

Reading Through the New Testament

James

Background to the Letter

**Outline:*

Marks of a Mature Christian:

I. He Is Patient in Trials (ch. 1)

II. He Practices the Truth (ch. 2)

III. He has Power over the Tongue (ch. 3)

IV. He Is a Peacemaker not a Troublemaker (ch 4)

V. He is Prayerful (ch 5)

**Warren Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary*

- The opening verse identifies the author of the letter as “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” There are several people in the NT with this name. This is most likely James, the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55).
- The brothers of Jesus did not believe in Him during his earthly ministry, but came to faith after His death and resurrection (John 7:5).
- (This) James was not one of the twelve, but the risen Lord appeared to him personally and he was regarded as an apostle (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19). James became an influential leader in the early church, especially in the region of Judea (Acts 12:17; 21:18; Gal. 2:9).
- The letter is addressed: “...to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.” There were pockets of Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire. He may be writing specifically to those scattered by the persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1).
- It is probable that this was one of the earliest books in the NT to be written, around 45 A.D.
- The letter is practical, dealing with how believers ought to live out their faith. He sometimes takes a scolding tone, rebuking readers for becoming worldly.
- James speaks of wisdom, and the letter is reminiscent of the OT wisdom books (i.e. Proverbs). The main theme is to be a doer, not simply a hearer, of the Word.

30 / 33 AD Death & Resurrection of Christ
 30 / 33 AD James becomes a believer
 36 / 37 AD Paul meets James in Jerusalem
 40-45 AD James writes his letter
 48 AD Paul writes Galatians
 48-49 AD Jerusalem Council
 Death of James 62 AD

The Problem of Partiality: (2:1-9)

1. One of the issues, plaguing some congregations, was an attitude of favoritism. Why were some people being treated differently than others (v.2-3)? What kind of message did that send?

2. Can you think of examples of how some churches (or believers) might show partiality today, maybe even unintentionally? Does God care if you are white collar or blue collar, wealthy or poor, black or white, well known or unknown? Will there be a difference in heaven?

3. In verse 1, James reminds us that the Savior we worship is “the Lord of glory.” Was Christ ever hesitant to associate with the lowly during His earthly ministry?

4. According to verse 5, what kind of people, by and large, comprised the early church? There is no question that everyone can be saved. But what makes power, wealth, and status stumbling blocks that might keep people from recognizing their need for God (see also 1 Cor. 1:26-29; Mark 10: 23-27)?

5. According to verses 8-9, what is the supreme command on which every instruction dealing with human relationships is based? Are we obeying that command, when we treat people differently because of what they look like, where they come from, what kind of job they have, or how popular they are?

Faith and Works: (2:14-20)

6. James also has a great deal to say about genuine, saving faith. How would you define what it means to be a believer? What does it mean to place your faith in someone? Is there a difference between understanding something in your mind (intellectually) and embracing it in your heart?

7. Much debate has swirled around this passage, throughout church history. Some say James and Paul contradict one another. But is that really the case, or are they dealing with two sides of the same issue?

Paul

a. we are saved by faith not w_____ (Eph 2:8-9)

b. Abraham b_____ God and was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:3)

c. if it were possible to be saved by obeying the Law, Christ died in v_____ (Gal. 2:21)

d. Paul exposed the error of l_____, or trying to earn God's favor through religion

James

a. good w_____ are a hallmark of saving faith

b. Abraham b_____ God, and his faith was demonstrated in action when he followed God

c. is it possible for a person who knows the Lord to exhibit absolutely no evidence in their life?

d. James exposed the danger of "fire insurance" Christianity, religion with no real substance

8. The point that James is trying to make is that being a Christian is more than repeating a prayer; it is inviting Christ into our life. The Lord loves us wherever we are, but He loves us too much to leave us there. Who dwells within every believer? What kinds of changes does He bring about? When we stray from the Lord, what will He do? We cannot see inside another person's heart, but if there is no outward change over a period of time, is it possible there has been no inward change? (Matt. 7:15-20)

9. It is true Paul is the apostle of grace; no one proclaimed or defended the doctrine of justification by faith more fiercely. But like James, Paul also has much to say about the role of good works in the believer's life. What do the following verses teach us? (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12; Titus 2:14; 1 Tim. 6:18)

10. Many people, then and now, want blessings from God but do not wish to follow Him, surrender their life, or walk in His ways. What does James say about that kind of attitude in 1:21-25?