

THE LETTER OF JAMES: the way to read it – as the writer intended!

The **structure** of this letter is a four section chiasm **ABB'A'**, which is the simplest and most ancient form of chiasm. Each section comprises parts **ABB'**, which in the longer form is **ABB'**; **ABB'**; **ABB'**. Each part of these further breaks down into three parts, **abb'**, which, in the main, further break down into three parts each, (**a**) (**b**) (**b'**). This describes the letter's **writing style**, where **A** (or **a**) is the introductory part; **B** (or **b**) is the first development and **B'** (i.e. **B prime**, or **b'**) is the corresponding part to **B**, (or **b**) and also the completing part.

1.1 (abb') Introductory Greetings: from James; 'to the twelve tribes'; greetings

1.2-27 Section A (26 verses) Trials and Temptations; the Humble and Rich; Religion

A (10 verses)	A	1.2-4 (abb')	'brothers', facing trials and testings, consider it pure joy
	B	1.5-8 (abb')	Lacking wisdom? Ask God, <u>believing</u> . The doubter
	B'	1.9-11 (//)	The rich and humble; the rich will perish
B (7 verses)	A	1.12	Blessed is the one tempted who endures trial
	B	1.13-15	The one tempted should not blame God
	B'	1.16-18	'brothers', good and perfect gifts come from God
B' (9 verses)	A	1.19-21	'brothers', be quick to listen, slow to speak
	B	1.22-25	Listen to the word and <u>do it</u>
	B'	1.26-27	Religious? Real religion is <u>action</u> and keeping pure

2.1-26 Section B (26 verses) No Favouritism; Law; Faith and Deeds

A (9 verses)	A	2.1-4 (//)	'brothers', show <u>no favouritism</u> between rich and poor
	B	2.5-7	'brothers', poor insulted, rich exploiting
	B'	2.8-9	The Royal law: love your neighbour, <u>no favouritism</u>
B (8 verses)	A	2.10-11	Keeping the whole law
	B	2.12-13	You are to be judged by the law: <u>being merciful</u>
	B'	2.14-17	'brothers', faith, but <u>no deeds</u> , <u>no mercy</u>
B' (9 verses)	A	2.18-20	Faith with and without deeds
	B	2.21-24	Abraham: evidence from the law; faith <u>without deeds</u> is useless
	B'	2.25-26	Rahab: one who was righteous for what she <u>did</u>

3.1-4.10 Section B' (28 verses) Teachers: the Tongue; Wisdom; Worldliness

A (12 verses)	A	3.1-4 (//)	'brothers', teachers will be judged more strictly
	B	3.5-9	The tongue: <u>blessing and cursing</u>
	B'	3.10a,10b-12	The mouth: <u>blessing and cursing</u> , ' <u>my brothers</u> ' (2x)
B (6 verses)	A	3.13-14	Who is wise and knowing?
	B	3.15-16	Wisdom: not from above...
	B'	3.17-18	Wisdom from above...
B' (10 verses)	A	4.1-3	So what of the <u>fight</u> s and <u>quarrels</u> amongst you?
	B	4.4-6	Friendship with the world's ways is hateful to God
	B'	4.7-10	Submit to God, humble yourselves before him

4.11-5.20 Section A' (27 verses) The Rich; Patience in Suffering; Prayer and Sins

A (13 verses)	A	4.11-12 (//)	'brothers', speak not against, or judge your brother, God is judge
	B	4.13-17	Making money, boasting, <u>sin of not doing</u> what you know
	B'	5.1-6	A warning to rich people, who cheat others
B (5 verses)	A	5.7-8	'brothers', be patient till the Lord's coming
	B	5.9a-c	'brothers', <u>don't grumble</u> against each other
	B'	5.10-11	'brothers', (<u>don't grumble</u>) remember the prophets
B' (9 verses)	A	5.12a-c	'Now above all... <u>brothers</u> ', swear not by heaven or anything at all
	B	5.13-18	Prayer and praying, <u>sins forgiven</u>
	B'	5.19-20	'brothers', turning a sinner around, saves and <u>covers sins</u>

An English translation follows. It is based on the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece and mixes phrasings from the New International Version and the Literal English translation which is linked to the Nestle Greek Text in the Interlinear Greek-English New Testament (Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd, London, 1974). My primary purpose of this hybrid translation is to demonstrate to those who cannot read the Greek of my *New Testament; New Testimony...*, Fourth Edition, 2013: 1) the letter's structure; and 2) the letter rhetor's writing style:

PROLOGUE: JAS 1:1

James, of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
servant, to the twelve tribes, to the ones in the dispersion,
'Greetings.'

SECTION A: JAS 1:2-27 The ‘crown of life’ is for the humble, faithful brother who perseveres in facing trials, lives a righteous life and proves his religion is true (the rich can expect nothing):

PART A: JAS 1:2-11

Consider it pure joy, <u>my brothers</u> , whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³	a	A
knowing that the testing of your faith develops perseverance . ⁴	b	
and perseverance must finish its work	(a)	b'
so that you may be mature and complete,	(b)	
not lacking anything. ⁵	(b')	
But if any of you lacks wisdom,	a	B
let him ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault,		
and it will be given to him. ⁶		
But let him ask in faith,	b	
nothing doubting ,		
because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷		
For let that man not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸	b'	
he is a double-minded ('two-souled') man,		
unstable in all his ways. ⁹		
But let the brother in humble circumstances boast in his high position. ¹⁰	a	B'
and the one who is rich in his low position,		
because he will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹		
For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant;	b	
its blossom falls,		
and its beauty is destroyed.		
In the same way,	b'	
the rich man will fade away,		
even while he goes about his business.		

PART B: JAS 1:12-18

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial ,		A
because when he has stood the test ,		
he will receive the crown of life that he has promised to those who love him. ¹³		
When tempted, let no one say, "God is tempting me."		B
for God is not tempted by evil,		
and he tempts no one; ¹⁴		
but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed; ¹⁵		
then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶		
Don't err, <u>my dear brothers</u> . ¹⁷		B'
Every good and perfect gift is from above,		
coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,		
who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸		
Having made it his purpose,		
he brought us to birth through the word of truth ,		
that we might be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.		

PART B': JAS 1:19-27

<u>My dear brothers</u> , know this: Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. ²⁰		A
For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹		
Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent		
and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save your souls. ²²		
Become doers of the word , and not hearers only, misleading yourselves. ²³		B
Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,		
this person is like a man who looks at his face ('of his birth') in a mirror ²⁴		
and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵		
But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom,		
and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—		
this person will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶		
If anyone considers himself religious		B'
and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue,		
he deceives himself.		
Of this one his religion is worthless. ²⁷		
Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:		
to look after orphans and widows in their distress,		
to keep oneself from being polluted by the world .		

SECTION B: JAS 2:1-26

**You are not to favour anyone over the poor, the law judges all;
both faith and works are necessary for righteousness:**

PART A: JAS 2:1-9

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism;² A
for if enters into your synagogue a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothes,
and there enters also **a poor man** in shabby clothes.³
and you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes
and say, "Here's a good seat for you,"
but say to **the poor man**, "You stand there"
or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"⁴
have you not discriminated among yourselves
and become judges with evil thoughts?⁵

Listen, my beloved brothers: B
Has not God chosen those who are **poor** in the eyes of the world
to be rich in faith
and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?⁶
But you have insulted **the poor**.
Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?
Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?⁷
Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?⁸

If you really keep **the royal law** according to Scripture, B'
"Love your neighbour as yourself,"
you are doing right.⁹
But if you show favouritism, you sin
being convicted **by the law** as lawbreakers.¹⁰

PART B: JAS 2:10-17

For he who keeps **the whole law**, yet stumbles in one thing, he is guilty of breaking all of it.¹¹ A
For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder."
If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.¹²

Speak and so do **as those who are going to be judged by the law** that gives freedom,¹³ B
for judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful:
mercy triumphs over judgment!¹⁴

What is the profit, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no works, B'
can such faith save him?¹⁵
If a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food¹⁶
and one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,"
but does nothing about his physical needs,
what good is it?¹⁷
In the same way, **faith by itself**, if it is not accompanied **by works**, is dead.

PART B': JAS 2:18-26

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have works." A
Show me your faith without the works,
and I will show you my faith by the works.¹⁹
You believe that there is one God. Well you do! Even the demons believe and shudder.²⁰
Do you want evidence, O foolish man, that **faith without works** is barren?²¹

Was not our ancestor **Abraham** considered righteous B
for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?²²
You see that his faith and his works were working together,
and his faith was made complete by what he did.²³
And the scripture was fulfilled that says,
"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,"
and he was called God's friend.²⁴
You see that a person is **justified by works** and **not by faith alone**.²⁵

Likewise also, was not **Rahab** the prostitute considered righteous B'
for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?²⁶
For as the body without the spirit is dead;
so **faith without works** is dead.

SECTION B': JAS 3:1-4.10 Control yourself, your tongue, live in wisdom, with works and humility:

PART A: JAS 3:1-12

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers,
knowing that **we will be judged** more strictly. ² A

We all **stumble** in many ways.

If anyone never **stumbles** in what he says, he is **a perfect man**, able to bridle his whole body. ³

Now if we put bridles into the mouths of horses
to make them obey us,
we can turn the whole animal. ⁴

Behold also ships:

although they are so large and are driven by strong winds,
they are directed by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵

So also the **tongue**, it is a small part of the body, and it makes great boasts. B

Behold what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark ⁶
And the tongue is a fire, a world of evil.

The tongue is set among our parts of the body corrupting the whole person,
and inflaming the course of nature,
and being inflamed by gehenna. ⁷

For all nature, of both beasts and birds, of both reptiles and sea creatures,
are tamed
and have been tamed by man. ⁸

But no man can tame the tongue.

It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. ⁹

With this we bless our Lord and Father,
And with this we curse men who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰

Out of the same **mouth** comes forth **blessing and cursing!** B'

It is not fitting, my brothers, that this should be: ¹¹ fresh water and salt water cannot flow from the same spring. ¹²

Cannot, my brothers, a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine figs, neither a salt spring produce fresh water.

PART B: JAS 3:13-18

Who is wise and understanding among you? A

Let him show it by good conduct, by his **works in humility of wisdom**. ¹⁴

But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵

This "**wisdom**" is not come down from above
but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil, ¹⁶

for where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and every worthless practice. ¹⁷ B

But the wisdom that comes from above B'

is first of all pure;

then peace-loving, considerate, submissive,
full of mercy and of good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸

and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for the one making peace.

PART B': JAS 4:1-10

What causes fights and quarrels among you? A

Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ²

You want something but don't get it.

You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.

You quarrel and fight.

You do not have,
because **you do not ask God**. ³

And when you ask you do not receive,

because **you ask with wrong motives**,
that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? B

Whoever therefore chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God, ⁵

or do you think scripture says without reason:

"the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely"? ⁶

But he gives us more grace,

wherefore it says:

"God opposes **the proud** but gives grace to **the humble**". ⁷

Submit yourselves, therefore, to God; B'

but **oppose the devil** and he will flee from you; ⁸

draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded ('two-souled') people, ⁹ grieve, mourn and wail.

Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom: ¹⁰ **humble** yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

SECTION A': JAS 4:11-5.20 Judgement of all/of the rich; but persevere; be patient for the Lord's coming:

PART A: JAS 4:11-5.6

Speak not against one another, brothers. A

Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him

speaks against the law and judges the law,

and if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. ¹²

There is **only one Lawgiver and Judge**, the one able to save and destroy, but you, who are you to judge your neighbour? ¹³

Come now you who say, B

"Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

What your life will be.

You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵

Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and we will do this or that." ¹⁶

As it is, you boast and brag.

All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. ^{5:1}

Come now you **rich people**, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. ² B'

Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³

Your gold and silver are corroded and their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.

You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴

Behold! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who reaped your fields are crying out against you.

And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵

You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.

You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. ⁶

You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

PART B: JAS 5:7-11

Be patient, then, brothers, **until the Lord's coming**. A

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how **patient** he is for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸

You too, **be patient**, and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹

Don't grumble against each other, brothers. B

Lest you be judged.

Behold, **the Judge is standing at the door!** ¹⁰

Brothers, as an example of **patience** in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ B'

Behold, we consider blessed those who have **persevered**.

You have heard of Job's **perseverance**

and have seen what the Lord finally brought about;

the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

PART B': JAS 5:12-20

Above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or any other oath. A

But let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no.

Lest under **judgement** you fall. ¹³

Is any one of you in trouble? **He should pray**. B

Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴

Is any one of you sick?

He should call the elders of the church

and let them pray over him

having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord ¹⁵

and the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well;

and the Lord will raise him up;

and **if he has sinned**, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶

Therefore **confess your sins** to each other, and pray for each other, so that you may be healed.

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. ¹⁷

Elijah was a man just like us:

he prayed earnestly that it would not rain,

and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸

Again he prayed,

and the heavens gave rain,

and the earth produced its crops. ¹⁹

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth B'

and someone should turn him back, ²⁰

know you that the one turning a **sinner** from the error of his way

will save his soul from death

and **will cover over a multitude of sins**.