



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 13
James James 4:13-17
“Planning for the Future”

Study By
Lorin L Cranford

Greek NT

13 Ἄγε νῦν οἱ λέγοντες· σήμερον ἢ αὔριον πορευσόμεθα εἰς τήνδε τὴν πόλιν καὶ ποιήσομεν ἐκεῖ ἐνιαυτὸν καὶ ἐμπορευσόμεθα καὶ κερδήσομεν· 14 οἷπινες οὐκ ἐπίστασθε τὸ τῆς αὔριον ποία ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν· ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστε ἢ πρὸς ὀλίγον φαινομένη, ἔπειτα καὶ ἀφανιζομένη· 15 ἀντὶ τοῦ λέγειν ὑμᾶς· ἐὰν ὁ κύριος θελήσῃ καὶ ζήσομεν καὶ ποιήσομεν τοῦτο ἢ ἐκεῖνο· 16 νῦν δὲ καυχᾶσθε ἐν ταῖς ἀλαζονεαῖς ὑμῶν· πᾶσα καύχησις τοιαύτη πονηρά ἐστιν· 17 εἰδὸτι οὖν καλὸν ποιεῖν καὶ μὴ ποιοῦντι, ἁμαρτία αὐτῶ ἐστιν.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

13 Oíd ahora, los que decís: Hoy o mañana iremos a tal o cual ciudad y pasaremos allá un año, haremos negocio y tendremos ganancia. 14 Sin embargo, no sabéis cómo será vuestra vida mañana. Sólo sois un vapor que aparece por un poco de tiempo y luego se desvanece. 15 Más bien, debierais decir: Si el Señor quiere, viviremos y haremos esto o aquello. 16 Pero ahora os jactáis en vuestra arrogancia; toda jactancia semejante es mala. 17 A aquel, pues, que sabe hacer lo bueno y no lo hace, le es pecado.

NRSV

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.” 14 Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

NLT

13 Look here, you people who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” 14 How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog -- it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. 15 What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.” 16 Otherwise you will be boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil. 17 Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

The Study of the Text:¹

With 4:13-17, James seems to move a slightly different direction in the series of admonitions. The direct address introduction to both this passage and the following one in 5:1-16 is the same, Ἄγε νῦν, and also is unique to James in the entire New Testament. He continues to address problems perceived to loom on the horizon for his readers, but now shifts to ‘preventative medicine’ rather than ‘prescriptive medicine,’ that he has been giving up to this point, and will resume in 5:7. That is, he addresses issues problematic in the larger Jewish communities of the Diaspora, but not problems that have as of yet made their way into the life of the Christian communities in the Diaspora. The language of the OT prophets is especially prominent in these two passages, and James’ admonitions for addressing them are largely the same as those in Amos and the other Hebrew prophets that he draws from so heavily.

The first issue in 4:13-17 was that of traveling merchants making business plans solely for profit and also with completely ignoring God in the making of those plans. Among the Jewish people in the latter years of the monarchy, and especially with the period after the Babylonian exile called the Diaspora, this became a common theme among Jewish writers. In part this issue arose due to huge sociological shifts in the Jewish world. The later years of the divided kingdom witnessed a dramatic shift from rural oriented living to increasingly urbanized life styles. Jews thus gravitated toward becoming traders in the ancient world. This trend was

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 application 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.

accelerated greatly by the exile in Babylonia in the fifth century BCE.

Christian communities in western societies face many of the same temptations that James' first readers did. The surrounding world, especially with dominated by raw materialistic capitalism, not only excludes God from any of its business plans, but considers Him completely irrelevant to them. Christians living in such an atmosphere face enormous and at the same time subtle pressures to conform to this worldly way of thinking. We have much to learn from James here.

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

Background:

In the world of James making money off a business operation played a certain role in Roman society. But the economic basis of that society was radically different from any version of economics followed today in the western world. Having awareness of these differences is important to understanding the nuances of what James said to his first readers.

Historical Setting.

External History. In the history of the hand copying of the Greek text of our passage a number of variations in wording surface (15 in the N-A text apparatus), but those having some impact on Bible translation surface in verse fourteen. The text apparatus of the UBS *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) lists three places in verse fourteen where significant differences exist among the five thousand plus manuscripts. First, the phrase τὸ τῆς αὔριον is replaced with τὰ τῆς αὔριον or with just τῆς αὔριον. Second, the grammar role of the relative clause ποία ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν introduced by the qualitative relative adjective ποία is shifted by adding a coordinate conjunction, either γάρ or δέ lifting the clause to a primary clause status. Third, the main clause ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστε ἢ is replaced by one of the following: ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστε or ἀτμὶς γάρ ἔσται ἢ, with both these patterns containing variations. The heart of the problem in all three instances is the difficulty in understanding clearly how James was setting up his comparison of such individuals planning without God to a vapor.



Some more details about each will help us understand the challenges faced by the copyists. With the first UBS text listing² οἱτινες οὐκ ἐπίστασθε τὸ τῆς αὔριον, *who are the kind of folks who do not understand the essence of tomorrow*, is replaced by some with ...τὰ τῆς αὔριον ποία, *the nature of tomorrow's happenings*. Or by a few copyists with ...τῆς αὔριον ποία ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, *what your life is like tomorrow*. Is the ignorance that James accuses the people planning without God of having a) ignorance of the nature of life itself, b) ignorance of knowing in advance the events to happen tomorrow, or c) ignorance of tomorrow completely? The adopted reading of τὸ τῆς αὔριον has slightly better manuscript evidence supporting it than do the alternative readings.³

The second variant reading location centers on the role of the clause ποία ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, *what is your life*.⁴ In the adopted reading the idea expression flows as *you who do not understand the essence of tomorrow, i.e., what your life is*. But a good number of manuscripts insert the causal conjunction γάρ turning ποία ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν into a question, *for what is your life?* That becomes the first of two justifying statements about the ignorance of those who plan without God. The second one is ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστε, *for you are a vapor*. The other alternative inserts the contrastive conjunction δέ turning the expression into, *you who do not understand the essence of tomorrow, but what is your life?*⁵ The adopted reading in which ποία ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν functions in apposition to τὸ τῆς

²{B} τὸ τῆς αὔριον κ Ψ 322 323 436 1067 1409 1735 2464 Byz [K L] Lect it^{ar, ff} vg (eth) Jerome // τὰ τῆς αὔριον A P 33 81 945 1175 1241 1243 1292 1505 1611 1739 1852 2138 2298 2344 syr^h // τῆς αὔριον B it

³“Of the several readings, τὰ τῆς αὔριον, though supported by several good witnesses (A P 33 81 1739 al), is suspect as a scribal assimilation to Pr 27:1; and, in view of a certain tendency of B to omit the article, the reading τῆς αὔριον cannot be confidently regarded as original. The remaining reading, τὸ τῆς αὔριον, is supported by a wide diversity of witnesses (κ K Ψ most minuscules vg syr^p arm al).” [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 613.]

⁴{B} ποία κ* B 1505 1611 1852 2138 it^l syr^h cop^{bo} arm // ποία γάρ P^{74, 100} κ² A Ψ 33 81 322 323 436 945 1067 1175 1241 1243 1292 1409 1735 1739 2298 2344 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect it^{ar, s} vg syr^p cop^{sa, bo} slav Jerome Augustine // ποία δέ it^{ff} eth geo

⁵“Although the reading with γάρ is widespread (P^{74vid} κ^c A K L P Ψ 049 056 most minuscules vg syr^p cop^{bo} al), the connective

αὔριον can best explain the origin of the alternatives, and thus has greater evidence in its favor.

The third variation from ἀτμὶς γὰρ ἔστε ἢ πρὸς ὀλίγον φαινομένη, ἔπειτα καὶ ἀφανιζομένη, *for you are a vapor which appears for a little while and then disappears*,⁶ centers on the verb ἔστε and the omission of the following article ἡ.⁷ The verb shift goes from *you are* to *you will be* to *it will be*. The second plural present tense ἔστε, *you are*, has the better support. The omission of ἡ has no impact on the meaning of the grammatical function of the two participles φαινομένη and ἀφανιζομένη. It is largely the difference between *a vapor which appears for an little while and then disappears*, and saying *a vapor appearing for a little while and then disappearing*. The nominative case feminine article ἡ states clearly that the feminine gender participles modify the feminine gender noun ἀτμὶς which are separated by γὰρ ἔστε, *for you are*.

From the adopted reading of the text the sense is that James accuses those planning without God to be ignorant of the essence of tomorrow. That is, they don't understand the nature of their own life, which is just like the morning mist which shows up temporarily in the early morning but then is quickly gone with the rising of the hot sun. James' evident allusion to Prov. 27:1, *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring*, brought about some of the confusion since the wording of the LXX is different: μὴ καυχῶ τὰ εἰς αὔριον· οὐ γὰρ γινώσκεις τί τέξεται ἡ ἐπιούσα.

The Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed) text apparatus lists some 15 places where variations surface in these verses.⁸ Careful examination of each of the places where appears to have been inserted (perhaps under the influence of the following clause) in order to prevent ambiguity (ποῖα may introduce an independent question, or may depend upon ἐπίστασθε). The reading ποῖα is adequately supported by \aleph^* B 614 67 syr^h cop^{bo} ms arm eth^{ro}.⁹ [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 613.]

⁶{C} ἀτμὶς γὰρ ἔστε ἡ 81 1243 1292 1852 syr^h // ἀτμὶς γὰρ ἔστε B 322 323 945 1175 1739 2298 // ἀτμὶς γὰρ ἔσται ἡ (A omit γὰρ) Ψ 436 1067 1505 1611 2138 2464 Byz^{pt} [K (P omit ἡ)] *Lect* (I 680* I 884 omit ἡ) (it^l) // ἀτμὶς γὰρ ἔστε ἡ (33 1735 2344 omit γὰρ) 1409 Byz^{pt} [L] / 592 (I 596 omit ἡ) / 883 / 921 / 1159 / 1441 it^{(ar, ff, (s))} (vg) (cop^{sa, bo}) sla^v John-Damascus; (Augustine) // ἡ \aleph

⁷“The connective γὰρ, seeming to interrupt the sense after the preceding question, was omitted in A 33 al. Although several important witnesses (including B and 1739) lack the article, the Committee considered it more probable that scribes would have accidentally omitted ἡ than added it. Since in later Greek αἰ and ε were pronounced alike, either ἔσται or ἔστε may have originated through itacistic corruption of the other; the evidence for the two together far outweighs that supporting ἔστιν. As between the second person ἔστε and the third person ἔσται, not only does external evidence on the whole favor the former reading, but it is probable that copyists would tend to prefer the third person in the reply to a question. The omission of ἀτμὶς γὰρ ἔστε in \aleph seems to be the result of accidental oversight on the part of the scribe.” [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 613-14.]

⁸Jakobus 4,13

- * καὶ A P M sy^h bo^{ms}; Hier Cyr (ἡ is replaced by καὶ; *today or tomorrow* becomes *today and tomorrow*)
 - | txt P⁷⁴ \aleph B Ψ 33. 81. 323. 945. 1241. 1739 al latt sy^p co
- * –σωμεθα A Ψ M I (πορευσόμεθα is replaced with πορευσόμεθα, *we will go* becomes *we might go*)
 - | txt \aleph B K P 323. 945. 1739 al lat; Cyr
- *¹ –σωμεν \aleph A Ψ 33 m (ποιήσωμεν becomes ποιησῶμεν, *we will do* becomes *we might do*)
 - | txt P¹⁰⁰ B P 323. 945. 1739 al latt; Cyr
- * A Ψ 33. 81 al; Cyr (ἐκεῖ, *there*, is omitted)
- * ενα A Ψ 33 m sy; Hier Cyr (ένα, *one*, is added)
 - | txt \aleph B P 945. 1241. 1739 pc latt
- *² –σωμεθα et *²–σωμεν Ψ m I; Hier (ἐμπορευσόμεθα is replaced by either ἐμπορευσόμεθα or ἐμπορεύσωμεν; same future tense replaced by subjunctive mood as in above instances)
 - | txt P100vid \aleph A B P 33. 323. 945. 1739 al lat; Cyr

Jakobus 4,14

- * –στανται P pc syp (ἐπίστασθε is replaced with ἐπίστανται, *you understand* becomes *they understand*)
- * † – B I (article τὸ is either omitted or replaced with τὰ)
 - | τα A P 33. 69. 81. 614. 630. 945. 1241. 1505. 1739 al sy^h
 - | txt \aleph Ψ M ff vg; Hier
- * γαρ P^{74,100} \aleph^2 A P Ψ 33. 1739 M vg syp co (γὰρ is inserted after ποῖα)
 - | txt \aleph^* B 614. 1505. 1852 pc I sy^h bo^{mss}
- *¹ ἡμων 33. 630 al vg^{ms} sy^p (ὁμων, *your*, is replaced by ἡμων, *our*)
- * 1-3 B 322. 323. 945. 1739. 2298 pc (variations of ἀτμὶς γὰρ ἔστε ἡ replace some of the words as reflected below)

variations surface again reveals that the essential meaning of the text is not changed. All of the variations outside of verse fourteen reflect stylistic updates to make the Greek text conform to patterns of natural expression current at the time and place of the copying of the manuscript. Those in verse fourteen reflect the difficulty in understanding the precise details of James' comparison that were discussed above in the UBS text apparatus.

Thus, we can confidently exegete the adopted reading of the text that it represents the original wording of this portion of James.

Internal History.

The topic being addressed by James is stated in verse 13 in rather precise details: οἱ λέγοντες· σήμερον ἢ αὐριον πορευσόμεθα εἰς τήνδε τὴν πόλιν καὶ ποιήσομεν ἐκεῖ ἔνιαυτὸν καὶ ἔμπορευσόμεθα καὶ κερδήσομεν, *who say, Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that city and spend a year there and conduct business and make some profit.* Clearly James is describing the itinerate Jewish trader who traveled from city to city over the eastern Mediterranean world making a living by trading goods. By the beginning of the Christian era this was a major way for Diaspora Jews to earn a livelihood outside Palestine.

But this raises some important background issues that need to be examined so that we can set the context for James' words correctly in their first century setting. These issues have to do with how economics worked in first century Rome. What was the economic system in place then that the Roman economy was built off of? How did Jewish traders fit into that system? How did one operate a business in that system? The reason these questions become important is that no modern system of economics resembles that one in ancient Rome at all. What I have also observed over these many years of studying and teaching the book of James is that very few modern commentators either have an awareness of the economic system in place during this time which shapes the precise meaning of some of James' terminology. Or, else they choose to completely ignore it and tend to read some modern -- either European or North American -- system of economics back into the text -- something blatantly false and misleading. I suspect this means that hundreds of thousands of sermons that have been preached from this passage have in reality little or no correct theological understand supporting what the preachers said.

How did the economy of the first century Roman empire work? In no shape or form was it either capitalist or Marxist in orientation. These two competing systems have only been around for less than 200 years in the modern world and didn't exist prior to that. It also wasn't the medieval feudal system of economics, although that system grew out of the ancient Roman system.

How then did the economy function in the first century? Essentially the economic basis of the Roman empire at the beginning of the Christian era was a system of patronage.⁹ Economic survival depended upon

| 4 κ
 | ατ. γ. (-33) εστιν η L 33. 623. 630 al (lat)
 | ατ. γ. (-A) εσται η (-P 1241 pc) A P Ψ M (l)
 | txt 81. 614 al syh; Hier?

*² δε και P 33 M (και is replaced by one of these variations)

| δε 61 pc sa
 | - 614. 630. 1505 pc vg^{st,ww} sy^h bo
 | txt κ A B Ψ 81. 945. 1241. 1739 al ff¹ vg^{cl}

Jakobus 4,15

* θελη B P 81. 614. 630. 1505. 1852 al (θελήση is replaced by θέλη)
 * bis -σωμεν Ψ 33 M (ζήσομεν becomes ζισωμεν; *we will live* becomes *we might live*)
 | txt P^{100vid} κ A B P (323). 945. (1739) al

Jakobus 4,16

* κατακαυχασθε κ 945. 1241. 1739. 2298 pc (καυχᾶσθε becomes κατακαυχᾶσθε)
 * *απασα* κ (πᾶσα, *all*, is replaced with the more intenseive ἅπασα, *all*, or with πᾶσα οὖν, *therefore all*)
 | πασα ουν 614. 630. 1505 al

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 595.]

⁹“The patron-client relationship is the basic building block of Greco-Roman society. In an economy in which most of the resources are held by a fraction of the population, attaching oneself to a patron would be essential to ensure the well-being of oneself and one's family. In a culture in which prestige and honor were highly valued, patrons would be willing to exchange material goods

the individual building a network of patron-client relationships.¹⁰ These relationships could be established between equals, which usually meant the official title of Friends, φίλοι. But they could be established between individuals in lower and higher levels of society. A third role in this system was that of broker or mediator, where a third party would facilitate setting up a relationship between two individuals. The establishment of the patron-client relationship meant numerous obligations of each party to the other.¹¹ These went well beyond just commercial or monetary obligations.

_____ In order to conduct business the merchant would have to develop a set of patron-client relationships or other assistance for the honor, loyalty and service that a client would provide. This form of beneficence, which involved mutual loyalty and personal connection, stood alongside the practice of public benefaction, in which giving brought recognition but did not involve the formation of patron-client bonds. The social institution of patronage becomes relevant for reading the NT since, for example, the language of ‘grace’ and ‘faith’ are central terms in both” [Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).]

¹⁰“**1.1. Patrons, Brokers and Clients.** Seneca speaks of the giving and receiving of benefactions as ‘the practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society’ (Seneca Ben. 1.4.2; cf. 5.11.5; 6.41.2). The Greco-Roman world was a patronal society, supported by an infrastructure of networks of favor and loyalty. These relationships were regarded as an essential element of security (Seneca Ben. 4.18.1). Such bonds existed between social equals who call each other friends (see Friendship) and for whom the dictum ‘friends possess all things in common’ holds true. Partners in such relationships exchanged favors as needed, with neither party being in an inferior, dependent role (Saller).

“Such bonds were also forged between social unequals, in which one party was clearly the patron of the other. These relationships might still employ the language of friendship out of sensitivity to the person in the inferior role (e.g., when Pilate is called ‘Caesar’s friend,’ Jn 19:12). The system did not lend itself to precise evaluations of favors (Seneca Ben. 3.9.3), such that mutual commitment tended to be long-term. The point of the institution was not even exchange but ongoing exchange (Seneca Ben. 2.18.5). Mutual bonds of favor and the accompanying bonds of indebtedness provided the glue that maintained social cohesion (Saller). In such a society, gratitude becomes an essential virtue, and ingratitude the cardinal social and political sin (Seneca Ben. 7.31.1; 4.18.1).

“In a world in which wealth and property were concentrated into the hands of a very small percentage of the population, the majority of people often found themselves in need of assistance in one form or another and therefore had to seek the patronage of someone who was better placed in the world than himself or herself. Patrons might be asked to provide money, grain, employment or land; the better connected persons could be sought out as patrons for the opportunities they would give for professional or social advancement (Stambaugh and Balch). One who received such a benefit became a client to the patron, accepting the obligation to publicize the favor and his or her gratitude for it, thus contributing to the patron’s reputation. The client also accepted the obligation of loyalty to a patron and could be called upon to perform services for the patron, thus contributing to the patron’s power. The reception of a gift and the acceptance of the obligation of gratitude are inseparable (cf. Seneca Ben. 2.25.3).

“A third figure in this network of patronage has been called the ‘broker’ (Boissevain) or mediator. This mediator acts as a patron, but his or her primary gift to the client is access to a more suitable or powerful patron. This second patron will be a friend (in the technical sense) of the broker, a member of the broker’s family or the broker’s own patron. Brokerage was common and personal in the ancient world. The letters of Pliny the Younger, Cicero and Fronto are filled with these authors’ attempts to connect a client with one of their friends or patrons (de Ste. Croix). Pliny’s letters to Trajan, for example, document Pliny’s attempts to gain imperial beneficia (benefits) for Pliny’s own friends and clients. In Epistles 10.4, Pliny asks Trajan to grant a senatorial office to Voconius Romanus. He addresses Trajan clearly as a client addressing his patron and proceeds to ask a favor for Romanus. Pliny offers his own character as a guarantee of his client’s character, and Trajan’s assessment of the secondhand client is inseparable from his assessment of Pliny—Trajan’s ‘favorable judgment’ of Pliny (not Romanus) is the basis for Trajan’s granting of this favor.

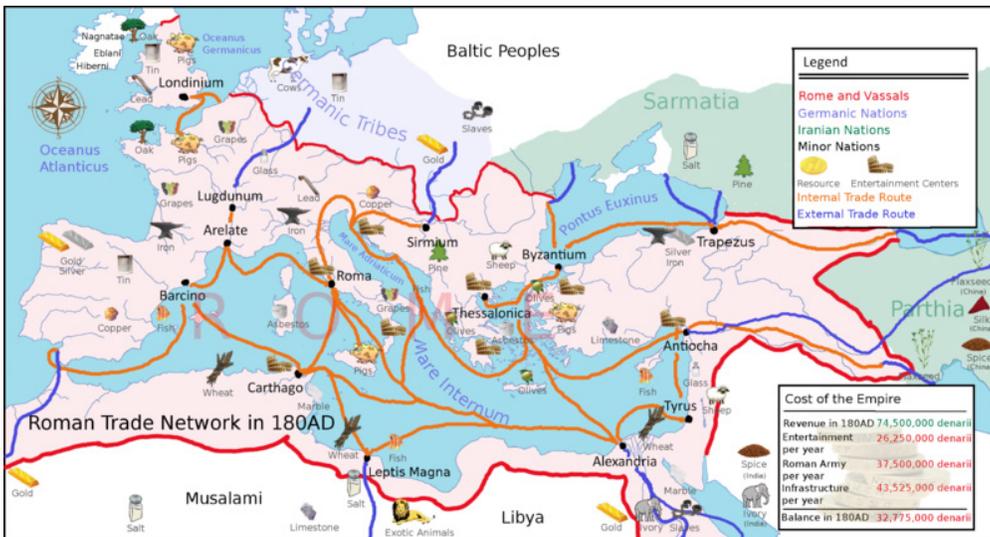
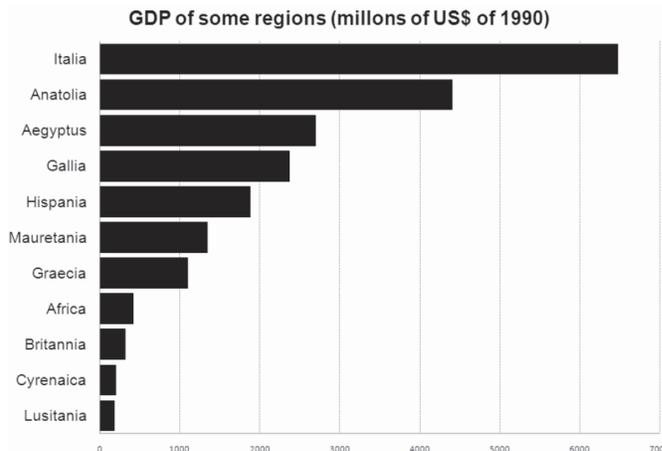
“Such considerations in the patron-client exchange have an obvious corollary in the church’s christology and soteriology, wherein God, the Patron, accepts Christ’s clients (i.e., the Christians) on the basis of the mediator’s merit. Within these webs of patronage, indebtedness remains within each patron-client (or friend-to-friend) relationship. Voconius Romanus will be indebted to Pliny as well as Trajan, and Pliny will be indebted further to Trajan. The broker, or mediator, at the same time incurs a debt and increases his own honor through the indebtedness of his or her client. Brokerage occurs also between friends and associates in private life. A familiar example appears in Paul’s letter to Philemon, in which Paul approaches his friend Philemon on behalf of Paul’s new client, Onesimus: “if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me” (Philem 17).”

[Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).]

¹¹“Benefits a patron might confer include legal representation in court, loans of money, influencing business deals or marriages, and supporting a client’s candidacy for political office or a priesthood. In return, the client was expected to offer his services to his patron as needed. A freedman became the client of his former master. A patronage relationship might also exist between a general and his soldiers, a founder and colonists, and a conqueror and a dependent foreign community.” [“Patronage in ancient Rome,” *Wikipedia.org*]

that could serve his purposes of increasing his wealth and status in society.¹² In regards to personal finance and state finance efforts to reform a horrible system of managing the *aerarium*, the state treasury, at the beginning of the empire by Augustus had some success in preventing raids on state moneys by private individuals of power.¹³ Most scholars are convinced that trade “was the engine that drove the Roman economy of the late Republic and the early Empire.”¹⁴ The patterns of commerce in the early empire centered around to groups of merchants:

The Romans knew two types of businessmen, the *negotiatores* and the *mercatores*. The *negotiatores* were in part bankers because they lent money on interest. They also bought and sold staples in bulk or did commerce in wholesale quantities of goods. In some instances the *argentarii* are considered as a subset of the *negotiatores* and in others as a group apart. The *argentarii* acted as agents in public or private auctions, kept deposits of money for individuals, cashed cheques (*prescriptio*) and served as moneychangers. They kept strict books, or *tabulae*, which were considered as legal proof by the courts. The *argentarii* sometimes did the same kind of work as the



Scenes from the Forum in Pompeii
Fresco from the house of Julia Felix

¹²For a very helpful assessment of the economy of the Roman empire see “Roman economy,” *Wikipedia.org*. Although modern estimates of the total population of the empire range from 60-70 million to over 100 million people, the more common estimation sets the figure at around 55 million people.

¹³For a very helpful study of finances in the Roman empire, see “Roman finance,” *Wikipedia.org*

“The *aerarium* (state treasury) was supervised by members of the government rising in power and prestige, the Quaestors, Praetors, and eventually the Prefects. With the dawn of the Roman Empire, a major change took place, as the emperors assumed the reins of financial control. Augustus adopted a system that was, on the surface, fair to the senate. Just as the world was divided in provinces designated as imperial or senatorial, so was the treasury. All tribute brought in from senatorially controlled provinces was given to the *aerarium*, while that of the imperial territories went to the treasury of the emperor, the *fiscus*.”

A helpful recent publication is Jean Andreau, *Banking and Business in the Roman World*, transl. by Janet Lloyd (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Particularly relevant is chapter twelve, “Financial life in Roman society and its economy.”

¹⁴See “Roman commerce,” *Wikipedia.org* for details.

mensarii, who were public bankers appointed by the state. The *mercatores* were usually plebeians or freedmen. They were present in all the open-air markets or covered shops, manning stalls or hawking goods by the side of the road. They were also present near Roman military camps during campaigns, where they sold food and clothing to the soldiers and paid cash for any booty coming from military activities.



Stoa of the ancient agora of Thessaloniki

The center of commerce for every city was the *forum* or ἀγορά. Merchants did most of their trading in the forum, which served as more than a marketplace. “In addition to its standard function as a marketplace, a forum was a gathering place of great social significance, and often the scene of diverse activities, including political discussions and debates, rendezvous, meetings, et cetera. In that case it supplemented the function of a *conciliabulum*.”¹⁵ In the Greek provinces the ἀγορά served the same basic purposes as the Roman forum, basically commercial and political functions.¹⁶ Trading of goods was usually a combination of both barter and money purchase. At the beginning of the empire the money purchases could be challenging because of a huge variety of coinage, both Roman and local.¹⁷



A Roman aureus struck under Augustus, c. AD 13–14; the reverse shows Tiberius riding on a *quadriga*, celebrating the fifteenth renewal of his tribunal power.



obverse



reverse



obverse



reverse

j= Bronze coin of Herod the Great (37-4 BCE)
k= Bronze coin of Roman Procurator (52-60 AD)

Diaspora Jewish merchants functioned within this system during the Roman empire, to some degree as outsiders. They were numerous since the Diaspora population of Jewish people was substantial and scattered extensively over the eastern and central Mediterranean world.¹⁸ Hopefully one can more easily see the challenges that Jewish businessmen faced

¹⁵“Forum (Roman),” Wikipedia.org.

¹⁶“From this twin function of the agora as a political and commercial space came the two Greek verbs ἀγοράζω, *agoradzō*, ‘I shop’, and ἀγορεύω, *agoreuō*, ‘I speak in public’. The word *agoraphobia*, the fear of open spaces or public situations, derives from the meaning of *agora* as a gathering place.” [“Agora,” Wikipedia.org]

¹⁷“Coinage was in widespread use throughout the empire, especially in the urban areas and among the military. However, it is difficult to determine how extensive the use of coinage was in many rural regions. Many commercial transactions may have involved barter rather than coinage. Certainly during the economic, political, and military troubles of the 3d century much of the economy seems to have been conducted by barter. The central government issued gold, silver, and aes coins. In many regions of the empire local aes issues supplemented imperial coinage (in Asia Minor, Palestine and the East in general, areas of Spain and southern Gaul) to meet the exigencies of local commerce. In some cases, even local issues of silver continued (Asia Minor). Egypt remained, after the Roman annexation of 30 B.C., a separate economic unit with regard to coinage. The mint at Alexandria coined *billon* (debased silver) and *aes* coinage of a standard different from that of the central government. These various local coinages, along with other indices, including the existence of regional tax zones which did not necessarily coincide with provincial borders (de Laet 1949: 119), reveal that the Roman empire was not a unified economic system, but a collection of various regional and local systems interacting to various degrees. There was a gradual trend toward unification of the imperial coinage and the elimination of all locally and regionally minted issues. This was accomplished by the reforms of Diocletian and his Tetrarchic colleagues in the late 3d /early 4th centuries and their minting of a series of *aes*, silver, and gold coins of good quality (West 1951: 290–302; Erim et al. 1971: 171–77). Accompanying this coinage reform was the first recorded attempt at empire-wide control of wages and prices: the Edict of Maximum Prices. This fiat was not a success (West 1951: 290–302; Erim and Reynolds 1970: 120–41; 1973: 99–110). The basic *laissez-faire* nature of the Roman economy, the size of the empire, and the inability or lack of willingness to enforce the edict resulted in its failure. Neither the unification of the coinage nor the edict reveals, however, a unified economic system, although this may have been one of the objectives.” [Steven E. Sidebotham, “Trade and Commerce: Roman Empire” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 630.]

¹⁸“As early as the middle of the 2nd century BCE the Jewish author of the third book of the *Oracula Sibyllina* addressed the ‘chosen people,’ saying: ‘Every land is full of thee and every sea.’ The most diverse witnesses, such as Strabo, Philo, Seneca, Luke

in the Diaspora. In order to survive financially, they had to learn how to fit into the existing system, not just the one imposed to some extent by the Romans, but also the local systems with their diverse traditions and customs. Maintaining one's Jewish religious convictions in such an atmosphere would indeed be challenging. And from available data, evidently many Jews either severely compromised their religious heritage, if not abandoned it completely.

Thus when James describes a Jewish merchant making business plans and not including God in those plans, he was not speaking theory, but indeed was addressing a real problem that his Diaspora Jewish Christian readers would be very aware of. Perhaps some of them even were drifting into a similar pattern.

Literary:

Genre: Apart from some distinctive expressions, i.e., ἄγε νῦν and ἔάν ὁ κύριος θελήσῃ, the content of 4:13-17 is general *paraenesis*. The moral exhortation contained here for his targeted individuals, i.e., the businessman planning without including God (v. 13), is for him to change his way of thinking. There is hope for this group of individuals to begin seeking God's will in making their business plans. This stands in contrast to the clearly connected (ἄγε νῦν, 4:13 & 5:1) passage that follows in 5:1-6 where eternal condemnation is pronounced upon the targeted group of wealthy individuals.

Context: Substantial diversity of viewpoint about the precise literary setting of 4:13-17 can be found in the commentaries. Coming to a conclusion about this will impact substantially the understanding of the content of these verses, largely in terms of insider or outsider focus. Some commentators try to link 4:13-17 with either 4:11-12 or 4:1-12 as a continuation of the sins going on inside the churches, especially that of arrogance and pride. This is highly questionable to say the least. The themes of these three pericopes, 4:1-10, 4:11-12, and 4:13-17, are distinctively different from each other, and possess only vague connections under rubrics such as sinful actions etc. But this is a modern way of thinking that wants to group them together. A much more natural understanding is to see the common idiom ἄγε νῦν, largely classical Greek in usage, as pulling 4:13-17 and 5:1-6 closely together. Added to that is the absence of the vocative ἀδελφοί in both pericopes but contained in 4:11-12 and 5:7-11, on either side of the two pericopes.

What comes out of such an understanding? Simply that in these two pericopes James is shifting from 'prescriptive medicine' to 'preventative medicine' in his emphasis. This is more easily seen in 5:1-6 than 4:13-17, but I am convinced it is the correct understanding. By picking up a common theme of the traveling merchant from ancient literature, and the Jewish merchant from the Old Testament prophets, he addresses a warning about making business plans without considering the will of God in those plans. From our above survey of the business world of the first century Roman empire, one can easily see this temptation to business men in the Jewish Diaspora. And this may have well been tempting to the Jewish Christian readers in the Diaspora as well. I strongly suspect that James is attempting to put this popular prophetic emphasis on the table in order to strongly encourage the businessmen among his Jewish Christian readers to resist the temptation they were observing all around them every day in the Diaspora. Additionally, should some non-Christian Jewish businessman come across this material from a Christian friend, perhaps he would find

(the author of the Acts of the Apostles), Cicero, and Josephus, all mention Jewish populations in the cities of the Mediterranean basin. See also *History of the Jews in India* and *History of the Jews in China* for pre-Roman (and post-) diasporic populations. King Agrippa I, in a letter to Caligula, enumerated among the provinces of the Jewish diaspora almost all the Hellenized and non-Hellenized countries of the Orient. This enumeration was far from complete as Italy and Cyrene were not included. The epigraphic discoveries from year to year augment the number of known Jewish communities but must be viewed with caution due to the lack of precise evidence of their numbers. According to Josephus, the next most dense Jewish population after the Land of Israel and Babylonia was in Syria, particularly in Antioch, and Damascus, where 10,000 to 18,000 Jews were massacred during the great insurrection. Philo gives the number of Jewish inhabitants in Egypt as one million, one-eighth of the population. Alexandria was by far the most important of the Egyptian Jewish communities.

“To judge by the accounts of wholesale massacres in 115 BCE, the number of Jewish residents in Cyrenaica, Cyprus, and Mesopotamia was also large. At the commencement of the reign of Caesar Augustus, there were over 7,000 Jews in Rome (this is the number that escorted the envoys who came to demand the deposition of Archelaus). Finally, if the sums confiscated by the governor Lucius Valerius Flaccus in the year 62/61 BCE represented the tax of a didrachma per head for a single year, it would imply that the Jewish population of Asia Minor numbered 45,000 adult males, for a total of at least 180,000 persons”

[“Jewish diaspora: Dispersion of the Jews in the Roman Empire,” *Wikipedia.org*]

For
142 you are a vapor,
 which appears for a little while
 then indeed
 vanishes;
143 ^{4.15} **Instead, you ought to say,**
 if the Lord wills
 we will both live
 and
 -- ---- do this
 or
 that.

^{4.16} But
144 now you are boasting in your proud pretensions;
 and
145 all such boasting is evil.

^{4.17} Therefore
 to the one knowing to do good
 and
 not doing it,
146 to him it is sin.

In this pericope the rhetorical structure is fairly well defined. The first two statements set up an antithesis with the assertion of what is being said (statement 142) followed by an accusation that such a stance fails to understand the basic issue of life itself (statement 142). The correct stance is set forth in statement 143, using a well known axiom in the ancient world. Statements 144 and 145 return to the initial stance with a stinging condemnation of its wrongness. The passage concludes with an application of the preceding in statement 146.

At the heart of the issue is a stance taken (statement 141) which the author declares reflects a basic ignorance about the nature of life itself. Subsequently, the author condemns it as an evil expression of pride (statements 144 and 145). In the midst of this, he presents the alternative stance in statement 143. The passage reaches a climax with the use of a piece of early Christian tradition that has come to be known as the 'sin of omission' in statement 146. This applies the discussion by way of a back-handed warning to adopt the correct stance.

Exegesis of the Text.

The twofold natural division of the above diagram provides the best understanding of the subdivisions of the text that should be the basis of the exegeting of the passage. The contrast between omitting and including God in one's plans is dramatic.

a) *Leaving God out of one's plans, vv. 13-14.*

13 Ἄγε νῦν οἱ λέγοντες· σήμερον ἢ αὔριον πορευσόμεθα εἰς τήνδε τὴν πόλιν καὶ ποιήσομεν ἐκεῖ ἐνιαυτὸν καὶ ἐμπορευσόμεθα καὶ κερδήσομεν· 14 οἵτινες οὐκ ἐπίστασθε τὸ τῆς αὔριον ποῖα ἢ ζωὴ ὑμῶν· ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστε ἢ πρὸς ὀλίγον φαινομένη, ἔπειτα καὶ ἀφανιζομένη.

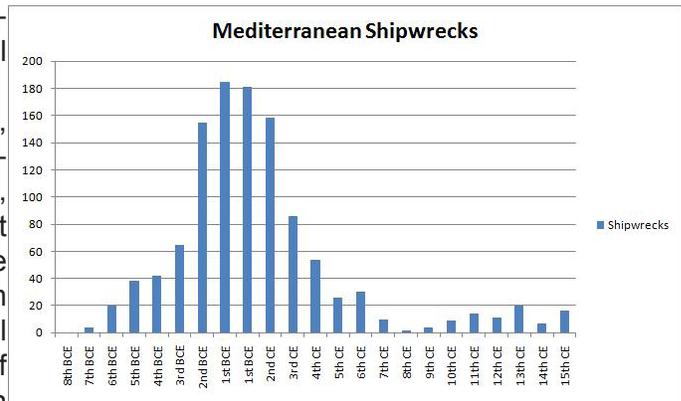
13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." 14 Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James begins with a rather strange expression: Ἄγε νῦν.²⁰ It idiomatically means something close

²⁰“The same Greek phrase will be used again in 5:1, directed to the rich. The present singular imperative of *agein* is found, as here, with the plural as early as Homer (Il. 3:441; Od. 3:332) as well as in drama (Aristophanes, *The Knights* 1011; Aeschylus, *The Persians* 140; *Eumenides* 307) and prose (Herodotus, *Persian War* 7:103; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* V,5,15; *Apology* 14); in the diatribe, see Epictetus, *Discourses* III, 24, 40; see also LXX Judg 19:6; Isa 43:6; Syb. Or. 3:562). As so often in James, it is speech as revealing the orientation of the heart that is the special target (2:3, 14, 16, 18; 3:9, 14).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The*

to “Come on now, you know better than this!” James expects his readers to be smarter than people who will make the statement about business plans.

He then identifies these people with *οἱ λέγοντες*, the ones saying. Are these people making these statements Christians? Some commentators will argue yes, but the above discussion under **Context** argues against these people here being inside the church. These were business people, primarily traders who traveled from city to city in their work. “According to archaeological evidence there was a large increase in the volume of long distance trade during Hellenistic and early Roman



Imperial times followed by a large decrease. This is evidenced in the archaeological data on the number of shipwrecks found in the mediterranean sea.”²¹ Jewish traders were very involved in this industry at the beginning of the Christian era.²² Most likely in James’ mind was the image of the merchant that surfaces most often in the Hebrew Bible along with the intertestamental Jewish writings.²³

But one should also remember that this trader segment of Roman society, existing almost completely among the elite, represents only a very small portion of the Roman empire.²⁴ Additional affirmation of the extensive merchant activity comes, ironically, from Revelation chapter eighteen where merchants and artisans,

Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 294-95.]

²¹“Roman Economy,” Wikipedia.org.

²²One of the interesting aspects here is what modern economists call “Trading Diasporas,” i.e., “communities of merchants living among aliens in associated networks.” [“Trading Diaspora,” Wikipedia.org] This ‘insider group’ among ‘outsiders’ developed early and preceded the Jewish Diaspora:

Trading Diasporas were formed as a result of international trade that resulted in the settlement of merchants in certain countries where they sold their products. Their importance to the global world was marked by their impact on the spread of cultures and ideologies of certain areas to the rest of the world. First mention of Trading Diasporas dates back around 2000 BCE when the Assyrian merchants traveled to the Anatolian Peninsula in order to sell their goods.² Trading Diasporas in this period of time were created as a result of the Assyrian traders staying as “semi-permanent residents” in cities of the Anatolian peninsula. According to Steve Gosch of the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire divides the Assyrian traders into “stayers” and “movers.”³ Gosch further explains that “stayers” were the merchants who permanently settled on the Anatolian peninsula while “movers” traveled back and forth in order to sell their goods.

How this played itself out among the Diaspora Jews early on is not yet understood clearly, largely because of lack of research into the documents of the ancient world. A much latter example with extensive documentation and understanding comes in the Jewish Diaspora in India where Jewish traders gained great recognition through their skills to facilitate trade between India and Portugal as ‘go-betweeners’ who understood local customs etc. and could negotiate successful business deals for the Portuguese. The general implication of existing materials suggest a keen skill in doing this kind of thing reaches way back to the early Exile in the fifth century BCE.

²³As one reflection of this image see the concordance listing of “Merchant*” for the NRSV with the Apocrypha where the word ‘merchant’ shows up some 33 times. Interestingly, the picture of merchants closer to the first Christian century becomes increasingly negative:

Ben Sira 26:29. A merchant can hardly keep from wrongdoing, nor is a tradesman innocent of sin.

Ben Sira 37:11. Do not consult with a woman about her rival or with a coward about war, *with a merchant about business or with a buyer about selling*, with a miser about generosity or with the merciless about kindness, with an idler about any work or with a seasonal laborer about completing his work, with a lazy servant about a big task— pay no attention to any advice they give

²⁴“The majority of the people of the Roman Empire lived in destitution, while the small fraction of the population that engaged in commerce was much poorer than the elite. Industrial output was minor, due to the fact that the majority poor could not pay for the products. Technological advance was severely hampered by this fact. Urbanization in the western part of the empire was also restricted by low overall population density and the poverty of the region. Low labour costs brought about by slavery may also have contributed to the lack of development in mechanical means of production.”²⁸ [“Roman Economy,” Wikipedia.org.

οἱ ἔμποροι²⁵ and τεχνίτης,²⁶ who have gotten rich from trade with Rome (=Babylon) mourn the destruction of the city.²⁷ The first Christian century comes during an era when trade had become very extensive from the beginning of the second century until well into the first century²⁸ and consequently the temptations to concen-

²⁵ἔμπορος, ου, ὁ (s. three prec. entries; Hom. et al.) Od. 2, 319 ‘one who boards a ship as passenger’, then, esp. **one who travels by ship for business reasons, merchant** (Hdt., Thu. et al.; ins, pap, LXX; Philo, Op. M. 147; Jos., Ant. 2, 32; 20, 34; TestZeb 4:6; loanw. in rabb.) denotes wholesale dealer in contrast to κάπηλος ‘retailer’ (for the contrast cp. Pla., Rep. 2, 371d) Mt 13:45 v.l.; **Rv 18:3, 11, 15, 23**. For this pleonast. ἄνθρωπος ἔ. **Mt 13:45**.—B. 821. DELG. 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), 325.]

²⁶τεχνίτης, ου, ὁ (τέχνη; X., Pla.; ins, pap, LXX; TestSol; ApcSed 5:4 p. 131, 26 Ja.; EpArist; Philo; Jos., Ant. 20, 219; Ar. 4:2; Just., Ath.) **craftsperson, artisan, designer** Dg 2:3; D 12:3. Of a silversmith **Ac 19:24, 25 v.l., 38** (PLampe, BZ 36, ’92, 66f [ins]). Of a potter 2 Cl 8:2 (metaph., cp. Ath. 15:2). πᾶς τεχνίτης πάσης τέχνης **Rv 18:22**.—Of God (Dox. Gr. 280a, 7 [Anaxagoras A 46]; Maximus Tyr. 13, 4c; 41, 4g; Herm. Wr. 486, 30 Sc. al.; Wsd 13:1; Philo, Op. M. 135, Mut. Nom. 31 δημιουργημα τοῦ τῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν μόνων τεχνίτου; Ar. 4, 2; Ath. 16, 1 al.) as the architect of the heavenly city (w. δημιουργός) **Hb 11:10**. Of the holy Logos ὁ τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργός τῶν ὄλων Dg 7:2 (cp. Herm. Wr. 490, 34 Sc. ὁ τῶν συμπάντων κοσμοποιητής καὶ τεχνίτης).—HWeiss, TU 97, ’66, 52–5; s. also lit. s.v. δημιουργός.—DELG s.v. τέχνη. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1001.]

²⁷**Revelation 18, NRSV.** 1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. 2 He called out with a mighty voice, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul bird, a haunt of every foul and hateful beast. 3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, **and the merchants of the earth** [οἱ ἔμποροι τῆς γῆς] **have grown rich from the power of her luxury.**”

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues; 5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. 7 As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief. Since in her heart she says, “I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief,” 8 therefore her plagues will come in a single day— pestilence and mourning and famine— and she will be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.” 9 And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; 10 they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, “Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.” 11 **And the merchants of the earth** [οἱ ἔμποροι τῆς γῆς] **weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, 12 cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, 13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves—and human lives.**

14 “The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your dainties and your splendor are lost to you, never to be found again!” 15 **The merchants of these wares** [Οἱ ἔμποροι τούτων], **who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,**

16 “Alas, alas, the great city, clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! 17 For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste!” **And all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea** [πᾶς κυβερνήτης καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων καὶ ναῦται καὶ ὅσοι τὴν θάλασσαν ἐργάζονται], **stood far off 18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, “What city was like the great city?”** 19 And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out, “Alas, alas, the great city, where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in one hour she has been laid waste.”

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints and apostles and prophets! For God has given judgment for you against her. 21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “With such violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will be found no more; 22 and the sound of harpists and minstrels and of flutists and trumpeters will be heard in you no more; and **an artisan of any trade** [πᾶς τεχνίτης πάσης τέχνης] will be found in you no more; and the sound of the millstone will be heard in you no more; 23 and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more; and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more; for your merchants were the magnates of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24 And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.”

²⁸Trade and commerce in the Roman world from the late 1st century B.C. until the 4th century A.D. underwent some fundamental alterations, yet there were some aspects which remained basically unchanged. At the beginning of the period the Mediterranean basin contained a number of independent / semi-independent political states in commercial-diplomatic contact and conflict with one another and with Rome. The larger states, Seleucid Syria (until 64 B.C.), Ptolemaic Egypt (until 30 B.C.), Hasmonean and later Herodian Judea (until the 1st century A.D.), Nabatean Arabia (until A.D. 106), states in Asia Minor (Galatia until 25 B.C., Cappadocia until A.D. 18, Commagene until the 1st century A.D.) and other smaller eastern powers, both nominally independent

trate on wealth were also very great.²⁹

What are the plans that James criticizes? σήμερον ἢ αὔριον πορευσόμεθα εἰς τήνδε τὴν πόλιν καὶ ποιήσομεν ἐκεῖ ἐνιαυτὸν καὶ ἐμπορευσόμεθα καὶ κερδήσομεν, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.” Each phrase of the statement reflects making business plans. The clear image painted by James is that of a traveling merchant, and reflects something James’ readers would have clearly understood.³⁰ Is the making of such plans inherently sinful? No, James does not condemn the making of business plans. But, as he makes clear in his amplifications, it is the attitude of arrogance and utter disregard for God that is implied in these plans. This is where the sin comes into the picture. The parameters of the plans themselves actually reflect a wise business practice that can help avoid financial disaster. But if God is left out of such plans -- as is assumed by James here -- then it becomes a “friendship with the world” matter that he has already severely condemned in 4:4-6. Clearly, in no way can this statement of James be read legitimately so as to imply that the making of plans for the future contradicts Christian faith commitment to God.

In verse fourteen James begins his critique of these plans described in verse thirteen. In reality the dependent relative clause introduced by the qualitative relative pronoun οἷτινες³¹ makes an accusation which

client states of Rome and autonomous entities, as well as the few independent states in the W (the kingdom of Mauretania until the 1st century A.D.), interacted as commercially independent, if not completely politically autonomous states. By the 4th century A.D. the entire Mediterranean basin had been unified politically under the aegis of Rome. Political unification by the 4th century also brought with it a unified system of coinage and laws regulating the commerce, though not a completely unified economy. This 4th-century economy was less *laissez-faire* than that of the 1st and 2d centuries. By the 4th century the state and the church took an increased interest and role in commerce, often at the expense of the independent entrepreneur (Whittaker 1983a: 163–80). This transformation from the 1st century B.C. until the 4th century A.D. was gradual, the by-product of a series of patchwork-stopgap solutions to economic problems rather than a deliberate long-term policy initiated by the Roman central government.

[Steven E. Sidebotham, “Trade and Commerce: Roman Empire” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 629.]

²⁹One signal of this also comes from the fairly extensive vocabulary on conducting business that is found inside the Greek New Testament. See Louw-Nida Greek lexicon topics 57.189 to 57.208, “**Earn, Gain, Do Business.**”

57.189 κερδαίνω^a; ποιέω^b: to gain by means of one’s activity or investment; **57.190 τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄρτον ἐσθίω:** (an idiom, literally ‘to eat one’s own bread’) to earn a living by one’s own efforts; **57.191 προσεργάζομαι:** to earn or to gain something in addition; **57.192 κέρδος, ους n:** (derivative of κερδαίνω^a ‘to earn, to gain,’ 57.189) that which is gained or earned; **57.193 ἐργασία^c, ας f:** to make a profit from one’s business or activity; **57.194 πορισμός, οὔ m:** a means of gaining a profit or wealth; **57.195 διαπραγματεύομαι:** to profit from engaging in commerce and trade; **57.196 ἐμπορεύομαι^d; ἔμπορία, ας f:** to carry on a business involving buying and selling; **57.197 πραγματεύομαι:** to be engaged in some kind of business, generally buying and selling; **57.198 ἐργάζομαι^b; ἐργασία^a, ας f:** to be involved in business, with focus upon the work which is involved; **57.199 μέρος^e, ους n:** a particular kind of business activity or occupation; **57.200 πορεία^b, ας f:** business pursuits, with the implication of extensive activity and journeys required; **57.201 εὐπορία^b, ας f:** an easy means of gaining a profit from one’s business or trade; **57.202 καπηλεύω:** to engage in retail business, with the implication of deceptiveness and greedy motives; **57.203 ἔμπορος, ου m:** (derivative of ἐμπορεύομαι^d ‘to be in business,’ 57.196) one who is engaged in commerce and trade; **57.204 πορφυρόπωλις, ιδος f:** a woman who specialized in selling purple cloth; **57.205 κολλυβιστής, οὔ m; κερματιστής, οὔ m:** one who exchanges currency, either in terms of different types of currency or different values of the same currency; **57.206 ἐμπόριον, ου n:** (derivative of ἐμπορεύομαι^d ‘to engage in a business,’ 57.196) a place for engaging in business; **57.207 ἀγορά, ἄς f:** a commercial center with a number of places for doing business; **57.208 μάκελλον, ου n:** an area in a city or town where meat was sold

[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), 578-580.]

³⁰⁻⁴The words which are put into the mouths of those who are making their plans are naturally intended to ring as animated and as true to everyday life as possible. This must be kept in mind in the interpretation, and especially in evaluating the textual variants. For one must reckon with the possibility that the vernacular style of the original might have been transmuted by the ancient editors of the text into speech more in accord with literary usage. This was certainly the case with the reading ‘today as well as tomorrow’ (σήμερον καὶ αὔριον). The ones making plans in Jas 4:13 say ‘today or tomorrow’ (σήμερον ἢ αὔριον).⁹ Perhaps the replacement of the future tense of the four verbs with subjunctive expressions also falls into this category, and if the future tense was not original in each of the four verbs, certainly also the assimilation of the four verbs to one another would be a product of this later editorial activity.¹⁰ The expression ‘a year’ (ἐνιαυτόν) without the adjective ‘one’ (ἓνα) is perhaps the vernacular, and therefore original, expression here.¹¹ Finally, the term ‘such and such a city’ (τήνδε τὴν πόλιν) is also a possible example of vernacular usage in this passage.¹² [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), 231-32.]

³¹The use of the qualitative relative pronoun οἷτινες from ὅστις rather than the more common relative οἷ from ὅς is that οἷτινες

is then followed by a justifying basis for the accusation.³²

Accusation: οἵτινες οὐκ ἐπίστασθε τὸ τῆς αὔριον ποία ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, *who are such that do not understand what tomorrow is, that is, what your life is.* James does not call these individuals, the οἱ λέγοντες in v. 13, ignorant, but strongly asserts their lack of comprehension about the nature of life.³³ The first expression τὸ τῆς αὔριον literally means ‘the what of tomorrow,’ in the sense of what will happen tomorrow. No one knows this information apart from God. The second clause ποία ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν stands in apposition with τὸ τῆς αὔριον and further defines tomorrow in terms of the nature of one’s life. The interrogative qualitative relative pronoun ποία from ποῖος, α, ον in the neuter plural literally means, ‘what kind of things will make up your life.’ Thus James’ accusation is strong. Planning for tomorrow is indeed guess work from a purely human standpoint. We may think we know what is going to happen in the future, but in reality we really do not.

Reason: ἀτμίς γάρ ἐστε ἡ πρὸς ὀλίγον φαινόμενη, ἔπειτα καὶ ἀφανιζόμενη, *for you are a vapor which appears briefly and then vanishes.* Why can we not know about tomorrow regarding our life? James’ answer reflect an often heard idea in the ancient world: life is very short and uncertain.³⁴ This had even more significance in the first century world where most men never lived past their 40s and women past their 50s. Given the rather chaotic nature of living in the first century Roman world, especially outside the Italian peninsula and as a peasant rather than an aristocrat, life was very uncertain. The brevity and even uncertainty of the ἀτμίς, probably mist, but possibly smoke,³⁵ is underscored by the relative clause stressing brief appearance followed by disappearance.

This failure to understand the nature of their lives led to a false assumption that they had complete control over their lives and could then plan them out in ways that would be certain to happen according to their plans. As the continuing critique in vv. 15-16 stresses, this signals personal arrogance that sees no need of God in one’s life -- something that correct understanding of the nature of life would correct.

carries the additional sense of ‘you who are such a nature that.’ That is, you belong to a group of people utterly ignorant of the nature of life.

³²Understanding exactly what James was trying to say here has proven difficult over the centuries of hand copying the Greek text. All of the significant text variations listed in the UBS 4th rev. ed of *The Greek New Testament* surface here. Our exegesis is based upon the adopted reading of this verse.

³³“A person does not know what will happen tomorrow. This is a thought which understandably is expressed in various poetic and paraenetic texts. Because of the possibility of a connection with our text here, the Jewish¹⁴ and the popular philosophical¹⁵ parallels are of interest. Also of interest is the relationship in thought between this passage in Jas and the parable in Lk 12:16–20, and with the portion of the section of woes in 1 En. 97:9f, where the rich say, ‘And now let us do what we proposed,’ and the apocalypticist answers them, ‘Your riches shall not abide but speedily ascend from you’ [trans. Charles, APOT]. However, no dependence at all can be proven between these texts and the one in Jas.” [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), 232-33.]

³⁴“ἀτμίς γάρ ἐστε ἡ πρὸς ὀλίγον φαινόμενη, ἔπειτα καὶ ἀφανιζόμενη, ‘Because you are a mist, appearing for a short while, then disappearing.’ The use of ἀτμίς (‘vapor,’ ‘mist,’ BGD, 120) expresses the thought that life is short (cf. Eccl 1:2; 12:8; 4 Ezra 4.24; 2 Apoc. Bar. 82.6; 1 Clem 7.6). The idea of the brevity of life was not the exclusive belief of Christians. Jewish (Job 7:7, 9; Pss 39:5, 6, 12; 49:13; 102:4, 12; 144:4; Prov 27:1; Sir 11:18–19; Wisd Sol 2:1–2, 5; 3:18; Philo, Leg. All. 3.226; 1QM 15.10) as well as Hellenic and Roman thinking (Ps-Phocylides, 116: οὐδεὶς γινώσκει τί μεταύριον ἢ τί μεθ’ ὥραν; Seneca, Ep. Mor. 101.4–6: *quam stultum est aetatem disponere ne crastini quidem dominum*, ‘how foolish it is to arrange one’s life, when one is not even a master of tomorrow!’ Cf. Dibelius, 233) ran parallel to Christian ideas (see Luke 12:16–20; 1 Clem 17.6). The verses in Luke 12 have affinity with the present passage, especially in the parable told by Jesus of how a wealthy man was prevented from enjoying his riches. The uncertainty of life is brought home in this parable because the rich man died unexpectedly. As the similar sounding words (used for effect, Davids, 122; Vouga, 123 n.5) φαινόμενη (‘seen’) and ἀφανιζόμενη (‘disappear’) suggest, a person is here today and gone today. The idea of a mist, especially one that rolls in from the sea and then vanishes, would be especially relevant for sea merchants (Adamson, 180). Instead of looking to God, who alone can sustain life, the person trusts in what can be accomplished by his or her own devices and designs.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 166.]

³⁵ἀτμίς, ἴδος, ἡ (since Hdt. 4, 75, 1; Pla., Tim., p. 86e; perh. PCairZen 534 I, 7 [III B.C.]; PGM 7, 639; 743; LXX; ApcMos 33) *vapor* ἢ *καπνοῦ smoky vapor* (like that of a volcanic eruption) **Ac 2:19** (Jo 3:3). Typical of what passes away **Js 4:14** (cp. Eccl 1:2 and 12:8 Aq.). ἢ ἀπὸ κύθρας *steam that rises from a pot*, typical of nothingness 1 Cl 17:6 (quot. of unknown orig.; s. RHarris, JBL 29, 1910, 190–95).—DELG s.v. ἀτμός, M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 149.]

b) Including God in one's plans, vv. 15-17.

15 ἀντὶ τοῦ λέγειν ὑμᾶς· ἐὰν ὁ κύριος θελήσῃ καὶ ζήσομεν καὶ ποιήσομεν τοῦτο ἢ ἐκεῖνο. 16 νῦν δὲ καυχᾶσθε ἐν ταῖς ἀλαζονεαῖς ὑμῶν· πᾶσα καύχησις τοιαύτη πονηρὰ ἐστίν. 17 εἰδότες οὖν καλὸν ποιεῖν καὶ μὴ ποιοῦντι, ἁμαρτία αὐτῶ ἐστίν.

15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

In the second half of this passage, James offers an alternative approach to making plans, along with continuing his critique of the planning without including God. He continues his somewhat unusual grammar pattern with an 'independent' infinitival phrase, that clearly signals the linking of ἀντὶ τοῦ λέγειν ὑμᾶς (v. 15) to οἱ λέγοντες (v. 13). In ancient Greek grammar dozens of syntactical constructions are possible and normal, that most modern western languages cannot imagine doing. This is one of them. The interpretive consequence of this construction is to make clear that the 'you' of the second person plural ὑμᾶς goes back to those specified in οἱ λέγοντες and its expansion in vv. 13-14.³⁶

The alternative put on the table by James is simply: ἐὰν ὁ κύριος θελήσῃ καὶ ζήσομεν καὶ ποιήσομεν τοῦτο ἢ ἐκεῖνο, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.³⁷ This kind of expression was commonly found in Greek and Roman texts of the ancient world.³⁸ James, and Paul also (cf. Acts 18:21, 1 Cor. 4:19, 16:7, Rom. 1:10, Phil. 2:19, 24), utilized this expression for a Christian understanding about life. The conditional sentence predicates two aspects of life on God's will: its continued existence and the activities that are done in it.

The ability to ποιήσομεν τοῦτο ἢ ἐκεῖνο, do this or that, assumes planning but within the framework of God's will. The concept of ἐὰν ὁ κύριος θελήσῃ, if the Lord may desire, follows Paul's expression: ἐὰν ὁ κύριος θελήσῃ, 1 Cor. 4:19; ἐὰν ὁ κύριος ἐπιτρέψῃ, 1 Cor. 16:7; τοῦ θεοῦ θέλοντος, Acts 18:21; ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ, Rom. 1:10; Ἐλπίζω δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, Phil. 2:19, πέποιθα δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ, Phil. 2:14 (see also Heb. 6:3, ἐάνπερ ἐπιτρέπῃ ὁ θεός). The use of the similar -- and occasionally identical -- phrase of James in Greek

³⁶ἀντὶ τοῦ λέγειν properly belongs with λέγοντες, v. 13." [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 279.]

³⁷One should note a variation in punctuation found in some translations. "If a break is made after the verb θελήσῃ (wishes), then καὶ ... καί means 'both ... and'; that is, 'If the Lord wishes, we will both live and do this or that' (see Martin, James, p. 167; and Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, pp. 233–34). Some ancient manuscripts have the subjunctive form of the verb 'to live' (φήσομεν) and punctuate this sentence: 'If God wills and [if] we live, we shall do ...' But the indicative verb φήσομεν, which is supported by the best manuscripts, is better read as part of the 'then' or result clause." [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 477.]

³⁸ἐὰν ὁ κύριος θέλῃ, "deo volente"; cf. Acts 18:21, 1 Cor. 4:19, 16:7, Rom. 1:10, Phil. 2:19, 24, Heb. 6:3.

The expressions ἐὰν θεὸς θέλῃ, σὺν θεῷ θεῶν βουλομένων, τῶν θεῶν θελόντων, or the equivalent, were in common use among the ancient Greeks. For references to papyri, see Deissmann, *Neue Bibelstudien*, 1897, p. 80; see also Lietzmann on 1 Cor. 4:19. Cf. Plato, *Alcib.* I. p. 135 D, *Hipp. major*, p. 286 C, *Laches*, p. 201 C, *Leges*, pp. 688 E, 799 E, etc., *Theæt.* p. 151 D, *Aristophanes*, *Plut.* 1188, *Xenophon*, *Hipparchicus*, 9, 8 (Mayor quotes many of the passages). Similar expressions were also in familiar use by the Romans, from whom the modern *deo volente* is derived. Cf. *Lampridius*, *Alex. Sever.* 45 si dii voluerint, *Minucius Felix*, *Octavius*, 18 "si deus dederit" vulgi iste naturalis sermo est, *Sallust*, *Jug.* 14, 19 deis volentibus, *Ennius ap. Cic.* *De off.* i, 12, 38 volentibus cum magnis diis, *Plautus*, *Capt.* ii, 3, 94 si dii placet, *id.* *Poen.* iv, 2, 88 si dii volent, *Liv.* ix, 19, 15, absit invidia verbo. See other references in B. *Brisson*, *De formulis et solennibus populi Romani verbis*, rec. *Conradi*, Halle, 1731, i, 116 (pp. 63 f.); i, 133 (p. 71); viii, 61 (p. 719).

The corresponding formula inshallah, "if God will," has been for many centuries a common colloquial expression of modern Arabic, cf. Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, ch. 13. It is not unlikely that the Mohammedans derived it from the Syrians, and that these had it from the Greeks. The Jews do not seem to have commonly used any such formula either in Biblical or in Talmudic times. The use of such formulas "was introduced to the Jews by the Mohammedans" (L. Ginzberg, *JE*, art. "Ben Sira, Alphabet of").

The statement often found that the practise recommended was a part of Jewish customary piety in N. T. times goes back at least to J. Gregory, whose *Notes and Observations on Some Passages of Scripture*, first published in 1646, are reprinted in *Critici sacri*, 1660, vol. 9. He quotes from the "Alphabet of Ben Sira" (written not earlier than the eleventh century; see *JE*, I. c.) a Jewish instance of the formula, and evidently based his statement ("mos erat inter Judæos") on this, with, perhaps, some knowledge of the ways of mediæval and later Jews. For the passage from the "Alphabet," see *Schöttgen*, *Horæ hebr.* pp. 1030 f.; the earliest use of it to illustrate *Jas.* 4:15 is probably J. *Drusius*, *Quæstiones hebraicæ*, iii, 24, 1599 (reprinted in *Critici sacri*, vol. viii).

The origin of this type of "apotropaic" formula among the Greeks and Romans is to be sought in the notions of divine vengeance for human presumption, to be averted by thus refraining from a positive assertion about the future.

It thus appears that James is here recommending to Christians a Hellenistic pious formula of strictly heathen origin. His own piety finds in it a true expression of Christian submission to divine providence.

[James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 279-80.]

philosophy typically contains a significantly different meaning than that in James and Paul.³⁹ In the Hebrew Bible, which is largely picked up by the New Testament writers and expanded, the concept of God's will fundamentally specifies God's sovereign desire for His creation.⁴⁰ Making our plans for the future inside the framework of God's will means planning actions and lifestyles pleasing to God and appropriate to His expressed will for behavior. Additionally, it means approaching each day seeking divine leadership in all of the activities and decisions of that day. Paul's primary way of depicting this latter point is following daily the leadership of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal. 5).

James is anxious to convince his Jewish Christian readers that this alternative to planning the future, in contrast to that in v. 13, is substantially better and appropriate for believers. This will distinguish them clearly from the Jewish merchant who leaves God out of his life.

In continuing his critique of the planning without God (cf. v. 13) in verse sixteen, James levels the charge against it as *νῦν δὲ καυχᾶσθε ἐν ταῖς ἀλαζονείαις ὑμῶν· πᾶσα καύχησις τοιαύτη πονηρὰ ἐστίν, But now you are bragging in your expressions of arrogance; all such bragging is evil.* The terminology of James here, *καυχᾶσθε, ἀλαζονείαις, and καύχησις*, pushes hard at the wrongness of such planning. These people plan in the proud mind that they know what is best and how best to make money out of a business opportunity; they don't need or want God involved.⁴¹ James emphatically condemns such an attitude and the verbal expres-

³⁹“θέλειν as commanding will. *a. Expressly of God and His purposes and rule.* The formula *ἐὰν θεὸς (θεοὶ) θέλῃ (θέλωσιν)* is a common legacy of antiquity.³² In the LXX this *θέλειν* is used of God's sovereign rule in creation and human history,³³ for His control manifested in individual events.³⁴ Josephus made much use of the very common expression *θεοῦ θέλοντος, or θελήσαντος.*³⁵ Philo uses *θέλειν* in dealing with God's creation, His direction of the world structure and His revelation.³⁶ But he can also ascribe this to φύσις.³⁷ Epict., too, can say *ὡς ἡ τύχη θέλει* instead of *ὡς ὁ θεὸς θέλει.*³⁸ For him the true *θέλειν* of the man who is trained philosophically is agreement with the *θέλειν* of God, while *τὰ μὴ θελητὰ θέλειν* means *θεομαχεῖν.*³⁹ He has in view the willing of what is attainable or possible, the non-willing of what is not possible, the acceptance of the inevitable. Thus everything depends upon the *μὴ θέλειν* of unprofitable wishes. He who accepts the foreordination of life by fate is completely subject to God.⁴⁰ The *Corp. Herm.* has its own distinctive use of *θέλειν* in relation to God. The will of the *νοῦς* at creation, i.e., of the demiurge, is that the cosmos should be living. God wills that all things should be. The existence of all things consists in this.⁴¹ Ign., too, treats of the divine will which is orientated to all that is. 1 Cl. refers to the will of God which sustains, which directs and which encloses all gnosis in Christ.⁴² *b. There is a human analogy to the authoritative utterance of God's will in the rule of princes and administrators, in the directions of the royal will,*⁴³ also in the desires of officials, in military commands,⁴⁴ and in the promulgation of law.⁴⁵ [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 3:47.]

⁴⁰God's *θέλειν* is always characterized by absolute definiteness, sovereign self-assurance and efficacy. It is resolute and complete willing. Only once is *θέλειν* used for the OT *רָצוּן* in the sense of elective and loving good-pleasure in the Son (→ II, 740): Mt. 27:43 quoting *ψ* 21:8. Elsewhere it refers either to the divine will in creation (1 C. 12:18; 15:38) or to the divine sovereignty in disposing to salvation (Jn. 3:8 of the Spirit in regeneration; 1 Tm. 2:4 of God's gracious and majestic will to save all). In Mt. 20:14 f., on the lips of the owner of the vineyard, it *V* 3, p 48 denotes the independent and self-efficacious power of disposal in the hands of God, who is free to do what He wills with His own. In R. 9:18, 22 Paul shows how the *θέλειν* of free and sovereign disposal is declared in the event of salvation. It finds expression as a demonstration of wrath and power both in having mercy and in hardening. If the antithesis of Gentile Church and Jews here determines the profound seriousness of the theme of a twofold disposing will, the presentation in Col. 1:27 stops at the glory of the mystery among the Gentiles. This divine *θέλειν* is declared to the Gentiles. In contrast to the sovereign divine will which characterises revelation, Lk. 4:6 introduces the disruptive picture of the pseudo-sovereignty of the Satanic claim. Other statements with reference to God use *θέλειν* to denote that which God requires of the righteous. In this respect there is recurrent reference (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Hb. 10:5, 8) to the prophetic statement that God requires *ἔλεος* and not *θυσία* (Hos. 6:6; *ψ* 39:6).

1 Pt. 3:17 refers to God's will in the direction of believers. Thus they have to suffer for doing what is right. The tribulation of persecution is appointed by God's will. But *τοῦ θεοῦ θέλοντος* or *ἐὰν ὁ κύριος θελήσῃ* (Ac. 18:21; 1 C. 4:19; Jm. 4:15 → 47) also applies in the detailed decisions of life, in resolves to plan and do things.

[Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 3:47-48.]

⁴¹“The case of these merchants, however, is far from the proper attitude, for in contrast to it (*δέ* strengthened by *νῦν*) they boast in their arrogance, a term significantly linked to the world and specifically to possessions in its only other NT use (1 Jn. 2:16; cf. Test. Jos. 17:8; 1 Clem. 21:5, where *ἐγκαυχωμένος ἐν ἀλαζονείᾳ* is contrasted to boasting in God, and *ἀλαζών* in Pr. 21:24; Jb. 28:2; 2 Macc. 9:8; Rom. 1:30; and 2 Tim. 3:2, where it appears in a vice list). This attitude which plans and acts as if God did not exist and as if they instead of God controlled life is evil: ‘all such boasting is evil.’ Boasting (*καύχησις*) is rarely anything but evil in scripture (1 Cor. 1:29; 5:6; Gal. 6:13; Rom. 3:27; 4:2), unless it is a boast in suffering, service for Christ, or God (Jas. 1:9; Rom. 5:2-3; 1 Thes. 2:9; Phil. 2:16). This boasting does not fit those categories, for these are people who have shut God out of their com-

sions coming out of it as evil, πονηρά.

In verse seventeen, James does something different, which serves as a conclusionary warning to this readers. In essence, he now returns to them by use of a general maxim, that is structured in the third person singular: εἰδῶτι οὖν καλὸν ποιεῖν καὶ μὴ ποιοῦντι, ἁμαρτία αὐτῷ ἐστίν, *Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin*. This statement is the so-called ‘sin of omission’ passage in the New Testament. Earlier in 2:13 and 3:18 James has reached out to a statement of timeless principle in order to apply it to the topic at hand. This is what he does here. The origin of the maxim cannot be determined despite some efforts by commentators to do so.⁴² It does, however, have definite echoes of a Semitic origin and represents James picking it up from some unknown Jewish source, or, perhaps, creating it himself out of basic principles from the Old Testament.

Whatever the source, the conjunction οὖν, therefore, ties its application closely on to the subject at hand.⁴³ The heart of the principle is simply that being informed of how to plan following God’s will and then not doing it constitutes sin before a Holy God: ἁμαρτία αὐτῷ ἐστίν. The good, καλὸν, that should be done is defined in verse 15: make your plans within the framework of God’s will.

His Jewish Christian readers are now forewarned. No one can claim, “I didn’t know I was supposed to make my business plans that way.” Very likely James is here extending out the idea of planning to encompass all of life, not just the business side of it. From our earlier survey of the commercial world of the ancient Roman empire, one can more readily understand the temptation to Jewish Christians in the Diaspora to be tempted by the almost universal pattern of making business plans with no thought of including God in them. They would often hear the empty phrase, “if the gods will it,” from their Gentile neighbors and then watch them live out their lives as functional atheists. They would run across fellow Jews in their town who had bought into such ways of thinking and were doing pretty much the same thing. The pressure to succeed in business coupled with this extensive model of godless planning and living would be tempting. James came down pointedly against this in order to help these believers avoid such disastrous traps.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

How does this apply to believers in our day? Particularly in materialistic, secular western society the temptation to functional atheism is strong. Not all that many Christian businessmen intentionally develop a business plan or business model patterned on principles of conduct laid out in scripture. The tendency is

mercial lives, although they may be pious enough in church and at home. This whole category of confident, not to say arrogant, planning is evil (πᾶσα ... τωαύτη), declares James: no part of life is outside the rule of God. Here James looks down the road of commercial independence and sees the dangers Hermas would later rebuke as already fully actualized (Herms Vis. 2.3.1; Man. 3.3; Sim. 6.3.5).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 173-74.]

⁴²“The source of the saying cannot be determined, although some have speculated that this could be a saying of Jesus (cf. Adamson, 181) and Laws, 194, argues it is an exposition of Pr. 3:27–28. There are, nevertheless, some indications of a Semitic origin: (1) in the paratactic construction (καί) instead of a hypotactic ‘if ... then’ clause, (2) in the pleonastic, but rhetorically emphatic, αὐτῷ (BDF §446), and (3) in the similarity to ἔστιν ἐν σοὶ ἁμαρτία of Deuteronomy (15:9; 23:21; 24:15 LXX).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 174.]

⁴³“This maxim, however, is not without a context, for the οὖν indicates that the author understands it as a summary of the preceding section. Yet if this is so, in what way is it a summary? First, it is not speaking of sins of omission per se, but of acts which one knows one ought to do (εἰδῶτι ... ποιεῖν) and does not do (e.g. Jb. 31:16–18; Lk. 12:47–48). Second, it is clear that the surface good one ought to do is to plan with a consciousness of God: the failure to do this is not just foolish or bad (πονηρά), but sin (ἁμαρτία). Third, the context is that of merchants whose business interests lead them to forget God (cf. Sir. 11:10; 31:5) and thus of Christian warnings against greed and hoarding (e.g. 12:13–21). Because of the context the use of καλὸν (the anarthrous construction is not remarkable, BDF §264) instead of καλῶς (cf. 2:8) is interesting, for it parallels the doing of the word/law of 1:21–25 (cf. Cantinat, 219) and the doing of charitable deeds (τὸ δὲ καλὸν ποιοῦντες) in Gal. 6:9. Thus it may well be that while on one level James is warning merchants about forgetting God in their business, on a deeper level he is reflecting on ideas such as those in Lk. 12:13–21 and viewing the whole motive of gathering wealth rather than doing good with it (i.e. sharing it with the poor) as a failure to follow known standards of Christian guidance, i.e. the total tradition about sharing with others (e.g. Luke 12; cf. Noack, “Jakobus,” 19; Reicke, Diakonie, 37–38; Laws, 193). Whatever his intention, such an interpretation bridges well to the next subsection.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 174.]

