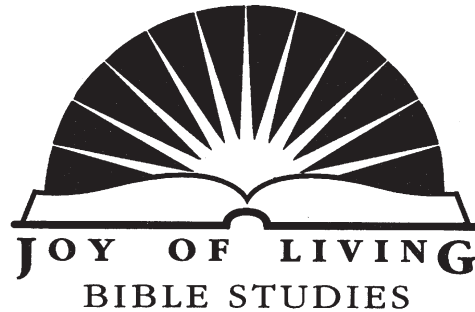


James

Lesson 1



Introduction to James

The book of James was a letter written to Jewish Christians who were “scattered among the nations” (James 1:1). These may have been believers from the early Jerusalem church who, after Stephen’s death, were scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch¹ (see Acts 2:5-12; 8:1; 11:19). James’ teaching about trials and oppression would be a great encouragement to these believers who were in the midst of such experiences.

James is believed to be one of the earliest New Testament books, written within 20 to 30 years after the death of Christ. The fact that it was written specifically to Jewish believers suggests that it was written when most of the church was Jewish, before the gospel had spread widely among the Gentiles.

The Author of James

The author identifies himself as “James.” There are four men named “James” mentioned in the New Testament:

- ☛ James, one of several brothers of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55)
- ☛ James son of Zebedee, one of the apostles (see Matthew 10:2)
- ☛ James son of Alphaeus, another apostle (see Matthew 10:3)
- ☛ James “the younger” (Mark 15:40)

James son of Alphaeus and James the younger did not have the stature or the influence that the writer of this letter had, and therefore neither was likely to have been the author.²

James son of Zebedee, along with his brother John and friend Peter, were the three apostles who were closest to Jesus (see, for example, Mark 9:2, where Jesus chose only these three men to witness His transfiguration). These three apostles were later called “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). So James son of Zebedee did have stature and influence, but he was martyred too early (A.D. 44) to have written the book of James.³

1. Frank E. Gaebelin, editor. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). See “Introduction: Destination.”
 2. Kenneth Barker, editor. *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985). See Introduction to James: Author.
 3. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. See “Introduction: Authorship.”

The author, therefore, was probably James the brother of Jesus. At first James and his brothers did not believe in Jesus, and even challenged Him and misunderstood His mission (see John 7:2-5). But, 1 Corinthians 15:7 says, after Jesus’ resurrection He “appeared to James, then to all the apostles.” James and his brothers believed (see Acts 1:14), and James eventually became prominent in the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 1:18-19). Even though James was no longer physically present with the scattered Jewish believers, he wrote to them as their pastor, urging them to make necessary changes in their lives and in their relationships to one another.

The Marks of True Faith

The book of James was written to convict and correct Christians whose lives were showing no evidence of their faith. Christ was not Lord of their lives. They said they believed, but since their faith did not result in action, it was a false faith. They claimed to serve Christ, but their lifestyles were self-centered.

James points out very clearly the marks of faith—the identifying characteristics given to those who come to Christ asking Him for forgiveness of sin. We will study about these attributes, which God alone can give to us. Here are a few of those marks of faith that are available to every Christian:

- ☛ Having joy and patience in the midst of trials
- ☛ Enduring temptations victoriously
- ☛ Guarding what we say in all situations
- ☛ Giving our time and resources generously
- ☛ Always searching for truth from God
- ☛ Doing good works empowered by the Holy Spirit.

True Faith Really Works!

The main purpose of the book of James is to affirm that genuine faith will result in good works—not in order to achieve salvation, but as evidence of a saving faith. When discussing good works, and the importance of living in obedience to Christ, it is vital to note that this is not the same as salvation by works. As we read in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

It is God's grace through the Holy Spirit that provides the strength for any work He may call you to do as a believer in Jesus Christ. As God declared in Zechariah 4:6, the work He called His people to accomplish would come about, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit."

After affirming that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, it is also important to note that we are saved to work. The very next verse after the great passage on salvation by grace says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Why not insert your name into these verses to declare or reaffirm your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as your willingness to allow God to work through you? Perhaps this would also be a good time to pray and commit yourself and your day to God, asking Him to show you the good works He has prepared for you in advance for this day. Let God know you are available to Him today!

Study Questions

Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Introduction to James.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the Introduction to James or from your teacher’s lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, tack it to your bulletin board, on the dashboard of your car, etc. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read James 1:1-12, concentrating on verse 1.

1. How does James describe himself in James 1:1a?

2. Challenge: The Greek word translated “servant” means both a “slave,” who completely belongs to the owner and has no freedom to leave; and a “servant,” who willingly chooses to serve the master.¹ The servant gives absolute obedience, total surrender and complete loyalty to the master. How does this definition of “servant” help you understand a Christian’s relationship to God? It may help to use a dictionary to define the words *obey*, *surrender* and *loyal*.

3. Personal: If you are a Christian, do you regard yourself as this type of servant/slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ? How might this knowledge change your attitude and actions?

4. a. To whom does James address his letter? (James 1:1b)

 b. Read Exodus 24:4. Who are the “twelve tribes”?

5. James 1:1 indicates that James is writing to Jews, descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel. Look ahead to James 2:1. What class or type of Jews make up his intended audience?

1. *The NIV Study Bible*. See notes on James 1:1 and Romans 1:1.

6. a. Read Acts 8:1 and 11:19. How did these Jewish Christians come to be scattered away from Jerusalem?

- b. The book of James was unanimously accepted into the canon of Holy Scripture by the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D., at a time when the Christian church was no longer primarily Jewish. Although James wrote specifically to Jewish Christians in this letter, his teaching is applicable to every Christian, no matter their race, ethnicity or the time in which they live. How do Romans 10:12 and Galatians 3:28 confirm this?

Third Day: Review James 1:1-12, concentrating on verses 2-4.

1. How are we to regard trials and difficulties according to James 1:2?

2. a. What does facing trials develop in a believer? (James 1:3)

- b. Challenge: Look up the word *perseverance* in a dictionary.

3. What is the final result when our faith perseveres through trials? (James 1:4)

4. a. Read Romans 8:17-18. Why does Paul say we can rejoice even in our sufferings?

- b. Read Romans 8:35-39. Who is with us through all trials, making sure that we overcome them victoriously?

5. Personal: What trials have you faced, or are you currently facing? Realizing that Jesus is with you through it all, are you able to thank Him for these experiences? Have you seen your spiritual maturity develop through perseverance?

Fourth Day: Review James 1:1-12, concentrating on verses 5-8.

1. What help does God offer to anyone who is facing trials? (James 1:5a)

2. The “wisdom” James speaks of means understanding the nature and purpose of trials and knowing how to meet them victoriously.¹ How will God respond when we ask for wisdom? (James 1:5b)

3. God is always willing to give wisdom to His people, but what barrier may exist within a person that prevents them from receiving God’s wisdom? (James 1:6-8)

4. a. Read Mark 9:17-27. What did the boy’s father say to Jesus in verse 24?
 - b. Unlike the “double-minded man” that James speaks of, who fluctuated between belief and unbelief, this man desired to believe and said he believed. Yet, recognizing his inadequate faith, he asked Jesus’ help in believing. How did Jesus respond to the man’s faith? (Mark 9:25-27)

5. Personal: Do you sometimes have trouble believing that God will use the trials in your life to produce spiritual maturity in you, or that He will help you meet and withstand the trials? Ask Him to strengthen your belief in Him so that you will not doubt, and so that you can receive His wisdom and help.

Fifth Day: Review James 1:1-12, concentrating on verses 9-11.

1. Although James seems to introduce an entirely new subject in James 1:9, the reference to persevering under trial in verse 12 shows that he is still addressing the same general subject of trials all the way through this passage.² In James 1:9, how does enduring trials for Christ’s sake change the true position of a believer who is poor?

2. Challenge: Read Acts 5:27-41. How did the apostles regard the worth of suffering for Jesus, according to verse 41?

3. How does the experience of suffering for Christ’s sake humble the rich believer, showing that their true position is no higher than that of the believer who is poor? (James 1:10-11)

4. a. Read Isaiah 40:6-8, which James echoed in James 1:10-11. How permanent are the lives and affairs of all people, no matter whether they are rich or poor?

1. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*

2. *Ibid.*

- b. What is the only thing that is permanent? (Isaiah 40:8b)
5. Read Ephesians 2:4-7. What permanent position has God given to every believer in Christ?
6. Personal: How do you view your position in life? Do you define it, as the world does, by your circumstances—financial assets, social position, etc.? Or do you define it by what God has done for you in Christ?

Sixth Day: Review James 1:1-12, concentrating on verse 12.

1. a. In James 1:12a, what does James call the status or condition of the person who perseveres under trial for Christ's sake?
- b. How does this echo Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:3-11?
2. The Greek word translated "stood the test" in James 1:12 was used to describe the testing of precious metals and coins to see if they were genuine.¹ How does 1 Peter 1:6-7 describe this process in our spiritual lives?
3. a. What will the believer who perseveres under trial receive? (James 1:12b)
- b. Who has been promised this crown? (James 1:12c)
- c. The Greek word for *crown* in James 1:12 is *stephanos*, which refers to a garland or chaplet worn by a victorious athlete. Believers have been given the *gift* of eternal life, but the "crown of life" referred to in James 1:12 is a *reward* to the believer who is victorious in his struggle against trials. From 1 John 5:4-5, who is victorious?
4. Personal: Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you love Him? Every believer is secure in Him. Whatever trials, whatever tests come your way, God will see you through and work it for your good. Read Jesus' words in John 10:27-30. How does this comfort you?

1. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.