦ, οὕτως ἐξανθήσει·†
16 ὅτι πνεῦμα διήλθεν ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ οὐχ ὑπάρξει
καὶ οὐκ ἐπιγνώσεται ἔτι τὸν τόπον αὐτοῦ.†

wither away as surely as summer flowers.

Spanish: BdA, pues él pasará como la flor de la hierba; BR-V, porque él se pasará como la flor de la hierba; CST, que él pasará como se pasa la flor de la hierba; DHH, Porque el rico es como la flor de la hierba, que no permanece; NBLH, pues él pasará como la flor de la hierba; NTV, Se marchitarán como una pequeña flor de campo; NVI, El rico pasará como la flor del campo; PDT, porque el rico desaparecerá como la flor de la hierba; BLP, pues se desvanecerá como la flor de la hierba; BLPH, pues se desvanecerá como la flor de la hierba; RVC, porque las riquezas pasan como las flores del campo; RVR1960, porque él pasará como la flor de la hierba; RVR1995, porque él pasará como la flor de la hierba; RVA, porque él se pasará como la flor de la hierba; TLA, pues las riquezas duran muy poco; son como las flores del campo.

German: Elberfelder 1905, denn wie des Grases Blume wird er vergehen; Luther 1912, denn wie eine Blume des Grases wird er vergehen; Luther 1984, denn wie eine Blume des Grases wird er vergehen; GNB, denn wie eine Blume auf der Wiese werden sie vergehen; Menge, weil er wie die Blumen des Grases vergehen wird; EÜ, denn er wird dahinschwenden wie die Blume im Gras; ZB, denn er wird vergehen wie die Blume des Feldes; NGÜ, denn er wird vergehen wie eine Blume auf dem Feld; SB, denn wie eine Blume des Grases wird er vergehen; NLB, denn auch er wird vergehen wie eine Blume auf dem Feld.

French: Segond 1910, car il passera comme la fleur de l’herbe; Ostervald, car il passera comme la fleur de l’herbe; BDS, En effet, il passera comme la fleur des champs; NEG1979, car il passera comme la fleur de l’herbe; SG21, car il disparaîtra comme la fleur de l’herbe.

Vulgate: quoniam sicut flos faeni transibit.

³³ ἄνθος, οὐς, τό (Hom.+).

1. blossom, flower specif., of a grape blossom 1 Cl 23:4. Type of that which does not last (Quint. Smyrn. 14, 207 ἀνδρῶν γὰρ γένος ἐστὶν ὁμοίον ἄνθεσι ποιήσ=like the flowers of the grass (Zohary, Plants 172f); Aristaen., Ep. 2, 1 πέπαιται τὰ ἄνθη) ἄ. χόρτου wild flower **Js 1:10**, cp. vs. **11. 1 Pt 1:24ab** (both Is 40:6f). Colorful splendor ApcPt 3:10 (descr. of κόμη as in Anacr., Fgm. 46 Diehl.2 [414 Page]). ἄ. ἀμάραντα unfading flowers 15.

2. fragrance of flowers ApcPt 5:16.—B. 527. DELG. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 80.

³⁴ χόρτος, οὐ, ὁ (Hom. et al.; in var. senses) **grass, hay** (Hes. et al.; pap, LXX; ViDa 8 [p. 78, 2 Sch.]; ApcrEzk P 1 verso 5 ἀκάνθος ἀντι χ[όρτου]; Jos., Bell. 6, 153, Ant. 20, 85; Just.), *in our lit. almost always of green grass standing in field or meadow* **Mt 14:19** (v.l. has the pl.); **J 6:10**. τὸν χόρτον τῆς γῆς **Rv 9:4**. ὁ χλωρὸς χόρτος (χλωρός 1) **Mk 6:39; Rv 8:7**. *Of wild grass in contrast to cultivated plants ὁ χόρτος τοῦ ἀγροῦ* **Mt 6:30**; cp. **Lk 12:28; Js 1:10, 11; 1 Pt 1:24abc (Is 40:6, 7.—ἄνθεα ποιήσ as early as Od. 9, 449; Zohary 172f). *Of stalks of grain in their early, grass-like stages* **Mt 13:26; Mk 4:28.—1 Cor 3:12** mentions χόρτος hay as a building material (of inferior quality, as Diod S 20, 65, 1 κάλαμος and χόρτος).—B. 519f. DELG. M-M**

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1087.]

The different in the numbering of the psalms is due to the use of a different numbering system in the LXX. In these Old Testament texts the reference is to the typical grass that grew wildly in the fields over against grass that was planted specifically for grazing by animals. Thus the most natural meaning of ἄνθος χόρτου is the blossom of a wild flower that served as grass. Even until today anemones and cyclamen carpet the hills of Galilee in the spring time, only to disappear with the scorching sun and blistering sirocco winds.



The expanded reason (v. 11) introduced by the γὰρ conjunction elaborates on the ὅτι clause (v. 10b) by way of a summarizing of Isaiah 40:6-8. Thus James utilizes an OT ‘scripture proof’ as part of his argument here:

ἀνέτειλεν ὁ ἥλιος σὺν τῷ καύσωνι ³⁵	the sun rises with its scorching heat
καὶ ἐξήρανε τὸν χόρτον	and withers the field
καὶ τὸ ἄνθος αὐτοῦ ἐξέπεσεν	its flower falls,
καὶ ἡ εὐπρέπεια τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἀπώλετο	and its beauty perishes

The four strophes of the reference utilize specialized verb tense forms designed to express timeless truth and principles.³⁶ Clearly James picks up on the widespread use of references to grass as symbols of transitoriness and lack of durability.³⁷ Such comparisons seemed a bit illogical in that world where wealth was viewed as one of the few things that could create stability and durability to life. But that world also knew that unforeseen circumstances could wipe it out completely very quickly and without warning.

In application (οὕτως καὶ, v. 11b) James returns to the rich man as the point of his comparison rather than further elaboration on the disappearing grass. His verb usage is interesting stylistically: the rich man παρελεύσεται (v. 10) and μαρανθήσεται (v. 11) in contrast to the grass whose blossom ἐξέπεσεν and ἀπώλετο (v. 11). With παρέρχομαι in v. 10, the rich man ‘passes away,’ an euphemism for dying.³⁸ That is, his life does not last any longer nor is any more certain than anyone else’s life, and it can be snuffed out suddenly and without warning. And with μαρανθήσεται from μαραίνω, the rich man will wither and die just like the plants in

³⁵“The flower is doomed because of the heat that accompanies the rising of the sun. καύσων can mean either ‘searing heat’ (so in essence KJV / AV; RSV; NEB; cf. Gen 31:40; Dan 3:67; Isa 25:6; Luke 12:55; Matt 20:12) or ‘scorching wind’ (NASB; cf. Job 27:21; Hos 13:15; Jonah 4:8; Ezek 17:10; 19:21) called the sirocco. Those who offer the former translation argue that strictly speaking the rising of the sun brings the ‘scorching heat’—not the ‘simoom’ wind—with (σὺν) it (BGD, 425; Davids, 78). However, there is no compelling reason to reject the latter translation (Schneider, TDNT 3:644), especially since James’ letter at least in its first draft was probably written against a Palestinian background.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 27.]

³⁶“The rare use of the Greek aorist here (also 1 Pet. 1:24; Matt. 13:44, 46, 48), which has been called ‘narrative’ or ‘gnomic,’ may well represent the Hebrew perfect to ‘emphasize the suddenness and completeness of the withering.’⁶⁰” [James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 63.]

³⁷“Grass and vegetation were favorite images in Jewish literature for transitoriness (Job 14:2*; Ps 37:2*; 90:5f*; 103:15*; Isa 40:6ff*; 51:12*; 2 Bar. 82.7). It is with Isa 40:6ff* that our passage has the clearest connection. Probably conscious that he is using words from the Bible, our author makes use of some expressions from the Isaiah passage (but not from 1 Petr 1:24*, where both the way in which the Isaiah passage is quoted and the point which is made with it are different) and he also follows its structure: introduction of the simile, its depiction, and the conclusion.” [Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 85-86.]

³⁸“παρέρχομαι mid. dep.; fut. παρελεύσομαι; 2 aor. παρήλθον, impv. in H. Gk. παρελθάτω **Mt 26:39** (also v.l.-ετω; B-D-F §81, 3; Mlt-H. 209); pf. παρελήλυθα (Hom.+). . .

3. to come to an end and so no longer be there, pass away, disappear (Demosth. 18, 188 κίνδυνον παρελθεῖν; Theocr. 27, 8; Ps 89:6; Wsd 2:4; 5:9; Da 7:14 Theod.; TestJob 33:4 ὁ κόσμος ὅλος παρελεύσεται) of pers. ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου παρελεύσεται **Js 1:10**. ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ **Mt 5:18a; 24:35a; Mk 13:31a; Lk 16:17; 21:33a; cp. 2 Pt 3:10; Rv 21:1** t.r. ὁ κόσμος οὗτος D 10:6 (cp. TestJob 33:4). ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη **Mt 24:34** (but s. 2); **Mk 13:30; Lk 21:32**. αἱ γενεαὶ πᾶσαι 1 Cl 50:3. ἡ ὀργή vs. 4 (Is 26:20). τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρήλθεν **2 Cor 5:17**.—Pass away in the sense lose force, become invalid (Ps 148:6; Esth 10:3b τῶν λόγων τούτων· οὐδὲ παρήλθεν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν λόγος) οἱ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρέλθωσιν (or οὐ [μὴ] παρελεύσονται) **Mt 24:35b; Mk 13:31b; Lk 21:33b**. ἰῶτα ἐν ἡ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου **Mt 5:18b**. οὐδὲν μὴ παρέλθῃ τῶν δεδογματισμένων ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ 1 Cl 27:5.”

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 776.]

the illustration.³⁹ The verbs are very close in meaning and here represent stylistic variations with the same essential point: the rich man's life does not last, his wealth doesn't gain him anything that the poor man doesn't already have also. Thus his suffering the loss of his wealth through a trial has done him a huge favor by uncovering the ultimate worthlessness of his material wealth. With it exposed to him, he can now focus on those values that will transcend this life and extend into eternity. For such an eye-opening experience he should rejoice and thank God that he now understands his life clearly.

2) God's blessing on those enduring trials, v. 12.

12 Μακάριος ἀνὴρ ὃς ὑπομένει πειρασμόν, ὅτι δοκιμος γενόμενος λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς, ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν.

12 Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Beatitudes served a variety of roles in the ancient world. For the Greeks they captured the essence of what was supposed to make life successful and happy. Perhaps their good fortune came from the gods, but not necessarily. However, for Jewish people in the first century world the blessing, μακάριος, had but one source: the God of Israel. Whether it would be realized now or in an eschatological future was not as important as the fact that God was the source of all blessing. When one spoke a blessing upon others in the name of God, he was invoking God's blessings upon the other people as God's acknowledgement of their having met His requirements of obedience.

The beatitude that James expresses in verse 12 accomplishes just such an invoking of God's blessings on those who face trials with the endurance described in vv. 2-11. Consequently this beatitude brings his discussion to a climax.⁴⁰ The elements of the beatitude consist of the blessing (Μακάριος), the requirements for the blessing (ἀνὴρ ὃς ὑπομένει πειρασμόν), and the causal definition of the contents of the blessing (ὅτι δοκιμος γενόμενος λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν).

Blessing: Μακάριος. The pattern employed by James reflects his Jewish heritage.⁴¹ It reflects an identical pattern to the beatitudes, numbers 2-7, in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5:3-10). Form critically this form was the apocalyptic Jewish beatitude, over against the Jewish wisdom beatitude.⁴² James believed the individual who successfully faced his trials as set forth in vv. 2-11 would come to realize the ultimate blessing of God in final judgment. As such this beatitude becomes a strong incentive to approach trials correctly.

Requirements: ἀνὴρ ὃς ὑπομένει πειρασμόν. The ultimate blessing of God depends on how the individual faces his trials. That means properly holding up under the weight of trials. Note here James' reaching back to vv. 2-4 where πειρασμοῖς as τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως are designed to produce endurance:

³⁹“μαραίνω aor. 3 pl. ptc. ἐμάραναν Wsd 19:21, opt. 3 sg. μαράναι Job 15:30. Pass.: 1 fut. μαρανθήσομαι; 1 aor. ἐμαράνθη; pf. ptc. μεμαραμμένοι (B-D-F §72) (Hom. et al.; ins, pap, LXX; gener. ‘quench, destroy’) in our lit. only pass. in act. sense: **to disappear gradually, die out, fade, disappear, wither** of plants (schol. on Nicander, Ther. 677; Job 15:30; Wsd 2:8) ὡς μεμαραμμένοι as if withered Hs 9, 1, 7; cp. 9, 23, 1f. Of one's spirit v 3, 11, 2 (cp. Appian, Bell. Civ. 5, 90 §379 μαραίνεσθαι of the πνεῦμα, wind=abate fully, die down; Jos., Ant. 11, 56; ApcSed 7:6 of beauty). Of Mary's name τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς οὐ μαρανθήσεται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα GJs 6:3 (codd. not Bodmer). Of pers. (Aristaen., Ep. 1, 10 μαραινόμενος τ. νοῦν), in gnomic statement: ὁ πλούσιος ἐν ταῖς πορείαις ... μαρανθήσεται *a rich person will wither away while trafficking* **Js 1:11** (s. the grave-inscription Sb 5199, 2 ἐμαράνθη; Jos., Bell. 6, 274 λιμῶ μαραινόμενοι; TestSim 3:3).—**Mt 5:13** v.l.; **Lk 14:34** v.l. (both for μωρανθῆ).—BHHW II 1144. DELG. M-M. TW. Spicq.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 616.]

⁴⁰“This verse recurs to the thought of vv. 2–4. The sub-paragraph should end after v. 12, not before it, as in WH. 's text.” [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 150.]

⁴¹“The pronouncing of blessedness on faithful Jews who walk in Yahweh's way and turn aside from evil is common in the Wisdom literature, e.g., Pss 1:1; 31[32]:1; 33:9b[34:8b]; Prov 8:32, 34; cf. Isa 56:2; Job 5:17; Sir 14:1, 20; 26:1; and Dan 12:12, which in Theodotion's rendering has the interesting reading μακάριος ὁ ὑπομένων as a close parallel with James' view of a test (see also the macarism in Herm. Vis. 2.2.7 The same encomium is carried forward from the OT into the teaching of Jesus: Matt 5:3–11 // Luke 6:20–26).” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 33.]

⁴²The difference between these two forms is signaled by the tense of the verb in the ὅτι clause. Present tense, meaning present application, reflects the wisdom beatitude, while the future tense, reflecting the apocalyptic beatitude, signals eschatological realization of the blessing. For the ‘already but not yet’ eschatology of Jesus note the eight beatitudes in Matt. 5:3-10 with numbers 1 and 8 wisdom while those between, numbers 2-7, are apocalyptic.

κατεργάζεται υπομονήν. Interestingly a few manuscripts substitute ἄνθρωπος for ἀνήρ in order to affirm the more inclusive term that could include everyone, male and female, rather than the more male oriented ἀνήρ.⁴³ But the absence of the article ὁ before ἀνήρ accomplishes the same point.⁴⁴

Basis: ὅτι δοκίμος γενόμενος λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν. In the standard pattern the ὅτι clause as the basis for the beatitude has the effect of specifying the content of the blessing. The core expression is λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον, **he will receive the crown**. The future tense signals eschatological realization at final judgment.

Note that this requirement, ὃς ὑπομένει πειρασμόν, does not imply earning the blessing. The trial is a testing of one's faith, τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως, and so no issue of earning God's blessing comes into the picture. Instead, the trial is the opportunity to demonstrate the genuineness (δοκίμιον) of one's faith commitment. Endurance (ὑπομένει) confirms that one's faith is genuine, as δοκίμος γενόμενος, asserts the individual himself to be an authentically committed believer.

The crown, τὸν στέφανον,⁴⁵ symbolizes eternal life, τῆς ζωῆς,⁴⁶ promised by God, ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο. This life was indeed something to be prized above everything else. The certainty of receiving this life comes from it being promised by God Himself. This follows the theme of Jesus in Mk. 9:43, John 3:15, 10:10, and Paul in Rom. 2:7. Loving God, τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν, means possessing a genuine faith commitment to God through Christ, τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως (v. 3). Faith for James is active, not passive, and is expressed through loving devotion to God, as chapter two will elaborate in great detail.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

In vv. 2-12 James calls upon every believer to approach life's hardships with Christian joy born of realizing that in every trial God is seeking to grow us up into spiritual maturity. He motivates us this direction with the promise of God's insight into trials available to us through sincere prayer. No believer is exempt from facing such hardships as his two examples from opposite ends of the economic scale affirm. The ultimate promise from our God is that demonstrating a genuine faith through enduring trials will bring God's blessing of eternal life in final judgment. We don't earn such a blessing, but our Heavenly Father promises to bestow it upon every believer who is authentic in his / her commitment to God through Christ. Now if that isn't incentive

⁴³“ἀνήρ] AΨ minn read ἄνθρωπος, probably an emendation in order not to exclude women.” [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 150.]

⁴⁴“This form of praising a virtue is very common in the O. T., especially in Psalms and Ecclesiasticus, for Hebrew שִׁבְחָה אִישׁ אִישׁ is naturally preferred to ἄνθρωπος in most cases. The article is omitted by LXX in most of the instances, probably because the statement is thought of as of general application (“blessed is any man who,” etc.). Cf. Ps. 1:1, 84:5, Prov. 8:32, Ecclus. 14:1, 20, 26:1, Is. 56:2, Job 5:17 μακάριος δὲ ἄνθρωπος ὃν ἠλεγξεν ὁ κύριος, 4 Macc. 7:22 διὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν πάντα πόνον ὑπομένειν μακάριόν ἐστιν, etc., Dan. 12:12 (Theod.) μακάριος ὁ ὑπομένων.” [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 150.]

⁴⁵“τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς. A crown (ἡτῆρα) was worn for ornament by the Jews, as by other peoples of antiquity, being sometimes a wreath of leaves or flowers (e. g. Judith 15:13, cf. Wisd. 2:3, etc.) worn at feasts (Cant. 3:11, Is. 28:1, 3, Ecclus. 32:2, etc.), weddings, and occasions of joy, sometimes a crown of gold (e. g. Ezek. 16:12, 23:42, Esther 8:15, Ep. Jer. 9, 1 Macc. 10:20, 13:37, 2 Macc. 14:4; cf. 2 Sam. 12:30 = 1 Chron. 20:2, where the crown of gold was probably on the head of an idol, see H. P. Smith on 2 Sam. 12:30). At least in the case of golden crowns it served as a badge of dignity and rank (cf. Philo, De somn. ii, 9), and could be used as a gift of honour (just as with the Greeks, cf. Epist. Arist. 320).

“Such a crown (usually of gold) is sometimes spoken of as worn by a king (Ps. 21:3, Sir. 40:4, Zech. 6:11, 14, Jer. 13:18, Ezek. 21:26 (31)), but others also could wear it, and it was not intended as a symbol of dominion. Many gold chaplets in the form of leaves have been found in ancient graves and are to be seen in museums. The ordinary badge of royalty (βασιλείας γνωρίσματα, Lucian, Pisc. 35; insigne regium, Tac. Ann. xv, 29) was not a crown (στέφανος) but a fillet (διάδημα, Hebrew רִתּוֹן), Esther 1:11, 1 Esd. 4:30, Wisd. 5:16, Ecclus. 11:5, 47:6, Is. 62:3, 1 Macc. 1:9, etc.). Not until the time of the later Roman emperors did the obliteration of the actual distinction between crown and diadem take place which has determined the meaning of the words in modern usage.

“From the Greeks the Jews became familiar with the custom of giving a wreath as a prize to victors in games. This was an important, but incidental, result of the general employment of chaplets (στέφανοι) as ornaments and badges of honour.”

[James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 150-51.]

⁴⁶“τῆς ζωῆς, exegetical genitive, as 1 Pet. 5:4, Ep. Arist. 280. The blessed life of eternity constitutes the crown. Cf. Rev. 2:10.” [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 152.]

enough for facing trials with rejoicing, I don't know what would motivate us.

Although very general in nature and thus applicable across the board to all believers, James' words had special tones to his initial Jewish Christian leaders. He drew wisdom out of a common Jewish heritage already familiar to them. This background made it easier for them to grasp, and gave it a tone of authority for them. Their special circumstance, especially for his readers in Diaspora Judaism, gave these words even stronger tones of encouragement and incentive. The rather dismal lifestyle of most Gentiles around them could be depressing and discouraging. But James built a fire under them to come at life with a joyous stance that was very different from that of their Gentile neighbors. Now, he had a realistic understanding that life could be and often was very harsh and demanding. And that reality wasn't ignored. But out of his religious experience as a believer in Christ he had come to realize that life didn't have to be approached negatively. In God's grace and provision a profound joy and contentment was possible even in the midst of severe trials.

That's James' enduring message to us today as well!

1. What kinds of trials do you experience? What is their basis? Economic? Racial? Religious? Educational?
2. How do you approach life? Is it stable? Chaotic? Lasting? Unpredictable?
3. Do you look to wealth to give you stability and predictability in life?
4. Are you trying to earn God's eternal crown? Or, is your faith commitment authentic?