

James (“Ya’akov”)

Chapter 2, Part 1: v1-13

The book of James is all about faith. How faith thinks, how faith acts, how faith matures. It is a call to believers to grow up in faith, and not remain “baby” believers in immature faith. It is about DOING and LIVING a mature faith, based on the Word of God – being DOERS, not just hearers. This daily “growing up” is sometimes a struggle against our flesh nature. It is the age old battle between our flesh and our spirit. Sometimes we need reminding of this, and reminding that some of what we do and think is evil in God’s sight, even if it seems ordinary, or “not so bad” in our own eyes. James continues to point out the things his brothers were doing that needed some fine-tuning. He begins this chapter by calling a common human practice to their attention – partiality and discrimination. The early believers did it, and we do it. But it is evil in God’s sight.

James next moves into the well-known passage about faith and works. Most people misunderstand this. This is not about good works. It is about a life that reflects our faith. It is again about DOING, not just hearing.



¹ My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. ² For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³ and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” ⁴ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

- This section hardly needs any commentary. Put bluntly, it would say, **“Your faith in the Master Yeshua cannot be mixed with favoritism.”**
- By adding the word **“glory”** after the Lord’s mention, James is indicating that no one is considered above or below another because we are all the same (all spiritually bankrupt!) before the only One deserving glory. (The words **“Lord of”** do not appear in the original manuscript. Only the word **“glory”** appears after Yeshua HaMashiach. “Lord of” is added for clarity.)
- Someone once said **“The way we behave toward people indicates what we believe about God!”** That is a profound statement worthy of much thought and prayer, and is exactly what James is speaking of throughout this letter. Our behavior reveals our faith, and even more, should reveal the character of the One in whom we have placed that faith and trust. Are we faithful witnesses to the character of our Lord and Father? Will others see Him in us?
- It is interesting to note that the **Greek word for “assembly” is sunagoge**, which means an assembly of people, or a congregation, specifically a Jewish congregation. It is our English word “synagogue.” The early believers were mostly Jewish, and met in their local synagogues, until persecution from other Jews and Romans pushed them into homes or even “underground.” This word, however, does not necessarily imply that these groups of believers met in established places like synagogues. This word implies an “assembly” or a group, meeting anywhere.

- *“...a poor man in filthy clothes...”* The Greek word used for “poor man” literally means a crouching, destitute beggar. James is using the polar opposites here to include the entire spectrum of dirt poor to dripping rich. The bottom line – NONE OF IT MATTERS! We should all see ourselves as the crouching beggar here. That is our appearance before the God of the Universe before we are covered in the righteousness of His Son. We need to understand that God has no vision for the outward man. He sees only the inward person.
- The behavior James is describing here is unfortunately all too common. It seems to be a human trait to place more value and status on people who look “rich.” We all tend to do this. In our worldly thinking, the person who is rich or dresses in fine clothes, is of more value to us than the poor man outside panhandling or begging for a handout. When both of these people “come into our assembly” how are they treated? We tend to show favoritism to those who “look” better. This is how the world thinks, and we are not to be part of the world. And, more importantly, this is not how our Savior thinks. Yeshua sees straight through the outer covering into the heart. He never shows partiality, never makes judgment based on outward appearances. We must learn to do as He does.
- It is likely that James is addressing this issue simply because it IS a human tendency that is not Godly, and does not please God, and has perhaps manifested itself throughout the early assembly of believers. Human behavior has not changed since the beginning. Our ways are not God’s ways, and we must train ourselves to act more like Him, than the world. It is a matter of practice and training, but first it is a matter of the heart. If our hearts are truly changed by Him, if we have a relationship and not just rituals, then we are far more likely to see others as He does.
- James is also **cautioning about what could be called “stratification”** in the Body of the Messiah. There should be no separation, no differentiation, within the believing assembly.
- **COMMENTARY: “Jewish people in that day coveted recognition and honor, and vied with one another for praise. Our Lord’s parables in Luke 14:7-14 deal with the problem, and also His denunciation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:1-39. We have this same problem with us today. Pyramid climbers are among us, not only in politics, industry, and society, but also in the church. Almost every church has its cliques, and often, new Christians find it difficult to get in. Some church members use their offices to enhance their own images of importance. Many of the believers James wrote to were trying to seize spiritual offices, and James had to warn them. (Wiersbe)**
- *“...have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?”* Partiality is frequently discussed in God’s Law. He references it repeatedly as being something that those who follow Him do NOT do. Romans 2:11 says there is *no partiality in God*. He doesn’t do it – we shouldn’t do it. Showing “partiality” is discrimination. Discrimination is a natural, sinful, human tendency. Here James calls it evil. We do this every day. We see people different than ourselves and we immediately judge them. We discriminate. And, if engaged, we are likely to show partiality. This is evil. It is a sin. We sin in thought as well, not just actions.

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

- *“Listen, my beloved brethren...”* This issue of showing partiality among others must have been a serious one to James. Here he is essentially pleading with his brothers and sisters in Yeshua to “listen up!” Pay attention....this is important.

- He is now going to show them the folly and worthlessness of their practice of playing favorites of the rich over the poor. Don't be deceived into thinking this was written only for the early believers. You and I do this daily!
- There are many scriptures that indicate to us that God has indeed selected the poor of this world, those who are scraping and scrabbling just to survive, to have riches unseen. They have a richness of faith, and contrary to what is seen on the surface, they are heirs of the wealthiest Father ever known. The word used for "rich" here is *plousios*, which means wealthy, and literally abounding in riches. This is often the faith of the poor in material wealth. They are rich in spirit, abounding in faith.
- Consider these references in scripture which the Hebrew people knew well:
 - *"But He saves the needy from the sword, From the mouth of the mighty, And from their hand. So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth."* (Job 5:15-16)
 - *"He delivers the poor in their affliction, and opens their ears in oppression."* (Job 36:15)
 - *"For the needy shall not always be forgotten; The expectation of the poor shall not perish forever."* (Psalm 9:18)
 - *"... You, O God, provided from Your goodness for the poor."* (Psalm 68:10b)
 - *"But I am poor and sorrowful; Let Your salvation, O God, set me up on high. I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving.... For the LORD hears the poor, And does not despise His prisoners."* (Psalm 69:29-30, 33) This sounds very much like James' previous thought of the poor being exalted because God lifts them on high. These people to whom James is writing were believing Hebrews who knew the Word of God, which was limited to what we call the "Old Testament" at that time. They were familiar with these concepts.
 - *"For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight."* (Psalm 72:12-14)
 - *"He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer."* (Psalm 102:17)
 - *"But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;"* (Isaiah 11:4)
- And in His well-known and quoted sermon on the mount, Jesus reiterated the blessings for those who please God. **These reference riches, but not the riches of this world.** Yeshua speaks of spiritual wealth and offers a level playing field of blessing for those who practice what he teaches, regardless of earthly wealth or status:
 - *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:3-10) The rich and the poor alike are blessed if they do these things. God does not look upon earthly status or wealth and neither should we.
- In chapter 1 James says that the poor man is exalted, and should rejoice in this. In this chapter he makes it clear than anyone who despises or shows partiality to this poor person is sinning, and not at all pleasing God.

- **COMMENTARY:** The Lord is on the side of the poor. He was born in a borrowed stable. He had to borrow loaves and fishes from a little boy to feed the crowd. ‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.’ (Mt 8:20) he had to borrow a coin to illustrate the truth. He borrowed a donkey to present Himself to Jerusalem. He borrowed a room to celebrate Passover. He died on a borrowed cross – it belonged to Barabbas, not to him [actually it belonged to US!] They put Him in a borrowed tomb – it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. (unknown author)

- After remembering our Lord’s earthly status and wealth, we should reconsider how we think of earthly “stuff.” It is mere “hay and stubble” which will eventually disappear.

- James is using a common and simplified example of playing favorites by citing the rich as opposed to the poor. **But there are many other forms of favoritism**, personal bias, and downright prejudiced thinking. None of these are acceptable to God. ALL OF THEM ARE SIN. We tend to judge and make snap decisions about people based on what we see with our eyes, over what is revealed in the heart. We often show favoritism based on: male and female, black and white, red and yellow (i.e., ethnic backgrounds), rich and poor, smart and not-so-smart, status and position, educational level, faith or religion, past transgressions, and just about any other kind of outward appearance we can either detect or know about. God says this is sin, for these are evil thoughts.

- **COMMENTARY:** “Sad to say, we often make the same mistakes. When visitors come into our churches, we tend to judge them on what we see outwardly rather than what they are inwardly. Dress, color of skin, fashion, and other superficial things carry more weight than the fruit of the Spirit that may be manifest in their lives. We cater to the rich because we hope to get something out of them, and we avoid the poor because they embarrass us. Jesus did not do this, and He cannot approve of it. How do we practice the deity of Christ in our human relationships? It is really quite simple: *look at everyone through the eyes of Christ*. If the visitor is a Christian, we can accept him because *Christ lives in him*. If he is not a Christian, we can receive him because *Christ died for him*. It is Christ who is the link between us and others, and He is a link of love. The basis for relationship with others is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Any other basis is not going to work. Furthermore, God can use even the most unlikely person to bring glory to His name. He used Peter and Zaccheus and John Mark, and He can use that poor man whom we might reject.” (Wiersbe)

- **“But you have dishonored the poor man.”** By playing favorites, James indicates that we “dishonor” that person. The Greek word for dishonor gives us a bit more punch. It is *atimazo*, which literally means to *condemn and maltreat, despise, make someone suffer shame, and embarrass them*. “Dishonor” is really too kind a word. We need to think more on the heavy side of this Greek word. By showing favoritism, we despise and condemn others, and truly cause them harm. In these terms, it is easy to understand the sinful nature of this behavior.

- **“Do not the rich oppress you...”** James is trying to use a little logic here. Why would they show partiality to the rich and wealthy when those are the very ones who make their lives difficult and often oppress them? The wealthy Jews in particular were especially nasty to and looked down on the lower class Jews, and treated them very badly. Perhaps this practice was creeping into the newly formed Church, the Body of the Messiah, and James wanted to put a stop to it.

- Imagine James having been converted himself, since he definitely did not start out a believer or a follower of the Messiah Yeshua. He watched his brother intently and knew of His impartial behavior, yet now His followers are displaying worldly actions instead of those of the Messiah. James is frustrated here, and his letter shows it.

⁸ *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; ⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

- James is referring to the Old Testament Law, or Torah (“instruction”), but here he calls it the “royal law.” In Greek, these words are *basilikos nomos*, which **gives this Law some new definition**. This is not just a series of laws, “do’s and don’ts” and other such instruction. These are the royal and regal ways of the sovereign King. These are not suggestions, they are the expectations of Godly behavior before a mighty King.
- He goes on to quote one of these laws, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* He is citing Leviticus 19:18 – *“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”* James says to his brothers, and to us, that if we do this, we are doing well. Jesus said that the entire Law was wrapped up in this. However, as always, look for the “but,” which is coming in the next verse.
- *“...but if you show partiality, you commit sin...”* And, here is the “but.” James congratulates those are truly able to meet the commandment regarding loving one another as we love ourselves (*however, we must say this is much harder to do than we think, so it is rather unlikely that many have actually thoroughly succeeded in this!*) BUT, he points out that although they may be able to do this, **if they show any partiality, any favoritism at all, they have broken the law and are convicted by it.** They have sinned and are found guilty. It doesn’t matter to what degree or how, they have sinned. The Torah is full of instruction regarding partiality. The Hebrew people know this, yet they have apparently overlooked it in their human (fleshly) responses to others.
- Just in case you might consider this showing of partiality or favoritism not to be too much of a “big deal” to God, as it relates to other “sins,” here is a sampling of this instruction from the Old Testament. It is a sinful human tendency, and God has addressed it many times, yet we still do it.
 - Exodus 23:3 *“You shall not show partiality to a poor man...”*
 - Deuteronomy 1:17 *“You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great....”*
 - Deuteronomy 10:17 *“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality...”*
 - Deuteronomy 16:19 *“You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality...”*
 - 2 Chronicles 19:7 *“Now therefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes.”*
 - Job 13:10 *“He will surely rebuke you If you secretly show partiality.”*
 - Job 32:21 *“Let me not, I pray, show partiality to anyone; Nor let me flatter any man.”*
 - Job 37:24 *“Therefore men fear Him; He shows no partiality to any who are wise of heart.”*
 - Psalm 82:2 *“How long will you judge unjustly, And show partiality to the wicked?”*
 - Proverbs 18:5 *It is not good to show partiality to the wicked...”*
 - Proverbs 24:23 *“These things also belong to the wise: It is not good to show partiality in judgment.”*
 - Proverbs 28:21 *“To show partiality is not good, ...”*
 - Malachi 2:9 *“Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways But have shown partiality in the law.”*

¹⁰ For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

- *“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”* Wow, this is the most convicting and humbling statement James has made so far. In this short verse, James makes clear the entire reason for our need for atonement. We cannot keep the Law, because even if we keep all of it and break just one “small” part, we are guilty of breaking it all. God is not partial. He is completely and fully holy. Any sin is sin. Any size of sin is sin. Any part of the Law broken is sin. And we cannot meet it. This very concise statement is good for us to remember, and especially good when we consider those “harmless” sins. There is no such thing as a harmless sin. It is an affront to God, and it is sin, worthy of conviction. The penalty for breaking any part of the Law is the same as for breaking all of it – death. Unless we accept the substitutionary sacrifice of Yeshua. It is good to think on these words very soberly.
- James goes on to present a sort of “chain link” analogy as he compares one sin to another and states that by keeping one and breaking another (*he references some pretty heavy duty sins here, but he could have also used envy, lying, lust or anything else we might rank “not as bad” as murder and adultery*) we have broken them all. The analogy to this might be compared to a chain suspended over a great chasm consisting of ten links (10 Commandments as a summary of the law). How many of those links would need to snap to plunge us into the abyss? Only one. It only takes one sin to break the entire law.
- *“So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.”* The “law of liberty” is the law that sets one free. It seems on the surface to be what we call a non-sequitur, or one thing that does follow another thing. (*“Non-sequitur” is Latin for “it does not follow.”*) It would not seem initially that “liberty” or “freedom” would logically follow the word law. This might also qualify as an “oxymoron” (*Greek for “sharp-dull,” meaning two things that are put together that do not normally go together, sometimes to create a paradox meaning, a mystery of sorts*) Either way, the law and liberty don’t seem to go together. The law puts us in bondage. Any law can place us in bondage to it. But here James says that **there is a law that actually provides freedom**. What would that be? Jesus said: *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:31-32) He also said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to Father except through Me.”* (John 14:6) So, it follows that the law that puts us into bondage is followed by freedom that is found only in the Messiah. The “law of liberty” then is actually the “law of the Messiah.” It is a spiritual “law” (*just as we have physical laws like gravity, etc.*) that freedom from the bondage of the law is only found in Yeshua.
- What James is saying then, is that those of us who believe and have accepted the free gift of salvation from Jesus **must behave as the Messiah instructed us to behave**. We can find those behaviors in the Gospels, especially in the final discussion and teaching that Jesus had on earth with His disciples the night before He died.



- We can sum up those “laws” from chapters 13-16 of John as follows. The “law of liberty” or the “**law of Yeshua**” includes:

- 1. Abide in Jesus.** *Stay close to Him always. Don’t wander away.*
- 2. Obey His Words.** *Live a life of obedience to His commands and do things His way, not our way. Jesus did not come to abolish the “law” but to fulfill it. The new covenant (Jeremiah 31) states that He will write His laws on our hearts. By the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, we will know how we are to behave and act, and what obedience looks like. We still make the choice, however, to be obedient, or not. Applying this to the letter from James means that although we know how to act, we know what a mature faith looks like, we must still choose to live it and show it to others. Favoritism, the subject of this part of the letter from James, is of the flesh, not of God. We are disobedient if we choose to act this way.)*
- 3. Receive and rely on the Holy Spirit.** *He will guide us into all truth, teach us, sanctify us.*
- 4. Pray in Jesus’ Name.** *Stand in His “stead” as His ambassador, empowered to do His will, and ask as He would ask.*
- 5. Love one another.** *Love fellow believers as Jesus has loved us. This can also extend to non-believers. We are to love everyone, as difficult as that may be, as God loves everyone. We know the old adage that we can hate the sin, but not the sinner. God loves sinners. He loves us – that should be proof enough!*

(for more information, see the lessons for John chapters 13-16)

- **“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”** This is actually a rather chilling statement of truth. The Law brings judgment, and without God’s mercy, it will bring death (eternal separation from Him). Judgment follows the law, but with God’s mercy extended to us through the atoning death of His Son, the death sentence is lifted, and we are pardoned. James is saying here that if we do not show the same mercy to others, we are in danger of experiencing judgment without that mercy. Mercy is stronger than judgment. “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” In our vernacular, mercy “trumps judgment.” It always has the last word.
- **There are only two ways we will be judged, and we make the choice.** We are either judged by the Law itself, or we are judged by the mercy and grace provided by the Messiah. And God expects us to use the same mercy when we interact with others. The scriptures are full of this spiritual law.

MAKING SENSE SO FAR....

So far in this short letter we have seen James discuss our responses as believers to three common life situations and issues: How do we behave, how do we respond to...

- 1. Trials and tribulations of life** *(challenges to grow from God)*
- 2. Temptations to do evil** *(seduction by the enemy)*
- 3. The Truth** *(actually doing God’s Word)*

All of this flows into this chapter 2 discussion of favoritism, because all of it deals with our behavior, our outward visible witness to who we are, and to who God is. We were created to have fellowship with God first and foremost. We are in this world to continue growing close to Him, and become more like Him. We are also here to glorify God, to reveal Him to the world at large. We are lights shining in the darkness. Jesus made that clear. If we are lights, do those lights burn brightly with His testimony and witness, or do they waver, flicker and come close to blowing out with the winds of life? Are we like the waves flowing randomly in the wind (see chapter 1), or are we stable and shining a bright light of Jesus into a dark world. This second chapter of James’ letter becomes the 4th point on our life responses. Chapter one is about responding well to trials, temptations and the truth (doing rather than just hearing). Chapter 2 begins with the 4th point, responding to others. We can do all of the first 3 points rather well, but if we fail on this 4th point, our witness has failed, and our lights have gone out. This little letter is all about showing a dark world who we are through our mature faith. More than that, it is about showing a lost world who HE IS, through a life of living for Him, by His Words, and in complete obedience to His Word.

The next part of this letter is a very well known section on faith and works. It all begins to make more sense when we fully understand the first part. It is ALL about a living faith. It is ALL about doing the Truth, not just hearing it. It is ALL about being a witness for our God, His lights, in a dark and lost world. **If we can’t do this, our purpose here is not being fulfilled.** It is critical, and the tone of James’ letter makes that clear.

James (“Ya’akov”)

Chapter 2, Part 2: v14-26

Chapter 1 of this letter was an “in-your-face” reminder that we are people of faith, and that faith must be seen and demonstrated. This entire letter is about our behavior, our daily lives, which are a direct result of our faith in Yeshua, and empowering by the Holy Spirit. In the first chapter James presents three conditions, common to all men, and essentially asks believers to line up their faith with their lives in those areas. We must ask ourselves, **“How do we behave, how do we respond to:”**

1. Trials and tribulations of life (challenges to grow, from God)
2. Temptations to do evil (seduction to evil, from the enemy)
3. The Truth (actually doing God’s Word)

These three areas are expanded as we flow into the first part of chapter 2. (Remember that chapters and verses were added by man. The original manuscript, and in this case letter, was one long document, not separated or distinguished by chapters.) We can add a 4th item as chapter 2 opens a discussion about favoritism and partiality. **“How do we respond to...others.”** Do we show favoritism, partiality, or make judgments based on appearance? Are we separating ourselves into “layers” of importance (i.e., similar to the caste system of India)? If so, that is considered evil, a sinful practice. We are to be lights in this dark world, and our lives should reveal who we are, our faith, and more importantly who HE IS. We are to reveal (glorify Him) His character.

**Faith Works
Faith Behaves
Faith Reveals
Faith Does**

Now in this second part of chapter 2, James **hits at the very core of his letter**, the most important point: our faith, unless it is lived with works that define us and reveal God, is useless. It is dead. A very important, and sobering, thought. This is one of the most misunderstood sections of scripture. “Works” are not good deeds, it is living a good life, one that mirrors the character of God and proves our faith.

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

- We need to read this entire section very carefully. This isn’t about good works. Here’s what this literally says **“What good is it if someone says he has faith, but his life does not show it? That faith will not save him.”** James may phrase in our understanding a sort of question. However, in the original construction, this question implies a negative answer. The statement is then made, “NO, a spoken faith without an actively faithful life will not save anyone.” This should be cause for us to seriously evaluate our own faith. Does it have fruit? Is it seen in our daily lives?
- James does not in any way “demote” the need for faith. That is not the point. **The point is that faith must be coupled with a life that shows it.** We are told throughout the scriptures of the importance, the life saving ability and necessity, of faith:

We are saved by faith: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9) (This does not contradict what James says. Faith without works can’t save, because it is not a living faith, but dead. And works without faith also cannot save, and does not give us any right to boast.)

We must walk (live) by faith: *“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”* (2 Corinthians 5:7)

We cannot please God without faith: *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”* (Hebrews 11:6)

Whatever we do without faith, is sin: *“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”* (Romans 14:23) *(This verse is used by Paul to indicate that keeping the Law is a matter of faith, not legalism.)*

Faith is believing without seeing: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* (Hebrews 11:1) Also, *“and Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed, Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”* (John 20:28-29)

- **Now James adds the ingredient that gives faith validity:** our lives (our “works”) that reflect it. If a person says he or she has faith, they are merely wearing a “label” unless what can be seen by the rest of the world validates that faith. There are two elements to our lives of faith. One is internal (our thinking and heart values) and the other is external (our actions). Both of these are what is spoken of here as “works.” What we must mix with faith is belief that behaves.
- **Matthew has said pretty much the same thing:** *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 7:16-21) James is reiterating exactly what Matthews says in this passage. Only James puts it into a pretty blunt and direct statement: If your faith doesn’t show, it is dead. This is nothing new, but somehow James makes it very, very personal.
- In chapter 1 James references the trials, tests, and most likely persecutions that were part of life for the early disciples. He knows about what was probably *“done to”* these believers. But in reality the very real danger is not so much the things that are done TO us, but the things done BY us. Our responses to what people or the world at large do to us is a real measure of our faith. We might be able to defend our faith, but can we demonstrate it? Words are useless without the behavior that matches them.

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

- Now James uses a real life example to illustrate his point. If we see someone in obvious need, and we merely send them cordially on their way, even wishing them well, without filling the need (*if we are able, and God nudges us to do so*)...then our faith is useless. This is an example of words and works. **Words are no good, if the works aren’t there to support them.** How many times have we wished someone well, even prayed with them, blessed them and kept them on our prayer lists, without taking the required step of faith to help meet their needs – especially if we are fully able to do so? This is not faith. It is just empty words.

COMMENTARY: "Pious clichés and Christian verbiage are not the evidence of saving faith. There must be a vocation to go along with the vocabulary. You can be very pious and say to an individual, "Brother I will pray for you, and I know the Lord will provide." My friend, the Lord put you there as a child of God to do the providing. I get a little weary sometimes when wealthy Christian laymen pat me on the back and say, "Dr McGee, you are doing a fine thing. You are doing the right thing in giving out the Word of God," but they do not have a part in supporting this ministry financially. I have a hard time believing they are sincere. You may piously say to someone, "Oh, brother, I'm for you." Are you for him? Are you back of him? My friend, a living faith produces something—you can identify it." (Mc Gee)

- It is interesting to note that in most cases where God deals with what is called "true faith" or "real religion" He references taking care of those who are in need – which is a real and tangible expression of our faith. He often illustrates this with comments regarding widows and orphans, as James did at the end of chapter 1, but it includes every physical need we might be aware of in anyone around us.
- *"Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* His point is that in these cases our words are useless, dead even. Words cannot clothe, feed or really comfort in times of physical and material needs. And, so it is the same with faith. Once again, the blunt and very serious statement that FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD. Faith alone cannot meet needs, even words of faith.

WOrdS WOrKS

Well DONE is better than well SAID.

- Jesus illustrated James' point in his parable teaching we call the "Good Samaritan." *"And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' " And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)*
- Years ago Mahatma Ghandi, the former prime minister of India was asked a question: **"What is the biggest obstacle to Christianity in India?"** Ghandi's answer is profound, and sadly true: **"Christians."** It is the same anywhere, even right here. This is precisely was James' letter is about.

This entire chapter can be diagrammed in a way that makes sense of James' argument, one that is critical for our understanding. He makes the point about faith five different times, through several defenses and references. (on the next page)

James Chapter 2 Diagrammed

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Sample
of
DEAD
Faith

**DON'T
DO THIS!**
(Partiality)
V. 1-7

WHY?

**DOCTRINAL
REMINDER**
V. 8-13
Nature of
Law & Mercy

Therefore...

**V. 14
POINT 1**

James begins this important chapter by presenting a sample of DEAD faith, or faith without works (proof of faith). He speaks of showing partiality or favoritism to the rich, neglecting or poorly treating the poor. The rich and poor are merely one example of favoritism, which is not pleasing to God and is considered a sin. He reminds his readers of doctrinal truths regarding the nature of the Law, and the character of mercy, giving a stern warning about those who do not show mercy. He then makes his first of 5 separate statements to **underscore his bottom line point: FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD**. He asks a question that demands a negative answer. Faith that is not matched with the proof of "works" cannot save anyone. This entire section assumes one important fact: faith is about a relationship with God, and a relationship with Him will naturally result in obedience and a mature working daily faith.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

No!

**ANOTHER
EXAMPLE**

Following this first sample of DEAD faith, James presents another example of faith without works by comparing "**words**" with "**works**." We cannot just speak words. They must be followed up with action. **This is a faith that BEHAVES.**

**WORDS
VS
WORKS**
V. 15-16

James then follows this "words vs works" argument with a **2nd restating of his main point: FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD**. **This is such a critical point that he makes it 5 times in this chapter alone.**

**Thus also faith
by itself, if it
does not have
works, is dead.**

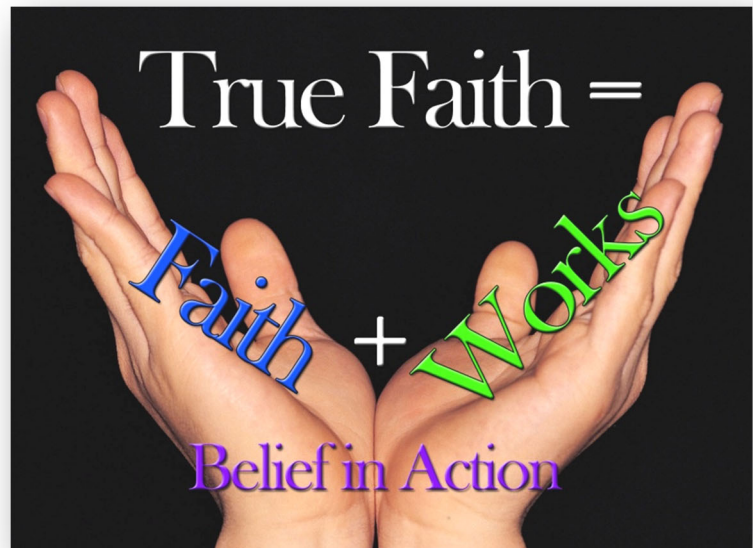
**V. 17
POINT 2**

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! ²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead.

- *“You have faith, and I have works.”* James now tries to anticipate the arguments others might bring to excuse their lack of faith or even “works.” **The statement he makes is really ridiculous** – “you have faith, and I have works.” First of all, works don’t save us. It must be accompanied by a saving faith in the person and work of Yeshua on our behalf. The scriptures are clear on that point. This statement would belong to a non-believer who thinks by doing good things he or she can enter heaven.
- Or we could turn his phrase around, “you have works and I have faith.” That is impossible. Faith does not work this way. One of the most important things we must remember is that **faith begins an eternal relationship that develops, matures and becomes closer and more intimate every day.** It’s hard for us to imagine this kind of relationship, except in a perfect marriage. The relationship we have is with the Father and the Son, and is rooted in the kind of love that always seeks the best for the other. This is the “*agapao*” kind of sold-out love. We all know by our own experiences that this kind of love always seeks to please, and do what we know the other person would desire. This relationship then is proved and seen in how we respond to what God has given us as His expectations and desires. Do we do them, lovingly and consistently...even eagerly? Or do we merely speak about them and use words instead of works? Anyone with the kind of relationship that true faith generates can never have faith without works. It simply isn’t possible – if the faith and the relationship are genuine.
- The Amplified version of this verse reads: *“But someone will say [to you then], You [say you] have faith, and I have [good] works. Now you show me your [alleged] faith apart from any [good] works [if you can], and I by [good] works [of obedience] will show you my faith.”* The entire tone of this is sarcastic, indicating that an “alleged” faith is no faith at all, if it is empty of the obedient works that prove it.
- *“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”* James is placing a challenge in front of anyone who would claim to have a faith without works. It is a dare that no one can take, because no one can “show” his or her faith without works. Words are not works. Labels are not faith. A true faith is seen and proved by an obedient life filled with good works pleasing to the Father, “works” that are a life lived in obedience to His Word. And as James presents throughout this chapter, it is primarily witnessed and observed in how we take care of others. Are there needs under our noses we simply pray about, instead of filling?
- We should note here that **real faith has both INTERNAL and EXTERNAL proofs or “works.”** James is speaking of external proofs, our lives that are visible and observed by others that prove our faith. But there is another dimension to this that cannot be ignored. Do we internally “prove” our faith, to ourselves (God already knows!) by “works” like trusting God, casting away fears, taking every thought captive? This is the place that faith is coupled with internal “works.” This is also the place where genuine external proofs begin, in our compassion and mercy for others that can’t be seen, but are the true generators of external acts of obedient faith.

- *“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”* James is still on the subject of words compared to works. Those who say they have a faith may give “lip service” to it, by saying all the right words. They can believe there is only one God, but they don’t believe IN HIM, or have any kind of relationship with Him. This is probably a reference to the Hebrew “Sh’ma” which is the classic identity statement of belief from Deuteronomy 6:4 *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!”* Again, the sarcastic, and caustic, tone of James here is recognizable. He says anyone who says this is right, but then, even the demons know and believe this, and they “tremble” in that knowledge. What is implied is that we should tremble as well before a holy and righteous God. We must come before Him in awe and obedience, not with empty words.
- *“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead.”* James has repeatedly offered arguments and testimony to make his main point. Here, after an “in-your-face” statement about words-only belief, and how the demons also respond to truths, he again states the main point: FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD. It is useless. By his words and tone, it’s almost as if he is asking, *“what part of this don’t you understand? How many times and in how many ways do I have to tell you this until you finally get it?”* We could ask ourselves the same question. Perhaps James has seen plenty of evidence among the early believers that indicated they did not truly understand what faith was supposed to look like. Note that he phrases a question...“do you want to know...” Maybe he is indicating that in their arrogance and favoritism, they really didn’t want to know the truth. But he’s certainly going to tell them anyway!
- It is interesting to note that the word used above for **“foolish”** is actually the word **kenos** in Greek, which literally means **“empty.”** How appropriate. The one who gives only lip service to faith is truly empty, void of any relationship with the living and One God. Dead inside.



²¹ *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*
²² *Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?* ²³ *And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.* ²⁴ *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*

- James reaches into the Tenach (Hebrew scriptures, our “Old Testament”) for well-known examples for his argument that faith without works is dead. Abraham is considered the Father of the Hebrew people. He is revered among the Hebrew people. He acted in faith, which meant that he believed the covenant God had made with Him, when he obediently followed God’s seemingly horrendous challenge to sacrifice his promised son Isaac.

- We know that God never intended this to happen and spared Isaac at the last moment (see Genesis 22). By this act of faith, Abraham was considered righteous, and called a friend of God. **His faith was proved by his obedient “works.”**
- When God presented this direct order (command) to Abraham, Abraham’s faith in God was not enough. He had to act on it, prove it, by his obedient works. The same is true for us, even though we generally are not faced with such a difficult challenge. But the Word of God is truth, whether it came in a dream, in an audible voice, or in the printed Word then or now. All of the Word is a command of God. All of it is to be lived faithfully as proof of our faith. We cannot pick and choose what suits us. Yes, many times it will be difficult to do so. In fact, probably most of the time, because we are working in direct contrast to our fleshly nature. But the Holy Spirit abides in us, and by taking every thought captive, we can indeed prove our faith by our works.
- We should not confuse this reference with the same one made by Paul regarding Abraham’s faith. As the commentary below shows, **Paul was speaking of *having* the faith, James is speaking of *demonstrating* the faith (by his works).**
- **COMMENTARY: “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? This question is often held to be directly opposed to Paul’s statement that Abraham’s faith, not his works, caused God to declare him righteous (Romans 4:1-5). Paul, however, was arguing for the priority of faith. James argued for the proof of faith. Paul declared that Abraham had faith, and was therefore justified, or declared righteous (Genesis 15:6), prior to circumcision (Genesis 17:11; cf. Romans 4:9). James explained that Abraham’s faith was evident in his practice of Isaac’s sacrifice (Genesis 22:12), and he was therefore justified, or declared righteous. Works serve as the barometer of justification, while faith is the basis for justification.”** (Walvoord and Zuck)

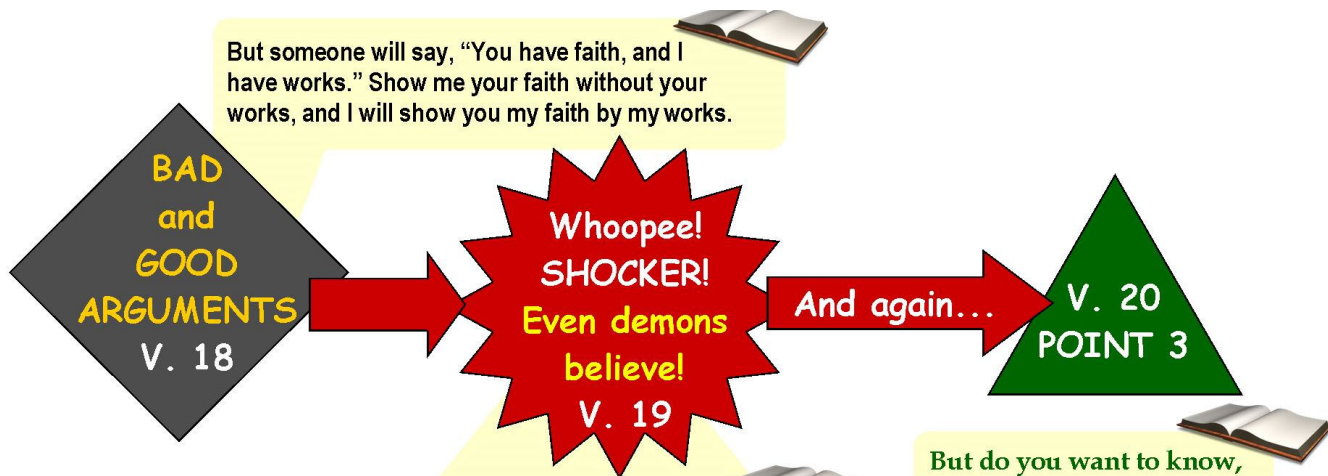
²⁵ *Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*

- The story of Rahab is found in Joshua 2. Rahab was a local prostitute from Jericho. She lived in a pagan city and most likely had no religious training. She was a Canaanite, one of whom God had said to drive out of the land. However, like most of Jericho, she heard the word spread of the mighty wonders and deeds of the God of the Hebrews, the God of Israel. And Rahab chose to believe those “rumors” and chose to follow this God rather than the hundreds of pagan demonic gods of the lands. This was a very good choice on Rahab’s part! Her faith in an unseen and unknown God saved her and her entire family. She proved her faith by hiding the Israelite spies sent into Jericho before the battle – at her peril. The spies promised to save her when they returned to destroy the city. If she had not done this, she would have died in the ensuing battle. **Not only did she live, she went on to become part of Israel.** She was King David’s great-great-great grandmother! (Rahab [Salmon] – Boaz – Obed – Jesse – David)
- It is important to understand that although both Abraham and Rahab had huge challenges to live out their faith, to combine faith with “works,” *and we might be tempted to consider these of far greater importance than taking care of the needs of others...ALL of these things are commands of God and hold equal weight with Him.* Regardless of what we are asked to do, not doing it is a sin. Doing it is what James is speaking of here, combining faith in God with our daily obedience to His Word. Being DOERS and not just HEARERS. THIS is the message of *faith without works is dead*. A dynamic faith, one that acts on what it believes, is the entire message of this letter.

²⁶ *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

- Here now is the fifth time in this chapter that James makes his point. This time he compares the body without a spirit to a faith without works. That body is truly dead, as we know it. Life is a gift from God and man is physically empowered and comes to life by His breath, His spirit. This is both a physical truth, and a spiritual truth. We can exist in body, but unless we are “born again” (as Jesus told Nicodemus in John chapter 3), we are in effect “dead” also. This rebirth in God awakens the spirit to life.
- James **uses this truth to underscore his point about faith without works**. True dynamic (alive) faith shows itself in works.
- We can only hope that by now, having read through this chapter (just a small portion of this letter, but the heart of it all), his readers then and his readers today will finally understand that our faith is meaningless, useless and dead – unless we are obedient to the whole word of God and combine our faith with a lifetime of “works” that prove our faith.
- It is worth asking ourselves at this time...**can we imagine what the “assembly of believers” or even the world at large, would be like if we all practiced DOING and not just HEARING the word of God?** If we all partnered our faith with our daily lives of obedient “works?” It is a very sobering thought and one worth prayer and serious commitment.

As before, these arguments can be diagrammed in a way that might help us understand how James has approached this subject. Verses 18-26 are found on the next page.



James now provides a potential argument someone might offer,

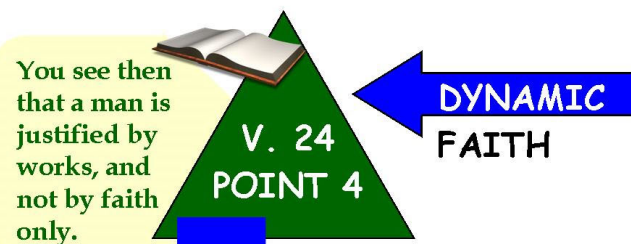
that faith does not have to accompany works, or works do not have to accompany faith. He says that the only way to prove faith is to show it by a life of "works." He presents both bad and good arguments. Next he gets a bit brutal by congratulating those who say they have faith in the One God in one breath, then in the other shocking them by stating that even the demons believe this and they are trembling in their boots! And once again, for the third time this chapter, he states the bottom line: **FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD**. (You can almost hear the words "between the lines" - "are you getting this yet??")

Now James moves into an argument of proof (defense) for his bottom line. He has so far in this chapter shown only illustrations of DEAD faith. **Now he will provide an introduction to DYNAMIC, living faith.** He provides the witnesses of two Old Testament characters, Abraham and Rahab (*a seemingly unlikely duo as one is the father of the faith and the other was a prostitute!*), both of which proved their faith by acting in obedience to God, by faith. He closes this chapter by **stating the main point again, for the fifth time.**

DEFENSE

Introduction to DYNAMIC Faith

ABRAHAM V. 21-23 (Proved his faith by his obedience)



You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

Summing it all up, The bottom line, just in case you didn't get it the first 4 times...

V. 26 POINT 5 "Faith without works is dead." !!!!!!!

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

OR...In other words...

Be DOERS of the Word, not just HEARERS!

(class posters on the following pages)

FAITH:

- WORKS
- BEHAVES
- REVEALS
- DOES

1 Sample of DEAD
Faith- v. 1-7

→ DON'T ←

DO THIS:
PARTIALITY~
FAVORITISM

(SIN)
⊘

NO!

2 DOCTRINAL REMINDER:

WHY is
partiality
a sin?

V. 8-13

the NATURE of....

→ THE LAW

(break one, break the whole thing)

MERCY

(if you show no mercy, you get none)

3 CAN FAITH
ALONE, WITHOUT
WORKS, SAVE?

v. 14
1st statement
of point

NO!

The
of James

FAITH WITHOUT
WORKS IS DEAD!

James says this 5 times
in chapter 2 (14, 17, 20, 24, 26)

⁴ **v.13-17**
WORDS
OR
WORKS?
"Well **DONE**
is better than
Well SAID."
[2nd statement of point] v.17

⁵ **BAD & GOOD
ARGUMENTS**
"one has works, **v.18**
another has faith..."
You believe...? **v.19**
Well, good for you!
SO DO DEMONS!
[and they tremble !!!]
[3rd statement of point] v.20

⁶ **DYNAMIC FAITH**
★ **ABRAHAM**
v.21-23
[4th statement of point]
★ **RAHAB**
v.25
[5th statement of point]

**SO, WHAT
IS THE
"POINT"
? (DUH!)**