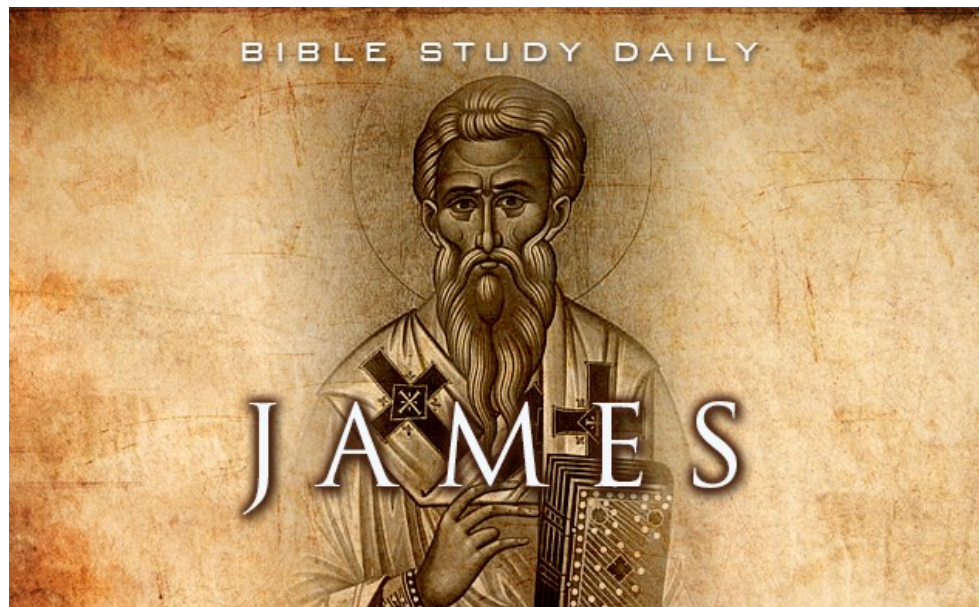




# BIBLE STUDY DAILY



This document contains the introduction to the book of James as well as my study notes for the book.



## Name

The title “James ” comes from the author James (1:1), the brother of Jesus.

## Author

There are four men named James in the New Testament. Only James, the half-brother of Jesus, was alive at the time of the writing of the letter and in a position to direct activities and believers in the early church.

## Genre

General Epistle

## Literary Form

The epistle of James has the typical opening of a letter, but the letter itself does not strictly conform to the genre. It does not even contain the ending greetings and benediction common to a letter. The tone of the letter is authoritative, almost like a lecture. It has elements of wisdom literature, exhortation, and even some prophecy.

## Time Frame

Flavius Josephus, the historian, recorded James being martyred in A.D. 62 so it had to be written before then. There is no mention of the Council of Jerusalem in A.D. 49 (James was the head of the church in Jerusalem) so it had to have been written before then as well. Most scholars agree a date between A.D. 45-48 is most likely.

## Emphasis

James' emphasis is on very practical matters of living a life in obedience to Christ. Paul's writing showed believers how Christ met the demands of the Law and brought salvation to man. James however, showed believers their obedience to God was a demonstration of their faith.

## Outline

- Salutation (1:1)
- Facing trials and temptations (1:1-18)
- Faith at Work in the Christian Life (1:19-2:26)
- The importance of Wisdom (3:1-18)
- Peace with God and each other (4:1-17)
- The disciplined Christian life (5:1-20)

# What I Noticed Today (James 1-5)

## James 1

In verse 1 James opens the letter with the usual sequence: the author's name (James, a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ), the audience (the 12 tribes of the dispersion), and a greeting.

**Note:** The phrase, "to the 12 tribes in the dispersion" refers to Jewish Christians who had been dispersed throughout the Roman empire. "Dispersion" is a translation of the Greek *diaspora*, which means "scattered."

In verses 2-12 James teaches about trials and maturity in the Christian life:

- Our attitude toward trials should be joy. Because the testing of our faith develops endurance, and endurance help us to become mature, lacking nothing.

**Note:** In this verse James is speaking of external trials, not internal ones which he addresses later. Also, note he does not say we should be joyful *for* trials, but *in* trials (in the midst of trials).

- If you lack wisdom ask God, for He gives wisdom generously.
- But ask in faith, without doubting.
- A doubter is unstable in all his ways and should not expect to receive anything (let alone wisdom) from the Lord.
- James uses illustrations of a poor man (humble circumstances) and a rich man. Neither one has anything to boast about because they are both equal before God.
- A man who endures trials is blessed, because he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.

In verses 13-18 James warns about temptation:

- No one undergoing a trial should think they are being tempted by God. He Himself does not tempt anyone.
- Each person is tempted by their own evil desires.
- After the evil desire is conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin gives birth to (spiritual) death.
- Every generous act and perfect gift comes from God.
- He gave us a new birth by the message of truth (the Gospel) so we would be His firstfruits (believers).

In verses 19-27 James speaks of the importance of hearing and doing the



Word:

- Understand, everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.
- Therefore, rid yourself of moral filth and evil, and replace it with the Word that saves you (the Word of God).
- Do not just *hear* the Word, but *do* the Word. Without doing the Word a person soon forgets what he has heard.
- But the person who hears the Word, and does good works will be blessed by God.

**Note:** James is not suggesting works righteousness. Works do not bring salvation. Doing good works are the result, or evidence, of a life committed to God.

If anyone thinks they are religious without controlling his tongue, he deceives himself. Pure and undefiled religion in the eyes of God is to care for widows and orphans, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

## James 2

In chapter 2 James discusses the sin of favoritism. When we show favoritism we are rejecting God's design making all men equal in His eyes.

In verses 1-13 James exhorts the reader to be accepting of others:

- Do not show favoritism to the rich man who enters the meeting (synagogue) over the poor man.
- When you do, you have discriminated and become judges with evil thoughts.
- God chose the worldly poor to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom. Yet you dishonor the poor man, while it is the rich man who oppresses you
- Don't they (the rich) blaspheme the noble name (Jesus Christ) pronounced at your baptism?
- If you keep the royal law (Love your neighbors as yourself, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39) you are being obedient to God.
- If you show favoritism you commit sin and are a transgressor (against God's royal law).
- Whoever keeps the Law but fails at one point is guilty of breaking it all.
- Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of freedom (the Gospel).
- Mercy triumphs over judgement.

**Note:** To those who have not been merciful, God will not be

merciful.

In verses 14-26 James explains they must not only accept others, but demonstrate their faith through good works:

- James asks a rhetorical question, can a faith that does not include good works save? The answer is no, because true faith is expressed in good works.
- Belief in God alone is not enough. Even the demons believe in God, but they cannot be saved because they are incapable of good works.
- In another rhetorical question James asks wasn't Abraham justified by works when he offered to sacrifice his son, Isaac? No, it was Abraham's faith that justified him.

**Note:** James' reference to man being justified by works and not by faith alone is often misinterpreted. He is again saying that the expression of true faith is in our good works.

- James repeats the same premise with the example of Rahab who, through faith, saved herself and her family by protecting the Israelite spies (a good work).
- Just as the body without a spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. Your faith is dead, if it does not reveal itself in good works.

### James 3

In chapter 3 James returns to the topic of misguided speech (2:16-18) and the importance of controlling the tongue:

- Not many should become teachers, because teachers will receive a stricter judgment.

**Note:** The teachers James is referring to are teachers in the church. They bear a great responsibility because they are handling God's Word, and have an impact on His people.

- If anyone does not stumble in what he says he is a mature man, able to control the whole body.
- A bit in the mouth of a horse is used to control the whole horse.
- A small rudder is able to steer a large ship.
- The tongue is small, but it can ignite fires. It is a world of unrighteousness. It pollutes the whole body. It is set on fire itself by hell.
- No man can control his tongue. It is restless, evil, and full of poison.
- We praise the Lord and curse men with the same tongue.
- We should not be this way.
- A spring does not put forth sweet and bitter water. A fig tree does not

produce olives. A grapevine does not produce figs. Saltwater springs do not produce fresh water.

**Note:** James' point in this section is that believers should be consistent, and controlled in their speech, avoiding speech that comes from the evil one.

In verses 13-18 James asserts that wisdom comes from God:

- James asks another rhetorical question, who is wise and has understanding among you?
- This person should show their works by good conduct and gentleness.
- But if you are bitter or envious, and have selfish ambitions don't brag and deny the truth (these are characteristics of someone who denies the truth of God's Word).
- Such wisdom (bragging, selfish ambitions, envy) comes from man and is unspiritual and demonic.
- Envy and selfish ambition yield disorder and every kind of evil.
- But wisdom from above (God) is pure, peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, and without favoritism and hypocrisy.
- The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace.

**Note:** Wisdom from God produces men who fulfill the royal law (love your neighbor as yourself) and develops unity within the church body.

## James 4

In chapter 4 James contrasts the impact of the proud with the humble and our will with God's will.

In verses 1-12 James addresses the sources of conflict as pride and selfishness:

- The source of wars and fights come from your cravings at war within you.
- You desire and do not have.
- You murder and covet and cannot obtain.
- You fight and war.
- You do not have because you do not ask.
- You ask and don't receive because you ask with the wrong motives—your own evil desires.
- Friendship with the world is hostility toward God.
- Whoever wants to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy.
- God's spirit within us does not want us to have selfish cravings.
- God gives grace. He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble

(Proverbs 3:34).

- Therefore (v. 6) submit to God and resist the devil.
- Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
- Cleanse your hands and purify your hearts.
- Do not be double-minded (trying to be worldly and Godly).
- It is better to grieve, mourn and wail with God than be merry without God.
- If you humble yourself, God will exalt you.
- Don't criticize one another. Criticizing or judging a brother criticizes and judges the Law.
- If you judge you are no longer a doer but a judge and there is only one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy.

**Note:** James is not referring to all criticism and judgement of a brother here. He is referring to maliciousness that violates the royal law to love one another.

In verses 13-17 James warns about boasting in our own will versus being open to following God's will in our lives:

- Do not boast about what you will do tomorrow, because you do not know what tomorrow will bring.
- Instead say, if the Lord wills, I will do such and such.
- Do not boast in your arrogance, because all such boasting is evil.
- It is a sin for a person who knows what is good to do and doesn't do it.

**Note:** The admonition in verse 17 can easily apply to all the instruction James has given thus far. To become spiritually mature we must do the good we know to do.

## James 5

In verses 1-6 James issues warnings to the rich:

- James admonishes those who put their trust in things of this earth that will decay: your clothes are ruined by moths, and your silver and gold are corroded.

**Note:** Silver and gold do not actually corrode, but they will perish in the end days. They do corrode the lives whose focus is on accumulating gold and silver for the sake of accumulation.

- Woe to you who have stored up treasures by withholding the wages of your workers.
- You have lived luxuriously and indulged yourselves.

- You have taken what belonged to the righteous.

In verses 7-11 James encourages the brothers to be patient as they anticipate the return of the Lord:

- Be patient and wait upon the Lord like the farmer who plants and waits patiently for the rains that will bring the crops.
- You must also be patient.
- Strengthen your hearts because the Lord is near.
- Do not complain about one another so that you will not be judged.
- Consider the prophets as examples of those who suffered with patience.
- We count as blessed those who, like Job, endured.
- The Lord is compassionate and merciful.

In verse 12 James admonishes the brothers not to swear by heaven or earth (take empty oaths). Rather, let your yes be yes and your no be no, so you won't fall into judgement. (Mean what you say, be truthful!)

In verses 13-20 James concludes the letter discussing the importance of effective prayer:

- If you are suffering, you should pray.
- If you are cheerful, you should sing praises.
- If you are sick, call for the elders to pray over you and anoint you with oil in the name of the Lord.
- The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will restore him to health, if he has committed sins he will be forgiven.


**Note:** There has been much confusion regarding the interpretation of verses 14-15. The phrase translated *sick person* literally means *is weary*. The meaning of the verse goes beyond physical illness. The prayer of faith is faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The ultimate end of a believer is spiritual restoration because our sins have been forgiven.

- Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so you will be healed.
- Elijah was a man with a nature like ours yet he prayed for it not to rain, and it did not rain for 3-1/2 years. Then he prayed for rain, and it rained.
- If any of you strays from the truth and someone turns him back to the truth, whoever turns a sinner back to God saves his life and covers a multitude of sins.

**Note:** The word used for *strays* from the truth is a person who is hopelessly lost. The aim of bringing them back is restoration.

*Some thoughts for further consideration:*



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- *James uses the term brother or brothers 17 times in this letter as he exhorts believers in very practical matters of Christian life: to seek God's wisdom, to be doers of the Word, to be just, to control our speech, to be humble, to submit to God's will, to wait upon the Lord, and to pray for one another.*
  - *We honor God and bring glory to Him when, through faith, we do the things He has commanded us to do.*