



The Letter of James  
Bible Study Session 8  
James 2:14-26  
“Faith that Saves”

Study By  
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**Greek NT**

14 Τί τὸ ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἐὰν πίστιν λέγῃ τις ἔχειν ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχη; μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σώσαι αὐτόν; 15 ἐὰν ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς 16 εἴπη δέ τις αὐτοῖς ἐξ ὑμῶν· ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε, μὴ δῶτε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος, τί τὸ ὄφελος; 17 οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔχη ἔργα, νεκρὰ ἐστὶν καθ’ ἑαυτήν.

18 Ἄλλ’ ἐρεῖ τις· σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω· δεῖξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων, κἀγὼ σοὶ δεῖξω ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν. 19 σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσοσιν. 20 Θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι, ὃ ἄνθρωπε κενέ, ὅτι ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων ἀργὴ ἐστὶν; 21 Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη ἀνεγένεας Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον; 22 βλέπεις ὅτι ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη, 23 καὶ ἐπληρώθη ἡ γραφὴ ἡ λέγουσα· ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη. 24 ὁρᾶτε ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιοῦται

**Gute Nachricht Bibel**

14 Meine Brüder und Schwestern, was hat es für einen Wert, wenn jemand behauptet: »Ich vertraue auf Gott, ich habe Glauben\*!«, aber er hat keine guten Taten vorzuweisen? Kann der bloße Glaube ihn retten? 15 Nehmt einmal an, bei euch gibt es einen Bruder oder eine Schwester, die nichts anzuziehen haben und hungern müssen. 16 Was nützt es ihnen, wenn dann jemand von euch zu ihnen sagt: »Ich wünsche euch das Beste; ich hoffe, dass ihr euch warm anziehen und satt essen könnt!« –, aber er gibt ihnen nicht, was sie zum Leben brauchen? 17 Genauso ist es auch mit dem Glauben: Wenn er allein bleibt und aus ihm keine Taten hervorgehen, ist er tot.

18 Aber vielleicht wendet jemand ein: »Hast du überhaupt Glauben?« Darauf antworte ich: Ich habe die Taten! Zeig mir doch einmal deinen Glauben, wenn du mir nicht die entsprechenden Taten zeigen kannst! Aber ich will dir meinen Glauben aus meinen Taten beweisen. 19 Du glaubst, dass nur einer Gott ist? Gut! Das glauben die bösen Geister\* auch – und zittern vor Angst. 20 Du gedankenloser Mensch! Willst du nicht einsehen, dass ein Glaube, der nicht zu Taten führt, nutzlos ist? 21 Wurde nicht unser Ahnvater Abraham\* aufgrund seines Tuns von Gott als gerecht\* anerkannt –

**NRSV**

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. 20 Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. 23 Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by

**NLT**

14 Dear brothers and sisters, what’s the use of saying you have faith if you don’t prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can’t save anyone. 15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, 16 and you say, “Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well” -- but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? 17 So you see, it isn’t enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all -- it is dead and useless.

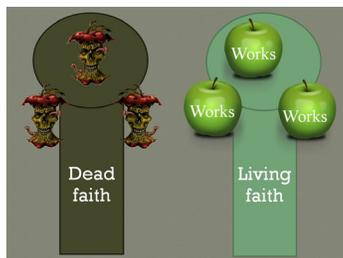
18 Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” I say, “I can’t see your faith if you don’t have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds.” 19 Do you still think it’s enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! 20 Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless? 21 Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was declared right with God because of what he did when he offered

ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον. 25 ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη ὑποδεξαμένη τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἑτέρα ὁδῶ ἐκβαλοῦσα; 26 ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρὸν ἐστίν, οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις χωρὶς ἔργων νεκρά ἐστίν.

nämlich weil er seinen Sohn Isaak als Opfer auf den Altar legte? 22 Du siehst also: Sein Glaube und seine Taten wirkten zusammen; sein Glaube wurde durch sein Tun vollkommen. 23 Auf diese Weise bestätigte sich das Wort in den Heiligen Schriften\*: »Abraham glaubte Gott, und dies rechnete Gott ihm als Gerechtigkeit\* an.« Er wird sogar Fre- und Gottes genannt. 24 Ihr seht also, dass ein Mensch aufgrund seiner Taten von Gott als gerecht anerkannt wird und nicht schon durch bloßen Glauben. 25 War es nicht ebenso bei der Hure Rahab? Auch sie wurde doch aufgrund ihrer Taten als gerecht anerkannt – weil sie die Kundschafter bei sich aufnahm und auf einem geheimen Fluchtweg aus der Stadt entkommen ließ. 26 Genauso wie der menschliche Leib ohne den Lebensgeist tot ist, so ist auch der Glaube ohne entsprechende Taten tot.

works and not by faith alone. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to do. His faith was made complete by what he did -- by his actions. 23 And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." He was even called "the friend of God." 24 So you see, we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone. 25 Rahab the prostitute is another example of this. She was made right with God by her actions -- when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. 26 Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also faith is dead without good deeds.



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

If one feels uncomfortable with what James put on the table in 2:1-13, what he says in 2:14-26 seems mild in comparison! If one could point to a single passage of scripture that has generated the most controversy over the centuries of interpretive history James 2:14-26 would stand at the top of that list. It raised some eyebrows in the early history prior to the middle ages, but nothing in comparison to the debates over it from the time of Martin Luther in the middle 1500s right into our world today.

Luther fought extensively over it with his Catholic opponents who saw in the word "works" the complete system of penance as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. Added to that challenge was their view that James taught faith **plus** penance as necessary requirements to salvation. Such understanding was so deeply established in Christian belief in the 1500s that Luther could not find any effective counter argument in his debates with them. The effect was that Luther reduced the book of James to a secondary status level in the canon of the New Testament, where it remained in the Luther Bibel until the 1912 revision. But even among Lutherans today, one will hear very few sermons based on James. Even Calvin and Zwinglii in the Reformed Church tradition of this time had trouble clearly understanding what James was getting at, although they did not discount the value of the book the way Luther did.

Later on in Protestant Christianity the successors of Calvin and Armenius fought extensively over this text in terms of the nature of faith. The typical Armenian view was that salvation is an issue of *faith plus works*,

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

while the followers of Calvin argued against this on the basis of Paul's declaration that salvation is "faith apart from works of law" in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. The theological issues that have emerged from this text are but one aspect the troubling nature of the passage. More practically James' very blunt demands about what kind of faith commitment is legitimate do -- and should -- pose enormous threats to a complacent Christianity that desires to be religious without serious involvement either in church life or demanding standards of behavior.

Thus from a variety of perspectives James 2:14-26 is a dangerous scripture text. Read it and understand it at great personal risk!

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

### Background:

Not too many background issues surface in this passage. But some are present and need addressing. The issue of poverty, particular due to famine, looms somewhat in the background. Interpretively, how Abraham was tested by God, and the role of the offering up of Isaac in that process is important against the backdrop of Jewish interpretive history. James' affirmation of demons needs some background clarification. How a Gentile prostitute became for Jews a heroic figure for genuine religious faith is important to understand. And then how she was viewed in early Christianity is also important. The excellent literary device of an ancient Greek diatribe used in this passage has background importance.

### Historical Setting.

**External History.** In the history of the hand copying of this passage in Greek over the first thousand years, only three places of word variation surface that the editors of The Greek Testament (UBS 4th rev ed.) considered important enough to impact Bible translation at this point.

The first place is in verse nineteen where the Jewish Shema allusion to Deut. 6:4 is worded in different ways.<sup>2</sup> The rather unusual Greek wording εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός reflecting the underlying Hebrew text posed questions of understanding for later copyists who were unfamiliar with the Hebrew. The intended monotheism affirmation was understood, but how best to communicate this was unclear. The LXX text of Deut. 6:4 is substantially different: κύριος ὁ θεός ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστιν, *The Lord our God is one Lord*. Thus the issue was not on which text properly quotes the LXX text of Deut. 6:4. Instead, it was on how best to express the meaning of Deut. 6:4 in natural, unidiomatic Greek.<sup>3</sup> The text reading εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός has better manuscript support and internal criteria favor it as well.



The second place is regarding the word ἀργή, *useless*, in verse twenty. Copyists had tendencies to replace it with a couple of words more frequently used by James, either νεκρά, *dead*, or κενή, *foolish*.<sup>4</sup> The alternative readings are most likely due to sight failures in readings these alternatives adjectives elsewhere

<sup>2</sup>{B} εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός P<sup>74</sup> & A 1735 2464 / 596 it<sup>ar,s</sup> vg cop<sup>sa,bo</sup> arm eth geo Cyril<sup>2/5</sup>; Augustine Faustus Salvian<sup>1/2</sup> Caesarius<sup>1/4</sup> // εἷς ὁ θεός ἐστιν C 33<sup>vid</sup> 81 1175 1243 2344 // εἷς ὁ θεός it<sup>ff</sup> vg<sup>mss</sup> Cyril<sup>2/5</sup> // εἷς ἐστιν θεός 945 1241 1739 2298 // εἷς θεός ἐστιν B 1292 1505 1611 1852 2138 // ὁ θεός εἷς ἐστιν 322 323 436 1067 1409 Byz [K<sup>c</sup> (K\* omit εἷς) L] Lect (l 592 omit εἷς) vg<sup>mss</sup> slav Didymus<sup>dub</sup> Cyril<sup>1/5</sup>; Salvian<sup>1/2</sup> Caesarius<sup>3/4</sup> // ἐστιν θεός Ψ Ps-Athanasius

<sup>3</sup>“Among the several readings, the main difference consists of the presence or absence of the article ὁ. Between the readings εἷς θεός ἐστιν (There is one God) and εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός (God is one), the second reading agrees with the common Jewish orthodoxy of the time regarding the unity of God and has very good manuscript support. The readings εἷς θεός ἐστιν and εἷς ὁ θεός ἐστιν appear to be changes made in order to agree with the style of the Christian claim (compare 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5). The reading ὁ θεός εἷς ἐστιν is the reading of the Textus Receptus and is clearly a later reading in which ὁ θεός is placed first in order to give ὁ θεός a more emphatic position.

“There is little difference in meaning among these variant readings. NRSV and NAB translate ‘You believe that God is one’; REB says ‘You ... believe that there is one God’; and NJB says ‘You believe in the one God.’ The text punctuates the words σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός (You believe that God is one) as a statement, but some modern versions translate these words as a question: ‘Do you believe that there is only one God?’ (TEV, similarly TOB and FC).”

[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), 472.]

<sup>4</sup>{B} ἀργή B C\* 322 323 945 1175 1243 1739 it<sup>ar,s</sup> vg<sup>ww,st</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> Augustine // νεκρά (see 2.26) & A C<sup>2</sup> Ψ 33 81 436 1067 1241 1292 1409 1505 1611 1735 1852 2138 2298 2344 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect vg<sup>cl</sup> syr<sup>p,h</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> eth slav Ps-Athanasius Didymus<sup>dub</sup> Cyril; Faustus Salvian Cassiodorus // κενή P<sup>74</sup> it<sup>ff</sup>

in the passage and thinking they also belong here.<sup>5</sup> External manuscript evidence heavily favors the adopted text reading.

The third place of variation in the UBS Greek text is in verse twenty.<sup>6</sup> Copyists were anxious that their readers not take the text reading τοὺς ἀγγέλους as referring to angels rather than human messengers. Thus the expression ἀγγέλους τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, *messengers of Israel*, or κατασκόπους, *spies*, were used instead of τοὺς ἀγγέλους, *the messengers*.<sup>7</sup> Both external and internal evidence strongly favor the adopted text reading as original.

In addition to these three places where variations surface the Nestle - Aland Novum Testamentum Graece (27th rev. ed.) lists several other variations in these verses.<sup>8</sup> A careful analysis of each of the variations will reflect no change in meaning for the text. Instead, they mostly signal stylistic improvement efforts by the copyists to bring the Greek language up to date for the time of their copying of the text.



Thus, as is normally the case, we can adopt the printed text of the UBS and N-A texts as the most likely

<sup>5</sup>“Instead of ἀργή (useless), the Textus Receptus and most manuscripts read νεκρά (dead). The reading in the text has strong manuscript support and may also involve a subtle play on words (ἔργων ἀργή [ἀ + ἔργη = without deed]). Very possibly copyists introduced the word νεκρά from either v. 17 or 26. The error found only in P<sup>74</sup> (κενή) was suggested by the preceding κενέ (foolish person). There is little difference in meaning in this context between the adjectives ἀργή and νεκρά.” [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), 472.]

<sup>6</sup>{A} ἀγγέλους P<sup>54vid, 74</sup> ⋈ A B Ψ 33<sup>vid</sup> 81 322 323 436 1067 1175 1243 1292 1409 1505 1611 1735 1852 2138 2344 Byz [K<sup>txt</sup> P] l 147 l 590 l 591 l 603 l 680 l 883 l 1159 l 1178 it<sup>ar, s, t</sup> vg syr<sup>h</sup> // ἀγγέλους τοῦ Ἰσραήλ 61 // κατασκόπους C K<sup>vr</sup>. L 945 1241 1739 2298 2464 Lect (l 1154 ἀγγέλους τοὺς κατασκόπους) it<sup>ff</sup> syr<sup>p, (hmg)</sup> cop<sup>sa, bo, ac</sup> arm eth geo slav

<sup>7</sup>“So that readers would not mistakenly understand ἀγγέλους as ‘angels,’ various manuscripts replaced ἀγγέλους with κατασκόπους (‘spies,’ also found in Heb 11:31) or added τοῦ Ἰσραήλ (of Israel). Translators may clarify the identity of the ‘messengers’ (TOB and Seg) by saying ‘the Israelite messengers’ (FC), ‘the spies’ (NIV), or ‘the Israelite spies’ (TEV and ITCL).” [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), 473.]

<sup>8</sup>Listing of text variants in N-A 27th rev ed. Greek text:

<p><b>Jakobus 2,14</b>          * B C* 1243 pc (τὸ is omitted)          * 2 l A C pc (sequence of λέγει τις is reversed or verb is replaced with λέγεις)            λεγεις 049          * σχη 614. 630. 1505 al (ἔχη is replaced either with σχῆ or ἔχειν)            εχειν 1827 pc</p>	<p><b>Jakobus 2,15</b>          * δε A C Ψ M vg sy<sup>h</sup> bo<sup>mss</sup> (either δὲ or γὰρ is added after ἐάν)            γαρ 1735 pc sa            txt ⋈ B 33. 69. 81. 323. 945. 1241. 1739 pc ff bo; Spec          * ἦ A (33). 81 al (ἦ replaces καὶ)            -1735 pc          * ωσιν A P Ψ 33. 1739 M (λειπόμενοι is replaced with λείπωσιν)            txt ⋈ B C K pc</p>
<p><b>Jakobus 2,16</b>          * και ειπη A Ψ 33<sup>vid</sup>. 81. 945. 1241. 1739. (2298) al bo<sup>pt</sup> (εἶπη δέ is replaced with καὶ εἶπη)          * B C* pc (τὸ is omitted)</p>	<p><b>Jakobus 2,17</b>          * εργ. εχ(η) L 049. 323. 1739. 2464 M; Hier Prim (ἔχη ἔργα is replaced)</p>
<p><b>Jakobus 2,18</b>          * 4 2 3 1 (ff); [Pfleiderer cj] (the sequence of πιστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα is shifted)          * P<sup>54vid</sup> pc ff (σου is omitted)          * εκ P<sup>54vid</sup> M; Cass (χωρίς is replaced with ἐκ)            txt ⋈ A B C P Ψ 33. 69. 81. 614. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739 al latt sy co          * σου C M (σου is added after ἔργων)            txt ⋈ A B P Ψ 33. 81. 614. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739 al latt sy co          *<sup>1</sup> P<sup>74</sup> A C Ψ 33. 1739 M vg (σοι δεῖξω are transposed)            txt ⋈ B 69. 614. 630. 1505 al; Pel (P illeg.)          * μου P<sup>74</sup> A P<sup>vid</sup> M vg sy (μου is added after πιστιν)            txt ⋈ B C Ψ 33. 81. 323. 614. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739 al ff</p>	<p><b>Jakobus 2,19</b>          * 3 4 1 2 (K* om. 1) M (various sequencing of εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός)            4 1 2 69 al            2 4 Ψ            1 4 2 B 614. 630. 1505. 1852 al            1 3 4 2 C 33<sup>vid</sup>. 81. 1243 pc            unus deus ff            1 2 4 945. 1241. 1739. 2298            txt P<sup>74</sup> ⋈ A 2464 pc</p>

original wording of this part of James.

**Internal History.** Some of the indirect allusions to background historical issues need some attention, although certain aspects become exegetical issues as much or more than background issues.

The issue of severe poverty in that world is in the background of a Christian couple showing up in a church gathering “naked,” γυμνοί, in v. 15. What must first be acknowledged is a dumb mistake by Bible translators using the English word ‘naked’ to translate γυμνοί. Although the adjective γυμνός, ἢ, ὄν can refer to being completely undressed, it just as readily designates inadequate clothing for specific occasions, such as in the illustration of vv. 15-16 of a Palestinian winter with temperatures below freezing.<sup>9</sup> The very intense social sense of propriety at the point of having on clothes when out in public would have made such a scenario of a Christian couple showing up at church completely naked preposterous, and thus would have ruined the point of James’ illustration. What James was saying is that from the kind of clothes this couple was wearing

<p><b>Jakobus 2,20</b>          * κενή P<sup>74</sup> ff (ἀργή is replaced with either κενή or νεκρά)            νεκρά κ A C<sup>2</sup> P Ψ 33 M t vg<sup>cl</sup> sy bo            txt B C* 323. 945. 1739 pc vg<sup>st.ww</sup> sa</p>	<p><b>Jakobus 2,22</b>          * συνεργει κ* A 33. 630 pc ff vg<sup>mss</sup> (συνήργει is replaced with συνεργει)            txt κ<sup>c</sup> B C P Ψ 049. 1739 M vg sy co          * αυτου 614. 630. 1505. 1852 al vg<sup>ms</sup> (αὐτοῦ is added after ἔργων)</p>
<p><b>Jakobus 2,23</b>          * P<sup>20</sup> L Ψ 614. 623. 630. 1241. 1505 al lat sy co (δὲ is omitted)            txt κ A B C P 049. 33. 1739 M vg<sup>mss</sup>          * δουλος 429. 614. 630. 1505. 1852 al sy<sup>h</sup> (φίλος is replaced with δοῦλος)</p>	<p><b>Jakobus 2,24</b>          * τοιουν m; Pel (τοιυνῶν is inserted after ὁρᾶτε)            txt P<sup>54vid</sup> κ A B C P Ψ 33. 81. 614. 630. 945. 1505. 1739 pc latt sy co</p>
<p><b>Jakobus 2,25</b>          * 1 623 al ff vg<sup>cl.ww</sup> (ὁμοίως δὲ are replaced)            ουτως C          * κατασκοπους C K<sup>ms</sup> L 945. 1241. 1739. 2298. 2464 al ff sy<sup>p</sup>.          (hmg) bo (ἀγγέλους is replaced)            αγγελους του Ισραηλ 61 pc</p>	<p><b>Jakobus 2,26</b>          * – B 1243 pc syp; Hier (δὲ replaces γὰρ)            δε ff; Or          * του 33. 69. 945. 1241. 1739. 2298 al (τοῦ is inserted before πνεύματος)          * των A C P 1739 M (τῶν is inserted before ἔργων)            txt P20.74vid κ B Ψ 81. 614. 630. 1505 al</p>

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 591-92.]

<sup>9</sup>γυμνός, ἢ, ὄν (Hom.+; also s. Just. A I, 37, 8 γυμνὸν σκέπε [ref. Is 58:7]; Mel.)

**1. pert. to being without covering**

**a. lit. naked, stripped, bare** (PFay 12, 20; Gen 2:25, 3: 7, 10f al.; Job 1:21; Mel., P. 97, 739 γύμνω τῷ σώματι) **Mk 14:52** (Arian, Bell. Civ. 5, 140 §582 γυμνοί ... ἔφουγον; TestJos 8:3 ἔφουγον γυμνός); **Ac 19:16** (cp. Philo, In Flaccum 36); **Rv 3:17; 16:15; 17:16**. περιβεβλημένος σινδόνα ἐπὶ γυμνοῦ who wore a linen garment over his naked body (Tyndale: ‘clothed in linnen upon the bare’) **Mk 14:51** (for the subst. τὸ γυμνόν=the naked body cp. Lucian, Nav. 33 τὰ γυμνά). πόδες (Euphorion [III B.C.] 53, 1 Coll. Alex. p. 40; Jos., Ant. 8, 362) Hs 9, 20, 3.

**b. fig. uncovered, bare** (cp. Diod S 1, 76, 2; Themistocl., Ep. 16 p. 756 H. γ. ἀλήθεια; Lucian, Tox. 42, Anachars. 19 ὡς γυμνά τὰ γεγεννημένα οἱ Ἀρεοπαγῖται βλέπειεν; Heliod., Aeth. 10, 29 w. ἀπαρακάλυπτος; Job 26:6; Philo, Migr. Abr. 192; Jos., Ant. 6, 286; Ar. 13, 5 αἰσχύνην; Mel., Fgm. 9, 19 P. a bared sword) Hb 4:13. Of the soul, whose covering is the body: naked **2 Cor 5:3** (cp. Pla., Cratyl. 20, 403b ἡ ψυχὴ γυμνὴ τοῦ σώματος, also Gorg. 523ce; 524f; Aelian, HA 11, 39. Artem. 4, 30 p. 221, 10f the σῶμα is the ἰμάτιον of the ψυχὴ; 5, 40; M. Ant. 12, 2 of the divine element in man, ‘which God sees without any covering’.—Of the νοῦς; Herm. Wr. 10, 17). S. on this EKühl, Über **2 Cor 5:1–10**, 1904; Jubbink, Het eeuwige leven bij Pls, Groningen diss. 1917, 14ff; WMundle, D. Problem d. Zwischenzustandes ... **2 Cor 5:1–10**: Jülicher Festschr. 1927, 93–109; LBrun, ZNW 28, 1929, 207–29; Guntermann (ἀνάστασις 2b); RBultmann, Exeg. Probl. des 2 Kor: SymbUups 9, ’47, 1–12; JSevenster, Studia Paulina (JdeZwaan Festschr.) ’53, 202–14; EEllis, NTS 6, ’60, 211–24. γ. κόκκος a naked kernel **1 Cor 15:37**, where an adj. is applied to a grain of wheat, when it properly belongs to the bodiless soul which is compared to it; s. σπέρματα γ. 1 Cl 24:5 and AcPlCor 2:26.

**2. pert. to being inadequately clothed, poorly dressed** (Demosth. 21, 216; BGU 846, 9; PBrem 63, 30; Job 31:19; Tob 1:17; 4:16) **Mt 25:36, 38, 43f; Js 2:15**; B 3:3 (Is 58:7).

**3. pert. to being lightly clad, without an outer garment, without which a decent person did not appear in public** (so Hes., Op. 391, oft. in Attic wr.; PMagd 6, 7 [III B.C.]; 1 Km 19:24; Is 20:2) **J 21:7** (Dio Chrys. 55 [72], 1 the ναύτης wears only an undergarment while at work).—Pauly-W. XVI 2, 1541–49; BHHW II 962–65; RAC X 1–52.—B. 324f. 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), 208.]

while at church, one could easily tell that they did not have adequate clothing to keep them warm enough from freezing in the bitter cold weather. Hence, the parting greeting, θερμαίνεσθε, “be warm,” in v. 16.

Climate patterns in modern Israel underscore this for ancient Israel. Although a “Mediterranean climate” with “long, hot, rainless summers and relatively short, cool, rainy winters” the temperature can easily dip to the freezing level or below in winter with occasional snow at the higher elevations.<sup>10</sup> One of these places would be Jerusalem at 835 meters (or 2739 feet) in elevation.



Snow in modern Jerusalem

Add to the climate factor the issue of poverty in both the Roman empire and in particular in ancient Palestine.<sup>11</sup> Famines brought on by drought and climate fluctuations were relatively common in the empire, and also in Palestine. Occasional disease based plagues did wipe out entire cities, such as Athens prior to the beginning of the Christian era. The entire system of social status and rank was determined by the Roman *census*, the official declaration of specific levels of wealth by the individual Roman citizen. Loss of wealth was one of the greatest fears in ancient Rome.

Thus that James could meaningfully use an illustration of a Christian couple showing up in a church meeting in extreme poverty is very plausible. In fact, the Roman satirists often used caricatures of poverty for illustrative and rhetorical training purposes. Such an example would have had clear meaning not only in Jerusalem, but also in the Diaspora regions of the eastern empire.

The background issues present in the explanation section of vv. 18-26 have strong exegetical tones, and thus are better treated in the exegesis of the passage below.

#### **Literary:**

Literary issues virtually always play an important interpretive role, and this passage is no exception.

**Genre:** Literary patterns in this text collectively fall under *paraenesis*, moral exhortation, of a general nature. The religious angle presented here stresses moral obligation to those in need as the natural expression of genuine faith commitment to Christ.

But also contained in this passage is a prime example of ancient Greek *diatribe*.<sup>12</sup> This literary device

<sup>10</sup>For more details see “Geography of Israel: Climate,” Wikipedia.org.

<sup>11</sup>One helpful recent study is Margaret Atkins, Blackfriars Hall, & Robin Osborne, eds., *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006). The study of poverty is more complex than might be assumed, as is pointed out in chapter one, page one:

What are we studying when we study poverty? Are we studying the social and economic structure that means that a proportion of the population has barely adequate access to the resources required for life? Or are we studying those in a society who at any moment happen to have less than some particular, and more or less arbitrary, threshold of resources? Or again, are we studying how the society in question analyses its own structure, how it classifies those with least resources, what it does about them and how it justifies to itself what it does or does not do?

Studying poverty in contemporary societies is closely linked to the question of what to do about it; ‘make poverty history’ is the political slogan of 2005. Doing something about it depends on understanding the nature of the problem to begin with. Are the poor a random collection of people who for different reasons have fallen on hard times but can be expected to improve their lot in better times (‘conjunctural poverty’ as it is sometimes called)? Or are the poor trapped by the structure of economic system, whether that be feudalism, capitalism, or whatever, so that in good times as well as hard times they will remain impoverished (‘structural poverty’)? Is poverty an economic problem (because a given society does not produce enough resources to go round), or is it a social problem (because the resources are there but for social reasons are maldistributed)?

<sup>12</sup>“The diatribe became a well-known literary form in the Greco-Roman world and is reflected in a number of authors of importance for study of the NT. The diatribe perhaps has its basis in the dialogues of Plato. Some of these literary constructions were probably based upon dialogues between Socrates and his disciples, but many of them may well have been greatly enhanced literarily by Plato, with some of them almost certainly his own creation. In these dialogues, Socrates engages in discussion with enquirers and leads himself and his discussion partner(s) to knowledge through positing and answering of questions. The process of discovering transpires through Socrates posing questions that lead the respondent either to suggest the answer or to defer to Socrates, at which point Socrates often develops the answer in greater length before moving the dialogue forward.

was widely employed by ancient Greek philosophers. Essentially, a diatribe is used by a writer to set up an objection to a point made by the writer. He creates an imaginary opponent who states the objection. Then in a fictional conversation between the writer and 'his opponent' the writer systematically demolishes the objection to his viewpoint.

James sets up such a diatribe in the first segment of his explanation section (vv. 18-26) in verses 18-23.<sup>13</sup> It is introduced by Ἄλλ' ἐρεῖ τις, *but someone will say*. What follows is a series of 'you' in the second person singular form of Greek. This diatribe is rhetorically a dialogue, and only one series of reciprocal conversation is stated: the objector speaks (v. 18a) and James' responds (vv. 18b-23). The interpretive issue that occasions difference of opinion is defining the boundaries of the objector's speech: v. 18a, 18a-b, 18a-c. We will address that issue below in the exegesis section. What James does is verbalize in the mouth of an imagined objector a strong disagreement with the core principle repeatedly expressed in both the admonition (v. 14) and illustration (vv. 15-17) sections: μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν; *such faith is not able to save him, is it?* (v. 14b); οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔχη ἔργα, νεκρά ἐστὶν καθ' ἑαυτήν, *so also faith, if it does not possess works, is dead by itself* (v. 17). His objector in v. 18 strongly disagrees with the intense linking of faith and action, and wants to separate them out as an either / or set of options.<sup>14</sup> James in his response, vv. 18b-23, proceeds to absolutely demolish this objection.

For English language readers sensing this is somewhat challenging but ὁρᾶτε, *you see*, in v. 24 is cast in the second person form as well. English does not distinguish between a singular and a plural 'you.' Thus a dramatic shift from speaking to the objector with the singular you in vv. 18b-23 to speaking to his readers beginning in v. 24 is blurred. Fortunately, most all other modern western languages retain a clear distinction between the singular and plural forms of you, and thus in reading those translations this shift is clearly marked in verse 24.

One of the interesting angles of this is whether James' imaginary objector in verse 18, ἐρεῖ τις, *someone says*, is the same person as in verse 14, λέγει τις, *someone says*. Two things argue against this: 1) the use of separate verbs for speaking, λέγω and the Aorist form of εἶπον, an obsolete form of εἶρω; 2) in verse 14, the 3rd class condition protasis ἐὰν πίστιν λέγει τις ἔχειν ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχη, *if someone claims to have faith but no works*, introduces a polite accusation of a false claim to faith. But Ἄλλ' ἐρεῖ τις, *but someone says*, in verse 18, is talking about an assumed real objection among James' readers, and is much blunter in tone, especially when James calls his objector ὁ ἄνθρωπε κενέ, *o mindless airhead*, in v. 20.

Both Paul and James make use of this literary device (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35 and similarly Rom. 9:19; 11:19), but James has by far the most elaborate structure here, using a form that matches or even surpasses most of those found among the Greek philosophers. Thus, as one might expect, some modern commentators use this as an argument against James being the author of this document. But those objections have been effectively countered in the proposal found in Lesson One on James 1:1. Among the Hellenistic Jewish Christian

"A number of authors in the Greco-Roman period made use of the techniques of diatribe. Some of the best known include Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom, Teles and Musonius Rufus. Diatribes are also attributed to a number of other authors, especially Stoic writers, for example, in Diogenes Laertius. The former slave Epictetus, who became an itinerant philosopher with a group of followers, has left eight books of his disputations with his followers. They are recorded by Arrian, who also wrote a history of Alexander's conquest of Persia. They purport to be the record of Epictetus's conversations with his students, and a number of features suggest that they may be genuine. However, a number of features indicate that literary artifice is involved in these dialogues, presumably by Arrian in the course of recording these dialogues. Several of these features include consistent and stylized use of rhetorical questions, distinctive phrasing by Epictetus and, perhaps most importantly, the feature of Epictetus's inevitable ability to respond appropriately."

[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).]

<sup>13</sup>"Several books within the NT can be characterized as diatribe, or at least as utilizing various features of the diatribe style. These include the book of James and some of Paul's letters, such as Romans and 2 Corinthians, among others. One of the major distinctives of the NT use of diatribe, however, is that the author of the respective book creates a fictive dialogue in which he writes both sides of the debate. This is particularly obvious in the use of rhetorical questions, where the biblical author guides the course of the argument by means of posing questions that he then answers." [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).]

<sup>14</sup>This remains true even should the alternative text reading in few papyri manuscripts be adopted where the point of the objection from πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα is reversed to ἔργα ἔχεις, κἀγὼ πίστιν.

editors who put this material together was superior knowledge and skill with literary forms of ancient Greek.

**Context:** The literary setting of 2:14-26 is clear and is defined by the structural outline below. The two pericopes in chapter two, vv. 1-13 and vv. 14-26 are clearly linked together by the common emphasis on πίστις, faith, in vv. 1 and 14. A few commentators deny this connection,<sup>15</sup> but do so on highly questionable assumptions that reflect deep failure in understanding the nature of biblical πίστις, thus leading them to serious errors in their exegesis of chapter two. In chapter two James not only ties the two pericopes together by the common word πίστις, he also builds his discussion of faith around the traditional Jewish and early Christian belief in the vertical / horizontal nature of authentic religious experience. One cannot be properly related to God (empty faith signaled by absence of deeds of obedience to God, vv. 14-26) without proper relationships to other people (empty faith signaled by failure to treat others the same way God does, vv. 1-13).

Had Christians down through the centuries had this foundational grasp of the setting of these pericopes in chapter two, massive debates, theological wars, and countless false teachings could have been avoided.

**STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT**  
Of James<sup>16</sup>

<b>PRAESCRIPTIO</b>		1.1
<b>BODY</b> 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
<b>Faith and Works</b>	<b>56-72</b>	<b>2.14-26</b>
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

**Structure:**

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

<sup>15</sup>“A connection between this treatise and the preceding one cannot be established.” [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), 149.]

<sup>16</sup>Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, *A Study Manual of James: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285. **Statements** indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual and also at the James Study internet site.

56 <sup>2.14</sup> **What good is it,**  
my brothers,  
if one claims to have faith,  
but  
does not have works?

57 **Such faith is not able to save him, is it?**

<sup>2.15</sup> If a brother or sister is without adequate clothes  
and  
lacking in daily food,  
and  
one from among you say to them,  
"Blessings on you,  
keep warm,  
eat to your heart's content,"  
<sup>2.16</sup> but  
you do not give them the necessities of life,

58 **what good is it?**

<sup>2.17</sup> So also  
if not accompanied by works,  
59 **such faith is dead**  
by itself.

<sup>2.18</sup> But  
60 **someone raises the objection,**  
"You have faith  
and  
I have works."

61 **Prove to me your faith apart from works.**

and  
62 **I will prove to you my faith by my works.**

63 <sup>2.19</sup> **Do you believe**  
that there is only one God?

64 **You do well;**

also  
65 **the demons believe**

and  
66 **--- ----- tremble in fear.**

<sup>2.20</sup> Now  
67 **do you wish to know,**  
O empty-headed one,  
that faith...is useless?  
apart from works

68 <sup>2.21</sup> **Was not Abraham our father vindicated**  
by works  
when he offered up Isaac his son  
upon the altar?

69 <sup>2.22</sup> **You can see**

that his faith worked together  
with his works,  
and  
his faith was brought to completeness,  
2.23 and  
the scripture was fulfilled,  
which says,  
"Abraham believed God  
and  
it was counted to him  
as righteousness."  
and  
he was called Friend of God.

70 <sup>2.24</sup> **You see**

that a person is vindicated  
by works  
and  
not by faith alone.

2.25 And

71 **was not Rahab the prostitute vindicated**

in a similar way  
also  
by works  
when she took in the messengers  
and  
--- sent them out by another way?

2.26 For

72 **so also faith...is dead.**

just as the body...is dead  
apart from the spirit,  
apart from works

In a similar pattern to 2:1-13 where the core rhetorical structure began with a basic spiritual principle, then was illustrated, and thirdly was defended and explained in detail, 2:14-26 follows essentially the same rhetorical structure. To be sure, the particulars are developed differently, but the foundational pattern is the same.

The basic spiritual principle, found in core statements 56 and 57 (verse 14), sets forth the premise that authentic faith naturally leads to a life of obedience to the Lord. Two rhetorical questions are used to forcefully introduce this position, and they are tied together with connections both logically and with formal grammar. Also expressed in these statements is that a non-working faith has no salvational power. That is, for faith to be real it must be more than mere words; concrete actions have to flow from it. Thus, issues with eternal implications are at stake here. The negative side of a faith claim is used via a hypothetical person ("if one claims") making a claim to faith but without backing it up in deeds. This will set a pattern for the remainder of the passage, since hypothetical situations will resurface further into the author's discussion. Whether or not the author originally had a specific person, or group of persons, in mind during the composition of these words can't be determined with certainty. But the text certainly points toward having historical individuals in mind. Very doubtful, however, is the earlier Tübingen school view expressed by F.C. Bauer in the late 1800s that this hypothetical person was none other than the Apostle Paul. The specific identification of an individual or Christian group in the middle of the first Christian century is impossible, given the limited information available.

The illustration of the author's premise is contained in statements 58 and 59 (verses 15-17). Although

the specific setting where the Christian brother and sister in dire need interact with the believing community isn't clearly identified, the close parallels of this illustration to the one in 2:2-4 argue strongly that the setting is a worship service here also, just as it was clearly identified before. Here, however, instead of discriminatory treatment of visitors to the worship service, the issue now is that of horrible neglect to minister to basic needs of those inside the community of faith. To be sure, hyperbole is clearly used in the language of James in describing the situation, but this strong language serves to make a dramatic point, driving home his view about the nature of authentic faith.

When the author begins to expand and defend his view in statements 60 through 72 (verses 18-26), he develops this section in two segments. In the underlying Greek text this shines forth very clearly but, because of the English language use of the personal pronoun 'you' for both singular and plural expressions, this distinction is completely washed out in translation.

The first tier of elaboration in statements 60 through 69 (vv. 18-23), the 'you' is singular. In statement 60, James introduces an objection to his stance in verses 14-17. Statements 61 through 69 constitute a carefully crafted response to his objector. He draws upon an ancient Greek literary device popularly called a "straw man" in statement 60; this 'straw man' serves as a sounding board for James to develop his view in greater detail while obliterating any possible objection to his view. The objection, "You have faith, and I have works," frames the structure of the response, which occurs at two levels. To be sure, the foundational issue is not that one person possesses faith and another possesses works. Implied in this is a dichotomy between faith and deeds of obedience, suggesting that the two have little essential connection to one another. James ardently rejects the validity of this. His response is more focused on addressing the falseness of this dichotomy.

Statement 61 challenges the objector to "prove his faith," which James is convinced can't be done apart from deeds of obedience. He subsequently elaborates on this point in statements 64 through 66, where he assumes his objector will point to sabbath worship recitation of the Shema as proof of authentic faith. In dramatic fashion the author rejects this ancient worship practice as evidence of true faith. Sure, one needs to orally confess faith, but mere confession is no indicator of authentic faith.

Statement 62 declares that the author's claim to faith can be verified by his deeds of obedience. In his elaboration of this point in statements 67 through 69, instead of pointing to expressions of faith in his own life, the author points to the father of the Jewish people, Abraham, as his evidence. Drawing upon patterns of first century Jewish interpretation of Abraham, James set forth that the offering up of the only son Isaac by Abraham was the undeniable confirmation of Abraham's faith via the divine provision of an alternative sacrifice by the Lord. Statement 68 makes this point, and statement 69 provides a four-fold interpretative commentary on this event in Genesis 22.

The second tier of explanation and defense is found in statements 70 through 72. Statement 70 (verse 24) shifts to a plural you, thus engaging his original readership more directly in the discussion in the same way the first part of the passage had with the same plural you (verses 14-17). The plural you will dominate the remainder of the passage. Using a frequently repeated pattern (cf. statements 57, 59, 70, 72), this second tier restates the foundational premise of the inseparability of faith from deeds of obedience. This adds transition from the 'straw man' objector to his readership. Next, the OT example of Rahab from Joshua 2 is set forth as evidence of the author's view (statement 71). Finally, the entire discussion is brought to a climatic expression of his premise in statement 72, with very picturesque and forceful language.

All of this can be charted out as follows:

Premise	56-57		v. 14
Illustration	58-59		vv. 15-17
Elaboration	60-72		vv. 18-26
First:	Objector	60	v. 18a
	Response	61-69	vv. 18b-23
	1st:	61, 63-66	vv. 18b, 19
	2nd:	62, 67-69	vv. 18c, 20-23
Second:	Readers	70-72	vv. 24-26

## Exegesis of the Text.

The exegesis of the text will be built around the three core elements of the passage: admonition (v. 14), illustration (vv. 15-17), and explanation (vv. 18-26).

### 1) Admonition, v. 14.

14 Τί τὸ ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἐὰν πίστιν λέγη τις ἔχειν ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχη; μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν;

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?

James signals a shift in direction with ἀδελφοί μου, *my brothers*. But the central emphasis remains on πίστιν, *faith*, as was true in 2:1-13. In placing his issue on the table with his readers here, a different tactic is used. He turns to rhetorical questions, but with a distinctive structure. The first one begins with a main clause, Τί τὸ ὄφελος, and is followed by an if-clause, a third class apodosis introduced by ἐὰν and the subjunctive mood verb form. The extreme pointedness of the main clause, the protasis, Τί τὸ ὄφελος, is moderated somewhat by the more polite third class apodosis if-clause.<sup>17</sup> The second question is simpler but a majority of translators have botched the translation horrifically over the years.<sup>18</sup> Both the grammar and the context make it abundantly clear that μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν; means “That faith cannot save him, can it?” And not “Can faith save him?” But preconceived theology regarding the requirements of salvation have dictated the translation patterns more than grammar and context.

The strategy in the first rhetorical question is to pose a potential scenario in the apodosis and then raise a serious question about its validity in the protasis. The second question then extends the negative evaluation by raising the issue of one’s eternal destiny being linked to the kind of faith exhibited -- or not exhibited in the scenario. The first evaluation has pragmatic tones, while the second question has profound theological implications. It would have been difficult for James to have framed this issue of saving faith more dramatically in ancient Greek. Consequently, we had better be certain that we fully understand what he is getting at here, since our eternal destiny hangs in the balance.

**Τί τὸ ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἐὰν πίστιν λέγη τις ἔχειν ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχη;** The point of the abbreviated main clause, Τί τὸ ὄφελος, *What good is it?*, is to stress the uselessness of claiming to possess faith without

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<sup>17</sup>“What good is it ...?”<sup>140</sup> still heard apparently today (*shū ilfaida*) in Jerusalem,<sup>141</sup> and common in some earlier Greek but not in the Bible (Job 15:3; 1 Cor. 15:32), is quite Socratic (Platonic) in this application of the test of ‘good.’ The meaning is clear. To paraphrase: ‘What is the use of a man claiming<sup>142</sup> to ‘have faith’ in our Lord Jesus Christ (2:1) if it is without works?’” [James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 121.]

<sup>18</sup>μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν;

**English:** Can faith save him? (KJV; KV21; NKJV); can that faith save him? (ASV); Claiming to have faith can’t save anyone, can it? (CEB); Is such “faith” able to save him? (CJB); Can that kind of faith save you? (CEV); Shall faith be able to save him? (DRA); Faith like that cannot save anyone. (ERV); Can that faith save him? (ESV; ESVUK); Can this kind of faith save him? (GW); Can that faith save you? (GNT); Can his faith save him? (HCSB); Could that sort of faith save anyone’s soul? (PHILLIPS); That faith is not able to save him, is it? (LEB); Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? (MSG); Can that kind of faith save him? (MOUNCE); Can that faith save him? (NASB); Can faith like that save them? (NCV); Can that kind of faith save them? (NIRV); Can such faith save them? (NIV; NIV1984; NIVUK; TNIV); Can that kind of faith save you from the punishment of sin? (NLV); Can that kind of faith save anyone? (NLT); Can just believing save him? (WE); whether faith shall be able to save him? (WYC).

**Spanish:** ¿Acaso puede esa fe salvarle? (LBLA); ¿Podrá salvar a alguien esa clase de fe? (CST); ¿Podrá acaso salvarlo esa fe? (DHH); ¿Acaso puede esa fe salvarlo? (NBLH); ¿Puede esa clase de fe salvar a alguien? (NTV); ¿Acaso podrá salvarlo esa fe? (NVI); ¿Acaso podrá salvarle esa fe? (NVIC); ¿Lo podrá salvar esa clase de fe? (PDT); ¿Podrá salvarlo esa fe? (BLP); ¿Acaso esa fe puede salvar? (RVC); ¿Podrá la fe salvarle? (RVR1960; RVA); ¿Podrá la fe salvarlo? (RVR1995); ¿Así no se van a salvar! (TLA).

**German:** Kann ihn ein solcher Glaube vor Gottes Urteil retten? (HOF); Kann auch der Glaube ihn selig machen? (LUTH1545); Kann der Glaube ‘als solcher’ ihn retten? (NGU-DE); Kann ihn denn der Glaube retten? (SCH1951); Kann ihn denn dieser Glaube retten? (SCH2000); Kann denn der Glaube ihn selig machen? (LUTH1984); Kann der bloße Glaube ihn retten? (GNB); Vermag etwa der Glaube ihn zu retten? (MENGE); Kann etwa der Glaube ihn retten? (EÜ; ELBERFELDER); Ein solcher Glaube kann niemanden retten. (NLB).

**French:** Une telle foi peut-elle le sauver? (BDS); La foi peut-elle le sauver? (LSG); Cette foi peut-elle le sauver? (NEG1979; SG21).

**Latin:** numquid poterit fides salvare eum (VULGATE).

deeds of obedience.<sup>19</sup> In the if-clause scenario, James juxtaposes a claim to faith and a life of obedience against one another. This imaginary member of the congregation, τις, *someone*, says that he possesses faith, πίστιν λέγει, -- not possesses it -- and James understands faith surrender to Christ to mean that evidence of it will show up in the person's living. Such faith is not a mere formality done at church and that's it. Nor is it just a verbal confession of Christ made at a given moment in time. Instead, genuine faith must be a life-changing commitment to Christ that is lived out day by day. Anything less is phoney and puts one on the opposite side of fence to James. Here James echoes Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:21-22):<sup>20</sup>

21 Οὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι· κύριε κύριε, εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. 22 πολλοὶ ἐροῦσίν μοι ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ· κύριε κύριε, οὐ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι ἐπροφητεύσαμεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δαιμόνια ἐξεβάλομεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δυνάμεις πολλὰς ἐποιήσαμεν; 23 καὶ τότε ὁμολογήσω αὐτοῖς ὅτι οὐδέποτε ἔγνων ὑμᾶς· ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν.

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' 23 Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'

As Jesus made it clear, formal confession without authentic obedience turns into spiritual suicide on the day of final judgment. Faith is deeper than our mouth; it must originate from down within in a deliberate surrender to Christ as Lord. It then flows out in verbal confession, as Paul asserts in Rom. 10:9-13:

9 ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ. 10 καρδίᾳ γὰρ πιστεύεται εἰς δικαιοσύνην, στόματι δὲ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν. 11 λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή· πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ καταισχυνθήσεται. 12 οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν διαστολή Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἑλλήνου, ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων, πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν· 13 πᾶς γὰρ ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται.

9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

It then transforms the way we live into doing the will of God day by day. Both James and Paul<sup>21</sup> in their own language affirm clearly this teaching of Jesus in the Sermon.

On the opposite side of faith is ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχη, *but does not have works*. What did James mean by ἔργα? The Greek word ἔργον itself merely designates action as opposed to rest. In this book, the word and James' meaning loom large with nine instances in 2:14-26 and one instance in 3:13. With the examples of Abraham

<sup>19c</sup>Τὶ τὸ ὄφελος is a regularly occurring phrase in such a dialogical style (1 Cor. 15:32; Sir. 20:30; 41:14; Philo Post. C. 86: τί γὰρ ὄφελος λέγειν μὲν τὰ βέλτιστα, διανοεῖσθαι δὲ καὶ πράττειν τὰ ἀίσχιστα; Epict. 1.4.16; 1.6.33; 3.7.30; 3.24.51; cf. Marty, 91, who notes that all the citations except 15:32 lack the article, as does the text in B C 99, and suggests the text here is an assimilation to 1 Corinthians; yet haplography plus assimilation to the common idiom better explains the article's absence in the minority manuscripts), always expecting a negative answer: it is no use at all. In a Christian context such as this, however, the 'use' takes on serious consequences, for it is salvation which is at stake. What James is asking is whether a certain faith will help one in the final judgment (the κρίσις of 2:13). The implied 'no' fits with the 'no' expected in the final clause of this passage: 'can such a faith [i.e. a faith lacking works] save him?' The eschatological ring of such a question is unmistakable (cf. 4:12; 1:21; 5:20 and W. Foerster, TDNT VII, 990-998, especially 996)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 120.]

<sup>20c</sup>The emptiness of such profession is not new in the NT. One has only to scan the prophets to discover a condemnation of ritual piety without practical justice for the poor (cf. Miranda, 111-160). John the Baptist is also reported as demanding deeds be added to faith (Lk. 3:7-14), and Jesus warned that it would not do to enter the last judgment merely verbalizing his lordship (Mt. 7:15-27; cf. 5:16). Paul also reiterates this theme (Rom. 1:5; 2:6-8; 6:17-18; 1 Cor. 13:2; 15:58; 2 Cor. 10:5-6; Gal. 6:4-6). James has already mentioned this theme in 1:22-27; here he underlines it. Works are not an 'added extra' to faith, but are an essential expression of it; cf. the importance of deeds of love alongside proper faith in late Judaism (m. Ab. 1:2; b. B. B. 9a; 10a; Lv. Rab. 31:3 on 22:24; Schechter, 214; Str-B IV, 559ff.; G. Moore, II, 168-169). Some of this emphasis in Judaism, however, first appeared in the post-70 period when charity became a means of atonement." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 120-21.]

<sup>21</sup>Cf. **Eph. 2:10**. 10 αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἔσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

and Rahab, James makes it clear that he means deeds of obedience expressed to God as faith commitment. In 3:13 works done out of humble commitment to God reflect the presence of wisdom in the believer's life.<sup>22</sup> One should note very clearly that Paul's concept of ἔργων in Rom. 4:2, 6; Gal. 2:16 (ἔργων νόμου) et als alludes to adherence to the ritual demands of the Torah centered in circumcism and formal commitment to obey the Law of Mose as the means to salvation. Paul's emphasis on ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς, *good works*, as the product of faith commitment is close to James' understanding here; cf. Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 9:8; 10:16; Gal. 6:10; Phil. 2:13; Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2:17; 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17; Titus 1:16; 2:7; 3:1, 8, 14.

Had Martin Luther been able to grasp this in the early 1500s when his Catholic opponents equated ἔργα with the RC system of penance along with a profound misunderstanding that thought James was say faith plus works are requirements for salvation, rather than a working faith, not only loads of theological wars could have been avoided over the next four plus centuries, but countless thousands of trees would have been spared being turned into paper in order to carry out this warfare in print. But tragically the notion that ἔργα equals penance was so deeply embedded into Christian thinking in the 1500s that Luther could not get past it. Countless other controversies have thus been spanned out of this debate at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

**μη δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν;** The importance of this issue raised by James is reflected in the second question: *Such faith is not able to save him, is it?* Several aspects here are important. The 'him' αὐτόν refers back to the τις, someone claiming to have faith, in the first question. The modern translations that change this important contextual signal by using you or something else do the modern reader a real disservice by mudding up the clear meaning in the biblical text. James speaks only of a person claiming faith but not demonstrating it in deeds of obedience. And he has in mind potential members of the congregations that this document is addressed to in 1:1. To be certain, both rhetorical questions have an axiomatic contour to them, but to dislodge the questions from this context and make them into timeless truth statements risks clear misunderstanding of James' point.

The definite article ἡ with πίστις clearly alludes back to the πίστιν claimed by the τις person in the first question. James is not talking about Christian faith in general terms contra the KJV, *Can faith save him?*, coming off the Vulgate *numquid poterit fides salvare eum*. The KJV translators evidently forget that Latin does not contain articles of any kind, and they did not check the underlying Greek text, before making a literal translation of the Vulgate over into English. Their Church of England religious orientation additionally made them more sympathetic to the Roman Catholic interpretive view of this text, which they helped preserve in their *Can faith save him?* translation. Plus they opened the door for countless debates and controversies later on with the 'faith plus works' or 'working faith' discussions, most of which historically have stemmed from the KJV translation of vv. 14-26. It is out of these controversies that the translation pattern of the KJV has achieved credibility in the eyes of many in the modern world. But such an understanding runs directly counter to both the clearly expressed grammar and the obvious context of the second question.

The infinite σῶσαι, *save*, must be clearly understood. In the five uses of σῶζω in the book, three of them, and possibly four, stress σῶζω as spiritual salvation, usually centered as here on the day of final judgement where σῶζω means Heaven and absence of it means Hell.<sup>23</sup> Only in 5:15 is σῶζω used in the broader sense of physical deliverance from disease, as it mostly is used in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>24</sup> Ironically James' use of σῶζω in the Aorist infinitive form σῶσαι (cf. 1:21; 2:14; 4:12) conforms strictly to Paul's dominant use of this same word in his writings as a soteriological term.<sup>25</sup> This connection between James and Paul seems to have been lost by many. What James understands is that phoney claim to faith will not bring God's salva-

<sup>22</sup>“The examples in 2:15–16 and 2:21ff. will show that the works being considered are not those of the ritual law, which were the works Paul opposed, but the merciful deeds of charity that 2:13 has already suggested (cf. van Unnik, 984ff.)” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 120.]

<sup>23</sup>For James' use of σῶζω see 1:21 (*δυναμένον σῶσαι* τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν); 2:14 (*μη δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι* αὐτόν); 4:12 (*δυναμένος σῶσαι*); 5:15 (*ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σῶσει* τὸν κάμνοντα); 5:20 (*σῶσει* ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ).

<sup>24</sup>For an important, alternative soteriological use of σῶσαι in the Synoptics see Matt. 16:25 // Mk. 8:35 // Lk. 9:24, where formal religion sees to 'save' its own soul and ends up losing it. But ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ οὗτος σώσει αὐτήν, *But whoever loses his life for my sake, this one will save it*.

<sup>25</sup>For Paul's specific use of the Aorist infinitive σῶσαι see 1 Cor. 1:21; 1 Tim. 1:15.

tion on the Day of Judgment to this individual.

One could easily wonder who this imaginary man might have been in the first century. The answer to that question is not difficult. Religion in the first century world took on many shapes and forms, since virtually one hundred per cent of the population claimed some form of religious commitment. Atheism and agnosticism was limited to only a few philosophers who comprised far less than one per cent of the population.

In the Greco-Roman world the practice of religion was strictly formal and centered on periodic offering of various offerings at the shrine built in the family home, along side the main roads, or in the temples dedicated to the various gods and goddesses. Ethics, i.e., moral behavior, had no connection to religion at all outside of Mithraism, Judaism, and Christianity, all three of which originated in the Middle East. That world was fully polytheistic and the vast majority of people worshiped multiple deities. Thus the Gentiles coming into Christianity out of this pagan background had quite a transition to make from a religion with very few demands, and certainly no moral demands, to a Christian faith that shaped their daily living completely. Formal religion was the name of the game for the vast majority of the people in the Roman Empire of the first century. In Judaism, things were a little better in some ways. But formal religion patterns prevailed here as well, just with different contours. Worship was centered in making a trip at least once a year to the temple in Jerusalem and more often if possible. Otherwise, worship centered in family observances of feast days etc. in the home.

The weekly observance of the Jewish sabbath from Friday evening to Saturday evening included for the men primarily attendance at the local synagogue on Friday evening where the study of the Torah was central along with prayers. Worship rituals for the temple and for use in the home were well defined and to be followed exactly, with prescribed prayers for every occasion and the reading of required texts from the Hebrew Bible. The idea of a personal relationship with the God of Abraham, although in the background, was not central to the religious experience of the Jewish person. Society in that world was collective, not individualistic. And thus religion was a group experience much more than an individual experience. The reciting of the Shema, Deut. 6:4, was an important part of family worship, temple worship, and synagogue Torah study. This was the expected 'confession of faith' to be renewed with each reciting of the scripture text. Obedience to the Torah, particularly the ritual requirements for the temple and for the home, were of critical importance. Personal morality, centered in maintaining ritual purity through Torah obedience, was the expectation of every covenant Jew.

Thus the Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem and those in Diaspora Judaism outside of Palestine, lived in a religious climate that encouraged outward conformity to ritual expectations. Depending on whether the family had sympathies toward the Sadducees, the Pharisees, or the Essenes, the pattern of daily religious practice could vary substantially. The vast majority of the Jewish people had commitments to none of the influential groups who actually were small in number but substantial in public influence. Most of the Jewish peasants attended the temple some depending on how close they lived, and occasionally the synagogue. Their religious expression centered primarily in the family. It was here that a more personal faith in God would be found, rather than in the established groups of institutionalized Judaism.

Into this heritage came the Christian faith with its demands for complete surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. The life transformation of such a faith commitment brought about deep changes in the daily practice of devotion to God through Jesus Christ. Expectations of high standards of moral commitment to the re-interpreted Law of Moses from a Christian perspective were elevated higher than in Judaism. Developing a dynamical spiritual relationship with the risen Christ through the presence of His Spirit living in each believer was a new challenge for the vast majority of first century Jewish Christians. Christian meetings, often daily and primarily in private homes, combined elements of synagogue scripture study with some worship patterns, although most Jewish Christians also continued to be active in the synagogue and in making trips to worship God in the temple.

It is against this kind of backdrop that James addressed this warning to his Jewish Christian readers. The tug of pulling back into a dominantly formal expression of religion that centered on observance of rituals would always be present for these Jews. Being a Christian was a lot more demanding than just being a religious Jew. Plus, then as well as now, formal religion makes far fewer demands on the individual. James saw in this a huge danger. He sought to address it directly and bluntly in order to prevent it becoming a plague on the Christian faith of these readers.

## 2) *Illustration, vv. 15-17.*

15 ἂν ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς 16 εἶπη δὲ τις αὐτοῖς ἐξ ὑμῶν, Ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε, μὴ δῶτε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος, τί τὸ ὄφελος; 17 οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἂν μὴ ἔχη ἔργα, νεκρὰ ἐστὶν καθ' ἑαυτήν.

15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Just as he did in vv. 2-4, James turned to an illustration to dramatically driven home his point of the worthlessness of a faith without obedience to God. And he used again an economic based illustration of a Christian gathering to illustrate his point. Framed in another rhetorical question, the apodosis, the if-clause containing the illustration, comes first (vv. 15-16b). The main clause, the protasis, comes at the end in v. 16c and repeats the exact wording of the introductory protasis in the first sentence of verse 14: τί τὸ ὄφελος, *what good is it?* Thus the illustration is closely linked to the beginning admonition in v. 14a. This literary pattern is the same structure (a long, complex apodosis, followed by a protasis in form of a penetrating rhetorical question) as that in vv. 2-4. But James adds an application at the end in the second sentence of the subunit.

**The scenario:** 15 ἂν ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς 16 εἶπη δὲ τις αὐτοῖς ἐξ ὑμῶν, Ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε, μὴ δῶτε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος, (vv. 15-16b). The scenario is set up with the third class apodosis signaling a potential situation among the readers, but without direct accusatory tones. It is built around two segments, the presence of fellow church members and the response of one of the leaders of the church to them.

**The scene is created by a Christian couple showing up at the church gathering:** ἂν ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς, *if a brother or sister is without adequate clothes and lacks food necessary for daily survival.* The individuals are identified as a brother or a sister, language clearly marking them as spiritual brothers and sisters, i.e., fellow church members. Unlike the two men who visited the gathering in vv. 2-4 who were outsiders visiting a church gathering, these two individuals are insiders who are a part of the group.<sup>26</sup> James makes a point to stress a spiritual brother and a spiritual sister, most likely signaling that these two were a married couple.<sup>27</sup>

But the problematic aspect is their appearance: γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς. It is so extreme that it is clearly obvious to everyone looking at them, without having to ask about their situation. Two aspects are described. **First** they γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν, *are without adequate clothes.* Contrary to the trend of some translations to render the term γυμνοὶ as 'naked,'<sup>28</sup> the term actually designates in this

<sup>26</sup>"The example considers, however, a situation of faith: it is a brother or sister who comes, one of the poor mentioned in 2:5 who belongs to the community, and it is 'one of you' (τις ... ἐξ ὑμῶν) who responds, also a member of the community (cf. Mt. 12:50; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 7:15). James is dealing with those who hold the faith and with an intracommunity situation (cf. Cantinat, 141-142)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 121.]

<sup>27</sup>"This is one of the remarkably few instances in the NT where the female equivalent of *adelphos*, designating a member of the community, appears (see also Philemon 2; 1 Tim 5:2; 1 Cor 7:15; 9:5; Rom 16:1)." [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 238.]

<sup>28</sup>The problem is that some commentators take the illustration out of the realm of possible occurrence in the first century world and make it hypothetical in the extreme assuming that James is trying to be excessively dramatic by describing a completely naked man and woman. But the third class apodosis argues against this, and such an extreme example implies that the man and woman were encountered not in public nor in a church gathering, but in the privacy of their own home. The point of the illustration loses its forcefulness and application relevancy with such a depiction.

This was not what James was describing! Instead, it was a scene that could easily happen repeatedly over the Roman empire with the high levels of severe poverty and frequent famines that left large numbers of the population in dire straits. Thus the illustration becomes much more meaningful to James' point, when understood this way. Added to this is the first century reality that most of the Christians came out of the peasant social class and thus were keenly aware of such hard situations.

Note the comments of Ralph Martin in the WBC:

ἂν ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς, "To illustrate: if a brother or sister is ill-clad and is lacking in daily sustenance." Against many commentators (Ropes, 206, who uses the expression of vv 15-16, "a little parable"; Mussner, 131; Dibelius, 152-53; Moo, 103; Adamson, 122) vv 15-16 depict a real situation in the church. The third class condition continues with ἂν followed by the present subjunctive ὑπάρχωσιν (from ὑπάρχειν, "to exist," lit., "be"; see BDF §414.1). This word, instead of the usual εἶναι, may be James' attempt to show that poverty is a permanent or at least an

context inadequate clothing to give needed protection from the winter cold.<sup>29</sup> Second, they are λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς, *lacking in the necessary daily food*. That individuals were deeply concerned over finding enough food to eat is reflected in Jesus' admonitions in Matt. 6:25-33.<sup>30</sup> The description of James indicates a situation of dire need for food to stay alive, something rather common especially during famines in the ancient world.<sup>31</sup>

Thus what James sets up in his illustration is the presence of a couple who are members of the congregation. When they arrive at the meeting, it is obvious to everyone present that these folks are in dire straits. They don't have sufficient clothes to protect them from the winter cold, and clearly they have not been eating adequately and face serious survival issues from the lack of essential nourishment to get them by on a day to day basis.

**The response of the church is reprehensible:** εἶπη δὲ τις αὐτοῖς ἐξ ὑμῶν· ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε, μὴ δῶτε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος. The response is twofold: verbal acknowledge of the couple's need, but no effort to relieve them. This adds to the insult toward the couple. The none action of the congregation (note 2nd pers. plural μὴ δῶτε) is not based on ignorance for one of the leaders of the group (τις ἐξ ὑμῶν) has publicly acknowledged their severe needs. This acknowledgement, to be sure, comes at the end of the gathering as the standard farewell (ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ) is given to them. What the illustration possibly assumes is that in the Jewish tradition of the *quppah* as practiced by the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 6:1-6<sup>32</sup>), tables would normally be set up for distributing food and money to the needy at the

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enduring state for those mentioned in v 15 (Adamson, 122).

[Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 84.]

<sup>29</sup>“The person is in a typical situation of need, as portrayed in numerous OT passages: γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχουσιν (having insufficient clothing; in rags or without the outer garment which kept one warm at night; Jb. 22:6; 24:7; 31:9; Is. 20:5; 58:7; Mt. 25:36; 2 Cor. 11:27; Jn. 21:7) and λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς (lacking daily bread; the adjective, which is a biblical hapax legomenon, is common enough in classical Greek: Diod. Sic. 3.32; Dion. Hal. 8.41.5; cf. Mayor; Dibelius, 21; and Adamson, 122, although other terms are more common in the NT; cf. Mt. 6:11, etc.). The description, then, is stylized, although one should not doubt that such examples of lack existed in the early church as in most marginal societies.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 121.]

<sup>30</sup>**Matt. 6:25-33.** 25 Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε [ἢ τί πίητε], μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσθητε. οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστὶν τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος; 26 ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὅτι οὐ σπεύρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν οὐδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτά· οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν; 27 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πῆχυν ἓνα; 28 καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε; καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνουσιν· οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν· 29 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. 30 εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ σήμερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιένυσσιν, οὐ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι; 31 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες, Τί φάγωμεν; ἢ, Τί πίωμεν; ἢ, Τί περιβαλώμεθα; 32 πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων. 33 ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ θεοῦ] καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well

<sup>31</sup>“Not only do these poor persons lack sufficient clothing but they are without adequate food supplies as well (λειπόμενοι from λείπειν, ‘to leave,’ but in the passive it means ‘be lacking’; see 1:4). τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς speaks of their deficiency ‘in daily sustenance’ (τροφή, ‘nourishment,’ ‘food,’ BGD, 827). ἐφημέρος, ‘daily,’ is a hapax legomenon (but see ἐφημερία, Luke 1:5, 8; cf. Matt 6:11; Luke 11:3 in the Lord’s Prayer), and may mean that they lack a ‘daily supply’ (Adamson, 122; Dibelius, 153) of the means to stay alive.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 84.]

<sup>32</sup>**Acts 6:1-7.** 6 Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις πληθύνοντων τῶν μαθητῶν ἐγένετο γογγυσμὸς τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους, ὅτι παρεθεωροῦντο ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ αἱ χῆραι αὐτῶν. 2 προσκαλεσάμενοι δὲ οἱ δώδεκα τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν εἶπαν· οὐκ ἀρεστόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς καταλείψαντας τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ διακονεῖν τραπέζαις. 3 ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἐπί τῃ ἀρετῇ, πλήρεις πνεύματος καὶ σοφίας, οὓς καταστήσομεν ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας ταύτης, 4 ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου προσκαρτερήσομεν. 5 καὶ ἤρεσεν ὁ λόγος ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ πλῆθους καὶ ἐξελέξαντο

end of the gathering.<sup>33</sup> Early on the Christian community in Jerusalem had begun practicing charity to the needy even though they struggled with how to properly manage it because the needs were so great, as Acts 6:1-6 affirms. Perhaps James is assuming in his illustration that the Diaspora Christian communities were not adequately putting this Jewish tradition into practice in taking care of their own who were in need. If so, then he is intensely critical of them for this failure.

The verbal acknowledgment comes from τις ἐξ ὑμῶν, *one from among you*. This seems to be James' indirect reference to one of the leaders of the group. What he says to this couple is completely repugnant.

Ἵπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, *Depart in peace*, was a standard Jewish religious oriented good-bye in the ancient world.<sup>34</sup> Thus a religious farewell uttered as a prayer wish for God's blessings is used to mask the inaction of the congregation to take concrete action to help this couple.

But making matters worse this spokesman for the church acknowledges the couples dire needs for both clothes and food: θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε, *be warmed and filled*. The context allows either the Greek passive voice, *be warmed and filled*, or the possible middle voice, *warm yourselves and fill yourselves*, which is the same spelling of these verbs.<sup>35</sup> The first word θερμαίνεσθε has a history in ancient Greek of being associ-

Στέφανον, ἄνδρα πλήρης πίστεως καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου, καὶ Φίλιππον καὶ Πρόχορον καὶ Νικάνορα καὶ Τίμωνα καὶ Παρμενᾶν καὶ Νικόλαον προσήλυτον Ἀντιοχέα, 6 οὓς ἔστησαν ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀποστόλων, καὶ προσευξάμενοι ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας.

7 Καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἤρξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ σφόδρα, πολὺς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει.

6 Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected *in the daily distribution of food*. 2 And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, 4 while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." 5 What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

<sup>33</sup>"In Jewish society widows were particularly needy and dependent, and the Old Testament singles them out along with orphans as the primary objects of charitable deeds.<sup>9</sup> The Hellenist widows may have been a particularly sizable group. Diaspora Jews often moved to Jerusalem in their twilight years to die in the holy city. When the men died, their widows were left far from their former home and family to care for them and were thus particularly in need of charity.<sup>10</sup> Many of them may have been attracted to the Christian community precisely because of its concern for the material needs of its members.

"The Christian concern that 'there be no needy among them' has already been referred to in Acts (2:44f.; 4:32, 34f.). The administration of community charity seems to have been in the hands of the apostles (4:35). As the church grew, they must have entrusted distribution to others, whom this text would indicate came primarily from the Aramaic-speaking constituency. Language barriers being what they are, it is easy to picture how some of the Greek-speaking widows were overlooked. In its charity the church may have followed somewhat the precedents already set in contemporary Judaism, which had a double system of distribution to the needy. The Jews had a weekly dole for resident needy, called the *quppah*. It was given out every Friday and consisted of enough money for fourteen meals. There was also a daily distribution, known as the *tamhuy*.<sup>11</sup> It was for nonresidents and transients and consisted of food and drink, which were delivered from house to house where known needy were dwelling. The Christian practice seems to have embraced elements of both Jewish systems. Like the *tamhuy* it was daily, and like the *quppah* it was for the resident membership."

[John B. Polhill, vol. 26, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 179-80.]

<sup>34</sup>"Ἵπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, 'Go in peace' ('Good luck to you,' NEB) is probably based on the idiom לכו בְּשָׁלוֹם (*lekû leššālôm*; לכו בְּשָׁלוֹם is qal imperative of *hālak*, 'to go,' 'to walk'; Judg 18:6; 1 Sam 1:17; 20:42; 2 Sam 15:9; Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50) and suggests a departure in peace offered as a prayer that God may give *šālôm*, i.e., prosperity (ἐν εἰρήνῃ, which is dative of attendant circumstance; see Moule, *Idiom Book*, 70, 79; the ἐν of our present phrase is used in loose fashion, similar to the accusative; BDF §206.1)." [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 84-85.]

<sup>35</sup>θερμαίνεσθε means 'warm yourself' (in middle voice) as from the heat of a fire (Mark 14:67; John 18:18, 25; see Isa 44:16; Hag 1:6; Job 31:20; see BGD, 359). If taken in the passive voice, then it reads, 'be warmed.' χορτάζεσθε means 'be filled [with food]' (the words in brackets are understood; see 2:15). If taken as middle instead of passive (Mayor, 97-98; Adamson, 123) the verb is 'eat one's fill' (see Phil 4:12). Probably the middle is better here for both verbs (Davids, 122) though either voice points to the fact that some professed believers are failing to meet the needs of other church members (Dibelius, 153; Moo, 103). This is then a serious charge (see Matt 25:31-46; 1 John 3:17-18), implying a breakdown in response to a dire human condition. The prayer-speech is thus shown to be hypocritical (contrast 3:17: ἀνυπόκριτος)."

ated with inadequate clothing to protect from the cold,<sup>36</sup> and clearly plays off the beginning reference γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν, *are without adequate clothes*. The other word καὶ χορτάζεσθε, *and be filled*, has an even greater insulting tone, since in secular usage it designated the feeding of animals. When applied to humans eating, it implied eating to excess, with much the same meaning as the English expression “pig out.”<sup>37</sup>

That a brother in Christ would have the gall to say such insulting words to a fellow believer in dire needs is had to understand. But one must first understand that society in the first century world was substantially more direct and blunt in speaking to one another than most modern western societies. And second, just a quick reflection on past experiences in modern church life will remind you of how utterly tactless people can occasionally be even in church.

But the problem is not just with the insulting words spoken to this couple, it is the complete failure of the entire congregation to take proper action in meeting those needs: μὴ δῶτε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος.<sup>38</sup> Not just the spokesman, but the entire group is held accountable for their inaction. In the Jewish synagogue this couple could have found a group ready and willing to help them, but not in their own church! James sees this as reprehensible.

**The conclusion:** τί τὸ ὄφελος; (v. 16c). The conclusion is simply *What good is it?*<sup>39</sup> No one could really argue with James' assessment of the worthlessness of the church's religious words that were not backed up by concrete ministry actions to a family within the congregation. Particularly within traditional Judaism

[Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 85.]

<sup>36</sup>That θερμαίνειν was commonly used of the effect of warm clothes is shown by Job 31:20, Hag. 1:6, but also by Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* vi, 6, p. 691 D, and a curious passage (quoted by Wetstein) in which Galen (*De vir. medic. simpl.* ii) criticises the common neglect of writers to observe the distinction between that which warms and that which merely keeps off the cold.” [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 207.]

<sup>37</sup>χορτάζω (χόρτος) 1 aor. ἐχόρτασα. Pass.: 1 fut. χορτασθήσομαι; 1 aor. ἐχορτάσθην (Hes.; pap, LXX; TestSol 9:2; TestJob, TestJud) 'to feed'

#### 1. to fill w. food, feed, fill

a. of animals, pass. in act. sense πάντα τὰ ὄρνεα ἐχορτάσθησαν ἐκ τῶν σαρκῶν αὐτῶν *all the birds gorged themselves with their flesh* **Rv 19:21** (cp. TestJud 21:8).

b. of humans τινά *someone* **Mt 15:33**; 1 Cl 59:4 (τοὺς πεινῶντας). τινά *someone with someth.* **Mk 8:4** (cp. Ps 131:15). Pass. (Pamphilus [I B.C./I A.D.] in Ael. Dion. *χ.* 14 ed. HErbse '50; Epict. 1, 9, 19; 3, 22, 66; TestJob 22:2; 25:10) **Mt 14:20; 15:37; Mk 6:42; 7:27; 8:8; Lk 6:21** (οἱ πεινῶντες νῦν); **9:17; J 6:26; Phil 4:12** (οἱ πεινῶν); **Js 2:16**. ἀπό *someone* (Ps 103:13) **Lk 16:21**. ἐκ *someone* **15:16**.

2. to experience inward satisfaction in someth., *be satisfied*, fig. ext. of 1 pass. (Ps.-Callisth. 2, 22, 4 χορτάζεσθαι τῆς λύπης=find satisfaction in grief; Ps 16:15) *be satisfied* **Mt 5:6** (*χ.* is also used in connection w. drink that relieves thirst: schol. on Nicander, Alexiph. 225 χόρτασον αὐτὸν οἴνω).—DELG s.v. χόρτος. M-M.

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

<sup>38</sup>The phrase τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος, the necessities for the body, covers both food and clothes, and designates the basics for survival. See the BDG definition:

**ἐπιτήδειος, εἶα, ον** adj. (Hom.: ἐπιτηδῆς 'appropriate for the situation', also s. next entry; Eur., Hdt. et al.; Ath., R. 52, 12 al.; gener. 'necessary, proper') **pert. to being made for an end or purpose, fit for, necessary** καιρῶ ἐπιτηδεῖω at a suitable time **Ac 24:25** v.l. (καιρὸς ἐ. as Jos., Vi. 125; 176).—Subst. τὰ ἐ. what is necessary (Hdt. 2, 174, 1; Thu. 2, 23, 3; ins, pap, LXX; TestSol 3:1 D; Jos., Bell. 3, 183, Ant. 2, 326; 12, 376) *w. τοῦ σώματος added what is necessary for the body, i.e. for life* **Js 2:16**.—B. 644. DELG s.v. ἐπιτηδέ. M-M. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 383-84.]

<sup>39</sup>“What good is it? James asks. Within the sense of the illustration, this ‘good’ refers to the situation of need that has gone unprovided for: words, however well meant, have not profited these needy people much. But some allusion to the second question of v. 14 is probably also intended: failure to provide for an obvious need not only harms those who are in need, but also raises question about the spiritual state of the one who fails to act to relieve the need. While this illustration undoubtedly reflects conditions among his readers, James may also make allusion here to the teaching of Jesus in the Matthean parable of the ‘Sheep and the Goats.’ God, says Jesus, will grant entrance into the kingdom on the basis of works of charity, but dismiss from his presence those who fail to relieve the needs of the destitute. Jesus, quoting one of those in need, says: ‘For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me’ (Matt. 25:42–43).” [Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 125-26.]

such failure would have been deplorable. But James sees something deeper at work here, beyond a failure to obey Torah guidelines for the poor. With the repetition of τί τὸ ὄφελος in v. 16 from v. 14, a close link is established to the spiritual issue of the credibility of one's faith claim, and this claim is at stake. Any congregation unwilling to minister to dire needs among its own membership has highly questionable claims to being Christian. Jesus' depiction of final judgment in Matt. 25:31-46 very likely stands in the background of James' mind.

**The application:** οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔχη ἔργα, νεκρά ἐστὶν καθ' ἑαυτήν (v. 17). That James has this broader issue in mind is made clear from the application statement in verse 17. His conclusion from the illustration (οὕτως) is to restate the foundational principle first expressed in v. 14 through the pair of rhetorical questions. Here it is stated as axiomatic principle that is timeless in nature.<sup>40</sup> The prepositional phrase καθ' ἑαυτήν, *by itself*, is capable of two possible meanings. First, faith if it stands alone is spiritually dead. Second, faith standing alone is spiritually dead inwardly. The difference in meaning is not substantial, and both possible meanings stress that authentic Christian faith will express itself in ministry actions, and if it does not then this kind of faith possesses no spiritual life whatsoever. This echoes the second rhetorical question in verse 14, and will anticipate the final axiomatic expression in v. 26 that states the same principle but in more graphic language: ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρὸν ἐστὶν, οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις χωρὶς ἔργων νεκρά ἐστὶν. That is, a none ministering faith is as dead as a corpse!

### 3) Explanations, vv. 18-26.

18 Ἀλλ' ἐρεῖ τις, Σὺ πιστὶν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω δεῖξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων, κἀγὼ σοὶ δεῖξω ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν. 19 σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσουν. 20 θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι, ὡς ἄνθρωπε κενέ, ὅτι ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων ἀργή ἐστὶν; 21 Ἀβραάμ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη ἀνελέγκτας Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον; 22 βλέπεις ὅτι ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη, 23 καὶ ἐπληρώθη ἡ γραφὴ ἢ λέγουσα, Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραάμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη.

24 ὁρᾶτε ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον. 25 ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη ὑποδεξαμένη τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἑτέρα ὁδῶ ἐκβαλοῦσα; 26 ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρὸν ἐστὶν, οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις χωρὶς ἔργων νεκρά ἐστὶν.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. 20 Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. 23 Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

The admonition (v. 14) and the illustration (vv. 15-17) now come in for amplification. This is anticipated by the application statement in v. 17 which helps transition into vv. 18-26. In the parallel explanation section in 2:5-13 James used a combination of Jewish and Hellenistic literary strategy to re-enforce his point about the non-discriminating nature of faith in its treatment of others (2:1-13). He employs a similar combination of Jewish and Hellenistic methods in order to make his second point about the action orientation of genuine faith (2:14-26). That strategy centers in two sections: vv. 18-23 and vv. 24-26. The first section is structured around a Greek diatribe in which James systematically destroys an objection to his foundational principle expressed in vv. 14-17. Jewish interpretive methods are embedded into this Greek diatribe in vv. 21-23 with his discussion of Abraham. The second section in vv. 24-26 are more Jewish and are addressed

<sup>40</sup>Note how James will repeat this literary strategy at climatic points through out this text with three axiomatic expressions of his basic point established in v. 14:

v. 17. οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔχη ἔργα, νεκρά ἐστὶν καθ' ἑαυτήν. *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

v. 24. ὁρᾶτε ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον. *You see that a person is vindicated by works and not by faith alone.*

v. 26. ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρὸν ἐστὶν, οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις χωρὶς ἔργων νεκρά ἐστὶν. *For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.*

directly to his readership with the use of the second person plural perspective. They center on Rahab as a hero of faith, which interestingly has a long, deep history in Jewish interpretation over the centuries leading up to the first century. What we encounter in the Explanation section is James at his literary finest. Very likely his Hellenistic Jewish Christian editors in the Jerusalem church played an important role in shaping this Greek expression of James' Aramaic preaching.

**The Diatribe, vv. 18-23:** 18 Ἄλλ' ἐρεῖ τις, Σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω· δεῖξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων, κἀγὼ σοὶ δεῖξω ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν. 19 σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσουσιν. 20 θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι, ὧ ἄνθρωπε κενέ, ὅτι ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων ἀργή ἐστιν; 21 Ἀβραάμ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη ἀνενέγκας Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον; 22 βλέπεις ὅτι ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη, 23 καὶ ἐπληρώθη ἡ γραφή ἡ λέγουσα, Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραάμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη.

Exactly how James sets up the imaginary conversation between himself and an opponent is challenging to understand. But with proper literary critical analysis the picture becomes clear. The conversation of the objector is cast in v. 18a: Ἄλλ' ἐρεῖ τις, Σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω, **But someone will assert, "You have faith and I have works."** James' response begins with v. 18b and continues through verse 23. And it comes in two parts: first the short challenge issued to the objector: δεῖξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων, κἀγὼ σοὶ δεῖξω ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν, **Show me your faith apart from works, and I will show you out of my works my faith.** This initial challenge to his objector sets up the longer amplification in which the challenge to the objector to demonstrate his faith apart from works is expanded in v. 19 with an reference to the Jewish Shema in Deuteronomy 6. The second challenge, **I will demonstrate...**, is developed around the example of Abraham in vv. 20-23. By this strategy James completely undermines any credibility of the objector and his views.<sup>41</sup>

**The objector:** Ἄλλ' ἐρεῖ τις, Σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω. The signaling of setting up an imaginary objector is given clearly with Ἄλλ' ἐρεῖ τις, **But someone will assert.** This objector ἐρεῖ τις has affinity with the λέγει τις person, **someone may say**, in v. 14, but should not be equated with this individual. It is one thing to make a phoney claim to something, but it is another thing to be willing to defend such a claim. Additionally, the person called τις in v. 14 claims to possess πίστιν, but the τις objector in v. 18 claims to possess ἔργα.

The putting of the objection, σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω into the mouth of the objector has created tons of confusion from early copyists to modern commentators.<sup>42</sup> It doesn't seem logical to many because

<sup>41</sup>This structure can be charted out as follows:

<b>Objector:</b>	v. 18a	you have faith; I have works	Point: faith and works can be separated
<b>James' response:</b>	v. 18b	show me your faith apart from works	Amplified in v. 19 (Shema & demons)
	v. 18c	I will show you from my works my faith	Amplified in vv. 20-23 (Abraham)

James' position throughout has been that faith and deeds of obedience cannot be separated because authentic faith is a working faith.

<sup>42</sup>Some of the strangest interpretive proposals imaginable have been put on the table down through the centuries. Davids summarizes some of these more influential ones, but sadly even he doesn't seem to understand what James is doing:

The initial clause, "But someone will say," obviously introduces some type of imaginary interlocutor into the situation, a typical device of a homiletic style. The style predisposes the reader to view this person as a hostile or erring voice, for it is in this way that Paul uses the clause (1 Cor. 15:35 and similarly Rom. 9:19; 11:19; Lk. 4:23) and also other Greek writers (Jos. War 7:363; 4 Macc. 2:24; Barn. 9:6; Xen. Cyr. 4.3.10), and of course the Stoics (cf. Ropes, 12; Bultmann). Yet the following clauses do not seem to oppose James's concepts. How are these data to be reconciled? Spitta, 77-79, and Windisch, 16-17, claim that the objection has disappeared from the text; only James's reply remains. Because of the difficulty of the other position, this solution is not to be rejected out of hand. Yet since it lacks manuscript evidence, it must remain a counsel of desperation for those who can accept no other solution.

Dibelius, 155-156, Marty, 96, Ropes, 208-214, Mitton, 108-109, Michl, 154, Schrage, 31, Laws, 123-124, and others argue that the problem is the proper interpretation of the σὺ ... κἀγὼ pair. As in the case of Teles, 5-6 (quoted fully in Dibelius, 156), the reference of σὺ and κἀγὼ is neither clear nor important. The point is that the interlocutor is claiming that faith and works may exist separately, as the many gifts of 1 Cor. 12:4-10. It is this separation which James then attacks. The strength of this interpretation is that it takes the introductory clause as referring to an opponent, as is the case everywhere else it has been observed. It also fits with the response in v 18b. Yet if this is what James means, he has expressed it very awkwardly, for ἄλλος ... ἄλλος (or ἕτερος) would have done much better (cf. the quotation of C. F. D. Moule in Adamson, 137: "To tell the truth, I cannot think of a less likely way to express what J. H. Ropes wants the James passage to mean than

of the reversal of positions between vv. 14 and 18.<sup>43</sup> But upon close analysis of the logic behind the shift the following reasoning appears to be behind how James set up his objection. He dared not give any semblance of legitimate claim to faith to his objector by allowing him to claim faith. Additionally, the issue was not faith or works in the sense of a choice of one or the other. Rather, it was clearly the matter of trying to sever deeds of obedience from an authentic faith; something that James adamantly opposed. This was the point in v. 14, rather than an option of faith or works. The reversal of perspective in the mouth of the objector enabled James better to address the real issue of the futile attempt to sever faith from deeds of obedience, as becomes clear in James' challenge to his objector in v. 18b and 18c.

With the objector 'taking the stance of claiming works rather than faith' James can now target such a claim from the angle he desires. The implication of the claim by the objector is that faith and works can easily be severed from one another so that the path to Heaven is a choice between one or the other. This was the issue first raised in verse 14 where the claim was made to a faith completely divorced from deeds of obedience. This was formal religion at its worst. This severing of faith and works James absolutely will not allow as legitimate!

**James' response: Part 1: v. 18b & 19.** *δειξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων*, (v. 18b)...σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσουν (v. 19). The first part of James' response to the objection is a challenge to his imaginary objector: *δειξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων*, [Show me your faith apart from works!](#) The objector's claim to possessing works is divorced from faith, but James challenges him to establish what he works represent. He assumes, as would have clearly been the case for every first century Jew, that certain deeds will represent faith in a formal way.

What James anticipates is the objector's response by affirming his 'works' center in a weekly affirmation of belief in the God of Abraham at the Friday evening synagogue meeting. Well before the beginning of the Christian era Jewish synagogue sabbath meetings began with a recitation of the Shema found in Deut. 6:4-5.

4 Hear, O Israel: ***The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.*** 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

4 Καὶ ταῦτα τὰ δικαιώματα καὶ τὰ κρίματα, ὅσα ἐνετείλατο κύριος τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἐξεληθόντων αὐτῶν ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου Ἴκουε, Ἰσραὴλ· ***κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν***· 5 καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου.

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what there stands written").

Mayor, 99–100, Mussner, 136–138, Adamson, 124–125, 135–137, and perhaps Cantinat, 146, argue that to take the content seriously the interlocutor must be favorable to James and expand upon his position in v 17 in another voice in 18a: "You (claim to) have faith, and I (you admit) have works. Show me your 'faith' apart from your works (you can not, naturally), and I...." If this is what the verse intends, then the *ἀλλ'* which introduces the verse cannot be adversative, but rather must be an emphatic particle following the negatives implied in 2:14–17. This use of *ἀλλά* has been argued by many grammarians and commentators: Chaine, 61; BAG, 37–38; MHT III, 330 ("yes, indeed," giving as examples Jn. 16:2; 1 Cor. 3:2; 2 Cor. 7:11; 11:1; Phil. 1:18); Thrall, 78–82. It is obvious that on the basis of this evidence one could see no adversative relationship, but rather emphasis: "Indeed, someone will say...."

Yet this reading, attractive as it is, also has its problems. First, why introduce a third person here? Can it be simply for rhetorical effect? Does James use such a device out of modesty? But in this case the "quotation" would have to extend at least to the end of 2:19. Second, while such a reading is grammatically possible, it appears linguistically improbable, for no one has yet been able to find a case where this common stylistic introduction did not introduce an opposing or disagreeing voice. The evidence just is not strong enough to make this the one exception.

It is obvious, then, that none of the solutions to this passage is without its problems. On the whole it appears that the second solution, that of Dibelius, is the most likely, for it is grammatically possible and yet explains the problems in interpretation. If that should not be persuasive, some version of the first solution should be the second choice, for it is possible that something was lost through an early haplography or, assuming that the Greek is an edited version of an Aramaic synagogue homily, that the translator/redactor left out a clause. But because such a solution is hypothetical it must remain a second choice.

[Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 123-24.]

<sup>43</sup>A few later copyists solved the problem by simply reversing *σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, καὶ γὰρ ἔργα ἔχω*, [you have faith and I have works](#), to read *σὺ ἔργα ἔχεις, καὶ γὰρ πίστιν ἔχω*, [you have works and I have faith](#). But this doesn't really solve the problem, and the overwhelming weight of evidence favors the adopted reading.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃<sup>4</sup>  
 וְאֶהְבֵּת אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךְ בְּכָל־לְבַבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ׃<sup>5</sup>

Thus in the expansion segment in v. 19 James commends (καλῶς ποιεῖς) his objector for a weekly affirmation of belief in the exclusive existence of God: σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, καλῶς ποιεῖς, *You believe that there is but one God, you do well.* In a completely polytheistic world the Jewish people stood out and in conflict with the religious stream of their day by adamantly insisting that only one God actually existed and that these others worshiped by the rest of the people were dead idols with no true existence. The Jewish people were passionate in this belief and reaffirmed it repeatedly especially in formal meetings such as the synagogue gatherings and the temple worship in Jerusalem. For James' objector, to make this formal confession at the synagogue every Friday evening was his 'work' that was needed to put him in good standing with God.

But James has the 'zinger' still to put on the table, for this weekly action that supposedly demonstrated the presence of faith by the objector was a faulty, empty claim to faith with no validity. His weekly 'work' at the synagogue only exposed how false any possible claim to faith was. It did not show true faith. Why not?

James' answer is in the second part of his amplification in v. 19: καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσουσιν. Whoa! Where did demons come into the picture? If believing is only mental affirmation that the one true God indeed exists -- what the objector was doing each Friday evening in reciting the Shema -- then the demons of Hell can make a better claim to such faith than this objector! They indeed believe, πιστεύουσιν, that God alone exists in total power over the universe. In fact, this knowledge of God's true existence scares them to death: καὶ φρίσσουσιν. The etymology of the verb φρίσσω literally means 'hair standing on end' as an expression of intense fright and fear.<sup>44</sup> The 'faith' of the demons scares the daylight out of the demons because they know for certain that this true God will condemn them to eternal damnation in the future.

What is wrong with a 'faith' that puts this kind of fear into the hearts of those who possess it? The answer is clear: this faith is mental affirmation, not unconditional surrender to the lordship of Almighty God. The demons' faith does not produce one act of obedience! Even though it goes deeper than the shallow formal faith of the objector, it still possesses absolutely no saving power. And the objector thinks that his formalized faith expression in reciting the Shema puts him in good standing with God? Wow! What delusion!

Unquestionably James' point here should send shudders into the hearts of lots of professing Christians in the modern world. So much of modern Christianity, especially in western society, is a contemporary reproduction of the objector's shallow faith. James is clear: if your faith is mere mental affirmation about God and not unconditional surrender to God, then you, my friend, are in serious trouble spiritually. It was this same tendency that dominated religious life in the beginning Christian century both in the Greco-Roman religious world and even among the Jewish people that James is severely condemning. There is false faith and there is genuine faith. Thus his probing of the objector's 'works' that supposedly validated a faith claim exposed a spiritually dead religion. James sought to prevent his readers from falling into such a death trap!

**James' response: Part 2: v. 18c & 20-23. κάγω σοι δείξω ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν** (v. 18c)... 20 Θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι, ὡς ἄνθρωπε κενέ, ὅτι ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων ἀργή ἐστίν; 21 Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη ἀνενέγκας Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον; 22 βλέπεις ὅτι ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη, 23 καὶ ἐπληρώθη ἡ γραφή ἡ λέγουσα· ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη. (vv. 20-23).

Part 2 of his short response to the objector in v. 18c asserts: κάγω σοι δείξω ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν, *and I will demonstrate out of my deeds my faith.* At this point James could have listed a long list of faithful

<sup>44</sup>φρίσσω 1 aor. ἔφριξα; pf. ptc. πεφρικώς (Hom. et al.; LXX; Joseph. [-ττ-]; TestSol 2:1; TestAbr [-ττ-]; ApcEsdr 7:7 p. 32, 19 Tdf. [θεός], ὄν πάντα φρίσσει; Just.) **to tremble fr. fear, shudder** (fr. φρίξ 'quivering, shuddering'; Hom. et al., w. acc. of pers. or thing that causes the fear), abs. (Da 7:15 Theod.; Philo, Det. Pot. Ins. 140) ὄλος ἤμην πεφρικώς Hv 1, 2, 1. Of hostile spirits (who shudder at exorcism: PGM 3, 227; 4, 2541f δαίμονες φρίσσουσί σε; 2829; 12, 118; Orph. Fgm. in Clem. Alex., Strom. 5, 125, 1; AcPh 132 [Aa II/2, 63, 12] φρίττοντες; Just., D. 49, 8; Ps.-Clem., Hom. 5, 5.—Of entities in general: Prayer of Manasseh [=Odes 12] 4; TestAbr A 9 p. 86, 30 [Stone p. 20]; 16 p. 96, 22f [St. p. 40]. On this subj. s. the commentaries w. further exx. [without the verb φρίσσω], esp. Dibelius, ad loc.; EPeterson, Εἷς Θεός 1926, 295–99.—Reff. and lit. on ὄνομα φρικτόν in SEitrem, Pap. Osloenses I 1925, 98) **Js 2:19.** In imagery of the earth B 11:2 (Jer 2:12).—DELG s.v. φρίξ. 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), 1065.]

deeds of service to Christ as the spiritual leader of the Christian movement in Jerusalem during the 40s and 50s of the first century. His faithfulness was widely acknowledged even by the Jewish people in Jerusalem in the 50s, so that one of his nicknames was “old camel knees.”<sup>45</sup>

But James did not live in an individualistic culture; rather he was part of a collective culture who thought more in group terms than in individualized terms. In that kind of culture, a far greater expression of one’s own faith could be found in the faith commitment of the founder of the group. Additionally, James’ objector belonged to this same group as well, the Jews. If the founder of the group, Abraham, were shown to exhibit the kind of faith that James was contending for, then the objector’s position about faith and works would be completely dismantled.

Thus in vv. 20-23 James puts the issue of Abraham’s faith on the table as demonstrating authentic faith commitment to God, in contrast to the formalized mental faith of the objector. He introduces this with another rhetorical question: *Θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι, ὧ ἄνθρωπε κενέ, ὅτι ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων ἀργή ἐστίν;* *Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?* The rather insulting tone in ὧ ἄνθρωπε κενέ, *o mindless person*, was a standard pattern in ancient polemics intended to put the opponent on the defensive.<sup>46</sup> Thus James challenges his opponent to learn the meaning of authentic faith from the experience of Abraham: *ὅτι ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων ἀργή ἐστίν, that faith apart from works is useless.*

Now he adopts a very typical Jewish approach to interpreting Abraham, that is rather different than the way Paul does. In v. 21 he appeals to the offering up of Isaac by Abraham as the vindication of Abraham’s faith: *Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη ἀνενέγκας Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον;* The rhetorical question assumes his objector will fully agree with him. Abraham is identified as ‘our father,’ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν, implying the Jewish heritage of both the objector and himself. The troublesome part of this statement for many interpreters is *οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, was he not vindicated by works.* How could the action of offering up Isaac accomplish such a divine action? A part of the modern tension read into this statement is that similar statements found in Paul seem to go the opposite direction.

**Rom. 4:1-5.** 1 Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν εὐρηκεῖν Ἀβραὰμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα; 2 *εἰ γὰρ Ἀβραὰμ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ἔχει καύχημα, ἀλλ’ οὐ πρὸς θεόν.* 3 τί γὰρ ἡ γραφή λέγει; ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην. 4 τῷ δὲ ἐργαζομένῳ ὁ μισθὸς οὐ λογίζεται κατὰ χάριν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ὀφείλημα, 5 τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην·

4.1 What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? 2 For *if Abraham was justified by works*, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 4 Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. 5 But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

**Gal. 3:6-9.** 6 Καθὼς Ἀβραὰμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην· 7 γινώσκετε ἄρα ὅτι οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσὶν Ἀβραὰμ. 8 προἰδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γραφή ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοῖ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ θεός, προεηγγελίσαστο τῷ Ἀβραὰμ ὅτι ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη· 9 ὥστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραὰμ.

6 Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” 7 so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.” 9 For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

A couple of observations are critical here. When Paul uses the phrase *Ἀβραὰμ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη* in Rom. 4:2, he means by ἔργων adherence to the ritual laws of the Torah for salvation. In James’ expression *Ἀβραὰμ*

<sup>45</sup>“The Apostle James was so dedicated to prayer that it is said that his knees were calloused from time spent in prayer -- on his knees. He prayed so long and so much that his knees were known as the camels knees.” [“Why was James called old camel knees?, Answers.com]

<sup>46</sup>“The address ‘O foolish person’ is part of the strong, direct style of both the diatribe (Bultmann, 60–61; cf. Hermas Vis. 3.8.9; Epict. 2.16.31–32) and the discourse of Jewish teachers (1 Cor. 15:36; Mt. 23:17; Lk. 24:25; Gal. 3:1; cf. Wessel, 80–82) and James (4:4, *μοιχαλίδες*). The term *κενός* itself (used in a different sense in 4:5) is the linguistic equivalent of *ῥακά* (Mt. 5:22) and has overtones not only of intellectual error (Mussner, 140; Cantinat, 148), but also of moral error (Jdg. 9:4; 11:3 LXX), thus coming close to *μώρος* (one must beware of taking the root meaning of *κενός*, ‘empty,’ ‘useless,’ out of context, to produce the implication ‘lacking works,’ as Adamson does, 127; cf. A. Oepke, TDNT III, 659).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 126.]

ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, he means by ἔργων acts of genuine obedience growing out of faith surrender to God. When both Paul and James are properly understood, they are making the same identical point: formal religion with mere outward ritual observance does not stem from genuine faith commitment to God, and thus has no saving power. Further, both writers use the verb ἐδικαιώθη in regard to Abraham. Clearly inside the literary context of Romans the judicial sense of justification is in Paul's sense of the term.<sup>47</sup> However, James will interpret Abraham strictly within the sense of traditional Jewish understanding where ἐδικαιώθη has the sense of vindication. Ultimately the two ideas of justification and vindication will intersect one another conceptually, but the meanings are sufficiently different to merit separate English terms.

A critical signal of how James is using Abraham comes with the reference to Isaac: ἀνεγένετο Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον.<sup>48</sup> Traditional Jewish interpretation saw the offering up of Isaac as the final, climatic test of ten between Genesis 15:6 and Genesis 22 where God repeatedly put Abraham to the test in order to validate the initial declaration of 15:6 that his faith was counted as righteousness. The ultimate validation came when God directly intervened by providing the alternative sacrifice that Abraham offered up before God. Traditional Judaism saw Abraham as obeying the Torah in his works, but James realized that the Genesis narrative describes Abraham as having made unconditional commitment to God in leaving his homeland and that -- although not perfect -- Abraham consistently did God's bidding throughout his life. His willingness to sacrifice the son of promise, Isaac, was the supreme expression of obedience which God dramatically acknowledged on the mountain. Thus this action proved unquestionably that Abraham's faith was

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<sup>47</sup>A side note: one of the sources of the creation of artificial tension between James and Paul since the 1500s has been the tendency of scholarship, especially in the last two hundred years, to excessively Hellenize Paul and at the same time to minimize the Jewishness of Paul. The role of the F.C. Baur Tübingen School in the late 1800s at this point has been enormous and remnants of it still remain in some scholarly circles. Adding fuel to that fire in Europe was the anti-Catholic tradition of the German Lutheran Church until after WWI in the middle 1900s, when Protestant / Catholic dialogues began to flourish on both sides of the Atlantic.

<sup>48</sup>“But what does ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη mean? Here it is certainly correct to bracket Paul's definitions and first of all search for answers in the Abraham tradition. The works are plural, which could indicate simply the class of actions leading to being declared δίκαιος, but which in the case of Abraham may well refer to his 10 testings, especially since testing (πειρασμός) is of such interest to James. In fact, the incident of the binding of Isaac (‘Aqedah) which James cites forms in Jewish tradition the capstone of a series of tests (Pirqe R. El. 26–31; Abot R. Nat. 32; m. Ab. 5:3; 1 Macc. 2:52; Jub. 17:17; 19:8), and the fact that Isaac is bound and then released is seen as evidence not only of Abraham's obedience to God, but also of the value of his previous acts of mercy, of charity:

The angels then broke into loud weeping, and they exclaimed: “The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth, he hath broken the covenant. Where is the reward of Abraham, he who took the wayfarers into his house, gave them food and drink, and went with them to bring them on their way?... for the slaughtering knife is set upon his throat.”

(see Ginzberg, I, 281; Ward, “Works,” 286–290; and Davids, “Tradition,” 113–116). That is, the release of Isaac is itself a declaration of righteousness. The Jewish reader considering Abraham and God's final declaration of his righteousness in Gn. 22:12 would think not on the declaration of Gn. 15:6 (which was considered an anticipatory statement and thus a result of merit), but on the hospitality of Abraham in Genesis 18 as vastly amplified in the course of tradition (*Test. Abr.* recension A, 1.17; Tg. Ps.-J. 7).

“These data mean that neither the works which James cites nor the justification which results are related to Paul. Rather, the works are deeds of mercy (which therefore fit with the opening verses of this section) and the ἐδικαιώθη refers not to a forensic act in which a sinner is declared acquitted (as in Paul), but to a declaration by God that a person is righteous, ṣaddīq (which is the implication of the ‘Now I know’ formula of 22:12; cf. Is. 5:23; Gerhardsson, 27; Dibelius, 162). Adamson is correct in seeing that a moral rather than a primarily judicial emphasis is intended (although of course there is some judicial tone in any declaration of standing by ‘the judge of all the earth’; cf. Marshall, 148). The point of James's argument, then, has nothing to do with a forensic declaration of justification; the argument is simply that Abraham did have faith, which here unlike other places in James means monotheistic belief — for this Abraham was famous in Jewish tradition — but he also had deeds flowing from that faith. His faith was not just ‘saying,’ but ‘saying and doing.’ He had responded to the ‘implanted word’ (1:21; cf. Burchard, “Jakobus,” 41, and contra D. Via, who tries to set the message of 1:18–24 in contradistinction to that in 2:14–26). Abraham did acts of mercy because of faith that God is one, and thus God put his approval on Abraham's life and declared him righteous.

“The interpretation above gives a new focus to the final phrase of the verse, ‘offering his son Isaac upon the altar.’ This test of the reality of the faith forms the point at which God's verdict becomes clear, for while Abraham starts to offer Isaac, God ratifies the covenant by sparing the boy's life. The ‘offering’ ends with the ‘binding,’ for Abraham was in fact righteous and obedient in all of his relationship with God. This concept is a long way from Paul and Hebrews (where a proleptic, typological resurrection is in view, Heb. 11:17–19), but just such a difference must be taken into account if one is to explain James's unique point of view.”

[Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 127–28.]

genuine, rather than mere formalism.

In the single sentence found in vv. 22-23, James comments on four conclusions to be drawn from the Isaac episode. He introduces it to his objector with βλέπεις ὅτι, [you see that...](#) signaling his intention to comment on the Gen. 22 narrative. He makes four points:

a) ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ, [his faith worked together with his works](#). James' first comment stresses his fundamental point through the entire passage. The language used here stresses a close intimate connection between Abraham's faith and his obedient actions. Within the framework of Jewish traditional interpretive understanding of Abraham, James makes the widely accepted point among first century Jews that one cannot separate Abraham's faith commitment from his deeds of obedience. Thus Abraham first and foremost proves James' point throughout this entire discussion, and consequently denies legitimacy to his objector's contention that one can separate the two.

b) καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη, [and out of his works his faith reached maturity](#). The second comment of James is that the nature of this inseparable connection affirms the necessity of obedient deeds as the key to developing faith from its initial expression into a completely mature expression of commitment to God. Here is where James' contention devastates the phoney faith understanding of his opponent. The objector saw deeds of obedience merely as formal expressions of a mental assent to God's existence. As a Jew he affirmed his monotheism religion in the weekly recitation of the Shema, but that was as far as faith went. James has completely rejected this as legitimate faith, and has contended that Abraham illustrates faith as unconditional commitment. But such a faith is dynamic, not passive acceptance. And as such it must be expressed in concrete actions of obedience to God. Thus Abraham not only illustrates the inseparable connection of faith and works, he also illustrates the nature of authentic faith.

c) καὶ ἐπληρώθη ἡ γραφή ἣ λέγουσα· ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραάμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, [and the scripture was fulfilled which says: And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness](#). The third comment offers one of the rare scripture proofs used in the entire book of James. He quotes Genesis 15:6 that affirms Abraham's faith commitment at the beginning of his journey to the western fertile crescent in obedience to God's calling. James says that the offering up of Isaac meant this divine declaration about Abraham early on ἐπληρώθη, [was fulfilled](#). That is, this declaration was demonstrated as completely correct when Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac over half a century later. God did not make a mistake declaring Abraham as righteous early on.

d) καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη, [and he was called God's friend](#). The fourth and final comment is not found anywhere inside the Hebrew Bible. But it is a commonly applied title in later Jewish writings: Jub. 19:9; 30:20; 2 Esd. 3:14; Philo Abr. 273. In the ancient world, and especially in the later Greco-Roman world, being called a Friend, φίλος, of someone carried enormous status. In that secular world of the first century the highest honor was attached to being called φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος, [Friend of Caesar](#). This simply because he was the most powerful human of that day. The title is occasionally found in Greek literature designating a person as Friend of Zeus or of the gods, usually specifying a patron of the deity who donated huge sums of money for the construction of temples to the deity.<sup>49</sup> For James, and especially for his Hellenistic Jewish Christian readers, the highest possible title would be φίλος θεοῦ, **Friend of God**.

Having friends is important in modern society, but this expression goes way beyond this. It was a formal title that signified that the individual enjoyed special status with a person of superior power and authority. It was a title that clearly expressed legitimate connection to the superior person without question. James' point here is climatic; the ultimate clincher that Abraham through his faith had a legitimate connection to Almighty God [was this title](#) which was widely acknowledged among the Jewish people.

<sup>49</sup>“In a special sense (Hdt. 1, 65=Galen, Protr. 9 p. 28, 26 J.: Lycurgus as φίλος of Zeus; Diod S 5, 7, 7 διὰ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς εὐσεβείας φίλον τῶν θεῶν ὀνομασθῆναι; Ael. Aristid. 27, 36 K.=16 p. 297 D.: θεῶν φίλοι; Maxim. Tyre 14, 6 φίλος θεοῦ as opposed to being δεισιδαίμων i.e. in a state of religious anxiety; JosAs 23:10 cod. A [p. 75, 4 Bat.; δοῦλος Philonenko] Jacob; SibOr 2, 245 Moses as ὁ μέγας φίλος Ὑψίστου; Just, D. 8, 1 χριστοῦ φίλοι [prophets]); on Abraham as φίλος (τοῦ) θεοῦ (TestAbr A 4 p. 81, 8 [Stone p. 10], B 4 p. 109, 1 [St. p. 66]) **Js 2:23**; 1 Cl 17:2; cp. 10:1 and s. Ἀβραάμ and MDibelius, exc. on Js 2:23. On ὁ φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου J 3:29 s. νυμφίος (cp. Sappho, Fgm. 124; Paus. Attic. [II A.D.] ζ, 3 [HERbse '50]). On φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος **J 19:12** s. Καῖσαρ and EBammel, TLZ 77, '52, 205–10; New Docs 3, 87–89 (noting that it is questionable whether Pilate's fortunes were closely bound up with those of Sejanus after the latter's fall out of imperial favor, s. JLémonon, Pilate et le gouvernement de la Juée '81, esp. 275f).” [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), 1059.

**The Exposition of Rahab, vv. 24-26:** 24 ὁρᾶτε ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον. 25 ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ῥαάβ ἡ πόρνη οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη ὑποδεξαμένη τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἐτέρα ὁδῶ ἐκβαλοῦσα; 26 ὡσπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρὸν ἐστίν, οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις χωρὶς ἔργων νεκρά ἐστίν. At this point James turns back to his readers with a shift to the second person plural frame of reference. At the same time he continues the strongly Jewish oriented defense of his point of the nature of legitimate faith with the illustration of the Gentile prostitute Rahab as an example of true faith.

When writing to Jewish Christians, one might expect James to use another traditional Jewish figure like David or Solomon to illustrate his point. But interestingly in the intertestamental Jewish writings, Rahab<sup>50</sup> is frequently held up along side Abraham as objects of faith.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, she is only mentioned one other time in the New Testament, and that in the very Jewish Christian writing of Hebrews (11:31), and also as an example of true faith: Πίστει Ῥαάβ ἡ πόρνη οὐ συναπώλετο τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν δεξαμένη τοὺς κατασκόπους μετ' εἰρήνης, *By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.*

James begins this section with a repeating of his central point: ὁρᾶτε ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον, *You see that a person is vindicated by works and not by faith alone* (v. 24). The language used regarding Abraham's faith and obedience is repeated again in short axiomatic form. The beginning verb ὁρᾶτε can be either the present indicative, *you see*, or the Aorist imperative, *see*, form of the verb from ὁράω. Translators will take differing approaches choosing one or the other understandings.

James' point is made even more clear here, especially by the second half of the that clause: καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον, *and not by faith alone*. The issue introduced in the beginning (v. 14) was that faith alone, πίστιν λέγει τις ἔχειν, was all that was needed. But James has argued consistently that such is not legitimate faith. Legitimate faith is not passive. Instead, its dynamical nature means that it will express itself in obedience to the God it has surrendered to.

Rahab becomes a good example for James not only because of interest in her among Jews in the ancient world, but because her verbal acknowledgment of the existence of God recorded in Joshua 2 makes James' point here dramatically. It was that verbally confessed faith that prompted her to give protection and assistance to the Israelite spies at Jericho. Both the objector (v. 18) and those targeted generally (v. 14) tried to make a verbal acknowledgement of faith in the existence of God the only required 'work' for salvation. James has repeated denied that faith and 'works' can be so linked. Faith confessed must become faith lived out in obedience. Rahab makes this point beautifully.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Ῥαάβ, ἡ indecl. (רַחַב; LXX; Just., D. 111, 4.—In Joseph. Ῥαάβη [v.l. Ῥαχάβη], ης [Ant. 5, 8]) *Rahab*, a prostitute in Jericho who, acc. to Josh 2, saved Israelite spies by hiding them. For this reason she was spared when the city was taken (Josh 6:17, 25). This courageous woman is cited as a model of faith, uprightness, and hospitality **Hb 11:31; Js 2:25**; 1 Cl 12:1, 3. FYoung, JBL 67, '48, 339–45. S. also Ῥαχάβ (B-D-F §39, 3; Mlt-H. 109).

[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), 902.]

<sup>51</sup>“Rahab was a person who fascinated the Jews (cf. Str-B I, 22–23; b. Meg. 14b–15a; b. Taan. 56; Ex. Rab. 27:4; Sipre Dt. 22(69b); Jos. Ant. 5:5–30).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 132.]

<sup>52</sup>**Joshua 2:8-13.** 8 καὶ αὐτοὶ δὲ πρὶν ἢ κοιμηθῆναι αὐτούς, καὶ αὐτὴ ἀνέβη ἐπὶ τὸ δῶμα πρὸς αὐτούς· 9 καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς Ἐπίσταμαι ὅτι δέδωκεν ὑμῖν κύριος τὴν γῆν, ἐπιπέτωκεν γὰρ ὁ φόβος ὑμῶν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς· 10 ἀκηκόαμεν γὰρ ὅτι κατεξήρανεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὴν ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν ἀπὸ προσώπου ὑμῶν, ὅτε ἐξεπορεύεσθε ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου, καὶ ὅσα ἐποίησεν τοῖς δυοῖν βασιλεῦσιν τῶν Ἀμορραίων, οἳ ἦσαν πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, τῷ Σηὼν καὶ Ὠγ, οὓς ἐξωλεθρεύσατε αὐτούς· 11 καὶ ἀκούσαντες ἡμεῖς ἐξέστημεν τῇ καρδίᾳ ἡμῶν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστη ἔτι πνεῦμα ἐν οὐδενὶ ἡμῶν ἀπὸ προσώπου ὑμῶν, ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν θεὸς ἐν οὐρανῶ ἄνω καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κάτω· 12 καὶ νῦν ὁμόσατέ μοι κύριον τὸν θεόν, ὅτι ποιῶ ὑμῖν ἔλεος καὶ ποιήσετε καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔλεος ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου· 13 καὶ ζωγρήσετε τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ τὴν μητέρα μου καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ πάντα τὸν οἶκόν μου καὶ πάντα, ὅσα ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐξελεῖσθε τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἐκ θανάτου·

8 Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof 9 and said to the men: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. 10 For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. 12 Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith 13 that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver

