

The Letter of James – Chapter 1

A Profile of the Author, Date, and Audience (James 1:1)

Of the four possible men named James that are listed in the biblical record, there is only one that most scholars agree is most probably the author of this letter - that is James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) What follows are other important notes about James that help us to give us context for the letter.

- James initially rejected Jesus as the Messiah (John 7:5), but came to belief after Jesus appeared to him following the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7).
- James was a key leader in the early days of the Jerusalem church. He was called a “pillar” in the Paul’s letter to the Galatian church.
- His speech in Acts 15:13-21 helps to settle the debate over the requirements for Gentile converts to the faith.
- He was known as James the Just because of his devotion to righteousness.
- He was martyred around AD 62 according to the first century Jewish historian Josephus.
- James was raised in the Jewish faith. He is also the brother of Jude (Jude 1)

The date of this epistle is thought to be between AD 44 – 49. This would make it the earliest book written in the New Testament canon. During this time period, Acts tells us that the church was under great persecution in Jerusalem under Herod Agrippa causing many to leave to escape persecution and death.

The audience was the twelve tribes (of Israel) that were scattered abroad, that is living outside of the home region of Palestine. While many Jews did not return following the Syrian and Babylonian exiles, this letter is geared to those who escaped the persecution of the Jewish religious leaders (Acts 7-8) and the Roman empire.

Count It All Joy! (James 1:2-12) - *There is no getting around the reality of hard times. How do you respond to trials or setback in your life? Why?*

Key Points:

- The trials of life come to help build our faith, not tear it down. (vs. 2-3)
- The goal of trials is to move us to spiritual maturity through faith in God. (vs. 4-8)
- Trials help to remind us that we are dependent on God. (vs. 9-12)
- God’s

Key Words:

- Trials: Greek word *peirasmos* meaning both trials and temptations. In this section, referring to external forces.
- Perfect: Greek word *teleios* meaning mature and complete. The underlying theme for the entire letter is moving to spiritual maturity.
- Wisdom: Greek word *sophia*. In this context, it refers to divine wisdom.
- Double-Minded: Greek word *dipsychos*. Literally two minds or divided mind. In this context, a mind split between God and the world.

Questions to Consider:

- Read Proverbs 3:5-6. Compare and contrast this passage with James 1:5-6. What helpful principles about wisdom do you observe?
- Read 1 Peter 1:6-9. In what ways do trial prove our faith is genuine? How does having faith in what we have not seen make a difference in difficult times?
- How would you define endurance as it relates to the Christian life? According to James 1:12, why is it imperative that we persevere?

Fighting Temptation (James 1:13-18) - Trying to deflect responsibility when we getting our hands in the proverbial cookie jar is human (and sinful) nature. It has been this way since the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. Adam blames "the woman [God] gave" him. Eve blames the serpent. Adam implicit tries to blame God. Is God ultimately responsible for our temptation and sin?

Key Points:

- God cannot be tempted and doesn't tempt us. (vs. 13)
- Our own desires are the source of temptation. (vs. 14)
- Unrestrained temptation leads to death. God is the source of new life. (vs. 15-18)

Key Words:

- Sin: Greek word *harmatia*. This relates to disobedience of God's will in thought, word, or deed. Literally, "to miss the mark."
- Temptation: Greek word *peirasmos* meaning both trials and temptations. In this section, referring to internal desires that lead to sin

Questions to Consider:

- Describe the progression from temptation to sin.
- How much are you tempted to blame other people or circumstances for your own sin? Where does that desire come from?
- Read Ephesians 2:5-6. What has God done in the life of each believer that gives them no excuse to sin?

Belief that Behaves (James 1:19-27) - James focuses on a proper reception of God's Word and a reaction to it that is reflected in an obedient life. Just as we should hunger for the Word, we should also seek to act on what we have learned. So, are you a "doer," or just a "hearer?"

Key Points:

- Hearing the word is the first step to a faith. (vs. 19-21)
- Hearing without doing is fruitless. Hearing and doing produces the fruit of faith. (vs. 22-25)
- True religion is defined by belief fueled action. (vs. 26-27)

Key Words:

- Doer: Greek word *poiétés*. Literal meaning is doer, performer, or poet. It carries the connotation that one's whole being - mind, soul, spirit, emotions - are dedicated to continual obedience. A life characterized by "holy energy."
- Hearer: Greek word *akroatés*. The connotation is of a passive listener, one who hears for the sake of hearing and not moved to action.
- Religion: Greek word *thréskeia*. In verse 26, denoting ritualistic, ceremonial public worship. When used in verse 27, it is characterized by words meaning clean and undefiled, the reference coming from the Mosaic law. Bad religion is uncontrolled talk with no action. Good religion is caring for those who are the least and left out.

Questions to Consider:

- Why is humility necessary in hearing and obeying God's Word (James 1:21)?
- In the arena of faith, how are "hearing" and "doing" different? How are they related?
- Read John 14: 21-24. How does Jesus relate love and obedience?
- Reflect on you life and habits. Are you aware of any specific situations in your life in which you are not doing what you know God's Word calls you to do? Why is the source of our reluctance to obey God's Word?