JAMES

James
Key Verse:

INTRODUCTION TO JAMES

The writer of this letter identifies himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." There are several men named James in the New Testament. James the Apostle, the brother of John, was martyred in Acts 12. James the younger, son of Alphaeus, was one of the Twelve. James, the most probable writer of this letter, is the brother of Jude, and the half-brother of Jesus; he was the leader of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). He was slow to recognize Jesus as the Christ (Jn 7:5), but later, he became a believer. He joined his mother Mary and Jesus' disciples as one of the 120 in the upper room prayer meeting at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). It is probable that this James is the one who is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 as one to whom the Lord appeared after his resurrection (1Co 15:7).

This letter is one of the "General Epistles." James wrote to "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." This may refer to the Jewish Christians who scattered after the martyrdom of Stephen; but it also is addressed to all Christians living as aliens and pilgrims in a godless world.

James tells us that faith without works is dead. His letter is full of wisdom, and reminds us of Proverbs in the Old Testament. It also reflects Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7).

IF YOU LACK WISDOM

James 1:1-8 (Wed.) Sept. 1

Key Verse: 1:5

1. Be joyful in trials (1-4)

God teaches us true wisdom through his training. The wise person is one who can discern God's hand working in every situation. So we must be joyful in trials, confident of God's love, and sure that he is working to help us grow in Christ. God's training teaches us perseverance. Perseverance means "keeping on"--not giving up. We can persevere when we trust God's love. If we depend on God and, by faith, persevere in the midst of trials, we will grow in our faith to be mature Christians.

2. Ask God for wisdom (5-8)

If anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask God. God wants us to come to him in complete trust, like children, and ask him for his direction and wisdom. He promises to give wisdom to anyone who asks in faith. Some people come to God and seek his will, make a decision of faith, then allow "second thoughts" to rob them of wisdom. A double-minded man is unstable in all he does.

Prayer: Father, give me perseverance and wisdom. Take away my fearful double-mindedness.

One Word: If you lack wisdom, ask God

PERSEVERE UNDER TRIAL

James 1:9-12 (Thur.) Sept. 2

Key Verse: 1:12

1. True riches and things that fade (9-11)

God exalts the humble and puts down the proud. So the brother in humble circumstances can be a spiritual leader among God's people. James 2:5 says that God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom. On the other hand, those who have material abundance should not take pride in their material possessions. They should take pride only in the cross of Jesus. The things of the world pass away like wild flowers in the hot sun.

2. The crown of life (12)

When the hot sun of trials and persecution rises, we must not dry up and fade away. We must persevere under trial. The trials of life are tests of faith. Whatever the trial may be, if we trust God and persevere, we will be blessed by God. God has promised a crown of life to those who love him. If we love God and do not doubt his love for us, he gives us strength to persevere. God's blessings are our true riches.

Prayer: Lord, help me to know what is valuable; help me to persevere under trial.

One Word: Love God; receive a crown of life

EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT COMES FROM GOD

James 1:13-18 (Fri.) Sept. 3

Key Verse: 1:17

1. God does not tempt anyone (13-15)

We cannot blame God for our sinful lives. He wants us to be his holy children, so he sent his Son to die on the cross for our sins. We are tempted by our own evil desires. When sinful desire arose in Cain's heart, God counseled him to master it (Ge 4:7). Cain ignored God's word and yielded to his desire. Desire conceives and give birth to sin, and sin grows until it gives birth to death. We must not be deceived; we must hold God's word in our hearts and master evil desires.

2. The Father of lights (16-18)

God is righteous and loving; his character and his purposes do not change like shifting shadows. He is the one who gives every good and perfect gift. He gave us the most precious gift of new birth into a living hope through his word of truth. Christ and his people are firstfruits of his new creation; someday he will finish restoring all creation.

Prayer: Father of lights, put your word of truth in my heart so that I may not sin against you.

One Word: All the gifts God gives are good

LISTENING AND DOING

James 1:19-25 (Sat.) Sept. 4

Key Verse: 1:25

1. Humbly accept the planted word (19-21)

Some people don't think before they act; they just react. We must be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Angry reactions to another's words or deeds can never produce a godly life; nor can a mind/heart full of moral filth produce a life that pleases God. The righteous life that God desires grows out of the word planted in our hearts. The word is planted when we hear God's word and humbly accept it. This word leads us to our Savior.

2. God's word is a mirror (22-25)

Studying God's word is like looking into a mirror. Sometimes we don't like what we see, and we had rather not look. But if we overcome our feelings and look intently into the perfect law of God and continue to do so, not forgetting what we have seen, we will find real freedom.

Prayer: Lord, help me to look into the mirror of your word every day. Help me to live according to that word. Work in me through your word until I can reflect your image.

One Word: Don't just listen; do it

RELIGION ACCEPTABLE TO GOD

James 1:26-27 (Sun.) Sept. 5

Key Verse: 1:27

1. Keep a tight reign on the tongue (26)

Jesus said that the words that come out of our mouths reflect what is in our hearts (Mk 7:21-23). Paul said that the depraved man has a corrupted mouth (Ro 3:12-14). According to James, a person's religion is worthless if he cannot put a bridle on his tongue, that is, what he says should build up and encourage others. Lies, gossip, words that damage another's reputation or

discourage him should not come out of our mouths. We must not fall into the trap of the world and allow our mouths to spew out criticism of everyone and everything. We should use our mouths to teach the Bible and to praise God.

2. Look after the needy; keep pure (27)

True religion is not just a matter of what we believe; it is really concerned with how we act. We must have the mind of Christ, and serve those who need our help. We must not follow the ways of the world or our peers into a corrupt lifestyle, no matter how tempting the invitation may be.

Prayer: Lord, work in my heart until I learn the faith that pleases you.

One Word: Faith that pleases God

DON'T SHOW FAVORITISM

James 2:1-12 (Mon.) Sept. 6

Key Verse: 2:1

1. Those whom God has chosen (1-7)

As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, we must learn to see people as he does. We must put highest priority on spiritual values. Those who are rich in faith are far more precious than those who are rich in worldly things. If we treat rich, worldly people with deference, and people who seem poor with indifference, we become judges with evil thoughts.

2. The spirit of the law (8-12)

The Royal Law is: "Love your neighbor as yourself." When the scribe in Luke 10 asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan. My neighbor is whoever needs my help. The Ten Commandments were given as guidelines for loving our neighbors. We become lawbreakers if we break even one. If we show mercy and kindness to some neighbors but withhold it from others, we break the Royal Law of love and become judges with evil thoughts. We must be strict in applying the law to ourselves, and generous in applying it to others.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see people as you see them, and be merciful and loving, not judgmental.

One Word: See people with Christ's eyes

SHOW ME YOUR FAITH

James 2:14-26 (Tue.) Sept. 7

Key Verse: 2:18b

1. Even demons believe--and shudder (14-19)

Biblical faith is expressed in action. If our faith does not take root in our hearts and flow into our hands and feet, it is dead. Faith that does not affect our lives is not real faith. Such faith is insincere. It is just like saying to a hungry brother, "Good luck. I'll see you around," and then doing nothing to help him.

2. Faith that can be seen (20-26)

James gives two examples of faith that is seen in actions. One is Abraham. He was called God's friend. He trusted God so fully that he could obey him even to the point of offering his only son on the altar. Paul tells us that obedience comes from faith (Ro 1:5). The other person is Rahab. She was a prostitute and a Canaanite--one of those destined for destruction. But she believed that the God of Israel was the Creator and Lord of the earth. She showed her faith by risking her life to help two Israelite spies. God considered her righteous, and she was saved.

Prayer: Lord, help me to have practical faith that is evident in my actions.

One Word: Show faith by obedient actions

TAMING THE TONGUE

James 3:1-12 (Wed.) Sept. 8

Key Verse: 3:7

1. The tongue is a fire (1-6)

A person who can control his tongue can control himself in every other way. James says that the tongue is like a bit used to control a horse or like a rudder of a ship. However, no one has such control of himself. We who teach are judged more strictly, so we must confess our inadequacy and ask God's help. The tongue is small but it can start a great fire. A person can destroy his own life and the lives of others by saying hurtful or unnecessary things. What we deliberately teach others has great influence; what we say casually without much thought sometimes has even more. By our words we can plant doubt and cause someone to give up in despair; or we can plant faith and hope and courage.

2. No man can tame the tongue (7-12)

If we are double-minded, our words will reveal it. If we praise God and curse men made in God's image, our double-mindedness is exposed. I cannot tame my tongue, but God can change my heart, and "out of the heart the mouth speaks" (Mt 15:18).

Prayer: Lord, change my inner life until my lips are used only to praise you and strengthen others.

One Word: Only God can tame my tongue

TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

James 3:13-18 (Thur.) Sept. 9

Key Verse: 3:17

1. Worldly wisdom (13-16)

Worldly wisdom springs from selfishness. Selfish ambition, greed, envy, and sometimes, a desire for revenge drive it on. It teaches us such things as, "Be your own man" and "If it feels good, do it." Such "wisdom" does not come from God, but from the devil. It produces disorder and all kinds of evil practices.

2. Wisdom that comes from God (17-18)

True wisdom comes from God. The really wise person shows his wisdom and understanding by his good life and by deeds done in humility. Wisdom from God is pure, considerate, peace-loving, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Those who sow peace are people of wisdom. Their lives produce a harvest of righteousness. Their hearts are quite different from those filled with bitterness, envy and selfish ambition. Their hearts are filled with love for others and true joy.

Prayer: Lord, give me the true wisdom that comes from you. Help me to sow your gospel of forgiveness and be a peacemaker.

One Word: Seek wisdom from God

YOU DO NOT HAVE BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK

James 4:1-6 (Fri.) Sept. 10

Key Verse: 4:2c

1. Because you do not ask God (1-2)

Why do people fight and quarrel with others? It is because they have a war going on inside themselves. They want something, and they try to get it by any means. God's people should not struggle with men because of their desires. If we have a strong desire, we should ask God. He loves us. He did not spare even his own Son, but gave him up for us. If what we want is what we really need, he will give it to us--if we just ask him. He wants us to pray and to depend on him.

2. Because you have wrong motives (3-6)

Sometimes we do ask, but we don't receive. Why? It is because we have wrong motives. Worldly people make pleasure-seeking their main occupation. They are friends of the world, and a friend of the world is an enemy of God. Worldly pleasures only make us want more. A godless person is never satisfied. God alone can satisfy the desires of our hearts. He will do so if we ask him with pure and humble hearts.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for giving me the desires of my heart. Teach me to pray.

One Word: Struggle with God, not men

RESIST THE DEVIL

James 4:7-12 (Sat.) Sept. 11

Key Verse: 4:7

1. Submit yourselves to God (7-10)

Our enemy is the devil. He does not like it when we decide to submit ourselves to God. He is very powerful, and he can defeat us if we fight him with our human strength. But when we resist the devil and come to God in repentance and faith, the devil will flee and God will give us victory.

2. Don't judge brothers or neighbors (11-12)

If we judge our brothers or our neighbors, we give the devil a handle on our own lives, and he can defeat us. The Bible teaches us not to judge others, but to repent ourselves; so, if we judge others, we are sitting in judgment on the law. We must not judge the law; we must keep it. We must listen to the Law and repent. God is the Law-giver and Judge. We must live humbly before him.

Prayer: Father, help me to resist the devil today. I want to draw near you; please draw near me. Help me to love others instead of judging them.

One Word: Resist the devil and he will flee

TRUST GOD FOR TOMORROW

James 4:13-17 (Sun.) Sept. 12

Key Verse: 4:15

1. I'll do it tomorrow (13-14)

Some people dream about how they will spend a vacation, or about how wonderful life will be after graduation, or after marriage, or after they get a job, or after they retire. Others plan the

great things they will do for God someday. Future plans seem to give security and direction. Some people insist on clinging to their plans, no matter how the world may change. But the world is indeed uncertain. No one knows what tomorrow will bring. We should not cling to the false security of our own plans.

2. If it is the Lord's will (15-17)

Our lives are like a mist that appears for a little while, then vanishes. So we must put our trust in the eternal, unchanging God. And we must not put off doing the work God has given us to do--for tomorrow may never come.

Prayer: Lord, help me to do your work today with all my heart, and to trust you for tomorrow.

One Word: Do it today

BE PATIENT

James 5:1-12 (Mon.) Sept. 13

Key Verse: 5:7

1. Warning to rich oppressors (1-6)

Injustice in the world makes righteous people burn with anger. But God's people don't have to live with anger and hatred in their hearts. The day of judgment will surely come, and those who have lived in luxury and self-indulgence will weep and wail. All their wealth will rot. Those who hoard wealth, while not paying the wages of the laborer must stand before the Righteous Judge and answer to him concerning those they have oppressed.

2. God's people must be patient (7-12)

It is not easy to be patient. But as a farmer patiently waits for the rains, then for the harvest, so we must learn to wait on the Lord. Our waiting must not be full of grumbling, nor done with an impatient, rebellious spirit. We must wait by drawing closer to God and seeking to know him better. He keeps his promises. Hastily-made vows are signs of impatience.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to wait patiently on you and grow in my inner person.

One Word: Be patient; Jesus will come

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

James 5:13-20 (Tue.) Sept. 14

Key Verse: 5:16

1. The prayer of a righteous man (13-18)

If one of us is in trouble or is sick, we should call together the elders and pray. Doctors and medicines are good and sometimes necessary, but prayer is always essential. God's word promises that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. We can become prayer warriors when we are clothed in God's righteousness. When forgiven sinners unite in prayer, God surely hears.

2. Turn sinners from sin (19-20)

God's greatest concern is that sinful people repent and believe his gospel and return to him. Elijah was a great prayer warrior. His heart was broken when he saw the sins of God's people. So he prayed, and God withheld rain for three years. After the people repented, he prayed again, and God poured out life-giving rain. We must pray for sinners to turn to God.

Prayer: Father, clothe me with your righteousness so that I can pray for your people.

One Word: Pray; repent; pray