

A large, textured, brown eye with a cross in the center of the iris. The eye is rendered in a painterly style with visible brushstrokes. The title 'Eyewitnesses' is written in a white, cursive script across the upper part of the eye.

Eyewitnesses

SESSION 3:
HEBREWS & JAMES

Prework Discussion

- There are five warning passages in the book of Hebrews. In the Bible Project video they explain that the warning passages are not there to make you afraid, but to show you that rejecting Jesus is foolish. If someone was scared about their salvation because of these warning passages, what would you say to them?

Hebrews

The Supremacy of Jesus

Recipients:

- The book is full of references to the Old Testament, and the overall point is to encourage a community not to go back to the Old Covenant.
= A largely Jewish-Christian composition is the most likely intended audience.

“Presumably [the letter was written] to discourage these professing Jewish Christians from reverting back to a form of Judaism less distinctively Christian so as to escape the growing threat of persecution and martyrdom under Nero.”
(Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*)

Author Possibilities

- Hebrews 2:3b “This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” Paul would never say this! (cf. Galatians 1:11-12)
- Barnabas? (Who was a levite, an encourager, and who accompanied Paul for a time)
- Luke? (who was a good writer, was proficient in Greek, and also accompanied Paul for a time)
- Apollos? (who was famous for his preaching and was brought up in Alexandria—which was famous for its exegetical school of interpretation)
- Priscilla? (which may account for the letter’s anonymity)

Author: Unknown

- Around A.D 200 Origen wrote: “Only God knows who wrote this epistle.”
- Is this a problem for the letter’s “apostolicity?”



Genre:

- Hebrews 13:22 “But I urge you, brethren, bear with this *word of exhortation*, for I have written to you briefly.”
- Acts 13:14-15 “But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, ‘Brethren, if you have any *word of exhortation* for the people, say it.’”
- A word of exhortation = a sermon.
- Hebrews is the written form of a sermon, or a substitute for a preached message.

Place: Rome?

- Hebrews 13:24 “Greet all your leaders and all the Lord’s people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.”
- Hebrews was often placed after Romans in some of the ancient canons
- Clement of Rome (died A.D. 99) was aware of this letter in Rome in the 90’s.

Date:

- Hebrews 13:23 “Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.”
= 1st century
- Hebrews 12:4 “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;” = before Nero’s persecution of Christians in A.D. 64

Outline:

- I. Prologue (1:1-4)
- II. Central Thesis: Asserting the Supremacy of Christ (1:5-12:29)
 - A. Over Angels (1:5-2:18)
 - B. Over Moses (3:1-4:13)
 - C. Over Other Priests (4:14-7:28)
 - D. Over the Old Covenant (8:1-10:39)
 - E. Over Previous “Heroes of the Faith” (11:1-12:29)
- III. Concluding Exhortations (13:1-21)
- IV. Letter Closing (13:22-25)

Hebrews

JESUS IS GREATER
DON'T GO BACK TO LESSER



Jesus: The Greater High Priest

- The priestly role was one of representation.
- They represented the people to God by offering sacrifices on the people's behalf.

Hebrews 4:14-16 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Jesus: The Greater High Priest

- One of the problems was that the High Priests themselves were sinners in need of grace.

Hebrews 7:26-27 “For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”

- Jesus is greater than the High Priests in the Old Covenant, because He is without sin.

Jesus: The Greater High Priest

- Another problem was that the High Priest had to complete these sacrifices year after year.

Hebrews 10:1-2 “For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?”

- Jesus sacrifices Himself “once for all” to fulfill the entire system.

Activity:

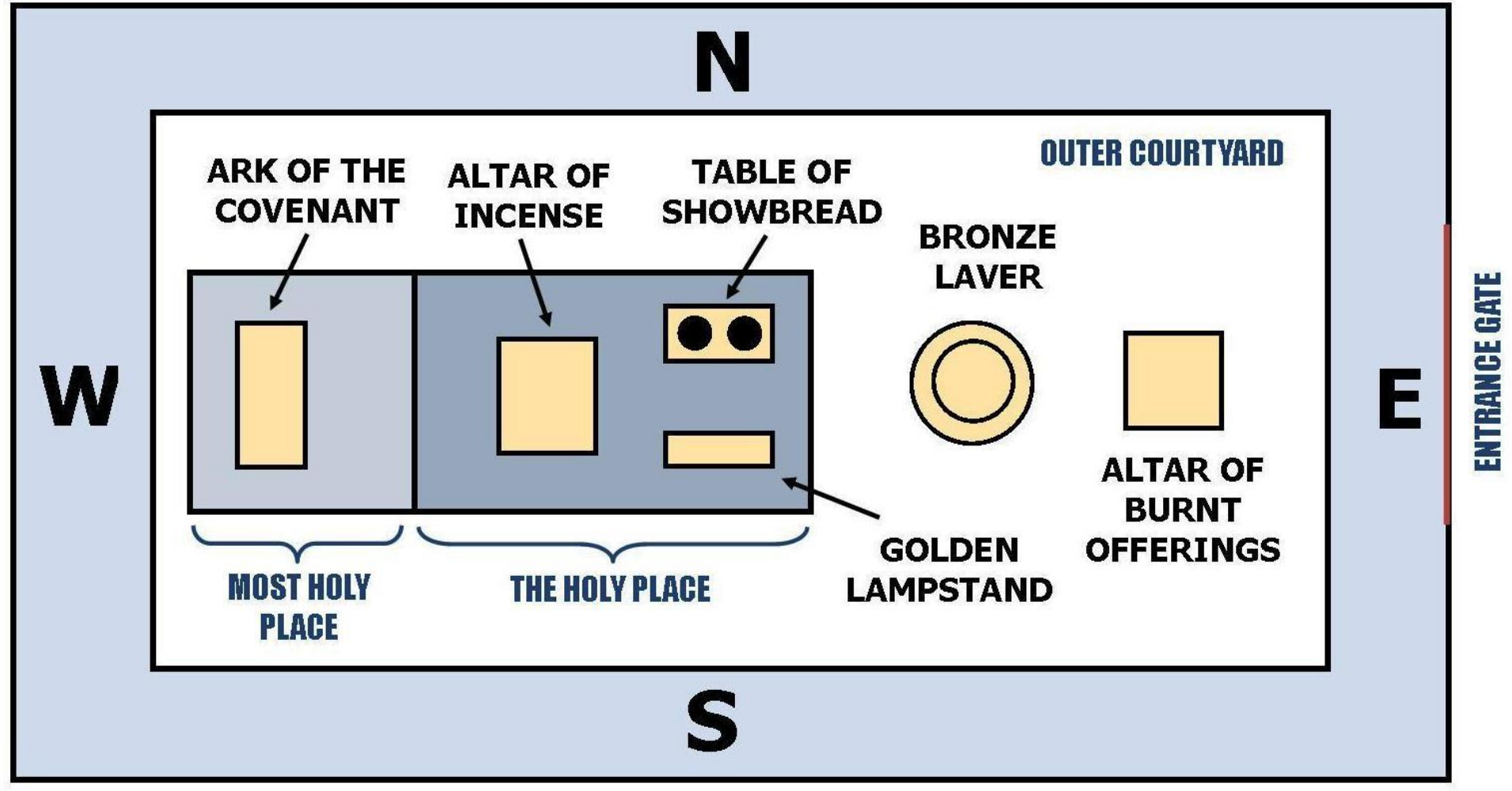
Choose a representative from your area and send them up front.

Jesus is Greater...

The author uses the same type of logic to show:

- That Jesus fulfills the Tabernacle itself (Hebrews 9:11-2)
- The Jesus mediates a greater covenant (Hebrews 9:15)
- That Jesus is the hero of faith that all the heroes of the faith looked forward to (Hebrews 12)

THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES (EXODUS 35-40)



What Does this Mean?

Hebrews 10:19-22 “Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Hebrews

JESUS IS GREATER
DON'T GO BACK TO LESSER



Warnings

The warnings in Hebrews show us different ways that we could fall away from following God, and encourage us to evaluate how we live our lives.

Drifting from the dock

Hebrews 2:1-4 We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ² For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴ God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hardening your heart

Hebrews 3:7-19 ⁷ So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice,⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness,⁹ where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did. ¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ ¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ”^[a]

¹² See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. ¹⁵ As has just been said:

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”^[b]

¹⁶ Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷ And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Do not harden

Hebrews 4:11-13 ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Move beyond the elementary teachings

Hebrews 5:11-6:12 ¹¹ We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. ¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

⁶ Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, ^[a] and of faith in God, ² instruction about cleansing rites, ^[b] the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so.

⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age ⁶ and who have fallen ^[c] away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. ⁷ Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸ But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

⁹ Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. ¹⁰ God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹ We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Good works vs bad works

Hebrews 10:19-25 ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Good works vs bad works

Hebrews 10:26-35 ²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸ Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^[a] and again, "The Lord will judge his people."^[b] ³¹ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³² Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. ³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

God is a consuming fire

Hebrews 12:23b-29 You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”^[a] ²⁷ The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our “God is a consuming fire.”^[b]

James

“A beautifully crafted punch in the gut”

Prework Discussion

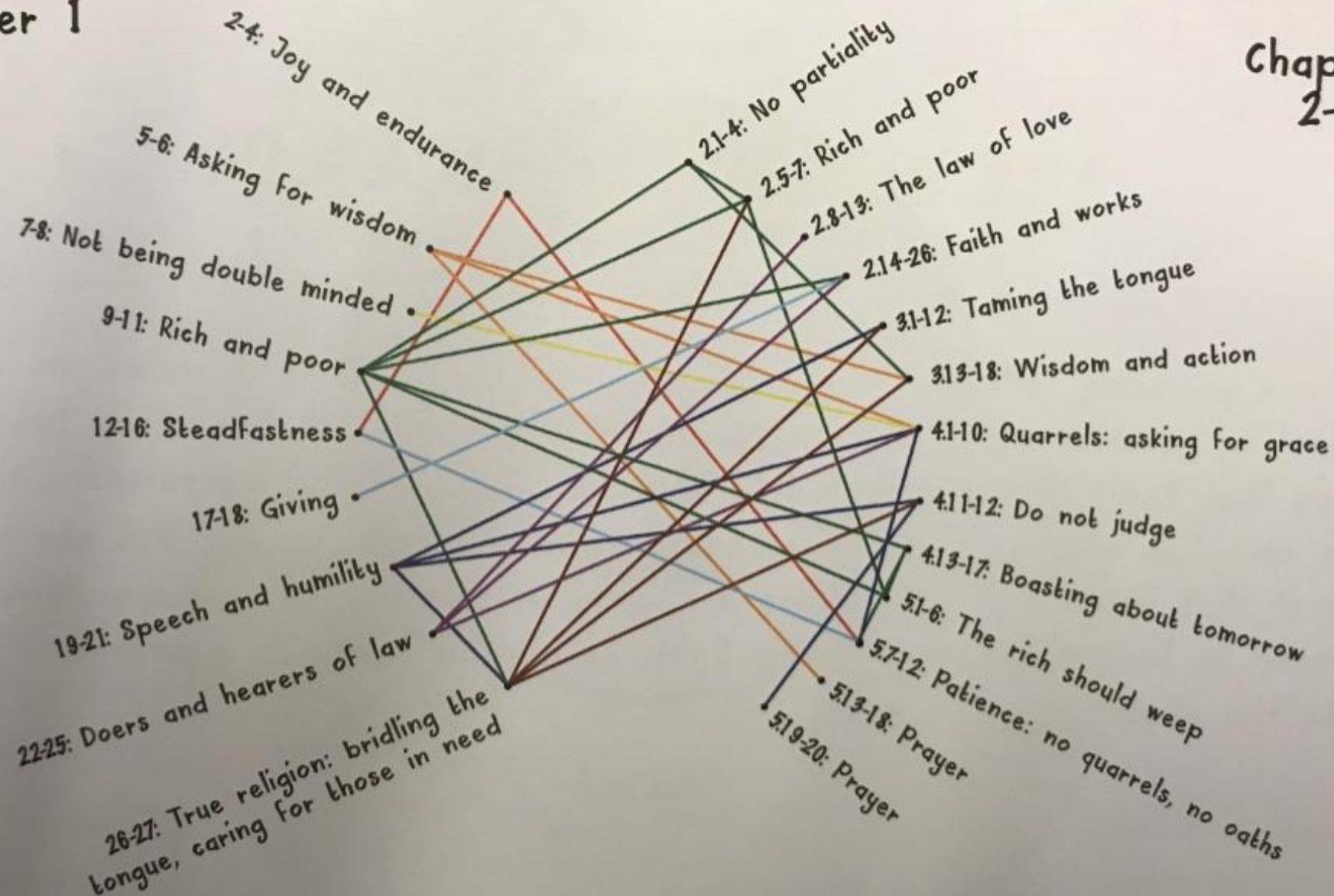
- Paul writes: “For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28). James writes: “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Is this a contradiction? Why or why not? How do you reconcile these texts?

Basic Info

- Author: James (Jacob), the half-brother of Jesus
- Audience: Jewish Christians (likely before the massive influx of Gentile believers that occurs later in Acts)
- Occasion: Jewish Christians flirting with worldliness manifested in
 - Economic prejudice (2:1-4)
 - Uncontrolled and critical speech (3:1-12); 4:11-12; 5:9)
 - Earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom leading to quarrels (3:13-4:3)
 - Arrogance (4:13-17)
 - Double-mindedness towards God negating effective prayer(1:5-8; 22-27; 2:14-26)

Chapter 1

Chapters 2-5



... that's that cleared up then ...

Major Influences

Wisdom Literature

- Style of language
- Short memorable statements (aphorisms)

Sermon on the Mount

- Emphasis on humility
- How to face persecution
- Once suggested that James is a commentary on applying the Sermon on the Mount

Faith & Works

James 2:14-17

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Types of Convictions (Beliefs)



PUBLIC: WHAT I WANT
YOU TO THINK I BELIEVE



PRIVATE: WHAT I THINK I
BELIEVE



CORE: WHAT I
ACTUALLY BELIEVE

“The best indicator of my true beliefs and my true purposes are my actions. They always flow out of my mental map about the way things really are. What I say I believe might be bogus. What I think I believe might be fickle. But I never violate my idea about the way things are. I always live in a way that reflects my mental map. I live at the mercy of my ideas about the way things really are. Always. And so do you.”

- John Ortberg (Faith & Doubt)

How to Reconcile James & Paul

“Justification is by faith alone”

- **Audience:** A divided church dealing with ethnocentrism
- **Issue:** How are we made right with God?
- **Point:** You can't be saved by becoming Jewish.

= You must entrust yourself to Jesus alone to be saved

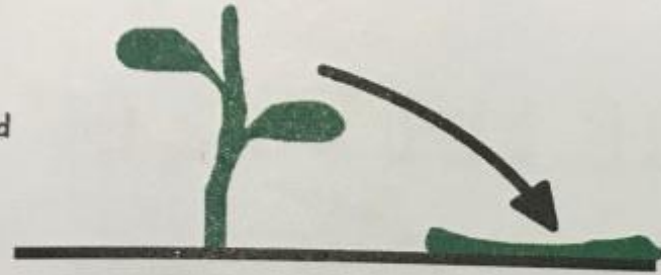
“Faith without works is dead”

- **Audience:** Jewish Christians struggling with worldliness
- **Issue:** How should Jewish Christians live?
- **Point:** A saving faith will be demonstrated in action

= You can tell whether or not you have entrusted yourself to Jesus by your actions

Paul

Works of the law



... all have sinned and
fallen short ...
(Romans 3:23)



... a person is
justified by faith and
not by works
(Romans 3:28)



Do we then
overthrow the law by this faith?
By no means! On the contrary,
we uphold the law (Romans 3:31)

Works of the law



Faith

James

Faith by itself, if
it has no works, is
dead (James 2:17)



... a person is
justified by works and
not by faith alone
(James 2:24)



I by my works will
show you my faith
(James 2:18)

Works



Faith



James

THE ONLY KIND OF FAITH THAT WORKS
IS THE KIND OF FAITH THAT WORKS

Application:

- “Widows and orphans” were the lowest of the low on the socioeconomic scale in the first century. Who are the “widows and orphans” of our day and age?
- Don’t let the fact that you can’t do everything for everyone keep you from doing something for someone.
- When you see a need, meet it!

Imagery

James's imagery is reminiscent of Jesus's parables. They need to be read slowly and contemplated to be understood.

Looking in the Mirror

James 1:22-25

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Taming the Tongue

James 3:3-8

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Friendship with God

James 4:4

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Warning to the Rich

James 5:1-6

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. ² Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴ Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. 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.^[a] ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.