

JAMES

Introductory Information

Author: James the brother of Jesus

Date: AD 45

Genre: Epistle/Letter

Recipients of the Letter: Jewish Christians scattered and persecuted throughout the Roman Empire (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19).

Occasion (What led James to write?):

These Jews in early first century AD were struggling with moving from a culture of OT Law to one of NT Grace. The persecution they endured included being ostracized from the synagogues, which were the center of Jewish life at the time. Jews would have felt lost in their faith without the synagogues. James, lead pastor of the Jerusalem Church, was Jewish. He would have felt responsible for caring for and leading these fellow Jewish Christians in the ways of grace in the midst of their scattering and persecution.

Purpose:

The Jewish Christians knew that the Law had come to an end through the death of Christ but were not sure how to live this new faith out in the midst of their scattering and persecution. Throughout the letter, James is answering the question, "What does obedient faith look like?"

James 1

Commentary¹

Summary of Argument

JAMES PRESENTS VARIOUS EXHORTATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS ON RIGHTEOUS LIVING IN ORDER TO SHOW THE JEWISH CHRISTIANS OF THE DIASPORA HOW FAITH OPERATES TO PRODUCE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW DURING THIS NEW AGE.

I. JAMES INTRODUCES HIMSELF AS A SERVANT OF GOD AND ADDRESSES THE TWELVE TRIBES WHICH ARE SCATTERED ABROAD—1:1

II. JAMES INSTRUCTS THE BELIEVERS IN THE REALM OF TESTING AND TEMPTATION IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM THAT **OBEDIENT FAITH PROFITS FROM TESTING AND RESISTS TEMPTATION**—1:2-18

A. He instructs them regarding testing so that they would know how to handle testing and profit from it—1:2-12

1. He tells them that their attitude toward testing should be one of joy because testing produces endurance which leads to maturity—1:2-4
2. He tells them that they should ask for wisdom in their testing so that they would see the good in it and know how to deal with it—1:5-8
3. He tells them that the correct estimate of testing should be rejoicing because of the eternal benefits—1:9-11
4. He tells them that the reward of enduring testing is the crown of life given to those who evince a love for God by their endurance—1:12

B. He instructs them regarding temptation so that they would have help in resisting it—1:13-18

1. He states that the source of temptation is not God but with sinful man—1:13-14
2. He states that the consequences of yielding to temptation is a cycle which leads to physical death—1:15
3. He warns them about being deceived that temptation is from God by noting that He is the giver of good things which is preeminently illustrated by the gift of regeneration—1:16-18

III. JAMES INSTRUCTS THE BELIEVERS IN THE REALM OF THE RECEPTION OF THE WORD IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM THAT **OBEDIENT FAITH PRODUCES OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD**— 1:19-27

^{1 1} Dr. Jerry M. Hullinger, *New Testament Life and Belief: A Study of History, Culture, and Meaning*.

- A. He exhorts them on their attitudes and actions in order to show the preconditions for receiving the Word—1:19-21
1. They are to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry for this does not bring the righteous life which God desires —1:19-20

Note #1:

"The righteousness of God" can be used in several ways. It was seen in the notes on Romans that the phrase describes the fact that God is righteous in the way He deals with people. It is also used by Paul of the judicial and objective righteousness which He imputes to people. James, however, uses it in the sense of the righteous life which God desires as a standard of life. As James develops this idea in the epistle, he is heavily dependent on the righteousness portrayed in the Old Testament and the Sermon on the Mount.

2. They are to rid themselves of moral filth and humbly receive the Word—1:21

- B. He exhorts them to be obedient to the Word—1:22-27
1. He states the requirement of being obedient to the Word—1:22
 2. He illustrates this requirement by one who looks in a mirror and does nothing in response and by one who looks into the mirror of the Word and does respond—1:23-25

Note #2:

By the "perfect law of liberty" James has reference to the righteousness depicted in the whole Old Testament and the Sermon on the Mount. The phrase "of liberty" has the idea of "that which liberates." Thus, it is righteousness that is distinct from enslaving, Pharasaic legalism with which they would have been familiar.

3. He applies the requirement by showing that a hearer and a doer will perform acts of mercy and lead a holy life—1:26-27

Reading the Passage

Read James 1 once per day this week. Thoughtfully answer 1-2 questions from the reading. Also, as needed, note the context and introductory material at the beginning of this study. That information will shape your understanding of the entire letter.

Thinking Through the Passage

How can you see the context show itself in this passage?

What do you notice when reading through this chapter? What things pop out to you?

Why do you think those specific things pop out to you?

Keeping in mind the context, what do you think the main idea of this passage is?

If you could sum that main idea up into three words, what would you say?

How does this truth apply to your life?

How does this passage speak to your life right now?

James 2:1-13

Commentary²

- I. JAMES INSTRUCTS THEM IN THE REALM OF PARTIALITY IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM THAT **OBEDIENT FAITH TREATS ALL PEOPLE ON THE SAME LEVEL**—2:1-13
 - A. He prohibits them to show favoritism and gives an illustration of how this could happen in their assembly and explains that by doing this they would be assuming the position of judge over people—2:1-4
 - B. He shows the results of partiality—2:5-11
 1. He contrasts the methods of judgment in order to show them that in they ended up rejecting whom God had accepted—2:5-7
 - a. He notes that God has chosen the poor to inherit the blessings of the Kingdom—2:5
 - b. He notes that they have insulted the ones chosen by God in favor of the ones who were persecuting them—2:6-7
 2. He explains that partiality violates God's law—2:8-11
 - a. He states that if one truly loves another he is keeping the royal law, but if he is not, he is breaking it—2:8-9

Note #3:

The law is called "royal" because it was given by Christ the King in the Sermon on the Mount. The law is the whole law of God and love toward one's neighbor is the crucial element governing human relationships.

- b. He states that if they break one part of the Law they were guilty of breaking all of it—2:10-11
3. He exhorts them to not show partiality because they would one day be judged by the law of liberty—2:12-13

Note #4:

The reference here is to the judgment seat of Christ. The mercy here is not salvific mercy but that mercy which will come to the Christian at the day of judgment. Our mercy toward others now will provide God with a further occasion to show mercy to the individual on the Day of Judgment. An unmerciful attitude, on the other hand, restricts God's flow of mercy.

² Dr. Jerry M. Hullinger, *New Testament Life and Belief: A Study of History, Culture, and Meaning*.

Reading the Passage

Read James 2:1-13 once per day this week. Thoughtfully answer 1-2 questions from the reading. Also, as needed, note the context and introductory material at the beginning of this study. That information will shape your understanding of the entire letter.

Thinking Through the Passage

James opens by warning the scattered Jewish believers about favoritism (2:1-4). How does showing favoritism place yourself as judge over people?

What do you notice when reading through this chapter? What things pop out to you?

Why do you think those specific things pop out to you?

What is partiality?

Keeping in mind the context, what do you think the main idea of this passage is?

If you could sum that main idea up into three words, what would you say?

How does this main idea apply to your life?

What is the role of mercy in the believer's life according to James 2:12-13?

James 2:14-26

Commentary³

I. JAMES INSTRUCTS THEM IN THE REALM OF FAITH AND WORKS IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM THAT OBEДИENT FAITH PRODUCES GOOD WORKS—2:14-26

Note #5:

This section in James has been the occasion for much debate. The position of the writer will be set out in a number of propositions: 1) James is addressing believers so the issue here is not eternal salvation but obedience in Christian living 2) *sozo* (to save) has a wide gamut of meaning, and James seems to often use the word in its Wisdom Literature sense of preservation of physical life (1:21—the context of the consequences of sin; 5:19-20—the context of physical death of a believer), 3) since James begins the section speaking to believers (2:14) it seems possible (using his analogy especially in 2:26) that just as the spirit (vitality) can leave the physical body, so works can leave faith leaving it worthless, nonproductive, and powerless in the life of the believer, 4) he uses the examples of Abraham and Rahab to show the cooperation of faith and works which vindicated them in man's sight. So, James speaks of justification by faith and justification by works in order to show that they go together in a living, dynamic faith, and 5) James is not writing here to give these readers a basis on which they can have assurance or a doctrine on the perseverance of the saints, but he is exhorting them to an obedient faith.

- A. He presents his first thesis that faith without works is dead—2:14-17
 - 1. He states that if faith is not living and productive than it is dead—2:14
 - 2. He illustrates this by an example of one who says something without any action to accompany it—2:15-16
 - 3. He concludes by stating that faith which does not produce action is dead—2:17
- B. He presents his second thesis that faith without works is demonic—2:18-20
 - 1. He states that faith without works is incapable of demonstration—2:18
 - 2. He states that faith without works is like that of demons—2:19-20
- C. He gives two illustrations in order to show faith and works go together—2:21-25
 - 1. He gives the example of Abraham to show that his faith was confirmed to be alive by his obedient offering of Isaac—2:21-24
 - 2. He gives the example of Rehab to show that her faith was confirmed to be alive by the aid which she gave to the spies—2:25
- D. He concludes by showing that as the body is dead without the spirit so faith is dead without works—2:26

³ Dr. Jerry M. Hullinger, *New Testament Life and Belief: A Study of History, Culture, and Meaning*.

Reading the Passage

Read James 2:14-26 once per day this week. Thoughtfully answer 1-2 questions from the reading each day. Also, as needed, note the context and introductory material at the beginning of this study. That information will shape your understanding of the entire letter.

This week, meet with one person and discuss your reading with them one-on-one. That person can be either inside of the group, or outside.

Thinking Through the Passage

Looking at 2:14, do you think a believer can have dead faith? Why or why not? *Note: look at the commentary and think about the audience of this letter when answering this question.*

What do you notice when reading through this chapter? What things pop out to you?

Why do you think those specific things pop out to you?

Is faith a work/good deed? If so, what does that mean for our salvation? If not, then who saves?

Keeping in mind the context, what do you think the main idea of this passage is?

If you could sum that main idea up into three words, what would you say?

How does this main idea apply to your life?

In your own words, what is the role of works in our Christian faith?

James 3

Commentary⁴

- I. JAMES INSTRUCTS THEM IN THE REALM OF THE TONGUE IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM THAT **OBEDIENT FAITH IS ABLE TO CONTROL THE TONGUE**—3:1-18
- A. He instructs his readers on the importance of the tongue—3:1-5
 - 1. He warns that not many should be teachers for they would be judged for their teaching—3:1
 - 2. He states that the one who can control his tongue is mature and able to control the rest of his person—3:2
 - 3. He gives three illustrations in order to show the importance and power of the tongue—3:3-6
 - B. He instructs his readers on the insubordination of the tongue by noting that while men have the ability to tame animals they do not have the ability to tame the tongue—3:7-8
 - C. He instructs his readers on the incongruity of the tongue—3:9-12
 - 1. He notes that the tongue blesses God on the one hand, and curses man who is in the image of God on the other hand—3:9-10
 - 2. He condemns this inconsistency by noting the perversion of this in nature—3:11-12
 - D. He instructs his readers on the two kinds of wisdom in order to show wisdom's role in controlling the tongue—3:13-18
 - 1. He notes the demand for wisdom in that it needs to be shown in the life—3:13
 - 2. He notes that the control of false wisdom leads to selfishness and evil—3:14-16
 - 3. He notes that the control of true wisdom is pure, etc., and leads to righteousness—3:17-18

⁴ Dr. Jerry M. Hullinger, *New Testament Life and Belief: A Study of History, Culture, and Meaning*.

Reading the Passage

Read James 3 once per day this week. Thoughtfully answer 1-2 questions from the reading each day. Also, as needed, note the context and introductory material at the beginning of this study. That information will shape your understanding of the entire letter.

Thinking Through the Passage

James 3:1-6 discusses the importance of taming the tongue. In your own words, what is the major benefit of disciplining your tongue? Is there a verse in this section that sums it up?

What do you notice when reading through this chapter? What things pop out to you?

Why do you think those specific things pop out to you?

How is the tongue tamed? Is it possible to tame your tongue according to 3:7-8? What are your thoughts on this?

Keeping in mind the context, what do you think the main idea of this passage is?

If you could sum that main idea up into three words, what would you say?

How does this main idea apply to your life?

According to James 3:13-18, what is wisdom's role in taming the tongue?

James 4

Commentary⁵

IV. JAMES INSTRUCTS THEM IN THE REALM OF WORLDLINESS IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM THAT **OBEDIENT FAITH PRODUCES LOYALTY TO GOD**—4:1-12

- A. He describes worldliness in their situation and rebukes them for allowing it in their lives—4:1-6
 - 1. He gives a description of the condition so that they would be able to recognize it—4:1-3
 - He notes that the source of strife in the Body comes from the sinful nature of man
 - 2. He rebukes the worldliness by noting that the one who is the friend of the world is an enemy of God—4:4-6
- B. He exhorts those who are worldly in order to show the cure for worldliness—4:7-12
 - 1. He calls them to proper action to God—4:7-10
 - a. He exhorts them to surrender to God's will—4:7a
 - b. He exhorts them to resist the devil—4:7b
 - c. He exhorts them to restore their fellowship to God—4:8a
 - d. He exhorts them to moral cleansing—4:8b
 - e. He exhorts them to inner purification—4:8c
 - f. He exhorts them to sorrow over their sin—4:9a
 - g. He exhorts them to mourn—4:9b
 - h. He exhorts them to laughter over their repentance—4:9c
 - i. He exhorts them to humility—4:10
 - 2. He calls them to proper action toward man—4:11-12
 - a. They are not to slander each other—4:11a
 - b. They are not to do this because it set themselves above the law and usurped the position that was God's alone—4:11b-12

V. JAMES INSTRUCTS THEM CONCERNING PRESUMPTUOUS PLANNING IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM THAT **OBEDIENT FAITH SHOWS DEPENDENCE ON GOD**—4:13-17

- A. He calls to attention those who do not feel their dependency on God as they make their plans—4:13
- B. He says that this is wrong because of lack of knowledge and the brevity of life—4:14
- C. He says that the correct attitude is one that recognizes God's authority and dependence on Him—4:15-16
- D. He concludes that to know what should be done (the preceding) and does not do it is sinning—4:17

⁵ Dr. Jerry M. Hullinger, *New Testament Life and Belief: A Study of History, Culture, and Meaning*.

Reading the Passage

Read James 4 once per day this week. Thoughtfully answer 1-2 questions from the reading each day. Also, as needed, note the context and introductory material at the beginning of this study. That information will shape your understanding of the entire letter.

Thinking Through the Passage

In James 4:1-6, James is rebuking worldliness in the Jewish Christians lives. List the specific things that James rebukes in these verses. Are these same things apparent in the Church today? Are they apparent in your life?

What do you notice when reading through this chapter? What things pop out to you?

Why do you think those specific things pop out to you?

Considering the rebukes of James 4:1-6, look at Romans 12:1-2. If the correction of worldliness is the refreshing of the mind, is worldliness a mind issue or a physical issue? Explain.

Keeping in mind the context, what do you think the main idea of this passage is?

If you could sum that main idea up into three words, what would you say?

How does this main idea apply to your life?

According to James 4:7-12, what is the cure for worldliness?

In your own words, sum up James 4:13-17. Use the commentary section for help.
According to these verses, what is it that we should depend on God for? Is it sin if we don't?

James 5

Commentary⁶

I. JAMES INSTRUCTS THEM CONCERNING THE RICH, JESUS' COMING, AND PRAYER IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM HOW OBEДИENT FAITH ACTS IN THESE SITUATIONS—5:1-20

A. James instructs them on the fate of the rich and how they are to live in light of this—5:1-12

1. He notes that judgment is coming on the unsaved rich because they oppress the poor, are self-indulgent, and are violent against the righteous—5:1-6
2. He instructs them on how they are to live as they wait for judgment to come upon the rich—5:7-12
 - a. He tells them to be patient as the farmer who waits for his crop—5:7-8a
 - b. He tells them to stand firmly—5:8b
 - c. He tells them to not grumble against each other—5:9
 - d. He gives the example Job of patient endurance—5:10-11
 - e. He tells them to be honest in all things thus not necessitating the taking of an oath—5:12

B. James instructs them in the area of prayer so that they would be helped in their present affliction—5:13-20

1. He says that those who are suffering hardship should pray, and those who are happy should sing songs of praise—5:13
2. He gives instruction for those who are sick—5:14-18

Note #6:

Views on this injunction include: the promise of physical healing, extreme unction, and prayer + medicine. The most plausible would be the latter with the understanding that the promise for healing must be combined with other Scripture related to the answering of prayer by God when it is His will. Another view, however, notes that the word for "sick" (*asthenei*) literally means "to be weak." While it is used in the Gospels to refer to physical sickness, it is often used in the epistles and Acts to speak of a weak faith or conscience (Acts 20:35; Rom. 6:19; 14:1; 1 Cor. 8:9-12). Furthermore, the word for "sick person" in James 5:15 is *kamnonta* is used only here and in Hebrews 12:3 where the meaning is "weary." In addition, the context of the book and this section is suffering under persecution. This would also be supported by the example of Elijah. Therefore, it is plausible to understand James as calling for the anointing and prayer by the elders for the believer who is weak and discouraged from his arduous circumstances. By these actions, he would be uplifted and encouraged.

The word for "anoint" (*aleipsantes*) means "to rub with oil" (unlike *chrío* which means "to ceremonially anoint). Thus, he is encouraging the common use of oil as a means

⁶ Dr. Jerry M. Hullinger, *New Testament Life and Belief: A Study of History, Culture, and Meaning*.

of refreshment in the ancient world. James also holds out the possibility that this discouragement has come as the result of personal sin.

- a. The sick person is to call for the elders of the church—5:14a
- b. The elders are to pray anointing him with oil—5:14b
- c. The prayer of faith will restore the person and if necessary insure forgiveness and because of this confess one to another—5:15-16a
- d. He illustrates from Elijah the fact that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective—5:16b-18

II. JAMES CONCLUDES HIS INSTRUCTIONS BY SHOWING HOW AN OBEDIENT FAITH ACTS TOWARD THOSE WHO DO NOT HEED THE ADMONITIONS OF THE LETTER—5:19-20

- A. He presents the scenario of a brother wandering from this truth and being restored by another brother—5:19
- B. He notes that this act has saved this brother from physical death—5:20

On the Healing of the Sick (James 5:13-20)⁷

Q: What do you think James means when he says in chapter 5, “the prayer of faith will save the sick?”

A:

The argument in chapter 5 is James arguing that believers must “Share with Concern.” In the culture, self-centered merchants were exploiting the poor and were gaining and hoarding wealth. James is writing this passage [Chapter 5] to tell them that hoarding earthly materials is a waste and will not produce any spiritual fruit. In fact, God is the owner of everything anyways, so we should be willing to give the things God has entrusted to us to someone else if they need it and we have extra. In 5:1-6, James writes about sharing possessions, and warns that hoarding wealth only ends in condemnation. In 5:7-12, James uses the term “brothers” and his tone changes from condemnation to sensitive consolation. He appeals here to Christians who have been victim of the wealthy’s greed to be patient. Finally, in the last section of the chapter [5:13-20], James says the believers should share in prayer. In these verses he outlines how a believer should go about praying for someone. First, he must have a sensitivity to someone’s needs (12-13), then he should engage in diligent supplication for those needs (14-18), and finally, he should recognize the significance of those needs (19-20). In verse 15 we read, “the prayer of faith will save the sick.” In this section, James is outlining how a believer should pray in supplication for someone else’s needs. We see in verse 14 the term “sick” used for the first time in the passage. Here it is evident that the

⁷ Ian Pace, *Q&A concerning James*, Piedmont International University, 2015.

term is not referring to physical ailments; however, it is referring to spiritual weariness. The term “sick” in the Greek literally means “to be weak.” In verse 15 the word “sick” means “to be weary.” The medicine for the “weak and weary” soul is the prayer of the elders of the church. This is reiterated in verse 16 when James writes that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” It is evident that the spiritual condition is being spoken of, and not the physical, by the statement, “and if he hath committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” at the end of verse 15.

In conclusion, according to the context of the passage, as well as the syntax of the Greek, it is unmistakable that the passage is dealing with spiritual weakness and weariness. James is saying that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is the solution to being spiritually healed, since God is the one who must be petitioned to do the healing.

Reading the Passage

Read James 5 once per day this week. Thoughtfully answer 1-2 questions from the reading each day. Also, as needed, note the context and introductory material at the beginning of this study. That information will shape your understanding of the entire letter.

Please note the final reading directions at the end of the questions this week!

Thinking Through the Passage

James 5 is written in a specific cultural context. Read the commentary notes from the Q&A to help you understand this context. How do you think this context shapes the rest of the passage?

What do you notice when reading through this chapter? What things pop out to you?

Why do you think those specific things pop out to you?

According to James 5:1, there is judgment coming on the rich merchants that James is addressing in his letter for oppressing the poor. Can you think of some examples of wealthy unbelievers in our society that oppress the poor?

Keeping in mind the context, what do you think the main idea of this passage is?

If you could sum that main idea up into three words, what would you say?

How does this main idea apply to your life?

What are your thoughts on James 5:13-20? Use the commentary to help guide your thinking. Feel free to use other sources as well. Is it addressing physical healing, or spiritual healing?

Final Reading

You have studied all the way through James! Great job!! Now that you have handled the truth of James in context, read this letter as it was meant to be read—all the way through in one sitting. Hopefully handling the passages within has helped you be able to understand James' flow of thought as you read it all at once.