

"Introduction to the Book of James"**Part 1**

Introduction: Last week we finished our study of the first 11 chapters of *Genesis* and as we approached the end of that study I was seeking God's will on where we should go next and I was directed to the book of James.

Now I believe this study will be a great blessing to you and to me as we slowly work our way through this letter.

As we prepare to step into this study there are 3 questions which we need to consider.

1. Who is the writer?
2. Who were the recipients of the letter?
3. What is the purpose for the letter?

I. Who is the writer?**Notice James 1:1**

There are 4 men in the Bible who have the name "James" but there is really only one who really fits the position of the writer of this letter. That would be the half brother of Jesus. Jesus was the virgin born child of Mary and the Son of God. Then after His birth Mary and Joseph had children of their own and one of them was James who is the man who wrote this letter which we are about to study.

Mark 6:1-3

And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.

² *And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?*

³ *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.*

Here we see that Jesus had a brother by the name of James. This is the writer of the book of James.

Now we also need to know that while James was probably the closest to Jesus in age, James doubted the claims of Jesus.

John 7:1-5

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.

² *Now the Jew's feast of tabernacles was at hand.*

³ *His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.*

⁴ *For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.*

⁵ *For neither did his brethren believe in him.*

Now let us move ahead to the book of Acts and we can step into the gathering of the Apostles in the upper room right before Pentecost.

Acts 1:13-14

¹³ *And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.*

¹⁴ *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*

Here we now see that all of his "brothers" are in the upper room joining in prayer. That would also include James our writer. How did this come about?

1 Corinthians 15:3-7

³ *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;*

⁴ *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

⁵ And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

⁷ After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

After the resurrection Jesus met with James one on one and from that day forward James was committed to following Jesus Christ. So back in Acts we find James waiting with the Apostles and his own brothers. He would go from there to be a very significant part of the early church.

But there is more. Let me now take you ahead in time.

Galatians 2:1, 9

¹Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.

⁹ And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

Here we see that James is now a pillar in the early church. James was actually the leader of the church at Jerusalem. In today's language he would have been considered the senior pastor of the church at Jerusalem.

There is something else which we need to understand before we move on. This letter was written around 45-50 AD. That makes it the earliest New Testament letter.

II. Who did James write to?

Notice James 1:1

James letter is addressed to the 12 tribes who were scattered abroad. These were believers who were scattered in the persecution of the early church. The letter is not addressed to any church in particular, it was meant to be circulated within the Jewish believers who were under the persecution.

III. What is the Purpose of the Letter?

I believe you will find the purpose of the letter very interesting. If you read some commentaries they will tell you that James is simply a practical book of assorted instruction in which the believer is to live while on this earth.

But I believe there is an underlying overall purpose for writing of this letter. I have a Bible I keep in my car for traveling and I pulled it out the other day to read James and I noticed the way this Bible had the letter outlined and it opened my eyes to the underlying theme. I want to read for you the introduction to James as found in that Bible.

"Faith without works cannot be called faith. Faith without works is dead and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work: it must produce: it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough: mental faith is insufficient. Faith must be there, but it must be more. It must inspire action. Throughout his epistle to Jewish believers, James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith must manifest itself in works of faith.

Faith endures trials. Trials come and go, but a strong faith will face them head on and develop endurance. Faith understands temptations. It will not allow us to consent to our lust and slide into sin. Faith obeys the Word. It will not merely hear and not do. Faith produces doers. Faith harbors no prejudice. For James, faith and favoritism cannot coexist. Faith displays itself in works. Faith is more than mere words: it is more than knowledge: it is demonstrated by obedience: it overtly responds to the promises of God. Faith controls the tongue. This small but immensely powerful part of the body must be held in check. Faith can do it. Faith acts wisely. It gives us the ability to choose wisdom that is heavenly and to shun wisdom that is earthly. Faith produces separation from the world and submission to God. It provides us with the ability to resist the Devil and humbly draw near to God. Finally, faith waits patiently for the coming of the Lord. Through trouble and trial faith stifles complaining."

When I read this together with the outline I realized that James is not only concerned about practical living but at the same time he wants his readers to be sure their faith is real. That is what I want you to see. James mentions many of life's challenges in this letter and then he tells us how faith will respond to each of these. It is within each of these challenges that James is calling for all of his readers to do a faith check. He knows there is such a thing as a false faith and he is very concerned about that. We can see it clearly in one of the sections of this letter.

Notice James 2:14-20

James is not saying that we are saved by faith plus works. He is saying that true saving faith will produce good works. Let me show you the outline which we will use to study this letter.

1. Faith Grows in Trials. (1:2-12)
2. Faith Never Blames God for Temptation. (1:13-18)
 3. Faith Obeys the Word. (1:19-27)
 4. Faith Shows No Favoritism. (2:1-13)
 5. Faith Produces Good Works. (2:14-26)
 6. Faith Controls the Tongue. (3:1-12)
 7. Faith Produces Wisdom. (3:13-18)
 8. Faith Produces Humility. (4:1-12)
9. Faith Produces Dependence upon God. (4:13-5:6)
 10. Faith Produces Patience. (5:7-12)
 11. Faith Prays for the Afflicted. (5:13-18)

That is the outline. So what we will see as we go through this letter is real life situations which James will use to help all of his readers to examine their faith to be sure it is true faith.

This is a concern which we see throughout the Word of God. Let me remind you that the Bible is God's love letter to man. It speaks of God's love and concern for man from the beginning to the end. It is God's desire that all people would be saved.

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

This is God's greatest desire. Then we see verses throughout the Bible that remind all people who profess to be saved to be sure their faith is real.

2 Corinthians 13:5

⁵ *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*

This is the very idea that James has as he writes this letter to the Jews who are scattered.

James teaching about how true faith will impact the way we deal with the challenges in life and this is also seen by the other writers of the Bible. Let me show you what I mean.

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

1 John 2:3-5

³ *And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.*

⁴ *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

⁵ *But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.*

1 John 3:6-10

⁶ *Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*

⁷ *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*

⁸ *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

⁹ *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*

¹⁰ *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*

These are a few examples of the tests which John gives to his readers to test their faith. This is really the same thing which James is doing.

Jesus showed the very same concern in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7:21-23

²¹ *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

²² *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*

²³ *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

In these verses Jesus spoke of the changed life as proof of salvation.

James will show us that good works give testimony that we are truly saved. Luther called the letter of James an "epistle of straw" because of how much James focused upon works. Luther believed the epistle of James contradicted Paul's teaching on grace.

Notice what Paul says.

Ephesians 2:10

¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **unto good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

Conclusion:

I could go on and on with verses that speak of works as evidence of salvation but you get the point.

Sunday July 6, 2014

#1 Recorded

AM Service

Next week we will start into the letter of James and we will see the different ways which James gives for people to examine their faith. But that is not all. We will see great practical instruction about dealing with the challenges of this life.

I want to close by reminding you that God ordains the paths which we walk and in His sovereign control He brings us into situations that will try the faith of true believers.