

JAMES ARGUMENT

Introductory Matters¹

Authorship

The Greek text calls the author *Iakobus*, which means Jacob (1:1). If this is so, why do we refer to James as the book's author? When the Hebrew name *Yacov* was translated into Greek, the "Y" sounding letter was changed into an "I" sounding letter. Thus, *Yacov* was changed *Iakobus*. This change was made because Greek has no similar Y sounding letter. The name *Iakobus* was retained as it was translated into Latin. However, as Latin evolved, the "I" sounding letter was replaced by a "J" sounding letter. Thus, the name became *Jacobus*. As Latin continued to develop, the B changed to an M. Thus, his name became *Jacomus*. When this word was translated into English, it became James.

There are *four New Testament figures* bearing the name James. Which of these four is responsible for writing the letter? Some believe it was the father of Judas (not Iscariot), who was an apostle (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). However, this James is obscure and unknown elsewhere in Scripture. Because the salutation implies that the author was well known by his audience, he is an unlikely candidate for the author of the letter. Others believe the writer was James the Son of Alphaeus (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). This James is probably also "James the Less" who is referred to elsewhere in Scripture (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 24:10). However, he

¹ Material for this introductory section was compiled from various sources, including Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 335-40; Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 462-66; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles*, Ariel's Bible Commentary (Tustin, CA: Ariel, 2005), 205-16; J. Ronald Blue, "James," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1983), 815-18; *Nelson's Quick Reference Bible Handbook*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 311-13; *Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 453-57; Mark Bailey and Thomas L. Constable, *New Testament Explorer* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1999), 537-38; Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on James," online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 27 January 2006, 1-3; Stanley Toussaint, "James," (unpublished class notes in BE 307B Hebrews, General Epistles, and Revelation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 1.

is also too obscure to be well recognized by the Jews in the Diaspora. Also, he surely would have made reference to his apostleship to add credence to his letter. Yet the author of the letter never refers to himself as an apostle.

Still others believe that the writer is James the Son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matt 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mark 1:19; 3:17; 10:35; 13:3; Luke 9:54; Acts 1:13). This James is considered a candidate because of his apostolic status. However, the writer never makes mention of his apostleship or the fact that John was his brother. Also, had an apostle written the letter, it probably would have been accepted much earlier in church history. Furthermore, his early martyrdom at the hands of Herod Agrippa in A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2) would demand that the letter was written very early. The best option is to attribute the letter to James the half brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal 1:19). James shared the same mother as Jesus but not the same father. Joseph was James' father and Christ's stepfather.

Internal evidence favors James the brother of Christ as the book's author. The salutation implies that the author was already well known to his audience. James the brother of Christ certainly fits this qualification since he was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal 2:9, 12). Because James was such a popular name in the New Testament world, only a popular person could have used it with little other clarification and still be recognized. Also, his authoritative tone demonstrated in the letter is understandable given his role as the pastor of the Jerusalem church. The notion that James the brother of Christ wrote the letter also receives support upon comparing the content of James' speech in Acts 15 with the material presented in the letter. Similarities include the words "greetings" (1:1; Acts 15:23),² "visit" (1:27; 15:14), "listen" (2:5; 15:13), "turn" (5:19-20; Acts 15:19) as well as the notion of being called by God's name (2:7;

² Interestingly, other than Acts 23:36, these are the only two places in the entire New Testament where this word appears.

15:17). “The Jewish character of the epistle with its stress upon the Law, along with the evident influence by the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., 4:11-12; 5:12), complement what we know about James ‘the Just’ from Scripture and early tradition.”³

Some believe that the evidence does not favor James the brother of Christ as the letter’s author because he never identifies himself as such. However, perhaps he identified himself as only a bondservant rather than the brother of Christ out of humility since he initially rejected Christ’s messiahship (John 7:5). Interestingly, Paul neglects to mention his apostleship in several of his letters (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phil 1:1). John also neglects to mention his apostleship in his three epistles. Others believe that the evidence does not favor James the brother of Christ as the author because the Greek is supposedly too good for a Galilean. However, because of a mixed population, many Israelites were bilingual (Acts 22:2). Also, because James was a prominent church leader, it is expected that he would have become fluent in Koine Greek, which was the universal language of the Roman Empire. It is also worth noting that a common cobbler named John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which is considered an English classic.

Although the *external* evidence is not nearly as strong as the internal evidence, it ultimately favors James the brother of Christ as the book’s author. Early on, the book struggled to achieve canonical status. For example, the book is not mentioned in the second century Muratorian fragment. Also, the Western church was slow in accepting the letter. Moreover, the book did not achieve general recognition until the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. However, many fathers from the Eastern Church accepted the letter before it was accepted by the Western Church. Among them are Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Augustine. Eusebius

³ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 463-64.

also seems to testify to the fact that it was genuine.⁴ It is also included in the Old Syriac Version. Allusions to the letter can also be found in the works of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp.⁵ Moreover, there are several logical reasons for the Western church's reluctance to unanimously accept the letter. Such reasons include the letter's alleged contradiction with Paul, the fact that James was not well known outside of Israel, uncertainty regarding James' identity, the Gentiles' reluctance to accept a book written exclusively to Jewish believers, its limited doctrinal emphasis in comparison to other epistles, its brevity, and the fact that the letter's target audience consisted of those in the East.

A brief *biographical sketch* of James is helpful in order to gain a better perspective of him as the book's author. Many contend that James was either the cousin or the stepbrother of Jesus. Some contend he was the child of Mary of Cleophas, who was the virgin Mary's sister. Others argue that he was the child of Joseph from a previous marriage. They claim that not viewing James as the natural brother of Jesus would explain his initial unbelief (John 7:3-5) as well as Christ's entrustment of Mary to John rather than to James (John 19:25-27). However, several reasons make it more likely that James was one of the children begotten by Joseph and Mary after Jesus' birth.

First, Scripture makes several references to Christ's brothers (Matt 12:46-50; 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 2:12; 7:3, 10). There is no reason for not giving the word "brother" in these verses a normal interpretation. The names of Christ's brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Second, Scripture is silent regarding Christ's supposed cousins and stepbrothers. Third, Scripture elsewhere refers to James as the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19). Fourth, Scripture refers to Jesus as Mary's first born son (Luke 2:7). Such a designation implies that Mary had other children. Fifth, according to Matthew 1:25, Mary and Joseph did not have physical relations "until" (*heōs*) after

⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.23.

⁵ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 272-73.

Christ was born. Such phraseology indicates that they experienced a normal sexual relationship after Jesus' birth. Sixth, the primary motive in arguing against the idea that Christ had natural brothers seems to be a desire to protect the Roman Catholic notion of Mary's perpetual virginity.

James seems to have been the eldest of Christ's brothers since he is listed first on the lists that enumerate all the brothers (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3). James spiritual odyssey was first marked by unbelief at Jesus' messianic claims (Mark 3:21-23; John 7:5). Such unbelief may explain his absence at the crucifixion. However, he was one of the first to receive the message that Jesus had risen from the dead (John 20:17). Luke also notes James' presence during Christ's post resurrection ministry (Acts 1:14). It seems that James became a believer after the Resurrection (1 Cor 15:7).

After his conversion, James rose to a position of responsibility within the church. Not only did Paul visit James in Jerusalem (Gal 1:18-19), but also Peter wanted James to know about his miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12:17). Eventually, James became known as an apostle (Gal 1:19). There seem to have been two categories of apostleship. One category represented those that were eyewitnesses to Christ's earthly ministry from the beginning (Acts 1:21-22) while a second category represented those who had seen the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 9:1). Apparently, James became an apostle in this latter sense.

He was also known as a pillar in the early church (Gal 2:9). James' prominence is also seen in how the Judaizers attempted to use his name in order to furnish credibility for their doctrine (Gal 2:12). He became the pastor of the Jerusalem church. He approved of Paul's credentials (Gal 2:9). During the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), he served as the final spokesman, delivered the verdict, recommended that the verdict be sent to the other churches, and issued the proclamation regarding what the Gentiles were free to participate in and what they were to abstain from. He also suggested

that Paul keep the Law so as not to offend those who were zealous for the Law (Acts 21:18-26).

Jude also referred to himself as James' brother in order to furnish support for his writings (Jude 1).

Apparently, James was married (1 Cor 9:5). He also developed "camel's knees" on account of his devotion to prayer. He was highly respected by the early Christians. Both believing and unbelieving Jews also knew him as "James the Just." Because his death is not mentioned in Acts, one must take into consideration extra biblical tradition in order to ascertain how James died.

Eusebius records Heggisippus⁶ as indicating that Paul's enemies eventually threw James off the roof of the temple. Apparently, the high priest Ananus⁷ presented James with the opportunity to avoid stoning through a public renunciation of the faith. When taken to the top of the walls of Jerusalem for the purpose of issuing the renunciation, James instead preached the gospel. An angry Ananus proceeded to push him off the temple. Although James survived the fall, those beneath the temple wall stoned him to death.

According to Josephus,⁸ James died in the interim months in between the death of Festus (A.D. 61),⁹ who was the Roman procurator of Judea, and the arrival of the new governor Albinus (A.D. 62). During this time there was an insurrection. Ananus accused James of violating the Law and thus ordered him to be stoned. Josephus not only recorded the stoning but also cited it as one of the reasons why God allowed the A.D. 70 judgment. In sum, both Eusebius and Josephus taken together indicate that James suffered death through martyrdom and died in A.D. 62–63.

⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.23.

⁷ Ananus was the son of Annas, who was the same high priest involved in Christ's trial as recorded in the gospels.

⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.9.1.

⁹ This is the same Festus spoken of in the Book of Acts.

Recipients

First, James' audience was Jewish. Several internal clues make this conclusion obvious. They are referred to as the twelve tribes scattered abroad (1:1), which refers to Jews in the Diaspora. The book also contains several unexplained allusions that would be self evident to a Jewish mind. Among them are first fruits (1:18; Lev 23:10), Gehenna (3:6), Lord Almighty (5:4), early and latter rains (5:7; Deut 11:14), oath taking (5:12), Elijah (5:17), Abraham "our ancestor" (2:24), Rahab (2:25), Job (5:11), synagogue (2:2), Law (1:25; 2:12), monotheism (2:19), and adulteresses (4:4). Other Jewish ideas found in the letter include proverbial wisdom, the preaching of the prophets, and allusions to the Sermon on the Mount. Moreover, the book contains 4 Old Testament quotes and 41 Old Testament allusions from 22 Old Testament books. Notably absent from the book are Gentile concepts of slavery, idolatry, and well developed Christian theology.

Second, James wrote to a persecuted audience. They were probably driven out of the land as a result of persecution of the Jews in Jerusalem, which was prompted by Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19). Because Peter would later write to the scattered Jews in the west (1 Pet 1:1), it is likely that James addressed the scattered Jews in the East. Thus, they may have been located in Babylon and Mesopotamia.

Third, James' audience consisted of believers. This fact is evident simply from the letter's opening verses where James explains that the trials that his audience was facing were necessary in order to mature their faith (1:2-4). How could their faith be perfected if they did not yet possess it? The repetition of the phrase "brethren" throughout the letter (1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10; 5:12, 19) also adds strength to the argument that James was addressing a believing audience. In addition, the fact that 54 of the letter's 108 verses are imperatives also testifies to the recipients believing

status. Why issue a command to an unbeliever who has no capacity for understanding spiritual truth (1 Cor 2:14)? In sum, James wrote to a believing, persecuted, Jewish audience.

Place of Writing

Several suggestions have been made regarding where the book was written. Among them are Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria. However, it seems most likely that the letter was written from Jerusalem. In Scripture, James is always located in Jerusalem subsequent to his conversion. In fact, James became the pastor of the Jerusalem church. James lived in the midst of Jerusalem throughout his entire adult life. Thus, Jerusalem is the most likely place for the origin of the epistle.

Date

James was the earliest New Testament book. The antiquity of James becomes evident upon noting several factors. *First*, the book had to have been written prior to A.D. 70, since it makes no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Such information would have been of great interest to a Jewish reader. Thus, James would have made some sort of reference to these events had the book been written subsequent to them. *Second*, only in Israel was there an agrarian economy spoken of in 5:4, where hired workers rather than slaves were used. Thus, the book was written prior to Israel's total occupation in A.D. 70. *Third*, because the gap between the Jewish rich and poor (5:1-6) was eliminated with the war of A.D. 66–70, the Book of James had to have been written prior to that time.

Fourth, the letter had to have been written prior to A.D. 62–63 since that is the date of James' martyrdom according to tradition. *Fifth*, the letter fails to mention any of the basic doctrines developed in the Pauline epistles. Examples include reference to the church as the body of Christ, the coming apostasy, the union of Jew and Gentile into one new spiritual organism, and Israel no

longer seen as a distinct entity from the church in this age. Because of these notable absences, James' letter must have been written prior to the Pauline letters. *Sixth*, the letter contains no developed Christology or theology. Thus, James must have been written prior to the development of these doctrines in the Christian age.

Seventh, there is no mention of the issue of Gentile circumcision that was dealt with during the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). Because James played such a prominent role in this council, it seems strange that he would fail to mention any of the issues it dealt with in his letter had it been written after the council had transpired. Because this council occurred around A.D. 49, James must have been written prior to this time.¹⁰ *Eighth*, the letter fails to mention Gentile inclusion in the church. Because the first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) took place in A.D. 48–49, the letter must have been written prior to this point in time. *Ninth*, James contains multiple allusions to the Sermon on the Mount.¹¹ Yet James never quotes this sermon verbatim. Thus, James must have been written prior to the recording of the Sermon on the Mount in written form.¹²

Tenth, because James' references to Christ have little linguistic concord with the synoptic Gospels, the composition of the epistle of James must have preceded the composition of the Synoptic Gospels. *Eleventh*, the letter refers to a primitive form of congregational worship. For example, meetings took place in a synagogue (2:2). Moreover, church leaders are referred to as teachers, masters, and elders (3:1; 5:14) rather than bishops and deacons. Thus, the book was written before the church experienced these later ecclesiastical developments. *Twelfth*, because the

¹⁰ Others suggest that this argument should not be pushed too far since the letter of James dealt with different issues in comparison to what was raised at the council.

¹¹ For helpful lists noting the parallels between Sermon on the Mount and James, see Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles*, 215; Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 340; Blue, "James," 818; *Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps*, 457.

¹² James probably received his knowledge of the Sermon on the Mount through his personal contact with Christ and the other disciples.

letter is addressed to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora (1:1), the time of the letter seems consistent with the dispersion of the Jews as recorded in the early chapters of the Book of Acts. These early chapters record how the early Jewish church transitioned from unity (2:41-47; 4:32-35) toward dispersion (Acts 8:1; 11:19-20). Because James was written during the general time period when this dispersion occurred, an early date seems appropriate.

Based upon these preceding reasons, a date of A.D. 44–47 for the composition of the letter would not be far from wrong. James was likely the very first book of the New Testament and Galatians was the second book. Because James was written prior to the Pauline letters, it is impossible to see James as a polemic against Paul's writings. Conversely, because of the close relationship that Paul had with James (Acts 15:13; 21:18; Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12), it is equally unlikely that Paul's writings should be construed as a polemic against James' letter.

Occasion, Purpose, Message, Theme

The *occasion* of the letter is that the believing Jews scattered in the Diaspora (1:1; Acts 8:1-4) were without the supervision of an apostle. They knew from their own national history that practical righteousness was a prerequisite for daily fellowship with God. The Law told them how such righteousness could be obtained. However, since they were part of the new dispensation of the church and outside of Jerusalem, they were without the Law. Thus, issues involving practical righteousness were paramount in their thinking. Therefore, James wrote for the *purpose* of explaining to them how living by faith could produce a practical righteousness that would please God in every area of life.¹³ James had the authority to address them. As the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, he had spiritual oversight over them and knew many of them personally.

¹³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Faith That Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 12.

The *message* of the book is that believers can experience a practical righteousness that is pleasing to God when they live by faith and walk by wisdom. The dominant *theme* of the letter is not to be hearers of the word only but also doers of it (Jas 1:22). In other words, hearers should be doers, belief should translate into behavior, and doctrine should become deed. It is fair to say that Paul emphasized faith, Peter emphasized hope, John emphasized love, Jude emphasized doctrinal fidelity, and James emphasized conduct.

Sub Purposes

In addition to this overarching purpose, James wrote in order to accomplish several sub-purposes. *First*, James wrote to explain why God allows trials into the life of the believer (1:2-18). *Second*, he wrote to explain the type of religion that pleases God (1:19-27). *Third*, he wrote to confront favoritism within the assembly (2:1-13). *Fourth*, he wrote to show Christians how living by faith will naturally manifest itself in good deeds (2:14-26). *Fifth*, he wrote to confront misuses of the tongue (3:1-12). *Sixth*, he wrote to describe heavenly wisdom (3:13-18).

Seventh, he wrote to contrast worldly wisdom and spiritual wisdom (4:1-12). *Eighth*, he wrote to explain the necessity for depending upon God in commercial planning (4:13-17). *Ninth*, he wrote to warn wealthy abusers (5:1-6). *Tenth*, he wrote to encourage patience in light of the Lord's imminent return (5:7-11). *Eleventh*, he wrote to explain the numerous kinds of prayer (5:12-18). *Twelfth*, he wrote to explain the necessity of retrieving the errant brother (5:19-20).

Unique Characteristics

James' epistle boasts several outstanding characteristics. *First*, it contains numerous similarities to the Sermon on the Mount. *Second*, it makes extensive use of Old Testament books, characters, figures, and illustrations. *Third*, the letter may be the most Jewish of all the New

Testament books. *Fourth*, the letter employs multiple illustrations from nature and every day life.¹⁴ *Fifth*, the letter utilizes numerous verbs involving proper and improper use of the tongue.¹⁵

Sixth, the letter contains only scant references to Christ (1:1; 2:1; 5:7-8). Thus, the letter's Christology is undeveloped. There are no references to Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, or atonement. *Seventh*, the letter does not emphasize the doctrinal, theological, or apologetic but rather the practical. Paul's developed theology is absent from the letter. However, this is not to say that the letter is devoid of all doctrinal statements (1:12-13, 17-18, 2:1, 10-13, 19; 3:9; 4:5; 5:7-9). Those areas of systematic theology that seem to receive the most treatment are hamartiology, theology, and eschatology. Other than Philemon, some have referred to it as the least theological book in the entire New Testament. *Eighth*, the letter contains many similarities to the ministry of John the Baptist (1:22, 27 and Matt 3:8; 2:15-16 and Matt 3:11; 2:19-20 and Matt 3:9; 5:1-6 and Matt 3:10-12). *Ninth*, the letter employs numerous literary devices including figures of speech, illustrations, rhetorical questions and hook words.¹⁶ *Tenth*, James' writing style is concise and pithy.

Eleventh, the letter represents a high quality of Greek. *Twelfth*, because of its employment of the writing style found in wisdom literature, it has been referred to as the "proverbs of the New Testament." *Thirteenth*, because the letter deals with social justice in its treatment of the rich oppressing the poor (1:10; 2:1-7, 15-16; 5:1-6), some have referred to it as the "Amos of the New Testament." *Fourteenth*, the letter seems to make several references to the approaching A.D. 70 judgment. *Fifteenth*, James is an authoritative book since half of its verses contain imperatives. However, such authoritativeness is tempered by love as James uses the phrase "my brethren" eleven times and the phrase "my beloved brethren" three times.

¹⁴ Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 340; Blue, "James," 817.

¹⁵ Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 340.

¹⁶ For a list of hook words, see Blue, "James," 817.

Sixteenth, the letter is arguably the oldest in the entire New Testament. *Seventeenth*, although the book allegedly contradicts Paul, it is actually harmonious with his teaching.¹⁷ On the basis of such an alleged contradiction, Luther referred to it as an epistle made of straw and categorized it at the end of his translation. *Eighteenth*, unlike Paul's pattern, James says virtually nothing about his own personal circumstances. *Nineteenth*, the letter's numerous subjects make organizing and outlining it a difficult task. *Twentieth*, the letter names no specific individual. *Twenty-first*, it lacks a customary benediction and conclusion. *Twenty-second*, like Hebrews, the letter is sermonic.

Structure

As previously mentioned, the book is difficult to outline. One possible way of dividing the book is between faith (1:1–3:12) and wisdom (3:13–5:20). The first section is introduced with the phrase “the proving of your faith” (1:3) and the second section is introduced with the distinction between heavenly and earthly wisdom (3:13-18). The topics in the letter might be divided further by noting the repetition of the word “brethren” (1:2, 19; 2:1, 14; 3:1, 10; 5:12, 19). Thus, the first half of the book can be divided as pertaining to trials (1:2-18), obedience to God's Word (1:19-27), favoritism (2:1-13), faith manifesting itself through works (2:14-26), and taming the tongue (3:1-12). The second half of the letter can be divided along the lines of wisdom in the areas of spirituality, commerce, the use of wealth, and waiting upon the Lord's imminent return (4:1–5:12) as well as prayer (5:13-18), and the restoration of the errant brother (5:19-20).

¹⁷ Such harmony will be demonstrated in the James 2 section of the argument.

Outline¹⁸

- I. Faith (1:1-3: 12)
 - A. Salutation (1:1)
 - 1. Writer: James (1:1a)
 - 2. Recipients: Believing Jews in the Diaspora (1:1b)
 - 3. Greeting (1:1c)
 - B. Faith is developed through trials (1:2-12)
 - 1. What trials produce (1:2-4)
 - a) Joy (1:2)
 - b) Patience (1:3)
 - c) Maturity (1:4)
 - 2. Prayer of wisdom (1:5-8)
 - a) Necessity of asking (1:5)
 - b) Necessity of faith (1:6-8)
 - 3. What trials produce (1:9-12)
 - a) Humility (1:9-11)
 - b) Expectancy (1:12)
 - C. Faith does not attribute evil to God (1:13-18)
 - 1. Command stated (1:13a)
 - 2. Reasons stated (1:13b-18)
 - a) Sin is contrary to God's nature (1:13b)
 - b) Sin emanates from man's nature (1:14-15)
 - c) God can only give good gifts (1:16-18)
 - i) Command not to be deceived (1:16)
 - ii) God gives good gifts (1: 17a)
 - iii) God's character demands He give good gifts (1:17b)
 - iv) Believers' regeneration as an example of God's good gifts (1:18)
 - D. Faith obeys God (1:19-27)
 - 1. The need for slowness in speaking and anger (1:19-20)
 - 2. The need for obedience to the Word (1:21-25)
 - 3. The need for true religion (1:26-27)
 - a) What true religion is not: unbridled speech (1:26)
 - b) What true religion is (1:27)
 - i) Compassionate acts (1:27a)
 - ii) Moral purity (1:27b)
 - E. Faith does not show favoritism (2:1-13)
 - 1. Exhortation not to show favoritism (2:1)
 - 2. Concept applied to a church service (2:2-4)
 - 3. God does not show favoritism in election (2:5)
 - 4. The rich oppress the poor (2:6-7)
 - 5. Favoritism violates the Law (2:8-11)
 - 6. God will judge favoritism (2:12-13)
 - F. Useful faith manifests itself in works (2:14-26)

¹⁸ The main headings in this outline have been adapted from Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 341.

1. Works accompany useful faith (2:14)
2. Illustrations (2:15-26)
 - a) Brother in need (2:15-17)
 - b) Demonic monotheism (2:18-19)
 - c) Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (2:20-24)
 - d) Rahab and the spies (2:25)
 - e) Body and its spirit (2:26)
- G. Faith controls the tongue (3:1-12)
 1. The tongue's influence (3:1-5)
 - a) In relation to teaching (3:1)
 - b) In relation to all of life (3:2)
 - c) Illustrations of the tongue's influence (3:3-5)
 - i) Bit in a horse's mouth (3:3)
 - ii) Rudder of the ship (3:4)
 - iii) Spark and a forest fire (3:5)
 2. The tongue's propensity for evil (3:6-12)
 - a) The tongue's Satanic potential (3:6)
 - b) The tongue is untamable (3:7-8)
 - c) The tongue's inconsistency (3:9-12)
 - i) The tongue praises God and curses men (3:9-10)
 - ii) Illustrations of the inconsistency (3:11-12)
 - (a) Fresh and bitter water from a fountain (3:11)
 - (b) Olives from a fig tree (3:12a)
 - (c) Fresh water from salt water (3:12b)
- II. Wisdom (3:13-5:20)
 - A. Wisdom defined (3:13-18)
 1. Wisdom demonstrated by works (3:13)
 2. Wisdom from below (3:14-16)
 3. Wisdom from above (3:17-18)
 - B. Wisdom in spiritual life (4:1-12)
 1. Wrangling (4:1-3)
 2. Worldliness (4:4-6)
 - a) Worldliness makes one an enemy of God (4:4)
 - b) Causes of worldliness (4:5-6)
 - i) Not the Holy Spirit (4:5)
 - ii) Pride (4:6)
 3. Essence of spiritual wisdom (4:7-12)
 - a) Submission (4:7)
 - b) Drawing near to God (4:8a)
 - c) Repentance (4:8b-9)
 - d) Humility (4:10)
 - e) Foregoing judgment (4:11-12)
 - C. Wisdom in commercial life (4:13-17)
 1. Necessity of planning one's life while depending upon God (4:13-15)
 2. Problem of planning without consulting God (4:16-17)
 - a) Arrogance (4:16)

- b) Sin (4:17)
- D. Wisdom in the use of wealth (5:1-6)
 - 1. Predicted judgment upon rich oppressors (5:1-3)
 - 2. For reasons for coming judgment (5:4-6)
 - a) Unpaid wages (5:4)
 - b) Wanton luxury (5:5)
 - c) Condemnation of the innocent (5:6)
- E. Wisdom in waiting for the Lord (5:7-12)
 - 1. Example of the farmer (5:7)
 - 2. Impact of imminency (5:8-9)
 - a) Strength (5:8)
 - b) Abstention from complaining (5:9)
 - 3. Old Testament examples of patience (5:10-12)
 - a) Prophets (5:10)
 - b) Job (5:11-12)
- F. Wisdom in prayer (5:13-18)
 - 1. Types of prayer (5:13-16a)
 - a) Afflicted: prayer of dependence (5:13a)
 - b) Happy: prayer of praise (5:13b)
 - c) Sick: prayer by the elders (5:14-15)
 - d) Sinful: prayer of mutual confession (5:16a)
 - 2. Power of prayer (5:16b-18)
 - a) General statement (5:16b)
 - b) Example of Elijah (5:17-18)
- G. Wisdom in restoring an erring brother (5:19-20)
 - 1. Necessity of warning an erring brother (5:19)
 - 2. Blessings of warning an erring brother (5:20)
 - a) Salvation from a premature death (5:20a)
 - b) Covering a multitude of sins (5:20b)

Argument

James spends the first half of the book (1:1–3:12) explaining to the believing Jews in the Diaspora that they can achieve a practical righteousness that pleases God by living by faith. After his salutation, in which he identifies himself as the writer and greets the dispersed Jews (1:1),¹⁹ he moves quickly into the subject of trials (1:2-12). Here, he explains that his audience can please God in their daily life as they adopt the right view toward their adverse circumstances. They can develop this correct view when they grasp what their trials produce (1:2-4). Tribulations should be endured

¹⁹ The reference to the twelve tribes in this verse and others (Matt 19:28; Acts 26:7; Rev 7:4-8) lays to rest the mistaken idea that the tribes are lost. Thus, the whole viewpoint of British Israelism is wrong.

with joy (1:2) since they produce patience (1:3) and maturity (1:4). If his readers lack this perspective, they should ask God to give it to them (1:5). However, this request must be made by faith and then God will give James' readers His divine perspective on trials (1:6-8).²⁰

Trials should also be endured with joy since they have the effect of humbling the one who experiences them. Such humility brings the believer into a closer walk with the Lord. The Christian who does not experience trials continues to live in arrogance and thus does not enjoy the same intimacy with Christ as the brother undergoing tribulation (1:9-11).²¹ Trials should also be endured with joy because the one who endures them will be given the Crown of Life at the Bema Seat Judgment (1:12).²² In sum, if James' audience adopts by faith God's vantage point on their tribulations, their daily life can please God even as they encounter such afflictions.

James goes on to give another angle on how his readers can exercise faith and thus please God in their daily lives as they encounter trials and temptations.²³ When believers experience these adverse circumstances, it is always tempting to blame them upon God. Here, however, James explains that living by faith will enable the believer not to attribute evil to God (1:13-18). After issuing the command not to ascribe evil to God (1:13a), James explains why such an attribution is

²⁰ "The prayer offered in faith" (1:6a) refers to an expectation that God can answer the prayer request. The one who lacks faith is analogized to wind driving a wave (1:6b) because he is similarly influenced by outside forces. The man who lacks faith is unstable in all his ways (1:8) because he lacks God's direction for his life.

²¹ Both men in this verse seem to be believers. Why would the rich man glory in his position (1:10) if he were not a believer?

²² Some interpret the Crown of Life as merely eternal life (John 5:24). Yet how can this be a reward if believers already possess eternal life? Others view the Crown of Life as the fullness of life or experiencing life to its fullest potential. However, it seems best to view the Crown of Life as one of five literal crowns that will be bestowed upon believers for various reasons at the Bema Seat judgment. Since the imagery for these crowns seems to be drawn from the Isthmian games where literal crowns were bestowed upon winners, a literal crown also seems to be in view here. These five crowns can be enumerated as follows: an incorruptible crown for mastering the old nature (1 Cor 9:24-27), a crown of rejoicing for the soul winner (1 Thess 2:19-20), a crown of life for enduring trials (Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10), a crown of righteousness for waiting the Lord's return (2 Tim 4:8), and a crown of glory for faithful shepherding (1 Pet 5:2-4). J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findley, OH: Dunham Publishing Company, 1958), 225.

²³ In verse 13, the same stem that is used to describe trials in the previous verses is used to depict temptations. Thus, James has transitioned from trials in 1:2-12 to temptations in 1:13-18.

inappropriate. First, because sin is contrary to God's nature, temptation cannot emanate from God anymore than God can be tempted (1:13b).²⁴ Second, the temptation to sin actually comes from man's fallen nature rather than God (1:14-15).²⁵ Third, believers are not to be deceived on this matter (1:16) because God can only give good gifts (1:17a). In fact, God's unchanging character of perfection requires that He must give good gifts (1:17b). The believer's status as a child of God is an example of such a good gift (1:18). For these reasons, it is unacceptable for believers to ascribe temptation to God. Believers will not make such a foolish accusation as they learn to live by faith in the midst of temptation.

Being born again through the Word (1:18) naturally leads James to speak of the believer's responsibility to obey the Word. James' readers can exhibit a practical righteousness that pleases God as they learn to obey God's Word in all circumstances. Obedience to God's Word (1:21-25)²⁶ is marked by slowness of speech and anger (1:19-20). It also encompasses true religion (1:26-27), which is characterized by controlled speech (1:26), compassionate acts (1:27a),²⁷ and moral purity (1:27b). As believers obey God's word by walking by faith, their daily lives will be pleasing to God.

Next James explains that living by faith does not produce favoritism (2:1-13). After issuing the general command not to show favoritism (2:1), he then applies it to a church service where the

²⁴ If God does not tempt, why did Christ say that believers should pray that God would not lead them into temptation (Matt 6:19-20)? Perhaps this verse has to do with the fact that believers should pray for God's resources, which will allow them to endure temptation. J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1997), 310.

²⁵ The order of lust, sin, and death is noteworthy.

²⁶ After laying down the principle that believers should obey God's Word (1:21-22), James illustrates disobedience to the Word with the example of the person who looks intently into a mirror and then forgets what he looks like (1:23-25). What is the perfect Law that gives liberty (1:25; 2:12)? Some say it is the Law of Moses (Ps 19:7). Others say it is Christ's explanation of the Law in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:21-48; Jas 2:8). However, it seems best to argue that the reference to the Law here refers to the Word of God in general (Jas 1:21-22), which has the capacity to liberate the soul (John 8:32). Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 310.

²⁷ "Widows and orphans" is a hendiadys encompassing all those oppressed.

rich are given preferential treatment (2:2-4).²⁸ James goes on to explain why favoritism is contrary to God's purposes and character. First, God does not show a preference for the rich when he elects people to salvation (2:5).²⁹ Second, it is foolish to favor the rich since they were the ones oppressing James' readers (2:6-7).³⁰ Third, favoritism violates the Law. If someone violates even a small aspect of the Law, then he is guilty of stumbling over all of it (2:8-11). Fourth, God will judge the believer exhibiting favoritism at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2:12-13).

James goes on to explain that living by faith will naturally manifest the kind of practical righteousness that pleases God through good works (2:14-26). While an abundance of good works may not automatically flow from every Christian's life, they do flow from the Christian who walks by faith (2:14).³¹ James then employs five illustrations in order to exemplify this point (2:15-26).³² First, those who walk by faith will meet the needs of their brothers (2:15-17). Second, those who walk by faith will exhibit a spiritual life far superior to the dead orthodoxy of a demonic monotheist (2:18-19).³³ Third, those who walk by faith will follow the example of Abraham who was willing to

²⁸ The "if" in verse 2 may indicate that James is referring to a hypothetical situation.

²⁹ The reference to the kingdom is clearly future in this verse.

³⁰ While the wealthy referred to back in 1:10 are believers, it is likely that the wealthy referred to in these verses are unbelievers since they are referred to as oppressors (2:6-7) and blasphemers (2:7).

³¹ The question in this verse implies a negative answer. "Save" here need not refer to justification. It could refer to being saved from a lifeless form of Christianity. Because the audience's justified status is already presumed throughout the letter, this interpretation of "saved" is better than understanding the term as related to justification. Throughout Scripture, the word "saved" is often used in contexts not involving justification (Matt 8:25).

³² The point of this pericope is that the believer's faith is worthless if it is not accompanied by works. This point is repeated three times (2:17, 20, 26).

³³ Some take this verse to mean that if a person does not have works, then he has no saving faith at all just as a demonic monotheist has no saving faith. However, this analogy seems inappropriate since it confuses God's program for the angelic realm with His program for the human race. Salvation is not available for the fallen angelic realm. James' only point in the analogy is that faith without works is useless rather than nonexistent. Another issue raised in these verses is what is the identity of "someone" in verse 18? Numerous suggestions have been proposed. Some say it is an ally of James. However this requires taking the word *alla* as emphatic yea or "indeed" (Luke 16:21; John 16:2; Rom 8:37; 2 Cor 7:11) rather than in its more common usage as "but." Others suggest that James is referring to two imaginary people by saying one person has the gift of faith while the other has the gift of performing works. However, "you" and "I" in verse 18 probably should not be understood as general references to "one" and "another." Still others contend that "someone" is an objector referring to "you" as the readers and "I" as James. However, "I" most probably refers to the speaker rather than James. Still others argue that James is referring to himself in the quote. However, this

sacrifice his only son Isaac (2:20-24).³⁴ Fourth, those who walk by faith will follow the example of Rahab who was willing to hide the spies in spite of personal risk (2:25). Fifth, by way of analogy, those who walk by faith will exhibit a spiritual life far superior to a lifeless corpse (2:26).³⁵

If James' audience walks by faith not only will their daily lives please God through an overflow of good works (2:14-26), but they will also accomplish one of the most challenging good works known to man: taming the tongue (3:1-12). Because of the tongue's vast potential for influence, the daily lives of believers please God when they learn to control their speech. James employs several illustrations in order to communicate the influence of the tongue (3:1-5). Because of the tongue's ability to influence the thoughts of men, those who teach will be held to a higher

option seems unlikely since James would have to be referring to himself as someone either without faith or without works. Yet another possibility is that the speaker is an objector who doubts James has faith. In essence, the speaker is saying, "you have works and no faith while I have both." The rest of the verse would then be James' response to this objection. However, why would anyone doubt James' faith? The best option is that the objector is a hypothetical person. In Greek diatribe style an objection was raised followed by a reply. Thus, the "someone" is merely a fictitious debater. Elsewhere, Paul raised hypothetical objections and followed them with a reply (Rom 9:19; 11:19; 1 Cor 15:35).

³⁴ Is James contradicting Paul when he says that Abraham was justified by his works (2:24)? This alleged contradiction is reconcilable upon recognizing that James and Paul are confronting different issues. They are dealing with different sides of the same coin. Both men taken together are giving the "full dimensions of faith." While Paul is dealing with self-righteous Judaism (Rom 3:28), James is dealing with dead orthodoxy (2:19). Paul uses "justification" to refer to the believer's declaration of innocence before God. James uses "justification" to refer to the evidence of the believer's faith before man (Matt 12:37; Luke 7:35). Thus, while Paul speaks of inward justification, James speaks of outward justification. While Paul looks at the issue from God's perspective, James looks at the issue from man's perspective. Interestingly, Paul uses Genesis 15:6 to demonstrate Abraham's justification before God and James uses Genesis 22 to show the evidence of Abraham's faith before man. Because 20 years transpired between these events, Abraham was already justified before God by the time the events of Genesis 22 occurred. Therefore, the events spoken of in Genesis 22 were simply a demonstration of Abraham's preexisting faith rather than an attempt to be made right with God on the basis of works. Some of the confusion comes from the fact that both men use the same words although with a different meaning. When the word "faith" (*pistis*) is used, Paul is using it in the context of justification and James is speaking of it in the context of sanctification. When the word "works" (*ergon*) is used, Paul is speaking of works of the Law to gain favor with God while James is speaking of the moral deeds of the believer. When the word "justified" (*dikaion*) is used Paul is speaking of a forensic declaration of innocence before God while James is speaking of evidence of faith before man. Thus, when all of this is taken into consideration, James is not contradicting Paul. In fact, even some of Paul's statements seem to closely mirror the theology of James (Gal 5:6). Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 310-11; Stanley Toussaint, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2035A Seminar in Hebrews and General Epistles, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2003.

³⁵ Because the audience's justification is presumed throughout the letter, the phrase "faith without works is dead" should not be construed as indicating faith is nonexistent if it is not accompanied by works. Rather, the phrase should be understood as conveying the notion that faith absent works is useless. Rather than being non-existent, it is worthless, impotent, and powerless to fulfill God's earthly purposes. Perhaps James uses the example of a corpse not to show that faith is non-existent but rather to demonstrate the severity by which God looks at a Christian's life that is devoid of works.

standard of accountability (3:1). In fact, because the tongue's influence is so great, if one can master it then he can alter the entire course of his life (3:2). Despite the fact that the tongue is a small part of the human anatomy, it wields great influence (3:3-5). Just as a small rudder can direct a giant ship (3:3) and a small bit can influence an entire horse (3:4) and a small spark can ignite an entire forest (3:5), the tongue is a small part of the body wielding tremendous influence. James is concerned that his readers master the tongue because of its potential for evil (3:6-12). The tongue can be used by Satan (3:6), is virtually untamable (3:7-8), and inconsistently blesses God and curses man (3:9-12). However, if James' readers walk by faith they can please God in their practical conduct by not allowing their tongues to be used as an instrument for evil.

Not only can James' readers please God in their practical conduct in living by faith (1:1–3:12), but they can also experience practical righteousness by walking according to divine wisdom (3:13–5:20). Wisdom is demonstrated by her actions (3:13). However, James' audience cannot be expected to walk in divine wisdom unless they first understand what it is and how it is different from earthly wisdom. Thus, James begins this section by furnishing a definition of what divine wisdom is and is not (3:14-18). Employing imagery from the Book of Proverbs, James explains that human wisdom (3:14-16) is jealous (Prov 6:34), selfish (Prov 28:25), arrogant (Prov 8:13), earthly (Prov 14:2), natural (Prov 7:18), demonic (Prov 27:20), and contentious (Prov 11:29). By contrast, divine wisdom (3:17-18) is pure (Prov 15:26), peaceable (Prov 3:1-2), gentle (Prov 11:2), reasonable (Prov 14:15), full of mercy and good fruits (Prov 11:17; 3:18), unwavering (Prov 21:6), and without hypocrisy (Prov 28:13).³⁶

Now that James has defined divine wisdom (3:13-18), he shows his readers how they can please God in their practical behavior by applying divine wisdom to various areas of life (3:13–

³⁶ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 466.

5:20). He first deals with the application of divine wisdom to one's spiritual life (4:1-12). The believer can apply wisdom to their spiritual life by avoiding wrangling with other believers. Such quarrelsomeness should be avoided since it emanates from man's fallen nature rather than God (4:1-3). The believer can further apply wisdom to their spiritual life by avoiding worldliness (4:4-6). Worldliness, should be avoided since it makes one an enemy of God (4:4), alienates the believer from the Holy Spirit (4:5),³⁷ and results in pride (4:6; Ps 138:6). Instead of pursuing the world, the believer can practice wisdom in his spiritual life by submitting to God (4:7), drawing near to God (4:8a), repenting of known sins (4:8b-9), exhibiting humility (4:10), and leaving judgment in God's hands (4:11-12).³⁸ As the believer applies divine wisdom to his spiritual life, he will manifest the type of practical righteousness that pleases God.

Believers must also apply divine wisdom to commercial transactions in order to manifest a practical righteousness that pleases God (4:13-17). Such wisdom involves depending upon God when making business decisions (4:13-15). A failure to exhibit an attitude of dependence in this regard is not only arrogant (4:16) but also sinful (4:17). While on the subject of commerce, James explains that a practical righteousness that is pleasing to God also entails a proper use of wealth (5:1-6). Thus, James predicts imminent judgment upon rich oppressors (5:1-3) for failing to pay wages (5:4), living in wanton luxury (5:5), and condemning the innocent (5:6).³⁹

The reality of coming judgment upon the wealthy brings to James' mind Christ's imminent return. Here, James explains to his audience that divine wisdom includes patiently awaiting Christ's

³⁷ The citation found here is not found anywhere in the Old Testament but rather represents a common idea drawn from multiple verses (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Ps 42:21; 84:2; Zech 8:2).

³⁸ Interestingly, the main verbs in 4:7-12 are all imperatives. How does speaking against one's brother cause one to judge the Law (4:11)? The Law commands one to love his brother (Lev 19:18). Thus, if one disobeys the Law in this area, he judges the Law by deeming it to be irrelevant. Stanley Toussaint, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2035A Seminar in Hebrews and General Epistles, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2003.

³⁹ Although believers are in view back in 1:10, it seems that unbelievers are in view here. These wealthy oppressors are described as those without hope (5:2) and destined for slaughter (5:5).

return (5:7-12). This attitude of expectancy produces a practical righteousness that pleases God by strengthening the believer (5:8) as well as deterring him from grumbling about his circumstances (5:9). Thus, James uses the example of a farmer (5:7), the prophets (5:10), and Job (5:11) to encourage his audience to wait upon the Lord. Just as Job's speech was above reproach as he endured trials (Job 1:22; 2:10), James' audience must similarly exhibit speech that is above reproach even in their adversities (5:12).⁴⁰ Such control over their speech will enhance their practical righteousness.

Believers must also apply divine wisdom to prayer (5:13-18). Different situations require different types of prayer. Those who are afflicted are to pray a prayer of dependence (5:13a). Those who are happy are to pray a prayer of praise (5:13b). Those who are sick are to receive a prayer of healing from the elders.⁴¹ Because some sicknesses are caused by sin, part of this prayer for healing may also involve a request for forgiveness (5:14-15).⁴² Those who are sinful are to pray a prayer of mutual confession (5:16a). As these sins are forgiven, the believer's newfound practical righteousness will enhance the power of his prayer life (5:16b).⁴³ This connection between practical righteousness and a powerful prayer life is exemplified through the prayers of Elijah (5:17-18).⁴⁴ In

⁴⁰ Should believers never take oaths, such as in the Boy Scouts or in a court of Law? In Biblical times, people often swore by some venerated object in order to guarantee the truthfulness of their words (Matt 5:33-37). James' point is that believers' words should be continually truthful (Eph 4:25) so that it is unnecessary to swear by anything in order to guarantee their veracity. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 312-13.

⁴¹ "The prayer offered in faith" is one offered with the confidence God will heal if it is within His will to do so (2 Cor 12:7-10; 1 John 5:4). While "sick" (*asqenew*) in verse 14 refers to physical sickness twenty times and to spiritual sickness fourteen times elsewhere in the New Testament, the immediate context favors understanding the word as pertaining to physical sickness. "Raise him up" (5:15) would be a strange way of describing only a spiritual healing. The oil refers to a literal anointing of oil on the head of the sick person. Although the oil symbolized God's work (Mark 6:13), it was not used in order to gain any additional favor with God.

⁴² Although sin can cause some sickness (John 5:14), not all sickness is attributable to sin (Gal 4:13).

⁴³ For other verses connecting practical righteousness and the power of prayer, see 1 Peter 3:7 and Psalm 66:18.

⁴⁴ There is no necessary conflict between the time period described here (Luke 4:25) and in 1 Kings 18:1. See Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 314.

sum, as believers pray for forgiveness and pray prayers of mutual confession they will achieve a practical righteousness that pleases God, which will allow them to experience greater power in prayer.

Finally, believers should apply divine wisdom in restoring the erring brother (5:19-20). James exhorts his audience to restore such a one (5:19) on account of the spiritual blessings that will be realized as a result of the restoration (5:20). This restoration may actually save him from a premature death (5:20a)⁴⁵ as well as cut short habitual patterns of sin in his life (5:20b). In sum, as believers intervene with wisdom into the lives of the wayward brethren, they can help them cease from habitual sin and thus achieve practical righteousness.

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⁴⁵ Apparently, some habitual sins in the believer's life may introduce him to the prospect of divine discipline taking the form of premature death (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16; Rev 2:23).

⁴⁶ Dibelius and Ropes are examples of critical commentaries. Hiebert and Robertson are examples of exegetical commentaries. Manton and Oesterley are examples of expositional commentaries. McGee and Wiersbe are examples of devotional commentaries.

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