
LIVING

OUT THE

TRUTH

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF JAMES

Contents

1. Trials & Temptations	James 1:1–18	P1
2. Wisdom & Word	James 1:19–27	P5
3. Favouritism & Faith	James 2:1–26	P8
4. Tongue & Talk	James 3:1–12	P12
5. Wisdom & Worldliness	James 3:13–4:12	P15
6. Perspective & Preparation	James 4:13–5:6	P17
7. Patience & Perseverance	James 5:7–12	P20
8. Rescue & Restoration	James 5:13–20	P22

1 TRIALS and TEMPTATIONS

James 1:1–18

Introduction: Some preliminary thoughts

a. Authorship

The letter claims to be written by ‘James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ’. There are several Christian leaders to whom this could apply. In truth there was but one James in the early church who was well enough recognized to be able to use such a simple greeting and that was James the son of Joseph, the brother of the Lord. This is the man who was personally visited by Jesus after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7), and it was probably at this time that he was converted. He was with the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 1:14), and soon rose to leadership in the church, being the major leader of the Jerusalem church by ad 50 (Acts 15:13–21; the fact that he spoke last indicates that he was viewed as the main leader) and continuing until after Paul’s last visit (Acts 21:18). While James led the Jerusalem church, Acts portrays him as concerned for church unity, being willing to negotiate compromises among Christian groups (*i.e.* those for and against Paul).

b. Recipients

The readers are *the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*. The phrase *the twelve tribes* probably does not mean that the readers were all Jews, but that James thought of them as the people of God, the true Israel, whether they were Jews or Gentiles (so also Gal. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9). The readers are scattered just as the Jews were scattered during the exile, which probably indicates that the readers were not living in the Holy Land. There is, however, another use of ‘scattered’. Peter (1 Pet. 1:1) uses the same term to indicate that since becoming Christians his readers were no longer at home in their native countries; their real home was heaven.

c. Purpose

James closes by stating exactly why he has written this letter (see James 5:19-20). This implies that the reason for the letter being written is to bring people back people who have wandered from the truth. The way this is done is by bringing them back to the Word of God and teachings of Jesus (1:21-22)

It was written to a church under pressure. Christians were not being martyred, but they were suffering economic persecution and oppression and the church was breaking under the pressure. There are two ways in which church members may respond to extreme pressure. They can either pull together and help each other or they can compromise with the world and split apart into bickering factions.

James wanted his readers to do the former but it was the latter that was actually happening as people struggled to 'get ahead' in the world. These problems make the letter very relevant for the church today.

c. Theme

The letter is filled with the teaching of Jesus. No other letter of the NT has as many references to the teaching of Jesus per page as this one does. It is not that James quotes Jesus directly, although he sometimes does (see in 5:12), but he normally simply uses phrases and ideas which come from Jesus. His readers would have memorized much of the Lord's teaching, so they would recognize the source. Most of these phrases come from the teaching of Jesus now in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) or Luke's Sermon on the Plain (Lk. 6). There is no better example in the NT of a church leader taking the Lord's teaching and applying it to church problems. The letter of James, then, becomes a model for the modern church on how to apply the teaching of Jesus.

How to handle trials and temptations

Read James 1:1-18

1. What is our natural response to trials?
2. How should Christians respond to trials?
3. How does James suggest that trials can be a positive thing in our lives? What does God do in our lives through trials? (vs. 3-4 and 12)
4. When we are going through trials, what role does a relationship with God play in the life of a Christian? (vs.5-8)
5. Why is the double minded person “unstable” and why will he receive nothing from the Lord? (see James 4:8 / Hebrew 11:6)
6. Can you explain how both poverty and wealth are trials?
7. What is the difference between a trial and a temptation?

8. What happens when we respond incorrectly to trials? Why do we respond incorrectly to trials?

9. In this passage what is God like? (1:5; 1:13; 1:17; 1:18) How should this determine the way we view our trials?

Think it through

1. When facing trials, how often do you turn to the Lord in prayer?

2. When things go wrong in your life and you fail, who gets the blame?

3. How can we avoid grumbling about what is wrong our lives?

Read James 1:19-27

1. Why does James raise listening, speaking and anger with regards to God testing us?

2. Why is it difficult to listen to God's word in our trials?

3. How should we listen to God's word? (v. 21)

4. What type of behaviour results when we fail to humbly accept God's Word?

5. What is the word of truth and what role does it play in our relationship with God (v. 18)? Why does James call it the "perfect law" (v. 25)?

6. What is the result of having a proper attitude toward God's word?

7. What great deception does James warn us about in verse 23-25? What point is James making in using the metaphor of looking into a mirror?

8. What are the marks of true religion? How is this connected to what James says about hearing and doing?

9. God defends the cause of the widow and has a special concern for her welfare (Deut 10:18 & Ps 146:9). This concern is concretized in several laws: Israel is commanded, “Do not ... take the cloak of the widow as a pledge,” and is told to leave what remains from harvesting grain, olives and vines for the alien, the fatherless and the widow (Deut 24:17–22).

Read Deut 10:18; 14:28-29; 16:11-14; 24:17-22 & 26:12-15.

- a. How did the law require the Israelites to treat orphans?

 - b. Why do you think the law included these instructions about widows and orphans? What does it tell us about God and His people?
-
10. We don't usually associate law with freedom. How does God's law bring freedom?

Think it through

1. In the first chapter, James clearly places an emphasis on the importance of God's Word in our lives. How would you summarise your attitude to God's word? Do your Bible reading habits need improvement?
2. What steps could you take to make sure that you put into practice what you hear or read in the Bible?
3. Are there situations in which you are quick to speak and quick to become angry? How could you change your behaviour in these situations?
4. Who are the "widows & orphans" in our congregation and how could you perhaps help them?

3

FAVOURITISM and FAITH

James 2:1–26

1. Reflect on James 1. What should our attitude be towards God's Word?

A. Favouritism ... showing partiality**Read James 2:1-13**

2. In what ways is our treatment of others a reflection of our attitude to God's Word?
3. What should we not be doing according to James in verse 1?
4. Why not? What is wrong with treating the rich better than the poor (cf. v. 4 & v. 9)? [Bear in mind that showing favouritism between rich & poor is only one example of the issue James is addressing. You may well think of other examples too.]
5. How is the law summed up in this passage (v. 8)? How is showing favouritism contradictory to this? How can breaking the law at one point mean you have broken all of it?
6. What characteristics should mark our treatment of others (vs. 12-13)? [Note: there are at least two aspects to this answer]

B. Faith ... outworking of the implanted word

Read James 2:14-26

7. How does James describe faith in this passage (cf. vs. 14, 17 & 26)?

8. What is the point of the illustration in verses 15 & 16?

9. How does James respond to the person who thinks they have no need for works/deeds because they have faith? What example does he give to show that faith, if mere intellectual agreement, is useless?

10. How does James describe the faith of Abraham? What is the relationship between Abraham's faith and his works? What is the result?

11. How does James describe the faith of Rahab (v. 25)? How did she, as a non-Israelite, show her faith in God?

12. Sum up, in your words, James' teaching on faith and deeds.

JAMES versus PAUL

This passage has caused much contention for centuries because of the way James emphasises the need for works in order to be saved. Wait a minute, you say: are we not saved by faith alone? What about the teaching of Paul in Romans & Galatians?

However, When we read Romans 3 & James 2 in their entirety, we see that the two authors are addressing quite different questions, even though some of the words are the same. James is continuing his emphasis from chapter 1, that simply hearing God's word and giving intellectual assent to it, counts for very little. Only those who put the word into practice – whose faith is expressed in good deeds – have a true and living faith at all.

Paul, on the other hand, is addressing those who seek to justify themselves before God by performing works of the Old Testament law. He teaches that it is only by putting our trust in God's promise of salvation through Jesus that we can be right with God (that is, justified). Later in Romans, Paul goes on to speak about how this trust in God is expressed in a changed lifestyle (Rom 6, 8 & 12).

John Calvin summarised it well: "We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone." A true saving faith will always be expressed in action, in the good deeds that God has prepared for us to do. If our response to God's offer of salvation is simply to hear it, or to nod our heads in intellectual assent to it, and not to act upon it, then we have not really put our trust in what we have heard. Our faith is lifeless, dead as a doornail.

The Implanted Word (Matthias Media, 1995) pages 31-32

C. Think it through

1. What ways might you be tempted to show favouritism both within the church and the wider community? How might you overcome this attitude and what can you do about it?
2. Are your deeds an expression of a living & active faith in God or are there areas of your life in which your deeds are inconsistent (or maybe even non-existent) with your faith in God. If so, how might you change this?
3. You explain to a non-Christian friend that we are not saved by good works but by Jesus' death alone. Your friend replies that if this is so, then it does not matter what you do. How would you answer from James?

4

TONGUE and TALK

James 3:1–12

1. “Sticks and stones can break my bones but names will never hurt me”. Do you agree with this statement? Have you ever been wounded by words?

2. What do the following Proverbs teach us about words:

Pr 10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Pr 12:6 The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.

Pr 12:18 Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Pr 11:12 A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue.

Pr 17:28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.

Pr 18:21 The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Pr 21:23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

Read James 2:1-13

3. Why do you think James uses 'teachers' as an example to warn us about how we use our tongues? What are the responsibilities of a teacher that results in him being judged more strictly?

4. What influence does your tongue have over your life? How does James illustrate this? (vs. 2-4)

5. James says, "no man can tame the tongue" (v. 8). Do you think it is possible that the tongue can be used for good or is James calling us to take a vow of silence? How is it possible to control the tongue?

6. "The tongue also is a fire" (v. 6). What does this teach us about the power of the tongue?

7. Read Matthew 12:33-36. What is the real problem with the tongue? (vs. 11-12) In terms of our speech, how can we make sure that what comes out of our mouths is 'fresh water' and not 'salt water'?

Think it through

1. In what way is our speech an indication of whether we have humbly accepted the implanted word? (cf. Jas 1:19-21 with Matt 15:1-11)
2. In light of this passage and James 1:19 & 26, do you need to change your speech (consider things like swearing, gossip & destructive conversations)? How might you begin to go about making these changes and how can your group help you to be accountable?

5

WISDOM and WORLDLINESS

James 3:13-4:12

Read: James 3:13 - 4:12

1. In what ways does James describe the double-minded person? (see Jas 1:7, 2:1-4 & 3:9). Describe in your own words how this double-mindedness manifests itself in our lives.
2. There are two types of wisdom. What is the difference between them?
3. According to James, who is a wise person and how does wisdom manifest itself in our lives?
4. James has already made a number of comments about the evil behaviour (see Jas 2:4; 2:19 & 3:6). According to vs.14-16 what causes evil behaviour?
5. Read Jas 1:13-15. What is the cause of human conflict? (Jas 4:1-3)
6. What must you do to overcome human conflict? (also see Jas 1:5)
7. What is worldliness and how does James describe it in James 4:4?

8. Who are the 'proud' and who are the 'humble' in this passage?

9. What action does James demand of Christians in vs. 7-10? What is God's promise to those who obey?

10. In what way has worldly behaviour affected the church?

Think it through

1. What choice is the Christian is always faced with?

2. According to this passage, on what three fronts does the Christian wage war?

3. In what way is this passage both a comfort and a challenge?

6

PERSPECTIVE and PREPARATION**James 4:13–5:6****Read: James 4:13–17**

These verses set forth another example of the worldly spirit.

1. In the context of the book of James, why do you think he begins by saying “Now listen”. What does this tell you about his readers? (James 1:19)

2. What is wrong with the way they go about planning their lives? How should they plan? (Read: Proverbs 16:9; 19:21 & 27:1)

3. Read Proverbs 27:1. What does James reminder vs. 14 teach us about life? What ought our attitude be toward the future? Is it wrong to plan for the future? (Psalm 102:11ff; Job 14:2; 7:7 & 7:9 and Psalm 103:15)

4. James 4:17 serves as a summary of what James has been teaching. Can you see how it fits into the general context of the letter? (see 1:22-26)

Read: James 5:1-6

5. Is money evil? (1 Timothy 6:9-10) Is it wrong for Christians to be wealthy? (1 Timothy 6:9-10) How ought Christians to use their wealth? (1 Timothy 6:17-19/ Matthew 6:19-21)

6. James is not condemning the rich for being wealthy. He is however exposing their abuse of wealth. In what ways have they done this?

7. Why do you think James speak so sternly to those who are rich? Do you think there is any advantage in being poor? (James 1:9-10).

8. James is obviously speaking to rich people who have abused their wealth. By calling them to “to weep and wail”, what is he requiring them to do? (vs. 1)

9. How can wealth in this world ‘testify against us’ on the day of judgement?

Think it through

1. How does the teaching in this passage tie in with James' concern in the letter as a whole?
2. In what way does James' teaching echo that of Jesus Himself?
3. What needs to change in your daily life as a result of this passage?

7

PATIENCE and PERSEVERANCE

James 5:7-12

Read: James 5:7-12

This section marks a change in tone in James. In a sense, the letter ends in the same way that it starts – call to be patient (1:4 & 5:7).

1. What two things does James want his readers to do in the face of various kinds of trials? (5:7, 10-11).
2. How are these two things linked to each other?
3. What motivation does James give for Christians to be patient? (vs. 7-9)
4. What three examples of patience in the midst of difficulties does James give and what point is he trying to make?
5. What two sins does James warn against as we go through trials? (5:9,12)
6. What promise does James give to strengthen believers as they seek to persevere in the midst of tests and trials?

7. What two sins does James warn against as we go through trials?
(5:9,12)

8. What does he say in order to give weight to these warnings?

Think it through

1. How do you think James' warning against grumbling and rash promises fits into the context of trials and difficulties?

2. In what way has this passage spoken to your heart and exposed hidden sins?

3. How do you think your life will be different if you live out the truth of this passage?

8

RESCUE and RESTORATION

James 5:13–20

Read: James 5:13–20

1. In what way is prayer the proper response to suffering? (cf. James 1:5)
2. Why do Christians who are happy “sing songs of praise”? (cf. James 1:16-17)
3. Cast your eye back over the book. What type of church life is described in the book of James?
4. What is the connection between sin and sickness? Is sickness sent to us when we commit individual sins? (cf. John 9:1-3; Mark 2:5; John 5:14 & 1 Corinthians 11:29-32)
5. Compare and comment on these translations of James 5:15 ...

English Standard Version: And the prayer of faith will *save* the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

New International Version: And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person *well*; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

King James Version: And the prayer of faith shall *save* the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Do you think there is a connection between sin and sickness in this verse?

6. What role do elders play in the church?
7. Why do you think the sick person calls for the elders and not for a doctor?
8. What was drought a sign of in the Old Testament? (cf. Deut.28:22 & Haggai 1:11) What was rain a sign of in the Old Testament? (cf. 2 Chronicles 6:26-27)
9. Why do you think James refers to Elijah's ministry? (1 Kings 18:21)
10. Who are the righteous? What makes the prayer of a righteous person powerful and effective?
11. How are people saved? How can we 'save' them? (Compare Elijah – 1 Kings 18:36-37 and James 5:19-20)

Think it Through

1. What is the role of the gospel in the rescuing of sinners from death and destruction?
2. What is the role of the Christian community in the life of believers? In what sense are we responsible for each other in our Christian walk? How well is your Bible Study group fulfilling this responsibility?