



The Letter of James  
**Bible Study Session 3**  
James 1:5-8  
“Gaining Wisdom”

Study By  
*Lorin L Cranford*

---

**Greek NT**

5 Εἰ δὲ τις ὑμῶν  
λείπεται σοφίας, αἰτείτω  
παρὰ τοῦ διδόντος  
θεοῦ πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς  
καὶ μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος,  
καὶ δοθήσεται αὐτῷ·  
6 αἰτείτω δὲ ἐν πίστει,  
μηδὲν διακρινόμενος,  
ὁ γὰρ διακρινόμενος  
ἕοικεν κλύδωνι  
θαλάσσης ἀνεμιζομένῳ  
καὶ ῥιπιζομένῳ· 7 μὴ  
γὰρ οἰέσθω ὁ ἄνθρωπος  
ἐκεῖνος ὅτι λήμψεται τι  
παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου 8 ἄνθρωπος  
δίψυχος, ἀκατάστατος ἐν  
πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ.

**Gute Nachricht Bibel**

5 Wenn es aber un-  
ter euch welche gibt, die  
nicht wissen, was sie in  
einem bestimmten Fall  
tun müssen, sollen sie  
Gott um Weisheit bitten,  
und Gott wird sie ihnen  
geben. Denn er gibt sie  
allen gerne, ohne ihnen  
Vorwürfe zu machen.

6 Sie müssen Gott  
aber in festem Vertrauen  
bitten und dürfen nicht  
zweifeln. Wer zweifelt,  
gleichet den Meereswo-  
gen, die vom Wind ge-  
peitscht und hin und her  
getrieben werden.

7 Solche Menschen  
können nicht erwarten,  
dass sie vom Herrn et-  
was empfangen; 8 denn  
sie sind in sich gespalten  
und unbeständig in allem,  
was sie unternehmen.

**NRSV**

5 If any of you is lack-  
ing in wisdom, ask God,  
who gives to all gener-  
ously and ungrudgingly,  
and it will be given you.  
6 But ask in faith, never  
doubting, for the one who  
doubts is like a wave  
of the sea, driven and  
tossed by the wind; 7,  
8 for the doubter, being  
double-minded and un-  
stable in every way, must  
not expect to receive  
anything from the Lord.

**NLT**

5 If you need wisdom  
-- if you want to know  
what God wants you to  
do -- ask him, and he will  
gladly tell you. He will not  
resent your asking. 6 But  
when you ask him, be  
sure that you really ex-  
pect him to answer, for a  
doubtful mind is as unset-  
tled as a wave of the sea  
that is driven and tossed  
by the wind. 7 People like  
that should not expect to  
receive anything from the  
Lord. 8 They can't make  
up their minds. They wa-  
ver back and forth in ev-  
erything they do.

---

**The Study of the Text:<sup>1</sup>**

In today's world most people want to know how smart you are? Seldom is the question framed, How wise are you? In the high tech world of today intellectual smartness is valued much more than wisdom about life. One clear indicator of this is the dramatic decrease in liberal arts education in western society. In the first century Jewish world, that did have religious sensitivities, wisdom was prized much more than intellect. The development of the intellect was very Greco-Roman. Among the Jewish people of the ancient world a very strong tradition had emerged toward the end of the Old Testament era called the Jewish wisdom tradition. It is strongly reflected in several books of the Old Testament. Most of the psalms come out of that side of ancient Israel. Closely connected to the psalms is the dominant wisdom heritage reflected in the book of Proverbs. But Ecclesiastes and the book of Job reflect other facets of this multi-dimensional heritage of wisdom. One of the central themes of this heritage in all of its diverse expressions was the possessing of wisdom and the using of it in daily living. This side of ancient Israelite life stood in contrast to the liturgical side that is reflected in the Torah out of the books of Moses. This tradition was centered on institutional worship of God first in the tabernacle and later in the temple, and had the sacrificial system with all of its elaborate rituals as its heart. From the time of Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea in the eighth century BCE onward the prophetic alternative in Israelite religious life stressed justice and righteousness as its central focus.

---

<sup>1</sup>With 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.

During the four hundred years after the end of the Old Testament era and prior to the beginning of the Christian era, two of these traditions flourished greatly.

The third, the sacrificial system of temple worship, struggled simply because the rebuilt temple by Ezra and Nehemiah after the Babylonian exile beginning about 500 BCE was such a scaled down pale copy of Solomon's temple destroyed in 586 BCE that it did not attract high level attention from most Jews. Not until the Hasmonean dynasty following the Maccabean wars in the 160s BCE did temple worship become popular again among the Jews. With the coming to power of Herod the Great just before the beginning of the Christian era, one of his first projects was the rebuilding and dramatic expansion of the temple in Jerusalem. Herod's temple as it is called by the beginning of the Christian era was several times larger than Solomon's temple had been and enormously more elaborate and ornate in design. This popularized temple worship substantially among the Jews by the beginning of the Christian era.

The other two sides of the Israelite religious heritage continued to flourish and evolve during the inter-testamental period. Israelite wisdom tradition in the OT era did not stress obeying the Torah greatly; rather it was concerned with coping with issues of daily living with insight from God and obeying the Laws of God stood in the background of emphasis. But with the flourishing of the wisdom tradition during this in-between period the emphasis shifted to obeying the Torah as a major part of Jewish wisdom. It especially tended to center attention on the so-called Holiness Code found mostly in Leviticus with its shifting toward a legalistic approach to religious life. The Jewish prophetic tradition underwent greater changes during these four hundred years. It evolved into the Jewish apocalyptic tradition with central attention on either a coming Messiah, or in some instances on a messianic age without a Messiah, or with multiple Messiahs. Its main concern was political liberation of the Promised Land from foreign invaders and the rise to world wide dominating power by the Jews over other nations.

From the book of James, it becomes clear that James had especially found the Jewish wisdom tradition appealing and packed full of spiritual insights worth while for Christians to adopt with appropriate modification. Thus in this short document the theme of wisdom, σοφία, will come to the surface in 1:5-8 and 3:13-18 explicitly and indirectly in several other places as well. For his preaching audience in Jerusalem the popularity of the wisdom teachings among Jews of that day was very high. How to cope with life, especially that controlled largely by the Romans as conquering troops who held absolute power, was no small issue. To live wisely as Jewish Christians, however, meant different contours to being wise. For Jewish Christians in the Diaspora, the Jewish wisdom tradition was appealing especially against the backdrop of the Greco-Roman wisdom orientation that saw coping with daily life very differently from the ways Jews did. But both these wisdom traditions stressed human accomplishment in coping either for gaining God's approval or for achieving personal virtue. Out of his Christian heritage, and especially through the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount etc., James had come to understand true wisdom very differently. In 3:13-18, he will pit Christian wisdom against Greek wisdom by claiming the Greek stuff is phoney while Christian wisdom anchored in the OT expression is true wisdom. This was a vitally important message for Jewish Christians in the Diaspora.

We need to regain appreciation for wisdom in our world. But it needs to be grounded in the understanding of wisdom set forth by James as the only true wisdom that comes from God. Learning how to make wise decisions rather than smart decisions would go a long way toward cleaning up the moral filth of modern society.

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

The first century world at its mid point was a turbulent place to live. The decade of the 50s saw Roman expansionism in the western empire with efforts to consolidate and extend control in the British Isles and in western Europe. Emperor Nero who came to power in 54 but by the late-50s was sinking into paranoiac chaos after some efforts to assassinate him failed. In Palestine the Jewish unrest over the presence and control of Rome was beginning to boil and would spill over into armed revolt in the mid 60s. The political football of the high priesthood over the temple in Jerusalem was being tossed around from local control to Herod Agrippa II, a grandson of Herod the Great, who controlled Chalcis and Syria from 48 AD to 53. But emperor Claudius removed these from his control and instead gave him Philip and Lysanias to rule. And then also emperor Nero added parts of Galilee, including the cities of Tiberias, Taricheae, and Julias from 55 AD. During much of that time he also had the right to appoint the high priest in Jerusalem. Never mind that he lived a

horribly immoral life, and much of it incestuously with his sister Bernice. He was so despised by the Jewish people that when the Jewish revolt momentarily freed Jerusalem from Roman control in 66 AD, Agrippa and Bernice were banished from Jewish territory.

Living as a Jewish Christian in Jerusalem during these days was challenging to say the least. Unrest and growing tensions evaporated any semblance of peace and tranquillity. The rapidly increasing influx of non-circumcised Gentiles into the Christian religion, although not in Jerusalem but in the Diaspora, was putting Jewish Christians especially at Jerusalem in a no-man's land between the Romans and the hard line Jewish traditionalists. The beginnings of the Jewish peasant Zealot movement, mainly in Galilee but present in Jerusalem, would produce the radical Sicarii who considered every Jew who cooperated with non-Jews as a candidate for assassination. But Jewish Christians in the Diaspora were not immune from the fall out of the turbulence erupting in Judea and Jerusalem. Support of the homeland against the Romans was marketed heavily in the synagogues of the Diaspora, adding difficulty to Jewish Christians who were both a part of the synagogue community and members of the Christian congregations heavily loaded with non-circumcised Gentiles. Wisdom in knowing how to cope with and to face the trials arising out of their world was needed very keenly.

### **Historical Setting.**

**External History.** In the centuries of copying this passage in Greek, no variations of wording surfaced that the editors of the United Bible Societies *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) considered important enough to impact the translation of this passage from Greek into other languages.



On the other hand, the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev ed) lists one place of variance in each of the four verses that are present in a comparison of the existing manuscripts containing this text.<sup>2</sup> Careful examination of these variations clearly reveal that the changes took place either for stylistic purposes or through accidental miss copying of the text.



The result of this is that we can confidently interpret the adopted printed text of the Greek as the original wording of this part of the document.

**Internal History.** Few direct markers of time or place are present in this text. But indirectly the focus on σοφία and how to acquire it becomes a highly important background concern. In the Introduction to this study some broad contours of James' Jewish heritage in the wisdom literary tradition were sketched out. But greater detail on the idea of wisdom in the ancient world is needed if we are to clearly understand James' point both here and in 3:13-18.

Knowing things and people is expressed in ancient Greek by a wide variety of terms. In English we learn things, know things, and understand things. Learning stresses acquiring knowledge; knowing stresses possessing knowledge; understanding stresses grasping knowledge. Knowledge can be γνῶσις, ἐπιγνώσις, ἀγνωσία (ignorance), οἶδα, σύνοιδα.<sup>3</sup> Even though Greek



#### <sup>2</sup>**Jakobus 1,5**

\* οὐκ K 049. 69 pm (these manuscripts use the negative οὐκ, rather than μή which is grammatically correct)  
| txt x A B C L P Ψ 33. 81. 323. 614. 630. 945. 1241. 1505. 1739 pm

#### **Jakobus 1,6**

\* ἀπιστων διακρ. pc (Before διακρινόμενος is added ἀπίστων, as unbelievers)  
| ἀπιστων (διακρ. 522 pc) οτι λημψεται 429. 522. 630 pc (some mss skip from ἀπίστων to οτι λημψεται leaving out a portion of the text.)

#### **Jakobus 1,7**

\* x C\*vid K 522. 1241 pc vg<sup>ms</sup> (these mss. omit τι, something)

#### **Jakobus 1,8**

\* γαρ 326. 621. 630 pc sy<sup>h\*\*</sup> (these mss. add the causal conjunction γάρ after ἀνήρ to make explicit the statement)  
[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 588.]

<sup>3</sup>“In the NT ‘know’ is usually either οἶδα or γινώσκω, together with some use of ἐπιγινώσκω, which can mean to know with clarity or completeness, but also can have the force of ‘recognize.’ The corresponding nouns are γνῶσις and ἐπιγνῶσις. Still another

terms are used for knowledge, one needs to have a clear distinction between the Greek idea of knowledge and the ancient Hebrew idea. Essentially knowledge to Greeks was static and theoretical, while to the Hebrews it was functional and dynamic.<sup>4</sup> Out of its Jewish roots, the New Testament adopts the Hebrew understanding of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> This is a profound difference of view point. For the Greek ultimate knowledge, or truth, was static and passive and was found in that dimension of the invisible that was eternal and perfect in character. On the contrary, to the Jew knowledge had its source solely in God and was knowable only to the extent that God made it known to humans through divine revelation. With it originating from the living God, knowledge was therefore dynamic and functional. Knowledge impacted individuals when acquired; it possessed power and influence. Central to all knowledge was the religious core that contained God's will for His creation. Everything else flowed out from this core.

Wisdom became σοφία in Greek,<sup>6</sup> which in the LXX could translate almost a dozen different Hebrew term, *epístamai*, occurs several times (e.g., Acts 10:28), usually having the force of 'understand.'

"It is tempting to conclude that *oída* and *ginōskō* ought to be distinguished from one another in their force, especially when both occur in the same context, appearing to express a distinction, but this is difficult to demonstrate (cf. Jn. 21:17; 1 Jn. 5:20). A limited distinction may be noted, in that *ginōskō* is sometimes used in the sense of 'learn' (Mt. 9:30; Lk. 19:15), whereas *oída* denotes settled knowledge, whether derived from revelation or instruction (Jn. 8:55). In contrast to 'opinion' (*dóxa*), *ginōskō* embraces reality as it truly is, whether truth (*alētheia*) or being (*ón*)."

[Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002), 48.]

Additionally Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene Albert Nida in the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.) list sixteen different categories of knowing: 28.1 - 28.16. These include some forty plus separate words with differing nuances of knowing in ancient Greek as reflected just in the New Testament, which in reality is but a small portion of the vocabulary on knowing in ancient secular Greek.

<sup>4</sup>"The Gk. ideal of knowledge was a contemplation of reality in its static and abiding being; the Heb. was primarily concerned with life in its dynamic process, and therefore conceived knowledge as an entry into relationship with the experienced world which makes demands not only on man's understanding but also on man's will." [D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 657.]

<sup>5</sup>"To speak of knowledge in these ways is natural in addressing a people who all formally believe that God exists but fail to acknowledge his claims. In Hellenistic Judaism and in the NT use of *ginōskein*, *eidenai*, and their derivatives we find Heb. thought modified by the fact that the Gentiles were ignorant even of God's existence (IGNORANCE). In general, however, the Heb. conception is retained. All men ought to respond to the revelation in Christ which has made possible a full knowledge of God, no more intellectual apprehension but an obedience to his revealed purpose, an acceptance of his revealed love, and a fellowship with himself (cf. Jn. 17:3; Acts 2:36; 1 Cor. 2:8; Phil. 3:10). This knowledge of God is possible only because God in his love has called men to it (Gal. 4:9; 1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Tim. 2:19). The whole process of enlightenment and acceptance may be called coming to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Tit. 1:1; cf. Jn. 8:32).

"Both Paul and John write at times in conscious contrast with and opposition to the systems of alleged esoteric knowledge purveyed by the mystery cults and syncretistic 'philosophy' of their day (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20; Col. 2:8). To these knowledge was the result of an initiation or illumination which put the initiate in possession of spiritual discernment beyond mere reason or faith. Against them Paul (particularly in 1 Cor. and Col.) and all the Johannine writings stress that knowledge of God springs from committal to the historic Christ; it is not opposed to faith but forms its completion. We need no revelation other than that in Christ. (\*GNOSTICISM.)"

[D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 658.]

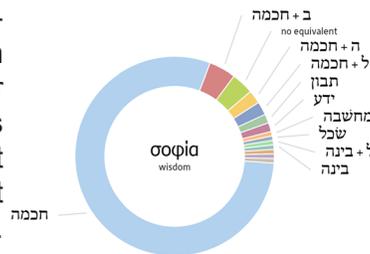
<sup>6</sup>This includes σοφία (noun), σοφός (adjective), σοφίζω (verb). Note Louw-Nida, who list this group of words here under knowledge reflecting the ancient Greek philosophical sense of these terms:

**28.8 σοφία, ας f:** knowledge which makes possible skillful activity or performance—'specialized knowledge, skill.' ἀπέστειλén με Χριστός ... εὐαγγελίξομαι, οὐκ ἐν σοφία λόγου 'Christ sent me ... to preach the good news not with skillful speech' 1 Cor 1:17. It is also possible to interpret σοφία in 1 Cor 1:17 as wisdom which makes possible correct understanding (see 32.32).

**28.9 σοφός, ή, όν:** pertaining to specialized knowledge resulting in the skill for accomplishing some purpose—'skillful, expert.' ὡς σοφός ἀρχιτέκτων θεμέλιον ἔθηκα 'I did the work like an expert builder and laid the foundation' 1 Cor 3:10. In some languages one may render the phrase 'expert builder' as 'one who knew just how to build best.'

**28.10 σοφίζομαι:** (derivative of σοφία<sup>c</sup> 'specialized knowledge, skill,' 28.8) to have specialized knowledge involving the capacity to produce what is cleverly or skillfully made—'to know how to create skillfully, to know how to contrive cleverly.' οὐ γάρ σεσοφισμένοις μύθοις ἐξακολουθήσαντες ἐγνωρίσαμεν ὑμῖν 'it was not any cleverly contrived myth that we were repeating when we brought you knowledge' 2 Pe 1:16.

words. Wisdom in the Hebrew sense is closer to understanding than to knowledge in meaning.<sup>7</sup> The emphasis is upon grasping knowledge rather than on possessing it. This idea is extended in σοφία to application to life and living. For the Jew it meant the ability to correctly apply the will of God to daily living. Thus in Jas. 3:13-18 the proof of wisdom is found in one's actions and decisions, not in the volume of knowledge that one possesses. James pits this σοφία against the standard Greek view with disruption and social chaos as the consequence. Similarly, Paul pits the two views of wisdom against one another in First Corinthians 1:20-25.<sup>8</sup> The Jewish wisdom he labels ἡ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ (*the wisdom of God*), and the Greek version,



[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), 334-35.] However, four distinct meanings are understood for σοφία alone by Louw-Nida: a) wisdom, 32:32; b) insight, 32:37; c) specialized knowledge, 28:8; d) Wisdom (title of a book), 32:41.

<sup>7</sup>Interestingly Louw - Nida list 61 separate categories of different meanings for ‘understanding’: topics 32.1 - 68. This much greater range mirrors the Hebrew influence on the thinking expressed inside the New Testament. The word group σοφία, σοφός, σοφίζω is listed under D. Capacity for Understanding (topics 32:24-41):

**32.32 σοφία<sup>a</sup>, ας f:** the capacity to understand and, as a result, to act wisely—‘to be prudent, wisdom.’ ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω ‘act with wisdom toward those who are not believers’ Col 4:5.

**32.33 σοφός<sup>b</sup>, ἡ, ὄν:** pertaining to understanding resulting in wisdom—‘prudent, wise, understanding.’ περιπατεῖτε, μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι ἀλλ’ ὡς σοφοί ‘don’t live like ignorant people, but like people who are wise’ Eph 5:15.

**32.35 σοφός, οὐ m:** a person of professional or semi-professional status who is regarded as particularly capable in understanding the philosophical aspects of knowledge and experience—‘one who is wise, wise man.’ ποῦ σοφός; ποῦ γραμματεὺς; ‘where is the man who is wise? where is the scholar?’ 1 Cor 1:20.<sup>9</sup>...

**32.36 σοφίζω:** to cause a person to have wisdom and understanding—‘to cause to understand, to cause to be wise, to make wise.’ τὰ δυνάμενά σε σοφίσαι εἰς σωτηρίαν ‘which is able to make you wise unto salvation,’ that is, ‘... cause you to have the wisdom that leads to salvation’ 2 Tm 3:15.

**32.37 σοφία<sup>b</sup>, ας f:** the content of what is known by those regarded as wise—‘wisdom, insight, understanding.’ ἐπαίδεύθη Μωϋσῆς ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ Αἰγυπτίων ‘Moses learned all the wisdom of the Egyptians’ Ac 7:22; σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις ‘yet, we have wisdom to tell those who are spiritually mature’ 1 Cor 2:6.

**32.38 φιλοσοφία, ας f:** human understanding or wisdom and, by implication, in contrast with divinely revealed knowledge—‘human understanding, human wisdom, philosophy.’ μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης ‘lest anyone make you captive by means of human understanding and worthless deceit’ or ‘... by means of the worthless deceit of human wisdom’ Col 2:8. In Col 2:8 φιλοσοφία may be rendered in some languages as ‘the way in which people are wise’ or ‘the way in which people understand things’ or ‘the manner in which people reason.’

**32.39 φιλόσοφος, ου m:** a person of professional or semi-professional status regarded as having particular capacity or competence in understanding the meaning or significance of human experience—‘philosopher, scholar.’ τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στωϊκῶν φιλοσόφων συνέβαλλον αὐτῷ ‘certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him’ Ac 17:18. In some instances φιλόσοφος in Ac 17:18 may be translated simply as ‘teacher,’ since such a word would normally designate a professional or semi-professional person involved in scholarly activities....

**32.41 σοφία<sup>d</sup>, ας f:** a document or book containing wise sayings (as in the phrase ἡ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ ‘the Wisdom of God,’ Lk 11:49, a possible reference to the OT or to apocryphal wisdom literature, possibly even a book which has been lost)—‘Wisdom.’ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ εἶπεν ‘for this reason the Wisdom of God said’ Lk 11:49. If one understands ἡ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ as being a reference to a book, one could translate the statement in Lk 11:49 as ‘for this reason, the book entitled The Wisdom of God has the words: ...’ On the other hand, the phrase ἡ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ in Lk 11:49 may mean merely ‘God’s wisdom’ (32.32), and therefore this expression in Lk 11:49 could be rendered as ‘God in his wisdom said’ or ‘God, who is wise, said.’

[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), 383-84.]

<sup>8</sup>**First Cor. 1:20-25.** 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

20 ποῦ σοφός; ποῦ γραμματεὺς; ποῦ συζητητῆς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; οὐχὶ ἐμώρηνεν ὁ θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου; 21 ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν, εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος

ἡ σοφία τοῦ κόσμου (*the wisdom of the world*). Several distinguishing traits between these two understandings of σοφία are important to understand. For the Greeks, possessing σοφία meant one had penetrated into the invisible world and had grasped a significant portion of the eternal οἶδα. He then had developed the skills to apply that to the visible, material world around him successfully. Thus at the heart of the Greek view is that a wise person, σοφός, was cleaver, skilled, smart above the average person. Thus, in contrast to Jas. 3:13-18, self-centeredness, ἐριθεία, and arrogance, ἀλαζονεία (cf. 4:16), become virtues rather than vices. This because possessing σοφία makes the individual superior to and better than others.

The orientation of Jewish σοφία meant that one had come to possess the ‘mind of God’ in greater proportion and thus was able to see reality and life not just from one’s limited human vantage point but also from God’s perspective. This meant the ability to understand the divine dynamic at work in the events of life which were hidden from the natural man. Or, as I have called it over the years, ‘spiritual horse sense.’

In Jerusalem with the more limited influence of Hellenism on Jewish life, the Jewish Christians would have been less tempted to being influenced by the Greek error. But with the calls for aggressive resistance against the Romans growing in the city during the 50s of the first century, the appeal for Greek σοφία that could outsmart the Romans and figure out ways of getting rid of them successfully would have been tempting to most residents of the city. For Jewish believers suffering hardships in the city, the idea that possessing Greek σοφία would enable me to cleverly avoid many of these hardships would have been tempting as well. Then for the Jewish Christians in the Diaspora, where the Greek influence was substantially greater and with less restraints on it, the temptation to define σοφία more from the Greek view than from the Hebrew view would have been substantially greater.

James needed to clarify true wisdom and to affirm to his listeners and readers that possessing it was very possible. Their God greatly desired to share His wisdom with them if they would ask Him properly. Acquiring it was not through tapping into the mysterious other world of eternity through the disciplined training of human effort, as the Greeks taught. Instead, the key to acquiring true wisdom was prayer flowing out of sincere commitment to God.

### **Literary:**

**Genre:** Clearly this passage is a continuation of the *paraenesis*, moral admonition, that began in 1:2-4. It has substantial affinities with Jewish wisdom heritage of the Old Testament and intertestamental Judaism. This set of admonitions addresses a gap in coping skills with the facing of hardships. At this point the wisdom heritage of James comes shining through at its brightest point. In language and conceptualization, James mirrors that heritage strongly, and yet with a distinctly Christian perspective.<sup>9</sup> Encouragement to ask for this wisdom grows mainly out of the character of God who is the source of the wisdom. Additionally, the

σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας. 22 ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖα αἰτοῦσιν καὶ Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν· 23 ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίους μὲν σκάνδαλον ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρίαν, 24 αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν, Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ σοφίαν. 25 ὅτι τὸ μωρὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σοφώτερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν, καὶ τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ θεοῦ ἰσχυρότερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

<sup>9</sup>“To a certain extent this idea [of wisdom as a gift from God] is found in such passages as Sir. 4:17 and Wis. 7:15; 8:21; and 9:4, 6, but Dibelius is correct in not finding these parallels fully satisfactory. Rather, one discovers that in line with the eschatological ring of 1:2–4 such parallels as 2 Bar. 44:14; 59:7; 2 Esd. 8:52; Eth. Enoch 5:8; 98:1–9; and 100:6 (which probably in turn depend upon the *masikilim* in Daniel 11–12) are more pertinent. Here there is a tension between wisdom as the gift of the age to come and wisdom as the present possession of the righteous remnant, as that which enables them to resist and endure the tests of this age. These same ideas appear in the DSS in 1QS 11; CD 2 and 6:3; 1QH 12:11–13 and 14:25; and 11QPSa154 (Syriac Psalm 2). Thus someone with a Jewish background would have every reason to pray for wisdom in the testing situation. Wisdom would make or keep him perfect or enable him to stand. Similarly, in the NT wisdom is closely associated with understanding the divine plan and responding to it. In 1 Corinthians, for instance, Christ is the manifestation of wisdom, especially in his sufferings (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:24). There is also a contrast between human wisdom (κατὰ σάρκα) and the divine perspective (κατὰ πνεῦματα). The Corinthians are the ‘perfect’ because they recognized the divine wisdom in Paul’s preaching (1 Cor. 2:4–6). Wisdom, then, is the possession of the believer given by the Spirit that enables him to see history from the divine perspective. One notices that James never mentions the Spirit, but frequently mentions wisdom, which such passages as Proverbs 8, Wisdom, Eth. Enoch, and CD 2 show can be a fluid equivalent for the Spirit as his gift. This relationship to the Spirit illuminates the significance of wisdom for James, who believes that failure in the test may be related to a need for this gift of eschatological power, the lack of which can keep one from being perfect (cf. Introduction, 51–56; Kirk).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 71-72.]

request must meet strict divinely imposed guidelines. God doesn't give out 'blank checks!'

**Context:** The literary setting of this pericope is important. Correct understanding here helps prevent false interpretation of its meaning and its central thrust. To be sure, the understanding of context is debated vigorously among modern scholars.<sup>10</sup> But the understanding below has more going for it than the alternative views.

#### STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT

Of James<sup>11</sup>

PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
BODY	1-194	1.2-5.20
<b>Facing Trials</b>	<b>1-15</b>	<b>1.2-12</b>
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
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

Through repetition of 'catch words,' basic themes etc., it becomes clear that verses 2-12 belong together as a basic pericope with the general theme of facing trials. Inside these verses, however, four distinct segments surface: vv. 2-4, 5-8, 9-11, and 12. That they should be considered together as a single unit becomes clear from a number of factors. First, the repetition of πειρασμός in verses two (πειρασμοῖς) and twelve (πειρασμόν) clearly establish the outer boundaries of the pericope. Second, the similarity in meaning of Πᾶσαν χαρὰν, *pure joy*, in verse two to Καυχάσθω, *take pride in*, in verse nine further links the segments as admonition and examples. The clear catch-word pattern of Jewish writing with λειπόμεινοι / λείπεται links vv. 2-4 to vv. 5-8.<sup>12</sup> James moves inside this pericope from encouraging joy in facing trials (vv. 2-4) to asking

<sup>10</sup>For example Peter Davids mistakenly limits the pericope to vv. 2-11, thus mistakenly eliminating the climatic reassurance of the beatitude as an encouragement to stand firmly in the experience of trials. [Davids, Peter H. *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 65ff.] Ralph Martin is worse than Davids in an artificial division of the passage into vv. 2-8, 9-11, 12-19a. [Martin, Ralph P. Vol. 48, *James*. Word Biblical Commentary. (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 12ff.] James Adamson follows the frequent pattern used by Davids in linking vv. 2-11 as a single pericope with the subdivisions of vv. 2-4, 5-8, and 9-11. [Adamson, James B. *The Epistle of James*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 52ff.]

<sup>11</sup>Taken 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.

<sup>12</sup>Thirdly, the presence of these link-terms to form a concatenation is a noteworthy literary feature of the hortatory style. We may point to vv 1-2 where χαίρειν-χαρὰν are clearly part of the author's reminiscence and the wordplay (Mussner, 62). The repetition of ὑπομονή in vv 3-4 (with the theme further developed in v 6), and of the root αἰτ- ('ask') in vv 5-6 with the recurrence of τέλειον-τέλειοι in v 4 as of διακρινόμενος (twice in v 6) are further evidence of an artistically crafted piece, in which the author's

God for wisdom to do this (vv. 5-8) to giving two encouraging examples on the opposite ends of the economic scale (vv. 9-11), to concluding with evoking a divine blessing on the individual who faces trials this way in the beatitude of verse 12.

Additionally, as the above outline suggests, the pericope of vv. 2-12 is closely linked to vv. 13-18 with the second section narrowing the scope of facing trials generally to the more specific seeing of those trials as a temptation to sin rather than as an opportunity to see God at work for good in the trials. The narrowing is signaled simply by shifting from the noun πειρασμόν to the verbal πειραζόμενος (vv. 12-13). This link accounts in part for the emphasis on God as a Giver of only good gifts in vv. 13-18. When our trials prompt us to rebel against God, we cannot blame God for the trial, but rather we must acknowledge that this urge comes from within us, our carnal passions, τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας.

Consequently, this unit of material so linked together sets an important contextual boundary on the understanding of the details of meaning for each subunit inside the pericope. Only mistaken interpretation would lift any of these subunits out of this context and attribute meaning beyond the established contextual boundaries.

**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 as 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.

1:5            Now  
               if any of you lacks wisdom,  
**3        let him ask**  
               from God  
                                   who gives to all  
   generously  
   and  
   without finding fault,  
               and  
**4        it will be given to him.**

1:6            But  
**5        let him ask**  
               in faith,  
               doubting nothing,  
               for  
**6        the one who doubts is like the wave of the sea**  
   driven  
   and  
   tossed  
   by the wind;

1:7            for  
**7        let not that man suppose**  
   that he shall receive anything  
   from the Lord,

1:8            a man  
   doubled-souled  
   and  
   unstable  
   in all his ways.

James 1:2-4 and 1:5-8

Linking Device

2 My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; 4 and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.



5 If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. 6 But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; 7, 8 for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

mind moves from one exhortation to another and purposefully carries the readers along with him.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *Word Biblical Commentary : James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 13.]

The thought structure of 1:5-8 is set up clearly in the Greek text. First is the Hebrew pattern of command / promise in statements 3 and 4. This is signaled by the imperative verb in the first as an admonition, and then is followed by a future tense verb in the second statement. The passive voice of the future tense verb stresses that God is the One who will give the requested wisdom.

Second is the repetition of the admonition in statement 5, but now with different modification. In statement 3 the modification centered on God as the one being requested to grant wisdom. But in statement 5 the focus is upon the requirements placed on the one asking for wisdom. This second admonition is then based on two reasons that are given in statements 6 and 7. These two reasons are stair-cased; that is, the second reason grows out of the first reason. The very blunt language of James in the second admonition with its two reasons seems harsh and uninviting to many modern western readers. But for James the blunt language is important for stressing the seriousness of the qualifications for requesting wisdom from God. God is most ready to grant wisdom, but only to those who will properly use it to make the correct decisions. It is too precious to waste on individuals not seriously committed to obeying God.

### ***Exegesis of the Text.***

Our exegesis of the passage will follow the above two fold structure of idea presentation by James.

#### **1) Seek wisdom from God for facing trials, v. 5:**

5 Εἰ δὲ τις ὑμῶν λείπεται σοφίας, αἰτείτω παρὰ τοῦ διδόντος θεοῦ πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς καὶ μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος, καὶ δοθήσεται αὐτῷ·

5 If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

The heart of this first admonition is a reaching back to a very ancient Hebrew way of thinking especially found in the Jewish wisdom tradition: God tells us to do something, and then He promises to bless those who do it. But additionally James had a more important model for this way of thinking: Jesus, who taught in Matt. 7:7, **7 Αἰτεῖτε, καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν·** ζητεῖτε, καὶ εὕρησεται· κρούετε, καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν, **Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.** This thought structure, labeled either “command / promise” or “exhortation / promise,” was deeply embedded into the Jewish mind of the ancient world. It thus communicated well with James’ Jewish Christian audience.

In the sentence prefield James places the if-clause with the catch-word λείπεται linking this admonition back to the preceding sentence of vv. 2-4 whose final word is λειπόμενοι. By this literary device James intentionally linked the need for divinely provided wisdom to the ability to face trials with joy.<sup>13</sup> To uncouple vv. 5-8 from vv. 2-4 in order to make it an all inclusive promise of wisdom is to falsely interpret the text. That’s clearly *not* what James is talking about here.

Additionally, one should note that this if-clause is cast in the first class conditional protasis of ancient Greek which assumes the reality of the if-clause statement. Thus, James assumes that his readers lack the needed wisdom to cope well with trials; he is not discussing theory here. To be sure, the assumption has politeness built into it by defining the person lacking wisdom as τις ὑμῶν, *any one of you*. Thus he does not single out individuals by name in this matter. Yet even this generalized τις ὑμῶν carries strong tones of having specific individuals in mind; there were those folks both in Jerusalem and in the Diaspora congregations. His putting of the hypothetical ‘double-minded’ man on the table in vv. 7-8 also assumes that at least some of his audience were attempting to put one foot in faith commitment to God and the other foot in the ways of the world around them.

**The command:** αἰτείτω παρὰ τοῦ διδόντος θεοῦ πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς καὶ μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος. Two primary aspects are important here: asking and who it is that we ask. In stark contrast to traditional Greek thinking, the acquiring of wisdom is not a matter of human determination to gain training and self-discipline sufficient to enable the person to tap into the eternal wisdom of the invisible world. Instead, acquiring wisdom means praying to God.

<sup>13</sup>Dibelius’ contention that the link is unconvincing is itself unconvincing:

The connection with what precedes is superficial, for the concept (lack of wisdom) which is employed for the transition is not carried through the entire saying.

[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), 77.]

But the acquiring of wisdom isn't automatic. We must ask God for it. Note that the Greek verb αἰτέω implies several things. First, we ask, not demand. This is signaled by the form of the Greek imperative present tense form of the verb. And by the inherent meaning of the verb.<sup>14</sup> We don't ever tell God what to do! Wisdom is a gift from God, not a right that we have. God doesn't owe it to us. Second, asking is not a one time action, as the present tense form of the verb stresses. We ask for wisdom in every situation of trials.<sup>15</sup>

Who is the God we petition for wisdom? It is God τοῦ διδόντος πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς καὶ μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος. First, James reflects the foundational point of Jewish wisdom: it comes from God and is religious in nature. The heart of the content of wisdom is affirmed repeatedly: the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 4:7; 9:10). The Jewish wisdom tradition reaffirms this repeatedly, e.g., Sirach 1:14. We cannot be wise apart from a sense of overwhelming awe of God. Thus wise understanding originates in God who shares it with those who request it from Him.

Second, God is one who gives wisdom (τοῦ διδόντος) to people. How does He do this? Is wisdom some mysterious substance that God sends down from Heaven? Second century Gnostic Christian heresy contended that one gains this special secretive saving γνώσις, knowledge of things spiritual, through a highly emotionally charged experience in which the Holy Spirit 'zaps' the individual in the process of implanting this knowledge into the mind of the person. The individual demonstrates possession of this saving knowledge by speaking in tongues and jumping around in excitement. Nothing of the sort is advocated by James here!

The intertestamental Jewish wisdom tradition saw the acquiring of wisdom as coming through instruction in the Law of God, as the Wisdom of Solomon 6:9-20 affirms.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the writings reflecting wise sayings were to be studied and applied to living. Further, this Jewish tradition was convinced that acquiring

---

<sup>14</sup>“**33.163 αἰτέω; παραιτέομαι**: to ask for with urgency, even to the point of demanding—‘to ask for, to demand, to plead for.’<sup>731</sup>

“**αἰτέω**: αἰτήσον με ὃ ἐὰν θέλῃς, καὶ δώσω σοι ‘ask me anything you want and I will give it to you’ Mk 6:22; ἠτήσατο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ‘he asked for the body of Jesus’ Mt 27:58; παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος ‘to anyone who asks you for an account of your hope’ or ‘... to give a reason for your hope’ 1 Pe 3:15. See also footnote 33.

**παραιτέομαι**: κατὰ δὲ ἑορτὴν ἀπέλυεν αὐτοῖς ἕνα δέσμιον ὃν παρηγοῦντο ‘at every Passover Feast he would set free any prisoner the people asked for’ Mk 15:6.

“**33.164 αἴτημα, τος** n: (derivative of αἰτέω ‘to ask for,’ 33.163) that which is being asked for—‘request, demand, what was being asked for.’ Πιλάτος ἐπέκρινεν γενέσθαι τὸ αἴτημα αὐτῶν ‘Pilate passed the sentence that they were asking for’ Lk 23:24.”

[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), 406.]

<sup>15</sup>Note the second century interpretation of this admonition by Ignatius:

(2) “Be as shrewd as snakes” in all circumstances, yet always “innocent as doves.” (cf. Mt. 10:16) You are both physical and spiritual in nature for this reason, that you might treat gently whatever appears before you; **but ask, in order that the unseen things may be revealed to you, that you may be lacking in nothing and abound in every spiritual gift.**

2 φρόνιμος γίνου ὡς ὁ<sup>1</sup> ὄφις ἐν ἅπασι καὶ ἀκέραιος εἰς αἰὲ ὡς ἡ περιστέρα. διὰ τοῦτο σαρκικός, ἵνα τὰ φαινόμενά σου εἰς πρόσωπον κολακεύῃς· **τὰ δὲ ἀόρατα αἶτει ἵνα σοι φανερωθῇ, ὅπως μηδενὸς λείπη καὶ παντὸς χαρίσματος περισσεύῃς.**

[Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 195-97.]

[Pope Clement I, Pope Clement I, Saint Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch et al., vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Pope Clement I, Saint Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and Kirsopp Lake, The Loeb classical library (London; New York: Heinemann; Macmillan, 1912-13), 268-70.]

<sup>16</sup>**Wis. of Sol. 6:9-20.** 9 To you then, O monarchs, my words are directed, so that you may learn wisdom and not transgress. 10 For they will be made holy who observe holy things in holiness, and those who have been taught them will find a defense. 11 Therefore set your desire on my words; long for them, and you will be instructed. 12 Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. 13 She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. 14 One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gate. 15 To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care, 16 because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought. 17 The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, 18 and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, 19 and immortality brings one near to God; 20 so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

wisdom comes out of living life in the fear of the Lord.<sup>17</sup> Wisdom is functional rather than textbook theory. When James speaks of asking God for wisdom it is this background that he builds off of and assumes his Jewish Christian audience will assume. For first century Christians not only the teachings of the Hebrew Bible but also the teachings of Jesus and His example provided basic sources for understanding what is wise and what is not. Plus writings such as the book of James were intended to provide wise guidance for serving God.

Third, what is this God like who gives wisdom to those facing trials (παῖσιν)? Again the Jewish parallelistic thinking surfaces with a positive trait (ἀπλῶς) and its opposite (μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος) mentioned. The positive trait ἀπλῶς, which is only used here in the NT, can refer to either generosity or simplicity.<sup>18</sup> The latter is more likely here in light of the opposite meaning of the antithetical parallel μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος.<sup>19</sup> Bible translators are divided on how to translate this adverb, but tend to favor the generosity idea.<sup>20</sup> The simplicity meaning stems

<sup>17</sup>Very central to this in intertestamental Jewish wisdom writings is the personification of wisdom as a lady who teaches her children the ways of the Lord. Lady Wisdom tends to become so associated with God that she becomes His extension dynamically in the world. This understanding is closely related to the idea of the Holy Spirit in early Christianity. Also, it may be in the background of Christian understanding of Jesus as the divine Logos as reflected in the fourth gospel. Whatever impact this had on early Christian thinking about God, this personification of wisdom served to emphasize the dynamical influence of wisdom in the daily life of the one who feared the Lord.

<sup>18</sup>“Yet, if the meaning of ὀνειδίζω is clear, what is the meaning of the *hapax legomenon* ἀπλῶς? Two meanings have been suggested: (1) ‘generously’ (Hort, Mitton, Cantinat) or (2) ‘without mental reservation,’ ‘simply,’ ‘without hesitation’ (Mayor, Dibelius, Mussner). The root certainly can mean ‘generosity,’ as Test. Iss. 3:8; Jos. Ant. 7:332; and 2 Cor. 8:2 and 9:11 show, but on the other side one can marshal excellent evidence for ‘simply,’ ‘with an undivided mind,’ or ‘sincerely.’ Epictetus states, ‘... stop letting yourself be drawn this way and that, at one moment wishing to be a slave, at another not, but be either this or that simply and with all your mind ...’ (Epict. 2.2.13). To this we may add the evidence of Rom. 12:8 and the long discussion in Hermas Man. 2 (which Laws, 55, believes is dependent on James; cf. Mayor’s citation of Philo and many Greek authors; Did. 4:7; Barn. 19:11; and also Spicq, 217–219; and Edlund, 100–101). This evidence when added to the parallel term μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος makes one lean toward the second meaning of ἀπλῶς, namely ‘without mental reservation.’ (Furthermore, as shall appear in vv 6–8 below, it prepares one for the description of the vacillating petitioner, whose divided loyalty prevents his prayer from being heard.)” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 72-73.]

<sup>19</sup>“ἀπλῶς adv. fr. ἀπλοῦς (Aeschyl.+).

**1. pert. to being straightforward, simply, above board, sincerely, openly** of guileless response to someth. that arrests one’s attention (Demosth. 23, 178; M. Ant. 3, 6, 3 al.; Epict. 2, 2, 13; Philo, Ebr. 76; Just., D. 65, 2; Ath., R. 60, 32 al.; Iren. 5, 30, 1 [Harv. II 407, 6; w. ἀκακῶς]) w. δίδοναι *without reservation* **Js 1:5** (s. MDibelius ad loc.; HRiesenfeld, ConNeot 9, ’44, 33–41); Hm 2:4 without having second thoughts about the donation (s. ἀπλότης 1) ἄ. τι τελέσαι fulfill someth. without reservation Hm 2:6a, cp. b. Pray wholeheartedly, with confidence προσευχᾶς ἀναφέρειν 2 Cl 2:2. Comp. ἀπλούστερον (Isaicus 4, 2) γράφειν write very plainly B 6:5 (cp. Iren. 1, prol. 3 [Harv. I 6, 5]).

**2. pert. to simplicity in verbal expression**

**a. in short, in a word** (Epict. 3, 15, 3; 3, 22, 96; Just., A I, 67, 6 ἄ. πᾶσι τοῖς ἐν χρεῖα οὔσι ‘in brief, all who are in need’, D. 5, 4 al.; Iren., 1, 18, 3 [Harv. I 172, 17]) ἄ. εἰπεῖν (TestAbr 10 p. 87, 27 [Stone p. 22]; 17 p. 99, 28 [St. p. 46]) to put it succinctly Dg 6:1 (the mng. frankly or bluntly i.e. not obliquely or deviously [M. Ant. 5, 7, 2; schol. on Apollon. Rhod. 2, 844–47a ἀπλῶς κ. κατὰ ἀλήθειαν ἐξεῖπειν—to state it simply and as it really is] is less prob. here, for the preceding context consists of explicit details).

**b. simply, at all** w. neg. expr. (reff. in Riesenf., op. cit. 37f, and Theopomp. [IV B.C.]: 115 Fgm. 224 Jac. p. 582, 18 ἄ. οὐδεῖς; Diod S 3, 8, 5 ἄ. οὐ; Just., A II, 2, 16, D. 6, 1; Eur., Rhesus 851) ἄ. οὐ δύναμαι ἐξηγήσασθαι I simply cannot describe ApcPt 3:9.—M-M. 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), 104.]

<sup>20</sup>**English translations:**

**Simplicity:** without a second thought, CEB; without reservation, LEB; loves to help, Message;

**Generosity:** generously, RSV, NRSV, ESV, TEV, HCSB, NASB, NIV, TNIV, Phillips; generous, NLT, CEV; liberally, KJV, ASV, WEB, 21stCKJV; gladly, NLT; freely, BBE; abundantly, D-RB; freely, NIRV; with open hand, Wey; largely, Wycliffe.

**German translations:**

**Einfachheit:** einfältig, LB 1545; gibt allen gern, NGÜ, Schlachter 1951, 2000, GNB, EÜ, NGÜ; jedermann gern gibt, LB 1984; vorbehaltlos gibt, ZB; gerne hilft, NLB.

**Großzügigkeit:** er jeden reich beschenkt, HfA; ohne weiteres. Menge-Bibel.

**Spanish translations:**

**Sencillez:** ninguno

**Generosidad:** abundantemente, BdA, NBLdH, RV 1960, 1995, RVA; con liberalidad, Castilian; sin limitación, DHH;

from the noun ἀπλότης which means simplicity, and sincerity. This is even clearer with the adjective ἀπλοῦς meaning single and as the opposite of διπλοῦς meaning two-fold. The meaning of generosity seems to have originated in translations from the influence of the Latin Vulgate *qui dat omnibus affluenter, who gives generously to all*. Even though it adopted the less desirable meaning, it has impacted virtually all modern translations toward this less desirable meaning. To be sure the generosity idea does have some antecedent in the preceding Greek literature.<sup>21</sup> In the background of James' thought here lies Prov. 3:28 which is the opposite of God: "Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it'—when you have it with you."<sup>22</sup>

Not only does God not hesitate to grant wisdom to the petitioner, neither does He attach strings to the wisdom He grants. The phrase μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος poses some translation challenges, not because of the obscurity of the idea but because we are hard pressed to capture the essential idea in most modern western

---

generoso, NTV, PdDpT; generosamente, NVI; con largueza, LPE, LPH; en abundancia, RVC, TeLA.

<sup>21</sup>The terms ἀπλοῦς and ἀπλότης have a wide range of meanings in Koine Greek. Accordingly, the statement in Jas which describes God's giving with the adverb ἀπλῶς has been interpreted in different ways, with ἀπλῶς meaning either 'with pure thoughts, without ulterior motives,'<sup>37</sup> or 'graciously, generously.'<sup>38</sup> Both meanings are attested in the milieu to which our saying belongs.

1) The variation of the original meaning 'purity' to the meaning 'open-heartedness' or 'kindness' can best be observed in the Testament of Issachar. The ἀπλότης, of which the speaker represents himself as the model, is the antithesis to being 'meddlesome' (περίεργος), 'jealous' (φθονερός), 'envious' (βάσκανος see Test. Iss. 3.3), and to lusting after gold or luxury (4.2; 6.1); therefore, the term here means 'uprightness, moderation.' Yet along with this stands 3.8, where the meaning 'open-heartedness' or 'kindness' is found: 'For from my earthly goods I provided everything for the poor and the oppressed out of the kindness of my heart' (πάντα γὰρ πένησι καὶ θλιβομένοις παρεῖχον ἐκ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τῆς γῆς ἐν ἀπλότητι καρδίας μου) [Trans.]. Here also belongs the passage in Josephus, Ant. 7.332: Ornan the Jebusite desires to give over his threshing—floor to David without charge for the erection of an altar: 'The king then said that he admired him for his generosity and magnanimity' (ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἀγαπᾶν μὲν αὐτὸν τῆς ἀπλότητος καὶ τῆς μεγαλοψυχίας ἔλεγε). Paul, for whom ἀπλότης means 'purity' in 2 Cor 11:3\* and Col 3:22\* (Eph 6:5\*), uses the word in connection with giving in 2 Cor 8:2\*; 9:11\*, 13\*, and perhaps also Rom 12:8\*. The reference in the 2 Cor 8 and 9 passages, at any rate, is to the size of the gift, and the word there means 'generosity.' However, the passage in Lucian, Tim. 56, which Theodor Nāgeli<sup>39</sup> introduces as evidence for the meaning 'generosity' in our passage, proves nothing; for in the words, 'toward a man so simple and ready to share his possessions as you' (πρὸς ἄνδρα οἷον σὲ ἀπλοϊκὸν καὶ τῶν ὄντων κοινωνικόν), the term 'simple' (ἀπλοϊκός) is not a synonym for the second adjective, but rather is intended to express Timon's good—natured simplicity (= εὐήθεια in Tim. 8).

2) On the other hand, the original meaning 'pure' has also acquired the special nuances 'direct,' 'without mental reservations,' 'unreservedly.' Marcus Aurelius clearly demonstrates this. In a section (11.15) directed against artificial sincerity (ἐπιτήδευσις ἀπλότητος), the word is found still with its fundamental meaning; and the adjectival form of the word occurring in the same paragraph must be understood in the corresponding sense: 'the good, sincere, and well-disposed man' (ὁ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἀπλοῦς καὶ εὐμενής 11.15.6).<sup>40</sup> Yet the adverb ἀπλῶς, especially when it is used with 'freely' (ἐλευθέρως), is found in Marcus Aurelius with the meaning 'unreservedly' or 'without mental reservation'; cf. 3.6.6, where 'choose the better unreservedly and openly' (ἀπλῶς καὶ ἐλευθέρως ἐλοῦ τὸ κρεῖττον) corresponds to the words in 3.6.3: 'allow room for nothing else' (μηδενὶ χώραν δίδου ἑτέρῳ) [Trans.]; 5.7.2, where it is said with reference to the prayer of the Athenians, 'Either do not pray at all, or pray in this frank and open manner' (ἤτοι οὐ δεῖ εὐχέσθαι ἢ οὕτως, ἀπλῶς καὶ ἐλευθέρως) [Trans.]; and 10.8.5: 'depart from life not in anger, but unreservedly, freely, and with modesty' (ἔξιθι τοῦ βίου μὴ ὀργιζόμενος, ἀλλὰ ἀπλῶς καὶ ἐλευθέρως καὶ αἰδημόνως, cf. also Epict., Diss. 2.2.13). A similar narrowing of the meaning is displayed in the Shepherd of Hermas in combinations of ἀπλῶς with verbs of giving. Admittedly, in Herm. mand. 2.1 and 2.7 the phrase 'have simplicity' (ἀπλότητα ἔχε) is found as the equivalent of 'be innocent' (ἄκακος γίνου); yet in the same Mandate (2.4) it is unambiguously stated, 'give unreservedly to all who are in need, not considering to whom you should give and to whom you should not give' (πᾶσιν ὑστερουμένοις δίδου ἀπλῶς, μὴ διστάζων τίνι δῶς ἢ τίνι μὴ δῶς) [Trans.]; and similarly, in Herm. mand. 2.6, the word ἀπλῶς is explained as 'not debating to whom he should give and to whom he should not give' (μηθὲν διακρίνων τίνι δῶ ἢ μὴ δῶ) [Trans.]. Herm. sim. 9.24.2f also obviously belongs here; in that passage it is said of the faithful, who are described as being ἀπλοῖ, that 'from their labors they provided for everyone, without reproaching or hesitating; the Lord, therefore, seeing their lack of reservation and total child-likeness ...' (ἐκ τῶν κόπων αὐτῶν παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐχορηγήσαν ἀνονειδιστως καὶ ἀδιστάκτως. [ὁ οὖν] κύριος ἰδὼν τὴν ἀπλότητα αὐτῶν καὶ πᾶσαν νηπιότητα) [Trans.];<sup>41</sup> cf. also Herm. sim. 2.7: "provide for the poor man without hesitation" (ἀδιστάκτως παρέχει τῷ πένητι) [Trans.].

Judging by these last-mentioned parallels, and by the phrase 'without reproaching' (μὴ ὀνειδίζων) which follows ἀπλῶς in our passage, the special sense mentioned in 2) is to be preferred and the word ought to be translated 'without hesitation.'<sup>42</sup>

[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), 77-79.]

<sup>22</sup>See also *Pseudo-Phocylides* 22: "Give to the poor man right away, and do not say, 'Come back tomorrow' " (πρωχῶ εὐθὺ δίδου, μὴδ' αὐριον ἔλθεμεν εἴτης)

[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), 79.]

languages.<sup>23</sup>

The negative human model as the sounding board for this idea was the first century patron, i.e., *patronus* in the Latin. Because less than five percent of the people controlled over ninety-five percent of the wealth, a deeply ingrained system of patronage, *patrocinio* or *patrocinium*, typified life in the first century world. A so-called self-functioning middle class hardly existed. Thus the vast majority of the population were either slaves or poverty level peasants. This pattern held true pretty much in Judea for the Jews as well, although not quite as extensively as elsewhere in the empire. Thus the vast majority of the population depended on the small minority of the wealthy and powerful to support them in various ways. When Augustus became emperor at the beginning of the Christian era, he assumed the title *pater patriae*, father of the country, with the stance that the entire population was indebted to him for their survival. Out of this system quite naturally came horrific abuse. One of the typical patterns was that when the *patronus* agreed to pay monetary funds for the services of a *clientibus*, all kinds of restrictions etc. came with that agreement. Stiff reprimand and warnings to the client were frequent.

James' point is that when God grants wisdom to the petitioner, He doesn't give it in the manner of a rude, demanding *patronus* so common in that world. To James' audience this was amazing news! The God of this universe would grant to them -- for the asking -- one of His most precious gifts, σοφία, and without fussing at them about giving something so valuable to such an unworthy commoner. How to translate this idea of μη ὀνειδίζοντος clearly is the dilemma of modern Bible translators. The tendency is to express negative criticism in the giving of wisdom.<sup>24</sup> Yet, this does not capture the rich historical background out of which the expression arises. God does not make us feel like dirt when He grants us His wisdom for facing trials!

The sincerity and the affirming nature of Almighty God in granting gifts to His people was an important theme in the Jewish wisdom heritage. Out of that heritage James sees God more than willing to grant His wisdom to the one who requests it.

**The promise:** καὶ δοθήσεται αὐτῷ. The second part of the command / promise structure is the expressing of the promise of God that guarantees divine response to proper obedience by the child of God.<sup>25</sup> This

<sup>23</sup>And Jas (as well as Hermas) alludes to still another abuse with regard to giving in this verse, viz., grumbling—rudely and with reproach holding up to the recipient the size of the gift, ‘upbraiding’ him with it, as Luther translates it. This admonition seems to belong to the common store of Greek as well as Jewish moral Wisdom.<sup>43</sup> From there it has been adopted by Christianity, as is shown by — in addition to our verse — the saying in the ‘Two Ways’ in Did. 4.7 = Barn. 19.11: ‘Do not hesitate to give nor grumble in your giving’ (οὐ διατάσεις δοῦναι οὐδὲ διδοῦς γογγύσεις) [Trans.].<sup>44</sup> God does not operate like that sort of human benefactor. Whoever finds this thought impossible on the grounds that the comparison is improper should read Ps. Sol. 5.13–15, or Philo, Cher. 122f, where human and divine gifts are compared.” [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), 79.]

<sup>24</sup>Translations of μη ὀνειδίζοντος:

**English translations:** and ungrudgingly, NRSV; you...won't be condescended to, Message; upbraideth not, Wycliffe, KJV, ASV, D-RB; without upbraiding, Wey; without reproach, WEB; without an unkind word, BBE; without keeping score, CEB; and graciously, TEV; without criticizing, HCSB; without reproach, ESV, NASB, NKJV, ESVa; not reproaching, LEB; without reproaching, RSV; enjoys giving, NCV; doesn't find fault, NIRV; without finding fault, NIV, NIV 1984, NIV UK, TNIV; will not resent your asking, NLT; without making them feel foolish or guilty, Phillips; will never say you are wrong for asking, NLV; will never say you are wrong for asking, WENT.

**German translations:** nichts vorwirft, Elberfelder 1905; keine Vorwürfe macht, Elberfelder; und rücket's niemand, LUTH1545, LB 1912; niemandem seine Unwissenheit vorwirft, HOF; keine Vorhaltungen, NGU-DE; ohne Vorwurf, SCH1951, SCH2000; ohne ihm Vorwürfe zu machen, NLB; etwas zum Vorwurf macht, ZB; macht niemand einen Vorwurf, EÜ; ohne laute Vorwürfe gibt, Menge; und niemanden schilt, LB 1984.

**Spanish translations:** sin reproche, BdA, NBLH, RVR1960, RVR1995; no zahiere, R-VB, RVA; no hace ninguna clase de reproches, Castilian; sin hacer ningún reproche, RVC; sin hacer reproche alguno, DHH; él se la dará, NTV, NVI, PDT; sin echarlo en cara, BLP, BLPH;

<sup>25</sup>“God gives without hesitation and without grumbling: Therefore, whoever asks from him will receive: ‘and so it will be given to him’ (καὶ δοθήσεται αὐτῷ).<sup>45</sup> It is not necessary to hypothesize a literary relationship between our saying and the dominical saying in Matt 7:7. The formulation in each case is self-explanatory (cf. ‘Ask from me and I will give to you the nations’ [αἰτησαί παρ’ ἐμοῦ καὶ δώσω σοι ἔθνη κτλ.] in Ps 2:8), and the concept is a frequent commonplace of Jewish-Christian didactic Wisdom. It is found once more in Jas (5:16) and twice in Sirach (7:10; 32:21); it is transmitted as a saying of Jesus in various passages and in various forms (Mk 11:23f = Matt 21:21f; Lk 17:5f; Matt 17:20; cf. also 1 Cor 13:2); but the most extensive treatment of it is provided by Herm. mand. 9.” [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), 79.]

is usually expressed by the use of the future tense form of the verb and also by it being in the passive voice in order to minimize the use of God's name directly, i.e., 'it will be given' rather than 'God will give it.'<sup>26</sup> God's promises are certain and trustworthy, unlike those from humans. The teaching of Jesus on this stresses emphatically this dependability of God to grant requests from His people; cf. Matt. 7:7-11 w. // in Lk. 11:9-13:

7 Αἰτεῖτε, καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν· ζητεῖτε, καὶ εὐρήσετε· κρούετε, καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν. 8 πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὐρίσκει καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται. 9 ἢ τίς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἄνθρωπος, ὃν αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ἄρτον— μὴ λίθον ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 10 ἢ καὶ ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ— μὴ ὄφιν ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 11 εἰ οὖν ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὄντες οἴδατε δόματα ἀγαθὰ διδόναι τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν, πῶσω μᾶλλον ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς δώσει ἀγαθὰ τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν αὐτόν.

7 Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

To James' Jewish Christian audience both in Jerusalem and in the Diaspora, such words were understandable out of their heritage and from awareness of social patterns in their world. These words offered great comfort and encouragement during times of trials. When life seemed ready to overwhelm them, the promise was that God would grant them the ability to see the positive coming out of the trial that He saw. This would provide the deep sense of joyous contentment to face such trials positively. Such willingness by God to help His people in such times was encouraging and inspired deeper commitment to Him.

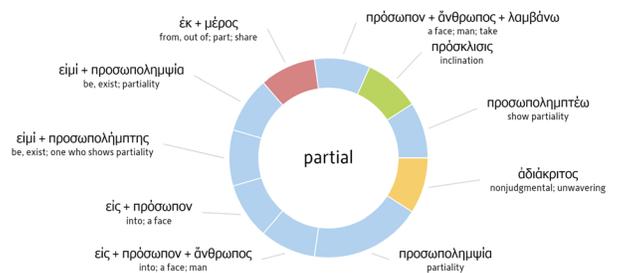
**2) Meet God's requirements for granting you that wisdom, vv. 6-8:**

6 αἰτεῖτω δὲ ἐν πίστει, μηδὲν διακρινόμενος, ὁ γὰρ διακρινόμενος ἕοικεν κλύδωνι θαλάσσης ἀνεμιζομένῳ καὶ ῥιπιζομένῳ· 7 μὴ γὰρ οἰέσθω ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος ὅτι λήμψεται τι παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου 8 ἀνὴρ δίψυχος, ἀκατάστατος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ.

6 But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; 7, 8 for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

The repetition of the admonition αἰτεῖτω, let him be asking, signals another important facet of seeking wisdom in times of trial. In the first instance the focus was on God's willingness to grant His wisdom. Now the focus shifts to the petitioner's responsibility in making the request for wisdom. When we ask God for something, we bear responsibility to make that request according to God's guidelines. He doesn't give out blank checks!

Responsibility and accountability to God is fundamental to the teaching of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. By virtue of being both our Creator and our Redeemer we **must** adhere to His guidelines. Both in this life and at final judgment these guidelines determine His blessing or His wrath. No loophole around this accountability exists. These guidelines apply uniformly to every human being, rich or poor, wise or dumb, powerful or helpless. The New Testaments stresses God's impartiality in His dealings with people, and especially with His own people, through a variety of expressions, as illustrated by the chart. It is inherent to His character, and thus is absolutely forbidden to His people, as James will assert in 2:1, 3:17 et als. Additionally God is utterly consistent in applying His guidelines to people as 1:17 affirms.



When we ask God for wisdom, what is our responsibility? James defines it again with an antithetical parallelism: ἐν πίστει and μηδὲν διακρινόμενος. He then elaborates on the second of these with a pair of reasons, i.e., the γὰρ clauses, bluntly telling the person not willing to meet these requirements to not even

<sup>26</sup>One should remember that in ancient Jewish tradition the third commandment against using God's name in vain (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11) came to mean that the most sacred name for God must not be spoken at all, except by the high priest in the Holy of Holies at the temple. Additionally, "wrongful use" of God's name included using it frequently. The danger was that such would lead to flippant use of God's name, which would bring down upon the individual the punishment contained in the Decalogue commandment. Consequently, the use of the passive voice form of the verb defining a divine action but without directly stating God's name became quite popular among Jewish writers.

bother to pray for them. Additionally, James will visit this theme of asking God again with a different focus in 4:2-3.

Both requirements need clarification, since they have been grossly misunderstood down through the centuries of interpretation. The positive requirement for asking is ἐν πίστει, *in faith*. What does he mean? Ask as a believing Christian? Ask fully confident that you will get your requests? Ask within the limits of orthodox Christian belief? Down through the centuries all of these views have been espoused.

One of the early second century interpretations of James at this point is the Shepherd of Hermas in his *Mandates* 9.<sup>27</sup> He wrote in the middle of the second century a helpful reflection on the concepts of James 1:6-8.<sup>28</sup> Although his views are not completely accurate, he does provide a helpful interpretation of James within a century of the writing of these words in the book of James.

What did James mean by ἐν πίστει? If lifted out of this context, almost any of the above interpretive views can be attached to the phrase. But when considered within the context of the book, and especially as the opposite of μηδὲν διακρινόμενος in the antithetical parallelism, limits on the meaning become clear. Twelve times James will use the word πίστις, *faith*, in this document.<sup>29</sup> Uniformly, he means by this term a commitment of obedience to Jesus Christ. Clearly πίστις signifies a life transforming commitment that has enormous impact on the way we live day by day. In 2:1, πίστις is commitment to τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης, *our Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Presence*. In the detailed exposition of πίστις in chapter two, it is a spiritual dynamic that changes the way with live and produces in us consistent expressions of obedience to God. As the opposite of διακρινόμενος here, it is exclusive commitment to God over against a faulty attempt to be religious and worldly at the same time with vesiculating back and forth between the two mind sets. διακρίνομαι means to be split into two parts in one's thinking and loyalties. Lack of focus on one of the two options is the opposite of πίστις.

Most likely in the background of James' expression here lies Matt. 21:21-22 with the parallel in Mk. 11:23-24.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup>He said to me, "Rid yourself of double-mindedness, and do not be at all double-minded about asking God for something, saying to yourself, for example, 'How can I ask for something from God and receive it, when I have sinned so often against him?' (2) Do not reason in this way, but turn to the Lord with all your heart and ask of him unhesitatingly, and you will know his extraordinary compassion, because he will never abandon you, but will fulfill your soul's request. (3) For God is not like men, who bear grudges; no, he is without malice and has compassion on his creation. (4) Do, therefore, cleanse your heart of all the vanities of this life, and of all the things mentioned to you above, and ask of the Lord, and you will receive everything, and will not fail to receive all of your requests, if you ask unhesitatingly. (5) But if you hesitate in your heart, you will certainly not receive any of your requests. For those who hesitate in their relation to God are the double-minded, and they never obtain any of their requests. (6) But those who are perfect in faith make all their requests trusting in the Lord, and they receive them, because they ask unhesitatingly, without any double-mindedness. For every double-minded man, unless he repents, will scarcely be saved. (7) So cleanse your heart of double-mindedness and put on faith, because it is strong, and trust God that you will receive all the requests you make. And whenever you ask for something from the Lord and you receive your request rather slowly, do not become double-minded just because you did not receive your soul's request quickly, for assuredly it is because of some temptation or some transgression, of which you are ignorant, that you are receiving your request rather slowly. (8) Do not, therefore, stop making your soul's request, and you will receive it. But if you become weary and double-minded as you ask, blame yourself and not the One who gives to you. (9) Beware of this double-mindedness, for it is evil and senseless, and has uprooted many from the faith, even those who are very faithful and strong. For this double-mindedness is indeed a daughter of the devil, and does much evil to God's servants. (10) So despise double-mindedness and gain mastery over it in everything by clothing yourself with faith that is strong and powerful. For faith promises all things, perfects all things; but double-mindedness, not having any confidence in itself, fails in all the works it tries to do. (11) So you see," he said, "that faith is from above, from the Lord, and has great power, but double-mindedness is an earthly spirit from the devil that has no power. (12) So serve faith, which has power, and have nothing to do with double-mindedness, which has no power, and you will live to God; indeed, all who are so minded will live to God."

[Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 399-401.]

<sup>28</sup>His writings contain five visions, twelve mandates or commandments, and ten parables or similitudes. The quoted passage is mandate #9 of the twelve.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. 1:3, 6; 2:1, 5, 14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26; 5:15.

<sup>30</sup>**Mark 11:23-24.** 23 ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὃς ἂν εἴπῃ τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ· Ἄρθητι καὶ βλήθητι εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, καὶ μὴ διακριθῆ ἔν τῃ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἀλλὰ πιστεῦῃ ὅτι ὁ λαλεῖ γίνεται, ἔσται αὐτῷ. 24 διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, πάντα ὅσα προσεύχεσθε καὶ αἰτεῖσθε, πιστεύετε ὅτι ἐλάβετε, καὶ ἔσται ὑμῖν.

23 Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart,

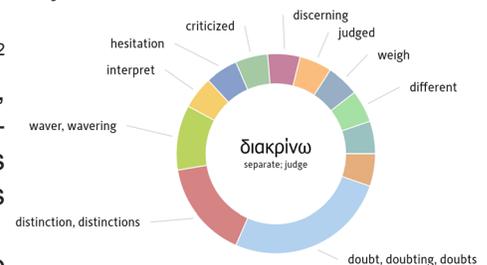
21 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, **ἐὰν ἔχητε πίστιν καὶ μὴ διακριθῆτε**, οὐ μόνον τὸ τῆς συκῆς ποιήσετε, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ εἴπητε· Ἄρθητι καὶ βλήθητι εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, γενήσεται· 22 καὶ **πάντα ὅσα ἂν αἰτήσητε ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ πιστεύοντες λήμψεσθε**.

21 Jesus answered them, “Truly I tell you, **if you have faith and do not doubt**, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done. 22 **Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.**”

Yet James expresses the idea somewhat differently with a stronger emphasis on commitment to God that places unconditional trust in God to grant His wisdom to the petitioner.<sup>31</sup> Thus when we ask God for wisdom to face trials that request must originate out of complete commitment to God that possess full confidence in God to grant us what is needed to cope with trials.

Its opposite is μηδὲν διακρινόμενος. This verb διακρίνομαι becomes central to not only this action that is the opposite of πίστις, but forms the heart of the two reasons set forth as a basis for the admonition to ask God for wisdom in a proper manner. Thus vv. 6b-8 are devoted to a portrait of the διακρινόμενος person and why this nullifies any request for wisdom. Consequently we need to clearly understand what James means with this verb.

The dictionary definition of διακρίνω provides a starting point.<sup>32</sup> When the verb is used in the Greek middle voice, as here in James, the sense is to waver back and forth between two opinions with uncertainty about which one is correct. It is off this core meaning that James builds his expression in this passage. In these verses, however, James enriches the concept with numerous statements.



In his first reason (γὰρ, v. 6b) ὁ διακρινόμενος is compared to but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. 24 So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

<sup>31</sup>“Surely James is reworking a concept found in Mt. 21:21 (par. Mk. 11:23), and in doing so he appears to be carrying the tendency of the Matthean redaction (where the faith-doubt contrast is sharpened from Mark) a little further to the point where he sees behind the doubt the root distrust of God: the petitioner really has no faith in God, for his whole attitude toward God is divided (cf. 1:8) and he thus lacks fortitude. He is ‘ὁ διακρινόμενος ... a man whose allegiance wavers’ (Ropes) or ‘one who lives in an inner conflict between trust and distrust of God’ (Mussner). This person is in no way ἀπλῶς toward God (cf. Paul in Rom. 4:20).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 73.]

<sup>32</sup>**διακρίνω** fut. διακρινῶ; 1 aor. διέκρινα LXX; impf. mid. διεκρινόμην. Pass.: fut. διακριθήσομαι LXX; 1 aor. διεκρίθην (s. κρίνω, διάκρισις; Hom.+).

**1. to differentiate by separating, separate, arrange** (Jos., Ant. 11, 56; Ath. 13, 2; 22, 1; Mel. P. 82, 611) of created things πάντα κατὰ τάξιν δ. effect an orderly arrangement for everything Dg 8:7. ἑαυτὸν δ. separate oneself IEph 5:3 (but the ominous tone of the context favors 3b below).

**2. to conclude that there is a difference, make a distinction, differentiate** (PGM 5, 103f σὺ διέκρινας τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ἄδικον; 4 Macc 1:14; Jos., Bell. 1, 27; Just., D. 20, 3; Ath. 15, 1) μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν betw. us and them **Ac 15:9**. τίς σε διακρίνει; who concedes you any superiority? **1 Cor 4:7** (Appian, Bell. Civ. 5, 54 §228 δ. τινά=concede superiority to someone, beside ἐπιλέγεσθαί τινα=select someone; cp. Philo, Op. M. 137 διακρίνας ἐξ ἀπάσης τὸ βέλτιστον). μηθὲν διακρίνων τίνι δῶ without distinguishing to whom he should give Hm 2:6; cp. **Ac 11:12**.—Pass. διακρίνεσθαί τινος be differentiated fr. someone Dg 5:1.

**3. to evaluate by paying careful attention to, evaluate, judge**

**a. judge correctly** (Job 12:11; 23:10) the appearance of the sky **Mt 16:3**; evaluate oneself **1 Cor 11:31**; recognize τὸ σῶμα vs. **29**.

**b. pass judgment on** w. acc. ἑαυτὸν on oneself IEph 5:3 (mng. 1 is also prob.); προφήτην D 11:7; abs. **1 Cor 14:29**.

**4. to render a legal decision, judge, decide**, legal t.t. (X., Hell. 5, 2, 10; Appian, Bell. Civ. 5, 76 §324 δίκαια διεκρίνοντο; SIG 545, 18; OGI 43, 4 and 11; pap; EpArist 110; Just. A II, 7, 2) ἀνά μέσον τινός decide betw. pers. (as Ezk 34:17, 20) **1 Cor 6:5**; s. EvDobschütz, StKr 91, 1918, 410–21 and ἀνά 1b, μέσος 1b.

**5. to be at variance w. someone**, mid., w. pass. aor. (B-D-F. §78)

**a. because of differing judgments dispute** τινί w. someone (Polyb. 2, 22, 11) **Jd 9**.

**b. by maintaining a firm opposing position or adverse judgment take issue** πρὸς τινα w. someone (Hdt. 9, 58, 2; Ezk 20:35f; Jo 4:2) **Ac 11:2** (=criticize).

**6. to be uncertain, be at odds w. oneself, doubt, waver** (this mng. appears first in NT; with no dependence on the NT, e.g., Cyril of Scyth. p. 52, 17; 80, 10; 174, 7) **Mt 21:21**; **Mk 11:23**; **Ro 14:23**; **Jd 22**. ἐν ἑαυτῷ in one’s own mind **Lk 11:38 D**; **Js 2:4**; GJs 11:2. W. εἰς Ro 4:20 μηδὲν διακρινόμενος without any doubting **Js 1:6**; hesitate **Ac 10:20**.—DELG s.v. κρίνω. M-M. TW.

[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), 231.]

the waves of the sea being tossed back and forth by strong winds: ἔοικεν κλύδωνι θαλάσσης ἀνεμιζομένῳ καὶ ῥιπιζομένῳ. The picture is graphic and dramatic.<sup>33</sup> This person has lost complete control of himself and is being pushed back and forth helplessly by outside forces. That is, in his thinking he has lost control, so much so that he can't make up his mind which way to go.<sup>34</sup>



The prompts an application of the picture to the ὁ διακρινόμενος, which is given in vv. 7-8 as the second reason (γὰρ) for the admonition. James refers to this person ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος, *that man*. The phrase emits strong negative tones about the person.<sup>35</sup> The core of the second reason is to deny that a person like this will not receive anything from God: μὴ γὰρ οἰέσθω ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος ὅτι λήμψεται τι παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου, *for let not that person assume that he will receive anything from the Lord*. Very bluntly James ridicules the expectation of any person asking God for wisdom while διακρινόμενος as a complete delusion. Not only will he not receive wisdom, he has no basis for expecting God's help at all. The idea of the verb ἔοικεν is to suppose or assume.<sup>36</sup>

Why? The picture of the ὁ διακρινόμενος person is very negative. To translate the ὁ διακρινόμενος as the doubter hardly meshes with the deeply negative picture painted here by James. Two additional qualifiers of this man are listed by James in verse eight: ἀνήρ διψυχός<sup>37</sup> and ἀκατάστατος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ.

<sup>33</sup>“The verb *eoika* (‘be like’) is perfect in form, present in meaning, and found in the NT only here and in 1:23. The comparison itself is perfectly fitted to the doubting person. What could be more unstable than a wave of the sea, responding to every wind? The translation supplies the word ‘wind,’ although it is implicit in both participles: the passive of *anemizein* literally means to be driven by the wind, and the passive of *rhipein* likewise means to be blown about. By itself, the phrase *klydon thalassēs* can connote ‘rough seas’ (see Philo, *On the Creation*, 58; Josephus, *Ant.* 9:210). For the comparison of the doubting person to a ship on a storm-tossed sea, see Philo, *Migration of Abraham*, 148; and for mental anguish as the tossing of waves, see also Philo, *On the Giants*, 51.” [Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 180.]

<sup>34</sup>“The point of the comparison is emphasized by means of the two participles;<sup>56</sup> their meanings are rather similar and their identical endings are no doubt intentional, for Jas is fond of such artistic devices.<sup>57</sup> Sea metaphors are used frequently in diatribe and in Philo, so that a comparison of this sort is quite comprehensible in an author such as Jas, who makes use of metaphorical language from this literature in other places as well.<sup>58</sup> But the application of the metaphor here is very simple and natural, and therefore its use at least need not have been transmitted through literary channels. Moreover, the Greek and Jewish parallels which have thus far been adduced<sup>59</sup> generally prove nothing more than the popularity of this group of metaphors. When one also compares the passages in Philo, *Sacr. AC.* 90 and *Gig.* 51,<sup>60</sup> then it becomes likely that κλύδων here does not mean ‘wave,’ but rather ‘billowing, surging.’ Therefore the doubter is not compared with the wave, but with the restless sea stirred up by the wind.” [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), 81-82.]

<sup>35</sup>“The petitioner is to ask out of trust in God because (γὰρ) the one who does not trust God (the Semitism ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος, the tone of which suggests the author’s disapproval, clearly refers back to the doubter of 1:6) will receive nothing, however much he may expect to receive something.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 74.]

<sup>36</sup>“οἰομαι contracted οἶμαι; impf. ᾤμην, ᾤου, ᾤετο (all LXX); 1 aor. ᾤήθην ITr 3:3 (Hom.+) **to consider someth. to be true but with a component of tentativeness, think, suppose, expect** foll. by acc. and inf. (PEleph 13, 6; POxy 1666, 2; Gen 37:7; Job 34:12; Jos., *Ant.* 1, 323; Just., *D.* 114, 3; Tat. 16, 1; Ath. 36, 1) **J 21:25**; 2 Cl 14:2; Dg 3:1. W. inf. foll. (PEleph 12, 1; PFlor 332, 8; POxy 898, 24; 1 Macc 5:61; 2 Macc 7:24; Jos., *C. Ap.* 2, 117; Just., *D.* 2, 6; 10, 3; Ath. 36, 1) **Phil 1:17**; 1 Cl 30:4 (Job 11:2); PtK 2 p. 14, 25; Dg 2:7; 3:4f; 10:3. W. ὅτι foll. (Dio Chrys. 65 [15], 22; Epict. 2, 19, 26; Lucian, *Ind.* 7 p. 106, Alex. 61 p. 265 al.; Ps.-Aeschines, *Ep.* 4, 2; Is 57:8; EpArist 227; Tat. 26, 1) **Js 1:7**; 2 Cl 6:6; 15:1. The passage ... εἰς τοῦτο ᾤήθην, ἵνα κτλ. ITr 3:3 is difficult, no doubt because of text damage; in their efforts to make tolerable sense of it, Zahn, Funk, and Bihlmeyer remain closer to the text tradition than does Lghtf. They read οὐκ εἰς τ. ᾤ., ἵνα κτλ. *I do not consider myself entitled to*, etc.—DELG. M-M s.v. οἶμαι.” [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), 701.]

<sup>37</sup>“First, ‘that person’ is ἀνήρ διψυχός, a two-souled man. The pleonastic ἀνήρ is, like ἄνθρωπος in the preceding verse, a Semitism; the use of ἀνήρ where the generic ἄνθρωπος would be more appropriate is known from the LXX, particularly in Psalms and Proverbs (cf. Ps. 32[31]:2 = ‘ādām). This usage is so characteristic of James that Windisch remarks that this literary style is ‘developed by men and in the first place shaped for men’ (cf. 1:12, 23; 2:2; 3:2; Ps. 1:1).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 74.]

The image of this person in James' mind is intensely negative. As a δίψυχος person this ἀνὴρ has two lives: one religious and one worldly. With the adjective δίψυχος (used only by James in 1:8 and 4:8), James seems to have coined a new word in Greek; it does not appear in any ancient literature prior to James.<sup>38</sup> Here James' translators from Aramaic to Greek coin a new word to reflect the clear Hebrew concept of undivided loyalty to God. Thus being a δίψυχος person places one in deep direct opposition to God whom James described in 1:5 as acting ἀπλῶς, *with single minded sincerity*. God acts toward us with sincere commitment to our good, and He then requires us to respond with sincere, undivided loyalty to Him. If we are not willing, then we should not claim His help when facing trials.

The second qualification ἀκατάστατος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ, *unstable in every way*, stresses the consequence of being δίψυχος. Inwardly he functions out of split loyalty; outwardly he reflects chaotic instability, ἀκατάστατος, in every aspect of his life.<sup>39</sup> James thus defines ὁ διακρινόμενος with intense terms in a most negative way. The picture he paints here is partly historical and partly caricature. To people around him he may appear to be normal and sound. He probably considers himself to be okay. But religiously he is a mess! His split loyalty between God and the world (cf. 4:1-10 for an even stronger condemnation) has destabilized his life religiously and otherwise. In genuinely spiritual terms, he is not a person of true faith and thus spiritually in trouble with God. Although outwardly religious, nothing but chaos is going on inwardly. And consequently his life lacks the consistency and stability that true faith commitment to God would bring. When life throws hardships at him, he has to figure out on his own how to survive them. God's help is not available, no matter how much he asks for it.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

Wow! This passage shouts at us to get our commitment to God in proper order! In the 'easy grace' era of so much of western Christianity today, James' words come down like a fire storm that shatters easy believism into a thousand pieces as it exposes the falseness of such claims to faith. The 'health and wealth' preachers are exposed as religious charlatans who have no connection to God through the Gospel at all. All they are preaching is a western style pagan materialism in the name of Christianity; and God will hold them

<sup>38c</sup>The term δίψυχος, which does not appear in Greek literature earlier than James, has its background in Jewish theology. In the OT one finds that a person is to love God with an undivided heart, a perfect or whole heart (Dt. 6:5; 10:10). Over against this is set the hypocritical or double heart (*lēb welēb* — Ps. 12:1, 2; 1 Ch. 12:33; cf. Ho. 10:2). Sir. 1:28–29 also speaks against the faithless man who is not wholly devoted to the fear of God, and in 2:12–14 he describes the double-hearted man as one who loses his ὑπομονή. This theme of 'either-or' single-hearted devotion, which is closely associated with two-ways teaching (cf. Sir. 33:7–15), is also found in both its positive and negative forms in the DSS (e.g. 1QS 2:11–18; 5:4–5; 1QH 4:13–14) and the Test. XII (Test. Lev. 13:1; Test. Ben. 6:5–7b). In rabbinic materials the teaching on the single heart means the total rejection of the evil *yēšer* in favor of the good (cf. Introduction, 35–38; Schechter, 257). With this in view, we reject the need to read back the meaning of this term from the Didache or Hermas (Did. 4:4; Barn. 19:5; 1 Clem. 9:2; 23:2; 2 Clem. 11:3; 40 times in Hermas), for both have developed this theology beyond James (and away from Judaism); rather we look to the Jewish material for background (contra Seitz, "Spirits," 82–95, and Laws, 60–61 = Marshall, "Δίψυχος," who sees it as a local Roman idiom).

The δίψυχος-type of person, then, is one whose allegiance to God is less than total, whose devotion is not characterized by ἀπλότης. Such a one, claims James, is 'unstable in all his ways.' Here is another Semitism, ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ (cf. Ps. 91[90]:11; 145[144]:17; 1QS 1:8; 3:9–10; 9:9), which is related to the two-ways type of literature; it means that the total conduct or way of life of the person in question is unstable or vacillating. The double-minded person is 'vacillating in all his activity and conduct' (Dibelius). (The root of ἀκατάστατος was later used of demonic activity in Hermas Man. 2.3; 5.2.7; cf. how Paul uses the noun in 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 12:20. James uses this root again in 3:8, 16.)

The author, then, concludes his description of this doubter with a strong condemnation: his divided mind, when it comes to trusting God, indicates a basic disloyalty toward God. Rather than being a single-minded lover of God, he is one whose character and conduct is unstable, even hypocritical. No wonder he should expect nothing from God! He is not in the posture of the trusting child at all. For James there is no middle ground between faith and no faith; such a one, he will later argue (4:8), needs to repent."

[Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 74–75.]

<sup>39c</sup>The adjective *akatastatos* here has the sense of fickle and unsteady (compare Epictetus, *Discourses* II, 1, 12; Polybius, *Histories* 7,4,6). In James 3:8 and 3:16, 'instability' takes on a more active and malign character. The term 'way' (*hodos*) is used of behavior or way of life (see LXX Pss 1:1, 6; 15:11; 118:1, 32; Prov 1:15; Wis 5:6). In James 5:20, James speaks of turning a brother from 'the way (*hodos*) of error.' Such language naturally suggests the ethics of 'the two ways' found in other Jewish moral literature (e.g., 4 Ezra 7:12–18; 1 Enoch 91:18; 2 Enoch 30:15; 42:10; Sib. Or. 8:399–403; T. Ash. 1:3–5; 1QS 3–4, though this passing allusion does not make that framework explicit.) [Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 181.]

strictly accountable on the day of Judgement.

But a large majority of professing Christians have a sincere faith commitment to God through Christ, and often struggle hard when life turns sour and hard to manage. From all indication, it was to these kind of people in his day that James' words are addressed. The hypothetical ὁ διακρινόμενος person is not presented as constituting a large segment of James' initial audience either in Jerusalem or in the Diaspora. But there were some either like that or else drifting toward that kind of split loyalty to God who needed the shock effect of these words of James.

Similar patterns hold true in the contemporary world of today. The lure of worldliness is still powerful and tempting. At the same time, for many keeping up religious appearances is very important as well. James' message is strong: you cannot walk through life with one foot in religion and the other foot in worldliness and expect God's blessing on your life. Such split loyalty is so abhorrent to God that He absolutely will not give His help to any such person as he struggles with the hardships of life.

But on the positive side James speaks loud and clear that when life slaps us in the face hard, we can respond with joyous contentment because our God makes His wisdom available to those who sincerely seek it in unconditional commitment to Him. Thus walking through life can be done in God's wisdom that opens up vistas of understanding about life completely hidden to the pagan mind. Thanks be to our God for helping us like this!



1. What does wisdom mean to you?
2. How does religious based wisdom differ from secular based wisdom?
3. What kind of a God offers to give us His wisdom in order to face trials?
4. How does God grant His wisdom to those who ask for it?
5. How does one ask God for His wisdom in facing hardships in life?
6. What are God's requirements to the petitioner for wisdom?