

namely, that our omnipresent Savior Who is always with us, sees and knows all things. Nothing is hidden from Him. Thus, when we mistakenly think that our “private conversation” is hidden from the “Judge of all the world,” we are greatly mistaken. Yeshua is listening to every conversation and even knows our non-verbalized thoughts.

Thus, when James states that “the Judge is standing right at the door,” he not only reminds us that the Almighty knows everything we are saying, but he also emphasizes that the Judge is “ready to enter the courtroom” to proclaim His verdict. As the author of Hebrews states:

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Heb 4:13)

The parallel of our text with 4:11–12 is clear. There, James warned against slandering one another and reminds us Who the true Judge is and emphasizes that we are to be doers of God’s commandments and not the judge of His divine ordinances.

Thus, when James states in our current text that “the Judge is standing right at the door,” he intends us to recognize that ever imminent return of our Lord. We are to live with this reality, that Yeshua could return at any time and we therefore purpose within ourselves that when He returns, He will find us faithful, striving to live righteously so as to honor Him.

One is reminded of Rev 3:20.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Rev 3:20)

## **10 – As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.**

James does not mention any specific prophet but simply refers to the prophets of the Tanach as a collective example of enduring suffering for the cause and glory of God. Jeremiah, who suffered at the hands of pagan kings and even by his own people, obviously comes to mind. He was given the message he was to deliver to Israel, but before he began, God told him that the people would not listen to him or receive his message.

You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you. (Jer 7:27)

Their response to Jeremiah's message was total refusal.

"But they say, 'That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.'" (Jer 18:12)

He was beaten, put into stocks (Jer 20:1–2), sentenced to death (Jer 26:11), the divine message he delivered in a scroll was burned (Jer 36:23), and he was thrown into a cistern that had no water, sinking into the mud and left to die (Jer 38:6). And even after being rescued, he was called a liar and dismissed (Jer 43:2).

Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest, was stoned in the very Temple court itself.

Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you.'" So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD. (2Chron 24:20–21)

When James writes of "suffering and patience," we should understand the word "patience" (*μακροθυμία*, *makrothumia*) to mean "the ability to endure or persevere." Paul uses this same term when describing the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience (*μακροθυμία*, *makrothumia*), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22–23)

The final clause, "against such things there is no law," has been variously understood by commentators. I take it to mean that "the work of the Spirit (in the believer's life) is not fixed by a set measure, but is unending."<sup>1</sup> That is, the power to persevere in difficult circumstances,

1 Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (TorahResource, 2010), p. 249.

including being persecuted for one's faith, is given by the Spirit of God as the child of God submits to His leading and waits upon Him for strength to endure.

... *who spoke in the name of the Lord.* – And what was it that caused the prophets of old, of whom James refers, to be so persecuted? It was that their words brought God's truth to the people they addressed, calling them to humble themselves, to repent, and to seek God's forgiveness. This went contrary to their self-centered bent and issued in their attempts to destroy the message of God and those who came speaking it.

**11 – We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.**

*We count those blessed who endured.* The word translated here as "endured" is the Greek ὑπομένω (*hupomenō*) meaning "to persevere," "to remain under" the difficulty or struggle and not to give up. We encountered this same word in 1:12.

Blessed is a man who perseveres ὑπομένω (*hupomenō*) under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.  
(James 1:12)

Thus we learn another important lesson from James' use of the prophets to illustrate his point: it is possible that even though one is speaking the truth and doing so to honor God, he or she may still be persecuted by those who are condemned by the message of truth, for they hate the message and the messenger.

This, of course, shows the fallacy of the so-called "prosperity gospel," that if one will simply say "yes" to "the preacher's invitation," one's life will be sheltered from trouble and persecution and all will be prosperous. Surely the blessing of God comes upon those who are His, but this does not negate the reality that the child of God may experience persecution (to one extent or another) by those who hate the message of truth because it unmask their feeble self-sufficiency.

Surely it is true that the primary goal of our salvation is that God would be glorified, and this can be accomplished regardless of the events that come upon us. We can magnify Him when we are prosperous, and we can glorify Him even when persecuted. This is well demonstrated by the true prophets of old.

*You have heard of the endurance of Job...* – Because the KJV became the most popular Bible throughout the English speaking world, its translation of this phrase produced the well-known phrase, “the patience of Job.” However, the Greek is, once again, the noun ὑπομονή (*hypomonē*) which is cognate to the verb ὑπομένω (*hypomenō*) which we encountered in the first clause of our verse. The verb means “to persevere” and the noun means “perseverance,” that is, “the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the proverbial phrase, “the patience of Job,” should be corrected to “the perseverance of Job.” Granted, patience and perseverance have much in common, but the primary aspect of our word “perseverance” has the added emphasis of remaining faithful even in very difficult times and events.

It is interesting to note that Ezekiel mentions Job together with Noah and Daniel yet he emphasizes “righteousness” as the outstanding virtue of Job.

...even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.” (Ezek 14:20, cf. 14:14)

As Kistemaker notes:

Even in the Book of Job, patience is not one of Job’s outstanding characteristics. Job betrays his impatience when he curses the day of his birth (3:1) and when he says that the “long-winded speeches” of his three friends never end (16:3).<sup>2</sup>

*...and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings* – It was the perseverance of Job that God blessed and it is this that James intends us to see. For in the final chapter of Job we read:

The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had 14,000 sheep and 6,000 camels and 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. He had seven sons and three daughters. (Job 42:12–13)

*...that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.* – The question that may enter the minds of some when they see “bad things happening to good people” is if this somehow diminishes the goodness of God or brings into question His sovereign control of our world. But this is

1 BDAG, “ὑπομένω,” p. 1039.

2 Kistemaker, *James*, p. 169.

the very reason James compels us to consider the prophets and Job. For even though Job encountered great trials and struggles, he persevered and in so doing, proved God to be righteous, holy, and good, and that He is full of compassion and mercy. This is clearly taught in the Tanach itself. Consider the proclamation of God's self-revelation as He met with Moses the second time on Mt. Sinai.

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed,  
 "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious,  
 slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;  
 (Ex 34:6)

Or the words of the Psalmist:

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and  
 abounding in lovingkindness. (Ps 103:8)

Though James does not reference such texts as these from the Tanach, he uses a word in our verse which is only found here in the whole of the Apostolic Scriptures. It is the Greek word *πολύσπλαγχνός* (*polusplagxnos*) which combines two words: *polus* meaning "very," "a great number" and *splagxnon* (literally) meaning, "inward parts," but is the Greek way of describing deep feelings of "love and affection."

The point that James intends for us to grasp is this: while our English translation has "full of compassion," the word used in our text would favor a more superlative description: "abounding in compassion" or "overflowing with compassion."

Thus, the emphasis James desires to give us is that nothing can come into our lives but what God intends for our good and His glory. Therefore, being infinite in His compassion, He never fails to give to His own all that is necessary to persevere in genuine faith and in so doing, to bring Him the glory He deserves.

Thus we see that James, as he comes to the conclusion of this epistle, takes us back to the beginning, thus forming "bookends" to the whole.

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has  
 been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the  
 Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

**12 – But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.**

In the context, the opening phrase, “But above all” (Πρὸ πάντων δέ, *pro pantōn de*), literally “before all,” seems clearly to be attached to the preceding context since James uses the connective *de* in this opening phrase. As such, this helps us to understand a more specific application of the admonition which follows. Since the previous context describes the various aspects of suffering and the apparent contention and division this might cause between people within the believing community, James now cautions his readers to be especially careful with their words. For very often in times of turmoil that may open the way to dissension within the local community of believers, people may say things or make declarations that are unwise and foment division rather than fostering healing and unity.

Thus, James is continuing his emphasis upon being careful about our speech, for in the previous context he warns us not to “grumble” against each other (5:9), and even this continues the exhortation given in 3:1–12 in which he reminds us that

...the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! (James 3:5)

But in considering this epistle as a whole, the phrase “But above all” may signal the concluding exhortation of the Apostle. Here, once again, he is emphasizing how important it is to guard one’s speech, for when one engages in *lashon hara*, “gossip,” “slander,” “evil speech,” this can become that which foments division and undermines the good that has been established within the believing community. Such negativity may likewise weaken the community, rendering them less and less effective to carry out the commands and desires of Yeshua. Rather than being a light to the world of the love of Yeshua for His own, the community divided by infighting fails to be a witness of God’s saving and redeeming power. Indeed, that the primary emphasis of this last chapter is that of unity within the local assembly of believers is highlighted by the fact that James uses the term “brothers/brethren” five times in these final verses of his epistle (5:7, 9 10, 12, 19).

In fact, James uses the Greek ἀδελφοί (*adelphoi*, plural of *adelphos*) 19 times in our epistle. It is clear that the plural *adelphoi* can refer simply

to siblings, i.e., brothers and sisters.<sup>1</sup> The point is this: all who through faith are “in Messiah Yeshua” are true and eternally unified in the same family of God. And here is the obvious application of this eternal truth: we must strive to see others who profess faith in Messiah and show the truth of their profession by their lives, as one with us. For even with our many diversities, we are spiritually united in God’s family.

...do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath – There have been some Christian groups that took these words of James to mean that Scripture, and thus God, prohibits taking any verbal oath or pledge. Most predominate in this regard were some (not all) of the Anabaptists, from which were formed the Quakers, Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, and Schwarzenau Brethren. In more ancient times, the Essenes, the Qumran sect of the Dead Sea Scrolls, were described by Josephus as condemning oath-taking as equal with perjury.

They dispense their anger after a just manner, and restrain their passion. They are eminent for fidelity, and are the ministers of peace; whatsoever they say also is firmer than an oath; but swearing is avoided by them, and they esteem it worse than perjury; for they say, that he who cannot be believed without [swearing by] God, is already condemned.<sup>2</sup>

But to interpret James’ words in this way is not only to misunderstand this inspired text, but also fails to take into account the wider teaching of Scripture. In the Tanach, the phrase “May God do so to X, and more” (כִּי יַעֲשֶׂה-לִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יוֹסִיף / כִּי יַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יוֹסִיף) is an oath formula and we find it numbers of times. Here are some examples:

*Eli, speaking to Samuel about the vision the Lord gave to him:*

He said, “What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you.” (1Sam 3:17)

Then King Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, “May God do so to me and more also, if Adonijah has not spoken this word against his own life. (1Ki 2:23)

*Ruth to Naomi* – Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me. (Ruth 1:17)

1 BDAG, “ἀδεῖλος,” p. 18, where the lexicon shows such usage by Euripides, Oxyrhynchus Papyri—list 4, etc.

2 Josephus, *War* 2:135 (2.8.6).

Moreover, the Torah speaks directly about taking an oath, and the requirement that it be kept:

You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. (Lev 19:12)

If (When) a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (Num 30:2)

When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. (Deut 23:21)

When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. (Ecc 5:4)

We see, then, that what James is emphasizing is precisely what Yeshua Himself taught in the sermon on the mount, and the parallel language is obvious:

| Matthew 5:34, 35, 37                 | James 5:12            |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| But I say to you                     | But above all         |
| make no oath at all                  | do not swear          |
| either by heaven                     | either by heaven      |
| for it is the throne of God          |                       |
| or by the earth                      | or by earth           |
| for it is the footstool of His feet  |                       |
| or by Jerusalem                      |                       |
| for it is the city of the great King |                       |
| let your word be "yes, yes"          | your yes is to be yes |
| or 'No, no'                          | your 'no, no'         |
| anything beyond these                | so that you may not   |
| is of the evil one.                  | fall under judgment.  |

While the date of James' Epistle is not certain, the general consensus of biblical scholarship is that it was written in the 40's or 50's CE. As such, James would have known the teaching of Yeshua, not only



by reading what others may have written down, but by having heard His word personally as well as having them repeated by others of the Apostles who undoubtedly continued to discuss and even memorize His teachings. Thus it is clear that James has the words of Yeshua in mind as he writes these final lines of his epistle, words which no doubt resonated in his own heart and mind.

The point to be made is that in Yeshua's teaching on oaths, which James here incorporates, He most assuredly did not prohibit taking an oath! Indeed, the command to let one's "no be no" and one's "yes be yes" is a form of an oath and taking a solemn pledge verbally and then doing all in one's power to keep what one has promised.

But what then do the inspired words of Yeshua and James mean when they state that one should not "swear" or "make an oath?" Since this divinely ordained teaching cannot be contradicting what the inspired words of the Tanach teaches, we must understand that such strong language prohibits making an oath or a promise which one never intended to keep in the first place, but in taking the oath spoke words falsely in order to gain that which one desired.

Another emphasis seems to be James' point as well, and this is that our word, even apart from taking a solemn oath, ought to be trustworthy and something others can count upon. When we say "yes" or "no," we must do all in our power to keep what we have promised. Thus, neither Yeshua nor James are prohibiting the taking of an oath. In our culture, such is necessary if one is going to be a witness in a court of law, or if one wants to immigrate and become a citizen, as well as in other circumstances. But the point is that we who are followers of Yeshua ought to be fully committed to keeping our promises. This is at the heart of what James emphasizes early (2:8), that the whole Torah can be summed up in loving God and loving one's neighbor (Lev 19:18). Indeed, keeping one's word is to demonstrate obedience to God and a genuine caring for others.

Oaths, as we may also call them, are by no means consistently forbidden in Scripture. God himself takes oaths to guarantee the fulfillment of what he has promised (see, e.g., Heb 3:11, 18; 4:3; 6:13, 16; 7:21). The OT law did not prohibit oaths but demanded that a person be true to the oath he had taken.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Moo, *James*, p. 233.

Our mere word should be as utterly trustworthy as a signed document, legally correct and complete.<sup>1</sup>

### 13 – Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

In the concluding verses of our epistle, vs. 13–18 are a unit characterized by six imperatives (commands). The first is in our verse, “he must pray” (προσευχέσθω < προσεύχομαι). This is for anyone who is “suffering” (κακοπαθέω, *kakopatheidō*). The word itself means “to suffer misfortune” and “to bear hardship patiently.”<sup>2</sup> Here we see a general teaching of the Scriptures, that even in this fallen world true believers may suffer hardship and one should not immediately think such suffering is punishment from God, for He may bring hardship to teach us lessons and to love Him more, something we might not learn otherwise.

Calvin notes regarding this opening phrase of our verse:

He means that there is no time in which God does not invite us to himself. For afflictions ought to stimulate us to pray; prosperity supplies us with an occasion to praise God. But such is the perverseness of men, that they cannot rejoice without forgetting God, and that when afflicted they are disheartened and driven to despair.<sup>3</sup>

...*Then he must prayer* – Our Father will always receive our prayers and act on our behalf, for our heavenly High Priest, Yeshua Himself, intercedes for us at the very throne of the Father. At times, the child of God may become weak in faith and wonder if God actually does care for those who are His. But the Scriptures teach us that God may even allow suffering in order to draw us closer to Him, for our risen and reigning Savior, our heavenly High Priest, intercedes for all those for whom He died.

who is the one who condemns? Messiah Yeshua is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Rom 8:34)

1 Martin, *James*, p. 204, quoting Mitton. Moffatt, J. *The General Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1928), p. 193

2 BDAG, “κακοπαθέω,” p. 500.

3 Calvin, *James*, pp. 354-55.