

JAMES

The name of five men in the New Testament:

1. James, the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' twelve apostles. James' father was a fisherman; his mother, Salome, often cared for Jesus' daily needs (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40-41). In lists of the twelve apostles, James and his brother John always form a group of four with two other brothers, Peter and Andrew. The four were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Their call to follow Jesus is the first recorded event after the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20).

James is never mentioned apart from his brother John in the New Testament, even at his death (Acts 12:2). When the brothers are mentioned in the Gospels, James is always mentioned first, probably because he was the older. After the resurrection, however, John became the more prominent, probably because of his association with Peter (Acts 3:1; 8:14). James was killed by Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, some time between A. D. 42-44. He was the first of the twelve apostles to be put to death and the only one whose martyrdom is mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 12:2).

James and John must have contributed a spirited and headstrong element to Jesus' band of followers, because Jesus nicknamed them "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). On one occasion (Luke 9:51-56), when a Samaritan village refused to accept Jesus, the two asked Jesus to call down fire in revenge, as the prophet Elijah once had done (2 Kings 1:10,12). On another occasion, they earned the anger of their fellow disciples by asking if they could sit on Jesus' right and left hands in glory (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45).

James was one of three disciples-- Peter, James, and John-- whom Jesus took along privately on three special occasions. The three accompanied Him when He healed the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); they witnessed His transfiguration (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28); and they were also with Him in His agony in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33).

2. James, the son of Alphaeus. This James was also one of the twelve apostles. In each list of the apostles he is mentioned in ninth position (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

3. James the Less. This James is called the son of Mary (not the mother of Jesus), and the brother of Joses (Matt. 27:56; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10). (Mark 15:40) refers to him as "James the Less." The Greek word mikros can mean either "small" or "less." It could, therefore, mean James the smaller (in size), or James the less (well-known).

4. James, the father of Judas. Two passages in the New Testament refer to a James, the father of Judas (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). Judas was one of the twelve apostles; he was the last to be listed before his more infamous namesake, Judas Iscariot.

5. James, the brother of Jesus. James is first mentioned as the oldest of Jesus' four younger brothers (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3).

In the third and fourth centuries A. D., when the idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary gained ground, a number of people argued that James was either a stepbrother to Jesus (by a former marriage of Joseph) or a cousin. But both options are pure speculation. The New Testament teaches that Mary and Joseph bore children after Jesus (Matt. 1:25; 12:47; Luke 2:7; John 2:12; Acts 1:14), and that the second oldest was James (Matt. 13:55-56; Mark 6:3). The gospels reveal that Jesus' family adopted a skeptical attitude toward His ministry (Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 7:5). James apparently held the same attitude, because his name appears in no lists of the apostles, nor is he mentioned elsewhere in the gospels.

After Jesus' crucifixion, however, James became a believer. Paul indicated that James was a witness to the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7). He called James an apostle (Gal. 1:19), though like himself, not one of the original Twelve (1 Cor. 15:5,7).

In the Book of Acts, James emerges as the leader of the church in Jerusalem. His brothers also became believers and undertook missionary travels (1 Cor. 9:5). But James became a prominent member of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9).

EPISTLE OF JAMES

The first of the general epistles of the New Testament and a document characterized by emphasis on a practical religion. The epistle reads like a sermon and, except for a brief introduction, has none of the traits of an ancient letter. Each of the five chapters is packed with pointed illustrations and reminders designed to motivate the wills and hearts of believers to grasp a truth once taught by Jesus: "A tree is known by its fruit" (Matt. 12:33).

Authorship and Date. The author identifies himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). At least five personalities named James appear in the New Testament. None has a stronger claim to being the author of this epistle than James, the brother of the Lord. Apparently neither a disciple nor an apostle during Jesus' lifetime, he is first mentioned in (Mark 6:3), where he is listed as the first (oldest) of Jesus' four younger brothers. After the ascension of Jesus, James emerged as a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9)-- a position he must have occupied for nearly 30 years, until his death.

This James is probably the author of the epistle that bears his name. He refers to himself simply as "James," with no explanation added. This indicates he was well-known to his readers. He calls himself a "servant" rather than an apostle; and he begins the epistle with the same "greetings" (1:1) with which he begins the apostolic decree following the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:23). These factors suggest one and the same James, the brother of the Lord. The Epistle of James gives few hints by which it might be dated. If James, the Lord's brother, is its author, then it must have been written before A. D. 62 (the approximate time of his death).

Historical Setting. James addresses the epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1). This implies a readership of Jewish Christians living outside Palestine. Elsewhere in the epistle, however, James refers to hired field labor (5:4), and this locates his audience inside Palestine. In James' day only in Palestine did farmers employ hired rather than slave labor, as was customary elsewhere. The epistle makes frequent references or allusions to the Old Testament. Its style and language are reminiscent of the Old Testament, especially wisdom literature and the prophet Amos. All these factors indicate that James was writing to persons of Jewish-Christian background. His emphasis was on the essentials of obedient living in accordance with the true intent of the law of God

Theological Contribution. The Epistle of James is a sturdy, compact letter on practical religion. For James, the acid test of true religion is in the doing rather than in the hearing, "believing," or speaking. James exalts genuineness of faith, and is quick to encourage the lowly that God gives grace to the humble (4:6), wisdom to the ignorant (1:5), salvation to the sinner (1:21), and the kingdom to the poor (2:5). He is equally quick to condemn counterfeit religion which would substitute theory for practice, and he does so with biting sarcasm. True religion is moral religion and social religion. True religion is doing the right thing in one's everyday affairs. In this respect James echoes clearly the ethical teaching of Jesus, especially as it is recorded in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). "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" (Matt. 7:21).

Special Considerations. Some Bible scholars suggest that James and Paul differ in their views on the saving significance of faith and works. Paul states, "A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28), and James says, "A man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:19). A closer reading of the two, however, reveals that they differ more in their definition of faith than in its essence. James writes to readers who are inclined to interpret faith as mere intellectual acknowledgment (James 2:19). As a consequence he stresses that a faith which does not affect life is not saving faith; hence, his emphasis on works. Actually, this is quite close to Paul's understanding. For Paul, faith is the entrusting of one's whole life to God through Christ, with the result that one's life becomes renewed with the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22). Further Paul uses faith in a comprehensive sense that must include all acts of obedience to God. It is faith that work through love, he said to the Galatians, that avails (Gal. 5:6). He used the same illustrations of ground producing fruit (Heb. 6:7-9) to show that faith must work in order to bring salvation.

It may be of some interest to consider the place it was written. If it is agreed that James, the Lord's brother, is the author, the book was written in Jerusalem. Paul, after three years in Arabia returned to Damascus, then to Jerusalem where his first contact was James, whom he calls "the Lord's brother." The apostles remained in Jerusalem during the persecution which scattered the other Christians. James letter begins by addressing those of the "dispersion." (ASV), those "scattered among the nations," (NIV) or simply those "which are scattered abroad." (1:1).

Works and Faith in James: Commentaries often pit Paul and James opposite to each other relative to works. Most

Calvinistic and Lutheran oriented scholars tend even to reject James because of the heavy emphasis on works. Martin Luther, the great German reformer, rejected James "a right strawy epistle." Roland Bainton, in his biography of Luther, wrote of Luther's translating that it was accurate to the point of never attempting to harmonize minor discrepancies he found in the Old Testament. Bainton noted that "trivial errors gave him no concern." Then, he added, "But when doctrinal matters were involved, the case was different. Luther read the New Testament in the light of the Pauline message that the just shall live by faith and not by works of the law. That this doctrine is not enunciated with equal emphasis throughout the New testament and appears to be denied in the book of James did not escape Luther, and in his preface to the New Testament of 1522 James was stigmatized as 'an epistle of straw.' Once Luther remarked that he would give his doctor's beret to anyone who could reconcile James and Paul." Here I Stand, Abington - Cokesbury Press, page 331.

There is no contradiction between Paul and James on either faith or works. J. Gresham Machen, one of the most eminent Bible scholars, wrote as follows: "The solution to the whole problem is provided by Paul himself in a single phrase. In Gal. 5:6, he says, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; bur faith working through love.' 'Faith working through love' is the key to an understanding both of Paul and of James. The faith about which Paul has been speaking is not the idle faith which James condemns, but a faith that works. It works itself out through love." (Machen's Notes on Galatians, page 220-221).

James 1:

Topics to discuss:

1. Who is James? Can you identify the author of this book we are studying?

2. It is written to the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” Identify those to whom this was sent and explain why they are “scattered abroad.”

3. James says to count it joy when you fall into divers temptations. How is it joy to be tempted in many or divers ways?

4. Define temptations as it is used in this and following verses.

5. Verse 3 says faith tried works patience. How does this happen? Do all who undergo such temptations develop patience?

6. After reading chapter 1, do you find thoughts that appear to express the general purpose of the book? If so, what is it? Apply verse 4 to the purpose of the book

7. James tells us that if we want wisdom, we may get it by prayer. Wisdom is more than knowledge, more than understanding. What is wisdom? Explain the difference in wisdom and knowledge.

8. How is wisdom used in the context of trials and temptations?

9. What is a “double-minded” man and how is he unstable in all his ways?

10. Connect verses 9 and 10-11. Verse 9 tells of a brother of low degree and verse 10 of a rich man. One is exalted; the other is made low. What is it that exalts a lowly man and humbles a rich man?

11. Is there any difference at all in the words “temptation,” “try,” and “test?” If so, how do they differ?

12. What is the source of the temptation in verse 12?

13. If God cannot be tempted, how is that the Bible often says such things as, “Where your fathers tried me by proving me, and saw my works forty years” (Heb. 3:9).

14. Is there a difference in being tempted (tried and tested) and “tempted with evil?”

15. James details the progress from lust to death. Give your impression of the figures of speech he uses. What process does this make you think of? Note the way the NIV translates the phrase “brings forth.”

16. Read verse 17 and Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8. What is meant by “no variableness” with God?

17. Read other verses such as John 3:3-8; 1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:22-23. Now be able to explain how all of God’s children are begotten of God and how they become his children.

18. Read Eccl. 5:1-7 and explain verse 19.

19. If the wrath of man doesn’t produce the righteousness of God, what does it produce. Look at other passages where the expression “righteousness of God” is found. (Rom. 1:17; 3:5,21,22; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21).

20. What is implied in verse 21 about preparation for receiving the word of God? How is it the “engrafted” word?

21. How is a forgetful hearer like a person who, after inspecting self in a mirror, goes and immediately forgets what kind a person he is?

22. What is the “perfect” law of liberty? How is it perfect?

23. What does “religious” mean?

24. How does an unbridled tongue make one’s religion vain?

25. How is pure religion and undefiled before God demonstrated?

26. What is a fatherless person? (Read Deut. 16:11-14; 24:17-21; 26:12-13).

James 2:

1. What do the first 7 verses teach us about human relations?
2. What is the “worthy name” that is blasphemed? Prove your answer with Scriptures. (Hint: Acts 11:26; 28:28; 1 Pet. 4:16).
3. The royal law is a law related to royalty. How is this a law that is expressed by loving one’s neighbor as one’s self? (Read Lev. 19:18).
4. How does one commit sin by showing respect of persons?
Note: The American Standard Version (ASV) and the New International Version (NIV) translate “convinced” as “convicted.”
5. How is it that being in violation of one point of law means one is guilty of the whole law? How is this explained in verses 11-14?
6. How does saying “I have faith,” without doing any works deprive one of any profit at all?
7. How does the illustration in verse 16 apply to saying one has faith but no works?
8. Works can be seen. Can you see faith -- or do you just see what it does?
9. In what sense do devils believe and tremble? What kind of faith is that?
10. Read Gen. 22:1,14; Rom. 4:22-25; Heb. 11:17-19. What is the significance of the word “when?” It says Abraham was justified “when” he offered Isaac?
11. Read Gen. 15:6; Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7; Rom. 4:1-7. What is the meaning of the word “impute?” On what basis was righteousness imputed to Abraham?
12. What do you think of using a Harlot as an example of faith? Read Josh. 2:1-21. Suggestion: Is there anything to lead us to think she remained a harlot?
13. Define the terms “spirit” and “body.” What part of man dies?
14. What is the difference in spirit and soul?
(Read: Luke 12:20; Heb. 10:39; Matt. 26:41; Luke 8:55; Matt. 10:28; Heb. 6:19; Job 32:8; Luke 23:46; John 6:63 and Luke 1:46-47.)

15. How does the treatment of faith that works fit into the theme of Christians being made perfect, or maturing? How would this apply in a purely physical sense such as growth and development physically?

16. Give the story of Rahab. Explain how she, a harlot, was justified and why James uses her as an example of faith that works.

James 3:

1. What is meant by the term “masters?”

2. How is that those who become “masters” receive greater condemnation? Why would a master be threatened so?

3. James tells us we all offend. He says, in effect, no mere man is perfect. Read 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chron. 6:36; Ecc1. 7:20; Rom. 3:9,23; 1 John 1:8,10.

4. What is James’ point regarding the bit in the mouth of a horse? How does that apply to our speech?

5. List the illustrations in verses 3-12 and show how they apply to controlling speech?

6. How is it that wisdom is shown in the control of one’s tongue?

7. Define wisdom again. How is a wise person identified? Both the ASV and NIV translate conversation (KJV) by “good life.” What is this good life that identifies a wise person?

8. Envy is: _____ Strife is _____
_____ If envy and strife in the heart are wrong, is it wrong to think evil things about others without saying or doing anything? (Read Matt. 15:19-20).

9. Why is wisdom from above first said to be pure, then peaceable? Is it possible for peace to exist without purity?

10. What is meant by “easy to be entreated?” The NIV translates the word as “submissive.”

11. Read Heb. 12:11. How does that verse compare to verse 18 and explain it?

James 4:

1. What kind of wars and fightings does James mean?
2. How does a war in our members affect us? (Read Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:16-17). Does this mean Christians have to deal with this internal conflict?
3. How do you not ask God for blessings amiss? How do you ask for blessings that are not for our personal desires? How is lust used in this verse?
4. Verse 4 calls those who are friends of the world adulterers and adulteresses. How does James mean that? What kind of friendship is involved in the verse?
5. The Scripture (What passage?) says such adulterers and adulteresses are enemies of God. Apply this to how people normally treat their enemies.
6. He asks if they think the scriptures say in vain (without reason, NIV) which he caused to live in us envies intensely. What spirit is this?
7. What grounds does God have to expect the church to be loyal and faithful? (Read Deut. 32:19ff; Jer. 3:14; Hos 2:19; Num. 11:29; Prov. 21:10).
8. Read Prov. 3:34; 29:23; 1 Pet. 5:5. Discuss these verses and apply them to verse 6.
9. Read John 6:44-45 and apply it to verses 7-8. How does God draw us to himself and how do we draw ourselves near him?
10. Over what should God's people be afflicted and mourn?
11. Define humility. Read 1 Pet. 5:6 and apply it to verse 10.
12. When you speak evil of another you judge another. What right do we have to judge others by speaking evil of them? What kind of speech is evil speaking?
13. List some of the don'ts for Christians given in this chapter.
14. What is the main lesson presented in verses 13-17.
15. How is it a sin to know to do good but fail to do it? Give some examples.

James 5:

1. In view of the general theme of the previous chapters, what point is made in verses 1-7?
2. Explain the illustration of the husbandman (farmer, NIV) as it applies to the requirement to be patient during suffering of affliction.
3. What is meant by “grudge not?”
4. Look up some illustrations of prophets who through suffering for righteousness are examples to us now.
5. Read Job 1:21-22; 42:10; Psa. 111:4. What is meant by the “end of the Lord?”
6. What is meant by “swear not” in verse 12?
7. Read verses 13-14. What is the Christian to do in suffering? In cheerfulness? In weakness and weariness? In sin?.
8. Does a perfect or mature Christian enjoy sinless perfection? If yes, how is he can comply with verse 15? If no, to whom does he confess these sins? Note: Fault here means sin. The ASV translates the word faults as sins.
9. Whose prayer is “the prayer of faith? -- the one who is sick or the one who prays for the sick?
10. What is the function of elders?
11. What purpose would oil being anointed serve?
12. From the way the verse reads, would it have been possible for there to have been any failure to cure the ill?
13. Do you believe Elders of the church today can do what these elders in this verse did then? Please explain your answer.
14. Read Psa. 23:5; Heb. 1:9; Isa. 61:1-3 fulfilled in Luke 4:16-21. Is anointing in all the verses used figuratively or literally?
15. In what sense is the individual “saved?”
16. Read 1 Kings 17:1; 18:42-45. How does the fact that Elijah prayed for rain and it rained apply to our prayers now?
17. What does “err from the truth” mean?

18. Is this talking about converting an alien sinner or an erring Christian?

20 Discuss the benefits derived from bring the lost back to the Lord.