

Bible Study Notes and Questions on the Letter of James

Overview: The letter has been written to the twelve of the tribes of the Jewish diaspora (**James 1:1; John 7:35**), that is Jewish believers in Jesus Christ living outside Israel. It has not been sent to any particular person or local church and therefore a circular letter.

It is believed by most Christian writers including this author that James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ (**Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:19**) was the writer of this letter; whilst some Christian writers put the case forward for James, son of Alphaeus, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, as the writer of this letter. The letter has been dated in 60 AD but others date it even before any of Paul's letters in 49 AD and therefore the earliest of all New Testament writings.

James was not a believer during Jesus' lifetime on earth (**Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-45; Luke 8:19-21; John 7:2-5**) but was converted when Jesus appeared to him personally after his resurrection (**1Corinthians 15:7**). He was present in the upper room in the temple (**Acts 1:14**) and he became one of the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem in settling the dispute regarding circumcision (**Acts 15:13-21**) and in sending a letter of proclamation to the Gentiles (**Acts 15:22-31; 16:4**). Evidence has shown James could have been married (**1Corinthians 9:5**) and he was very much a man of prayer. He had the nickname "James the Just". He was killed by the Jews in about 61-62 AD. Although no record of how he died, tradition has said he was martyred by being thrown off the pinnacle of the temple, then stoned and finally clubbed to death. He was praying like Jesus "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they do". It was discovered that his knees were as hard as camel's indicating a man who spent much time in prayer alone especially in the temple in Jerusalem.

James has written much on practical Christianity as shown below:

- 1) Responding to trials (**1:2-17**), outwardly (**1:2-12**) and inwardly (**1:13-17**).
- 2) Being doers of the word of God by obedience to it (**1:18-27**).
- 3) Treating everyone alike without partiality (**2:1-13**) with an attitude of love for both the rich and the poor.
- 4) True faith will lead to works as seen in the examples of Abraham and Rahab (**2:14-26**).
- 5) The use of the tongue that is a blessing but can do so much harm when misused. It needs to be tamed by the power of God (**3:1-12**).
- 6) The distinction between wisdom that is man-made and demonic and divine wisdom (**3:13-17**).
- 7) Warnings against dissension and worldliness amongst Christians (**4:1-5, 11-12**).
- 8) The steps that Christians must take for genuine repentance (**4:6-10**).
- 9) Doing the will of God rather than making your own plans for material gain (**4:12-17**).
- 10) The rich warned of their wealth leading to pride, injustice and selfishness (**5:1-6**).
- 11) Encouragement to be patient enduring suffering in this present life knowing the future prospect of the coming of the Lord (**5:7-12**).
- 12) Emphasis on prayer and supporting others who were sick or who had been tempted to fall away from God (**5:13-20**).

This letter has emphasised good works in showing the practical outworking of faith in Jesus Christ.

Questions

Chapter 1

- Q.1)** How do we respond to trials outwardly and what is their purpose and goal? See **1:2-8, 12.**
- Q.2)** Contrast the poor and the rich men in how James saw them in times of trial. See **1:9-11.**
- Q.3)** What is the danger of giving into temptation inwardly? See **1:13-15** and **Genesis 2:17; 3:1-10.** Show the steps that can lead to death.
- Q.4)** How can we overcome temptation inwardly in **1:13-18?**
- Q.5)** Read carefully **1:18-27.** Show how James has stressed the role of the word of God in at least five points. See **1:18; 1:19-20; 1:21; 1:22-25; 1:26-27.** How should believers respond to the word of God?
- Q.6)** What does James mean by “religion” in **1:27?**

Chapter 2

- Q.1)** Show how James condemned partiality in showing preference particularly to the rich rather than the poor. See **2:1-7.**
- Q.2)** Read carefully **2:1-7** again. Can you see how God looks upon the poor? See also **Luke 6:20; 1Corinthians 1:26-31.**
- Q.3)** How much importance does James give to the law of God in **2:8-13?**
- Q.4)** What has James taught about faith in **2:14-20?**
- Q.5)** How did James illustrate living faith in **2:21-26?** Can you show that the principle of **verse 22** has been fulfilled? See also **Genesis 22:8-18; Joshua 2:8-13; Hebrews 11:31.**
- Q.6)** Are there any contradictions in what James and Paul teach about faith in view of James having written “justified by works” in **2:25?** Read again **2:14-26** and compare with **Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-10.**

Chapter 3

- Q.1)** Why will masters “*receive the greater condemnation*” (King James version) / teachers “*receive a stricter judgment*” (New King James version). See **3:1; Matthew 7:1-2; 23:4; 1Corinthians 11:29-32.**
- Q.2)** Consider carefully the examples James uses to illustrate the tongue being a small member and yet can “*boast great things*” (**3:5**). See **3:2-5.**
- Q.3)** Read **3:2-12.** Show how the tongue can be misused and the damage that can be caused. See also **1Kings 12:12-16; 1Chronicles 10:12-16; Proverbs 1:26; 4:11; 5:9; 15:1b.**
- Q.4)** Read again **3:4-12.** Show how the tongue can bring blessing and encouragement with the right words used. See **1:19; 3:113; 5:10-, 12-13; Proverbs 15:1a; 25:11; Colossians 4:6.**
- Q.5)** What can we do to control the tongue? See **1:5, 19; 3:13; Psalm 19:4; 143:3; Proverbs 21:22.**
- Q.6)** What distinctions can be made between the two kinds of wisdom described in **3:13-18?**
- Q.7)** Read carefully **3:14-16.** What kind of character can be shown for a man with earthy, sensual and devilish wisdom? See also **Genesis 3:1-6; 11:1-9; Proverbs 6:12-19; Romans 1:18-25; 3:18; 1Corinthians 1:19-21; 3:12-15; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 2:1-3; Revelation 3:14-22.**
- Q.8)** Read carefully **3:13, 17-18.** What kind of character can be shown for a man with divine wisdom? See also **1:5, 19; 4:8; Proverbs 3:13; 9:10; Luke 6:36; 10:25-37; John 15:1-16; 1Corinthians 1:24, 30; 2:12; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 1:17; 2:10; 4:15; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 2:3; 2Timothy 3:15.**

Questions continued**Chapter 4**

Q.1) Read carefully **4:1-5, 11-12**. What are the difficulties that God's people may have in getting along with one another?

Q.2) What steps did James show to us that will bring true repentance in **4:7-10**?

Q.3) What should our attitude be about planning for the future in view of what James has written in **4:13-17**?

Chapter 5

Q.1) What are the warnings we should take from **5:1-6** where James has denounced the rich? See also **Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Proverbs 13:11; 23:4; Jeremiah 22:13; Matthew 6:19-21, 31-34; Luke 12:15-21; 16:19-31; 1Corinthians 3:11-15; 4:2; 1Timothy 6:10, 17-19**.

Q.2) How should we prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to reign on earth according to James in **5:7-12**. See **Job 23:10; Romans 15:4; 2Corinthians 12:7-9; Galatians 6:9; 2Timothy 2:1-7; 1John 3:2-3**.

Q.3) How did James show effective prayer using the examples in **5:13-18**?

See also **Romans 8:26-27; 1Corinthians 11:27-31; 1Timothy 2:1-3; 1John 1:8-9; 5:14-15**.

Q.4) In what ways can we be called to help others who have backslidden in turning away from the Lord? See **5:19-20; Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 22:31-32; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:15; Hebrews 2:1; 1Peter 4:8; Jude 21-23**.

Miscellaneous Questions

Q.1) What did James reveal of who God is? See **1:5; 2:5, 19; 4:6; 5:15-18**.

Q.2) What does the letter teach about prayer? See **1:5-8; 4:2-3; 5:13-18**?

Q.3) Make a list of the practical issues that James mentioned in his letter. Which of these issues has challenged you to do better? How can you improve in facing up to these issues?

Q.4) What did James teach about the rich? See **1:10-11; 2:3, 6-7; 5:1-6**. Is there evidence that he has warned the rich for not showing love to the poor?

Q.5) What lessons can we learn about patience from this letter? See **1:2-8, 12; 5:7-12**.

Q.6) What were the problems in the church that James has dealt with in this letter?

Q.7) Read through the entire letter of James. In what ways does this letter help us to mature spiritually? See also **Hebrews 5:12-14; 6:1-3**.

Q.8) Write out a list of questions to examine your own heart to show how mature you really are spiritually? For example: Do I show patience more and more in times of difficulty? Do I take time to listen carefully to others? How do I react in times of trial?

Q.9) What lessons can we learn of the practical outworking of faith? You may find it helpful to consider the letter in three sections: **1) the trial of faith, 1:1-18, 2) the attributes of faith, 1:19-5:6, 3) the victory of faith 5:7-20**.

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