



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 09
James 4:1-10

Study By
Lorin L Cranford

Greek NT

<4:1> Πόθεν πόλεμοι καὶ πόθεν μάχαι ἐν ὑμῖν; οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν, ἐκ τῶν ἡδονῶν ὑμῶν τῶν στρατευομένων ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ὑμῶν; <4:2> ἐπιθυμεῖτε καὶ οὐκ ἔχετε, φονεύετε καὶ ζηλοῦτε καὶ οὐ δύνασθε ἐπιτυχεῖν, μάχεσθε καὶ πολεμεῖτε, οὐκ ἔχετε διὰ τὸ μὴ αἰτεῖσθαι ὑμᾶς, <4:3> αἰτεῖτε καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε διότι κακῶς αἰτεῖσθε, ἵνα ἐν ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ὑμῶν δαπανήσητε. <4:4> μοιχαλίδες, οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ἡ ἴλια τοῦ κόσμου ἔχθρα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν; ὃς ἐὰν οὖν βουλευθῆ ἄλος εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου, ἐχθρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ καθίσταται. <4:5> ἢ δοκεῖτε ὅτι κενῶς ἡ γραφή λέγει, Πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα ὃ κατώκισεν ἐν ἡμῖν, <4:6> μείζονα δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν; διὸ λέγει, Ὁ θεὸς ὑπερηφάνοις ἀντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν. <4:7> ὑποτάγητε οὖν τῷ θεῷ, ἀντίστητε δὲ τῷ διαβόλῳ καὶ φεύξεται ἀφ' ὑμῶν, <4:8> ἐγγίσατε τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐγγιεῖ ὑμῖν. καθάρισατε χεῖρας, ἀμαρτωλοί, καὶ ἀγνίσσατε καρδίας, δίψυχοι. <4:9> τάλαιπωρήσατε καὶ πενήθησατε καὶ κλαύσατε. ὁ γέλως ὑμῶν εἰς πένθος μετατραπήτω καὶ ἡ χαρὰ εἰς κατήφειαν. <4:10> ταπεινώθητε ἐνώπιον κυρίου καὶ ὑψώσει ὑμᾶς.

Die Gute Nachricht Bibel

1 Woher kommen denn die Kämpfe und Streitigkeiten zwischen euch? Doch nur aus den Leidenschaften, die ständig in eurem Innern toben! 2 Ihr verzehrt euch nach etwas, was ihr gerne hättet. Ihr mordet und seid eifersüchtig, aber das bringt euch dem ersehnten Ziel nicht näher. Ihr versucht es mit Kampf und Gewalt; aber ihr bekommt trotzdem nicht, was ihr wollt, weil ihr Gott nicht darum bittet. 3 Und wenn ihr ihn bittet, bekommt ihr es nicht, weil ihr nur in der Absicht bittet, eure unersättliche Genussucht zu befriedigen. 4 Eure Liebe gehört nicht Gott, ihr handelt an ihm wie Ehebrecher! Wisst ihr denn nicht: Freundschaft mit dieser Welt bedeutet Feindschaft gegen Gott. Wer sich also mit der Welt befreunden will, verfeindet sich mit Gott. 5 Es heißt nicht umsonst in den Heiligen Schriften: »Mit Leidenschaft erhebt Gott Anspruch auf den Geist, den er, der Schöpfer, in uns wohnen ließ.« 6 Aber in seiner Gnade will er uns noch viel mehr schenken; denn es heißt auch: »Gott widersetzt sich den Überheblichen, aber denen, die gering von sich denken, wendet er seine Liebe zu.« 7 Deshalb ordnet euch Gott unter! Leistet dem Teufel Widerstand, und er wird vor euch fliehen. 8 Nähert euch Gott, und er wird sich euch nähern. Reinigt eure Hände von Schuld, ihr Sünder! Gebt eure Herzen Gott hin, ihr Unentschlossenen! 9 Klagt über euren Zustand, trauert und weint! Nicht mehr lachen sollt ihr, sondern weinen. Euer Jubel soll sich in Jammer verkehren und eure Freude in Trauer. 10 Beugt euch tief vor dem Herrn, dann wird er euch hoch erheben!

NRSV

1 Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? 2 You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet^{F20} something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, "God^{F21} yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? 6 But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

FOOTNOTES:

F20: Or you murder and you covet

F21: Gk He

NLT

4:1 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you? 4:2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it. 4:3 And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong – you want only what will give you pleasure. 4:4 You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God. 4:5 What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealously longs for us to be faithful^{F12}? 4:6 He gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, "God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble."^{F13} 4:7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. 4:8 Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you hypocrites. 4:9 Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. 4:10 When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on him, he will lift you up and give you honor.

FOOTNOTES:

F12: Or the spirit that God placed within us tends to envy, or the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, opposes our envy.

F13: Prov 3:34.

The Study of the Text:¹

Context of our passage:

	STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT Of James ²	
PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
BODY	1-194	1.2-5.20
Facing Trials	1-15	1.2-12
God and Temptation	16-24	1.13-18
The Word and Piety	25-37	1.19-27
Faith and Partiality	38-55	2.1-13
Faith and Works	56-72	2.14-26
Controlling the Tongue	73-93	3.1-12
True and False Wisdom	94-102	3.13-18
Solving Divisions	103-133	4.1-10
Criticism	134-140	4.11-12
Leaving God Out	141-146	4.13-17
Danger in Wealth	147-161	5.1-6
Persevering under Trial	162-171	5.7-11
Swearing	172-174	5.12
Reaching Out to God	175-193	5.13-18
Reclaiming the Wayward	194	5.19-20

The literary context of 4:1-10 can be seen from the above outline, as far as a context exists. One important signal of thought flow in James is his use of the direct address, “my brothers” (ἀδελφοί μου). He consistently uses it to introduce new topics beginning in 1:2 and continues down through 3:1. The direct address forms, i.e., the vocative case use in the Greek, jumps to “prostitutes” (4:4, μοιχαλίδες) and “sinners” (4:8, ἁμαρτωλοί) and “double minded ones” (4:8, δίψυχοι), before jumping back to “brothers” (ἀδελφοί) in 4:11. This abrupt interruption of the more pleasant “brothers” to use the harsh, highly blunt terms in verses 4 and 8 signals intensity of expression. Divisiveness in the church (4:1-10) and slandering of fellow church members (4:11-12) logically go together, but each pericope is well defined by boundary markers into two separate units. Thus the preservation of ‘snippets’ of James’ earlier preaching is again reflected in the lack of a clearly defined literary setting for 4:1-10.

The larger historical context for 4:1-10 is much more significant. In Greek philosophical circles discussions of the origins of wars and violence were rather common:

Philo, *De Gigantibus*, XI. 51: (49) And again, the scripture saith in another passage, “But stand thou here with me. For this is an oracle of God, which was given to the prophet, and his station was to be one of unmoved tranquillity by God, who always stands immovably; for it is indispensable, that all things which are placed by the side of him must be kept straight by such an undeviating rule. (50) On this account it is, as it seems to me, that excessive pride, named Jethro, marvelling at his unvarying and always equal choice of what was wise, a choice which always looked at the same things in the same way, was perplexed, and put a question to him in this form, “Why dost thou sit by thyself?” (51) For any one who considers the continual war raging among men in the middle of peace, and existing, not merely among nations, and countries, and cities, but also among private houses, or I might rather say, between every individual man and the inexpressible and heavy storms which agitate the souls of men, which, by their evident impetuosity, throw into confusion all the affairs of life, may very naturally wonder, if in such a storm, any one can enjoy tranquillity, and can feel a calm in such a billowy state of the stormy sea.

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

²Taken 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.

Plato, *Phaedo*, 66C-D: [66b] And when they consider all this, must not true philosophers make a reflection, of which they will speak to one another in such words as these: We have found, they will say, a path of speculation which seems to bring us and the argument to the conclusion that while we are in the body, and while the soul is mingled with this mass of evil, our desire will not be satisfied, and our desire is of the truth. For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and [66c] also is liable to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after truth: and by filling us so full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies, and idols, and every sort of folly, prevents our ever having, as people say, so much as a thought. **For whence come wars, and fightings, and factions? whence but from the body and the lusts of the body? For wars are occasioned by the love of money, and money has to be acquired for [66d] the sake and in the service of the body; and in consequence of all these things the time which ought to be given to philosophy is lost. Moreover, if there is time and an inclination toward philosophy, yet the body introduces a turmoil and confusion and fear into the course of speculation, and hinders us from seeing the truth; and all experience shows that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body, and the soul in herself must behold [66e] all things in themselves:** then I suppose that we shall attain that which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers, and that is wisdom; not while we live, but after death, as the argument shows; for if while in company with the body, the soul cannot have pure knowledge, one of two things seems to follow -- either knowledge is not to be attained at all, or, if at all, after death. For then, and not till then, the soul [67a] will be in herself alone and without the body. In this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible concern or interest in the body, and are not saturated with the bodily nature, but remain pure until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us. And then the foolishness of the body will be cleared away and we shall be pure and hold converse with other pure souls, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere; [67b] and this is surely the light of truth. For no impure thing is allowed to approach the pure. These are the sort of words, Simmias, which the true lovers of wisdom cannot help saying to one another, and thinking. You will agree with me in that?

James only partially agrees with these two philosophers about the source of human conflict. And his solution to it is radically different than either that of Philo or Plato. And James is taking a common question about society in general and applying it to the congregation of believers. That gives distinctive tones to his expression.

Exegesis of the Text:

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

103	4.1	From where do wars and fightings . . . come? among you	
104		Do they not originate from your passions which are at war among your members?	

105	4.2	You crave and		Desire Non fulfillment
106		--- do not possess;		Consequence
107		you kill.		
108		Also you covet and		Desire Non fulfillment
109		--- are not able to obtain;		Consequence
110		you fight and		
111		--- do battle.		
112		You do not possess because you do not ask;		

113 ^{4.3} **you ask**
 and
 114 **--- do not receive**
 because you ask wrongly,
 so that you might squander your requests
 on your **passions**.

^{4.4} You harlots,
 115 **do you not know**
 that friendship with the world is enmity
 with God?
 Therefore
 116 **whoever chooses to be the world's friend**
shows himself
to be God's enemy.

^{4.5} Or
 117 **do you suppose**
 that the Scripture to no purpose says
 that the spirit...tends toward envy?
 which He caused to live
 in us

^{4.6} But
 118 **He gives greater grace;**
 wherefore
 119 **it says,**
 "God sets Himself against the proud;
 but
 --- gives grace to the humble."

^{4.7}	Therefore		
120	be submissive to God;		
	and		
121	be opposed to the devil,	□	Command
	and		
122	he will flee from you;	□	Promise
^{4.8}	draw near to God	□	Command
	and		
124	He will draw near to you.	□	Promise
	You sinners,		
125	cleanse your hands,		Outward
	and		
126	you double-minded ones, purify your hearts.		Inward
^{4.9}	Become miserable		
	and		
128	begin mourning		

129	and start weeping;		
130	Let your laughter be turned into mourning		
131	and --- your joy -- ----- into gloominess.		
132	^{4.10} Be humbled before the Lord,		Command
133	and He will exalt you.		Promise

Summary:

The rhetorical structure of this pericope is rather well defined. The author's thesis position is once more introduced by a rhetorical question (statement 103) then followed by his own answer (statement 104).

The second section (statements 105-119) represent his elaboration of his position about the source of disruption and chaos in human experience. This expansion unfolds in two segments: **(1)** statements 105 through 114 develop a logical exposition of the nature of 'passion' set forth in statement 104; **(2)** statements 115 through 119 build on the first section with an exposition on 'friendship with the world,' which is at the heart of 'passion.'

Statement 117 presents a huge challenge to Bible translators and interpreters. The difficulty lies in the final clause of verse 5 which is introduced as an OT scripture reference. The difficulty is that no OT passage comes close to the words used by James. Thus Πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα ὃ κατώκισεν ἐν ἡμῖν can be translated as 1) "the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely"; 2) "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"; or 3) "the Spirit He has caused to live in us yearns jealously." The first one works better.

The third section (statements 120-133) apply the previous discussion through a series of rapid fire admonitions to abandon worldliness and return to God. This is the solution to the issue of disruption of relationships.

In summary, disruption of relationships with others is due to passion. Passion by nature has an orientation to this world, not to God. The solution then is to abandon the world and return to God.

You will notice from the block diagram that the writing style of James changes somewhat here from the previous passages. A lot higher ratio of admonitions (imperative mood Greek verbs) is found here. Also, the sentences are characteristically very short and pointed in meaning. Additionally, references to Old Testament scripture passages play a more important role in this pericope than is usually the case in this NT book. The effect is to pick up the tempo of thought expression with more forceful statement of viewpoint. Ironically, the topic of this pericope is commonly found in the non-religious Greco-Roman literature all the way back to the classical Greek philosophers some three hundred years earlier.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) Have you experienced the kind of chaos James describes in your church? Or, in a previous church you belonged to?

- 2) What lies at the root of most church squabbles?

- 3) How well do you control 'passion' in your life?

- 4) How well do you maintain the tension of being a Christian "in this word but not of it"?

- 5) When you realize the tendency toward worldliness in your life, how do you deal with it?