

Introduction to James

Introduction

What is real Christianity? How can someone tell that you are a Christian? Less than 2,000 years ago, the first Christians had to answer that question, and we do too. The book of James shows what makes Christians different from other people. We are blessed to have this book because it will teach us how Christians behave.

I. Purpose of James

The hardest part of being a Christian is BEING a Christian. Christians have to believe in a God they cannot see. Believing in a god you cannot see is called **faith**. It is not easy to have faith.

Christians also have to trust that God's **wisdom** is better than man's wisdom. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge. You can know a lot of information and still not be wise. In his book, James will teach us about God's wisdom and how it is different than man's wisdom.

If we say that we are Christians but do not live as Christians, we make it harder for unbelievers to learn about the true God. In fact, they may see our actions and misunderstand the true God. Of course, there are some people that say they are Christians but are not. Many nice people try to live the Christian life by being kind and doing good works. But, without believing in Christ and repentance, it is impossible to be saved.

The book of James could be called a "How to Live Like a Christian" book. James will bring up a very important question: if your life does not show proof (works) that you are a Christian, are you really saved? James will argue that a true Christian life will show good

works, meaning he/she will do good acts. He will teach believers what those good works look like in day to day life. The key phrase in the book of James is *faith without works is dead* (James 2:20).

James' teachings about good works have often been misunderstood. Some people argue that James and the apostle Paul (who wrote much of the New Testament) disagree about faith and works. Imagine a wrestling match with Paul in one corner saying, "Man is saved by faith without works (Galatians 2:16)!" Now, picture James in the other corner calling out, "Faith without works is dead (James 2:20)!" Are they really arguing? Not at all. James says IF you are saved THEN you will do good works. Paul teaches IF you are saved THEN you are blessed, because your works had nothing to do with you getting that salvation...only Christ can have the credit for your salvation!

God has given believers three ways to help them live Christian lives. They are:

1. The Bible (the word of God).
2. Prayer.
3. Other believers (the Body of Christ).

All of these are made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has these spiritual blessings. James encourages believers to respond to God with actions. In the last chapter, he describes a powerful prayer life.

James speaks to two different groups of people in his epistle. One group is those that have a hard time doing what God wants. Raise your hand if that's you! The second group is people that do not take their life of faith seriously. Imagine meeting someone who uses bad language, uses God's name in vain, and says mean things about other people

and then tells you that he is a Christian. You would be shocked. Those are the kind of people in group two. James wants believers who call themselves Christians to act like it.

II. Date of James

Many scholars believe James was the first book written in the New Testament. "It is fairly certain that as early as 66 or 67 A.D., the Book of James was known and regarded as Scripture" (Unger's Bible Handbook, 1967, pg. 783).

III. Recipients of James' Epistle

James was written to the first **generation** of Christians. Most of them were Jews who had lived their whole lives practicing Judaism. Jews had lived according to the ceremonial and moral laws which God had given to Moses. The moral laws taught how to behave toward God and others. These laws are still in effect today. But, the ceremonial laws were different. They were a foreshadow of the Messiah that would come. A foreshadow is similar to a wrapped present. You can see the shape of what's inside, but you do not know exactly what it is. In the same way, the Jews knew that the ceremonial laws pointed to the Messiah that would come some day and save them. They did not know how they would be saved or who the Messiah would be.

To understand the people James was writing to in his epistle, you need to understand the ceremonial laws by which they had lived. There were rules about purity, diet, sacrifices, and so much more. Some rules were instructions on what the priest must wear, what he needed to do inside the temple, and who was allowed to go in the temple. Jesus, the Messiah, replaced the need for an human priest. Jesus' sinless life, His sacrifice on the cross, and His resurrection made Him our permanent High Priest. We no longer need to find an human priest to ask God to forgive our sins, nor do we need to sacrifice an animal to lessen God's wrath. We can pray directly

to Jesus who is the ultimate High Priest. So, just like the wrapped present, the Jews could see they needed the high priest, they just did not know who He would be and how He would change their way of life. Because Jesus kept all the laws perfectly, He shares His 'perfectness' with us. He is the only way that we can talk to God.

James was writing to instruct how to live as a Christian, a believer in Christ. James knew it would be difficult for the Jews to give up their old ways, even though the old ways had been a terrible burden on them, and impossible to keep perfectly. Not only that, they had to endure **persecution**. Like them, we need to learn to live by faith. We are the only generation of Christians this world knows, and we need James' book as much now, as they did then.

IV. Author

Who wrote the book of James? Was it one of the "James" mentioned in the New Testament? We know of three: 1) the apostle and son of Zebedee, 2) the lesser known apostle, and 3) the brother of our Lord. Let's look at all three.

The apostle James, who was the son of Zebedee, was the brother of John the Evangelist and one of the first to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:21). He was very close with Jesus. However, he was killed because of his faith in 44 A.D. (Acts 12:2). He was probably not the author.

The second apostle named James was the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3). There is nothing known about him other than that he was called "James the Less," maybe because he was smaller than the other apostle James. But, we know that the author of James was probably well-known because he signed only his first name without more details (James 1:1). (Note: In those days, letters were addressed to the recipient and from the sender at the beginning of the letter.)

The third James mentioned in the Bible is the most likely author because 1) he would have had the authority to write as an apostle, and 2) he was well known to the church. This James was the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19).

Looking closer at James, the Lord's brother, we find that he was a witness to Jesus' resurrection and present in the upper room, praying with the believers after Jesus ascended into heaven (1 Corinthians 15:7 and Acts 1:14). We also know that he became head of the Jerusalem church after Peter left (Acts 12:17), he gave Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:9), he made the ruling at the First Church Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Peter, Paul, and the apostles respected him (Galatians 1:19, 2:9,12) and history records James was martyred in 62 A.D. Clearly, he was well known and had the authority to have written the book.

V. Theme

The theme of James is that "Faith Works." Like Paul, James believed that faith alone, in Christ alone was the way of salvation. James' book is a close look at what life looks like after you are saved. James believed saving faith resulted in serving faith...faith that showed works.

VI. Relevance of the Study of James

Bible study is needed to make our minds sharp and ready to serve God. If you give God one half-hour each day for this study, and are faithful with your homework, God will prove Himself to you and reward you.

VII. Outline of James

- A. Victorious Faith - James 1
- B. Valid Faith - James 2
- C. Verbal Faith - James 3
- D. Vital Faith - James 4
- E. Vindicated Faith - James 5

In Jeremiah 15:16 we read, *Your words were found and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.* Jesus said that 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4). God's words in the Bible are words to live by. They are nutrition for our souls and make for a healthy personality. Are you more concerned with what you wear and what you eat than your soul and personality? Do you fail to feed yourself God's holy words? James calls God's word the *word of truth, which is able to save your souls* (1:18 and 21). Studying James should reshape your character, relationships, speaking, wisdom and prayers until miracles happen. †

Prayer

Pray that God will open your heart and mind to learn as you study the book of James over the next six weeks. Praise God for giving you the Bible to help you understand what He desires for you.

Memory Verse

James 1:3 & 4 *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

Vocabulary

faith - belief, trust, and loyalty in God

wisdom - learning received over a period of time; knowledge and good sense

epistle - a formal letter

generation - a group of individuals born and living at the same time

persecution - treating in a way meant to be cruel or harmful; suffering caused because of a belief

QUESTIONS FOR JAMES LESSON 1

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. a. List the “four ways” (page 1 of notes) which God has given us to meet the challenges of life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

- b. Of these “four resources,” which do you use the most?

- c. Which would you like to use more often?

2. Please share one thing from the notes which stood out to you as being very important.

DAY TWO: Read James 1:1-8.

3. a. How does James describe himself?

- b. What do you learn about James from Matthew 13:55 and Galatians 1:19?

- c. To whom is James’ letter written?

4. a. According to James, how should a Christian react to “trials?”

- b. What is produced in your life when you go through trials and your faith is tested? Circle the correct answer(s).

a mean spirit sadness patience sore knees completeness

5. a. If you need wisdom, whom should you ask? Why?

b. What do you need to have when you ask?

c. What should you not have when you ask? Why?

6. ? (Thought Question) Explain what you think it means to be “double minded.”

DAY THREE: Read James 1:9-15.

7. a. What should a lowly (poor) person “glory in” (take pride in)?

b. What should a rich person “glory in” (take pride in)? Why?

8. a. Who does James say is “blessed?” Circle the correct answer(s).

one who gives in to temptation

one who is never tempted

one who tempts others

one who endures temptation (trials)

one who keeps others from temptation

b. What does James say this person will receive? What do you think this is?

c. What do you think it means to “endure” temptation?

9. a. Does God tempt people? YES NO

Why or why not? Give verse: _____

b. What is the root of all temptation?

c. What happens when a person gives in to temptation?

d. What is the result of full-grown sin?

DAY FOUR: Read James 1:17-21.

10. a. What do you learn about God in verses 17 and 18?

b. Put verse 18 into your own words. (See verse 21 to help with your understanding.)

11. What do you learn about yourself from verse 18?

12. a. What should you be quick to do?

b. What should you be slow to do? Why?

DAY FIVE: Read James 1:22-27.

13. a. From verse 22, what kind of people deceive themselves?

b. How is this kind of person described?

14. a. What should you continue in according to verse 25?

b. What is the proper way to respond to the “perfect law of liberty?” See also verse 22.

c. ♥(Heart Question) Are you more like the person in verse 24 or 25? In what way(s)?

15. a. From verse 26, what other kind of people deceive themselves?

b. What else does James say about this kind of person?

16. a. What is pure and undefiled religion (faith) before God?

b. ♥(Heart Question) What evidence does your life show of your faith in Jesus Christ?

VOCABULARY FOR JAMES LESSON 1

***"The more words you know, the more clearly and powerfully you will think...
and the more ideas you will invite into your mind."***

— Wilfred Funk

DAY ONE: Write the definition of each vocabulary word.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

DAY TWO: Write three sentences using three different vocabulary words from this lesson.

1.

2.

3.

DAY THREE: Circle the word's synonym(s). (Synonym is a word/phrase that means the same thing.)

1. **faith** devotion belief doubt

2. **wisdom** knowledge teeth understanding

3. **persecution** harm blessings cruelty

DAY FOUR: Match the word to its meaning.

Word	Definition
faith	a formal letter
wisdom	a group of individuals born and living at the same time
epistle	belief, trust, and loyalty in God
generation	treating in a way meant to be cruel
persecution	learning received over a period of time

DAY FIVE: Review previous vocabulary words. Try to work from memory.

Wordsearch: Review previous vocabulary word(s). Try to work from memory.

Find the hidden words left, right, forward, backward, and diagonally. Each letter is used only once.

N E L T S I P E M H
D O D Y V E G A L S
S W I N Y H T I A F
T N K T E T U D M J
H M A K A S A G I G
S T P L L R Z W D E
W I S D O M E M O W
A G S F R J D N R G
Y Q Q C F Q S C E W
Y D B V Z O K A X G

faith**wisdom****epistle****generation**

ANSWER KEY

