
The Epistle of James

Class Lessons by Ted Gatza

Introduction
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AUTHOR:

James, who identifies himself as "a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). There are four men who bear this name in the New Testament:

James, son of Zebedee and brother of John - A fisherman called by Christ (Mt 4:17-22) who later became an apostle (Mt 10:2). Together with John, they were nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" because of their impulsiveness (cf. Mk 3:17 with Lk 9:51-56). He was killed by Herod in 44 A.D. (Ac 12:1-2).

James, son of Alphaeus - Another one of the apostles (Mt 10:3; Acts 1:12), about whom very little is known. He may be "James the younger," whose mother, Mary, was among the women at Jesus' crucifixion and tomb (Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40; 16:1; Lk 24:10). In Jn 19:25, this Mary is called the wife of Cleophas, perhaps to be identified with Alphaeus.

James, father of Judas the apostle - Even more obscure, one of the few references to him is Lk 6:16.

James, the brother of our Lord - A half-brother of our Lord (Mt. 13:55), who did not believe in his brother at first (Jn 7:5). He became a disciple following the resurrection (1 Co 15:7; Ac 1:14) and gained prominence in the church at Jerusalem (Ga 2:9). As evidence of his prominence, Peter sent him a special message following his own release from prison (Ac 12:17). James also played an important role in the conference at Jerusalem (Ac 15:13-33), and Paul brought him greetings upon arriving at Jerusalem (Ac 21:18-19).

"James, the Lord's brother" (Ga 1:19) is most likely the author of this epistle. Tradition describes James as a man of prayer, which may explain the emphasis on prayer in his letter. It was said that he prayed so much, his knees were as hard as those on a camel. He was martyred in 62 A.D., either by being cast down from the temple, or beaten to death with clubs. It is reported that as he died, he prayed as did Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

RECIPIENTS:

The epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1). This naturally leads one to think of Jews (Acts 26:6-7) living outside the land of Palestine. Since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, many Jews were scattered throughout different nations (Ac 2:5-11). While Jews, the epistle makes it clear that they were also brethren in the Lord, i.e., they were Jewish Christians. Nineteen times James calls them "brethren" and at least one time he definitely means those who were brethren "in the Lord" (2:1).

It appears many of these Jewish Christians were poor and oppressed. Being Jews, they would often be rejected by the Gentiles. As Jewish Christians, they would also be rejected by many of their own countrymen. The letter indicates that most were poor, and some were being oppressed by the rich (2:6-7). Because it was not addressed to a single church or individual, it has been categorized a "General" or "Catholic" (universal) epistle along with 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude.

TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING:

With no mention of the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts 15 (A.D. 49), and the use of the word "synagogue" (assembly, 2:2), A.D. 48-50 is the date commonly given for this epistle. This would make it the first book of the New Testament written. If James, the Lord's brother, is the author, then he probably wrote it in Jerusalem.

PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE:

The epistle deals with a variety of themes, with an emphasis upon practical aspects of the Christian life. Some of the subjects include handling trials and temptations, practicing pure religion, understanding the relation between faith and works, the proper use of the tongue and display of true wisdom, being a friend of God rather than a friend of the world, and the value of humility, patience and prayer.

While these may appear unrelated, they are crucial to the growth and development of the Christian. For this reason, I suggest that James' purpose was: TO INSTRUCT CHRISTIANS CONCERNING TRUE AND PRACTICAL RELIGION

In this epistle is a call to be doers of the Word, manifesting a living faith through one's works. In 108 verses, there are 54 imperatives (commands), prompting some to call James "the Amos of the New Testament."

KEY VERSE: J

ames 1:22 - "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

BRIEF OUTLINE:

SALUTATION (1:1)

I. TRUE RELIGION ENDURES TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS (1:2-18)

A. WITH JOY AND PATIENCE (1:2-4)

B. WITH WISDOM FROM GOD (1:5-8)

C. WITH A PROPER PERSPECTIVE (1:9-11)

D. WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF TEMPTATION (1:12-15)

E. WITH AN AWARENESS OF THE FATHER'S GOODNESS (1:16-18)

II. TRUE RELIGION CONSISTS OF DOING, NOT JUST HEARING (1:19-2:26)

A. ONE SHOULD BE SWIFT TO HEAR (1:19-20)

B. ONE SHOULD NOT BE HEARERS ONLY, BUT DOERS (1:21-27)

C. ONE SHOULD NOT SHOW PERSONAL FAVORITISM (2:1-13)

D. ONE SHOULD SHOW THEIR FAITH BY THEIR WORKS (2:14-26)

III. TRUE RELIGION DISPLAYS WISDOM, NOT JUST SPEAKING (3:1-18)

A. THE DANGER OF THE TONGUE (3:1-12)

B. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY WISDOM (3:13-18)

IV. TRUE RELIGION BEFRIENDS GOD THROUGH HUMILITY (4:1-17)

A. HOW TO BE AN ENEMY OF GOD (4:1-6)

B. HOW TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD (4:7-17)

V. TRUE RELIGION BLESSED THROUGH PATIENCE, PRAYER AND LOVE (5:1-20)

A. THE CURSE OF RICH OPPRESSORS (5:1-6)

B. THE BLESSING OF PATIENCE (5:7-12)

C. THE BLESSING OF PRAYER (5:13-18)

D. THE BLESSING OF LOVE FOR THE ERRING (5:19-20)

Lesson 1 – Chapter 1:1-11

Jame 1:1 (ASV) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion, greeting.
2 Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations;
3 Knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience.
4 And let patience have [its] perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.
5 But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.
6 But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the

surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. 7 For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord;
8 a doubleminded man, unstable in all his ways.
9 But let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate:
10 and the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.
11 For the sun ariseth with the scorching wind, and withereth the grass: and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his goings.

Questions

1. There are many people named James in the New Testament. Who do you suppose this James to be? Why?

2. Who were the twelve tribes that James is addressing this letter to? _____

3. What does the word "fall" indicate about these temptations? _____

4. What does the word "patience" mean in vs 3? _____

5. Why should we be joyous by being tempted? _____

6. What does it mean for patience to "have it's perfect work"? _____

7. What part does wisdom play with temptation and endurance? _____

8. Define Upbraideth. _____

9. Describe a doubting faith. _____

10. What will the doubting receive from God? _____

11. What is a double minded man? _____

12. What is the contrast between the brother of low degree and the rich? _____

Lesson 1 Cont.

13. Describe the fate of the rich man. _____

14. What is the evident attitude of the rich man that James describes? _____

Lesson 2 - Chapter 1:12-18

12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which [the Lord] promised to them that love him.

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man:

14 but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death.

16 Be not deceived, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.

18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Questions

1. What does endurance of temptation do for us? _____

2. What does endurance of temptation provide for us? _____

3. What does the reception of a crown indicate about temptation and endurance? _____

4. Where do our temptations come, if they do not come from God? _____

5. How do we correlate that God tempts no man with Gen. 22:1? _____

6. What is the process of temptation? _____

7. What are we drawn away from? _____

8. What is lust compared to in vs. 15? _____

9. What could the brethren be deceived about concerning temptation? _____

10. Why is God identified as the "Father of Lights"? _____

11. What is the parallel that James makes with the phrase "that is cast by turning"? _____

12. What does bringing us forth symbolize? _____

13. What did God use to bring us forth with? _____

14. What were they the firstfruits of? (Compare I Cor. 15:20-23) _____

Lesson 3 – Chapter 1:19-27

19 Ye know [this], my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
20 for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.
21 Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves.
23 For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror:
24 for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what

manner of man he was.
25 But he that looketh into the perfect law, the [law] of liberty, and [so] continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing.
26 If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain.
27 Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Questions

1. What does it mean to be “swift to hear and slow to speak”? _____

2. How does “swift to hear and slow to speak” lead to “slow wrath”? _____

3. What can be said of the righteousness of God? _____

4. Describe what we are to put away? _____

5. How is God's word to be received by us? _____

6. What is the delusion that James refers to? _____

7. What is the fallacy of the person that hears God word and not be a doer? _____

8. What is said of God's law? _____
9. What does the word continueth mean? _____

10. Who will receive the blessing from God? _____
11. How does vain religion result from a tongue that is not bridled? _____

12. What does it mean to “visit”? _____

Lesson 4 – Chapter 2:1-13

2:1 My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [the Lord] of glory, with respect of persons.

2 For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing;

3 and ye have regard to him that weareth the fine clothing, and say, Sit thou here in a good place; and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool;

4 Do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren; did not God choose them that are poor as to the world [to be] rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before the judgment-seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme the honorable name by which ye are called?

8 Howbeit if ye fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well:

9 but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one [point], he is become guilty of all.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou dost not commit adultery, but killest, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty.

13 For judgment [is] without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy: mercy glorieth against judgment.

Questions

1. Why does James use the term “brethren”? _____

2. How are we to consider other people? _____

3. What two classes of people does James describe in verse 2? _____

4. Describe the distinction that could be made by the brethren with the rich and poor. _____

5. What two things are the outcome of this type of distinction? _____

6. Why were the poor chosen to be rich in the faith? _____

7. What were James' observations about the rich? _____

8. How do you suppose that the rich blasphemed the name of Christ? _____

9. How could these brethren fulfill the royal law? _____
10. How does the law view those who have respect of persons? _____

11. What does the word “stumble” in verse 10 suggest to us? _____

Lesson 4 Cont.

12. What does James say about those who keep certain parts of the law and not other parts? _____

13. Knowing that they were going to be judged by a Law of Liberty, what should their conduct be? _____

14. What is the nature of judgement? _____

15. How does mercy "glorify against judgment" ? _____

Lesson 5 - Chapter 2:14-26

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food,

16 and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself.

18 Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from [thy] works, and I by my works will show thee [my] faith.

19 Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe, and shudder.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?

22 Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect;

23 and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God.

24 Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith.

25 And in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way?

26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.

Questions

1. What is the profit of salvation *with* works? _____

2. How distraught is the brother or sister in verse 15? _____

3. Describe why there is a lack of profit in verse 16. _____

4. What is the conclusion of "faith, if it hath not works" in vs. 17? _____

5. As a collective, can some in the church have faith and others have works? _____

6. How does James say that faith can be demonstrated? _____

7. Does James seem to indicate that there is a difference in the belief of the saints and demons? _____

8. What is James conclusion of "faith without works" in vs. 20? _____
9. Abraham was justified by works in offering up his son. What does Heb. 11:17 say about his faith? _____

10. What perfected Abraham's faith? _____
11. What condition did Abraham's faith and works place him with God? _____

12. What is James Conclusion about faith and work in vs. 24? _____
13. If Rahab was justified by her works, what can we conclude about her faith? _____
14. What is his conclusion about faith and works in vs. 26? _____

Lesson 6 - Chapter 3:1-18

3:1 Be not many [of you] teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment.

2 For in many things we all stumble. If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.

3 Now if we put the horses' bridles into their mouths that they may obey us, we turn about their whole body also.

4 Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by rough winds, are yet turned about by a very small rudder, whither the impulse of the steersman willeth.

5 So the tongue also is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire!

6 And the tongue is a fire: the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell.

7 For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind.

8 But the tongue can no man tame; [it is] a restless evil, [it is] full of deadly poison.

9 Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the likeness of God:

10 out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet [water] and bitter?

12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a vine figs? Neither [can] salt water yield sweet.

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart, glory not and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom is not [a wisdom] that cometh down from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace.

Questions

1. Why did James tell the brethren "Be not many of you teachers" _____

2. Why does James remind them of a "heavier Judgment"? _____

3. What does James remind the brethren about the nature of man? _____

4. Why does James compare not stumbling in word to a perfect man? _____

5. Describe the control of a bridle on a horse. _____

6. What action and when does it occur does a rudder have on a ship. _____

7. What is such a small member of the body able to do? _____

8. Describe the actions of the tongue in verse 6. _____

9. What has man tamed? _____

Lesson 6 Cont.

10. Why is it difficult to tame the tongue? _____

11. Why is the tongue full of deadly poison? _____

12. What should we always remember about man? _____

13. What does James say is possible to come out of the same mouth? _____

14. What two examples does James use to show that we should not be "double-tongued"? _____

15. What will the wise and understanding person do? _____

16. How can there be glory found in a bitter and factious heart? _____

17. Where does a tongue that is "full of deadly poison come from? _____

18. What is associated with jealousy and faction? _____

19. How does James describe the wisdom that comes from above? _____

20. How can we obtain righteousness? _____

Lesson 7 - Chapter 4:1-17

4:1 Whence [come] wars and whence [come] fightings among you? [come they] not hence, [even] of your pleasures that war in your members?

2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and covet, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; ye have not, because ye ask not.

3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend [it] in your pleasures.

4 Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God.

5 Or think ye that the scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?

6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore [the scripture] saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

7 Be subject therefore unto God; but resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let

your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall exalt you.

11 Speak not one against another, brethren. He that speaketh against a brother, or judgeth his brother, speaketh against the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

12 One [only] is the lawgiver and judge, [even] he who is able to save and to destroy: but who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?

13 Come now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain:

14 whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that.

16 But now ye glory in your vauntings: all such glorying is evil.

17 To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Questions

1. Where does James say that wars and fightings come from? _____

2. What seems to be the attitude of these people as described in verse 2? _____

3. How can one ask God for something and not receive it? _____

4. How does friendship with the world make one an adulteresses and enemy of God? _____

5. What seems to be the attitude some were taking toward the inspiration of the scriptures? _____

6. How does God deal with the proud and the humble person? _____

7. How doe we begin to find peace with God? _____

8. What is the double minded person commanded to do? _____

9. Why are these people to mourn, weep, and mourn? _____

Lesson 7 Cont.

10. How can we be exalted by God? _____

11. If we speak against or judge a brother in Christ, what are we doing? _____

12. If we judge our brother, what have we failed to do? _____

13. What does verse 13 seem to indicate about their attitude God and life? _____

14. What does James remind them about our life? _____

15. What does verse 15 say that their attitude should be? _____

16. What do you think their "vauntings" were that they gloried in? _____

17. What does James say that sin is? _____

Lesson 8 - Chapter 5:1-20

5:1 Come now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you.

2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

3 Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days.

4 Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out: and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

5 Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter.

6 Ye have condemned, ye have killed the righteous [one]; he doth not resist you.

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain.

8 Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

9 Murmur not, brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged: behold, the judge standeth before the doors.

10 Take, brethren, for an example of suffering and of patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord.

11 Behold, we call them blessed that endured: ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful.

12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; that ye fall not under judgment.

13 Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise.

14 Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

15 and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him.

16 Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.

17 Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

19 My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him;

20 let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.

Questions

1. What security can the rich find in their wealth? _____

2. What does James say about the state of their riches, garments and precious metals? _____

3. What would their wealth be to them? _____

4. How had they treated those who labored for them? _____

5. What had the Lord heard from these laborers? _____
6. How had the rich lived their lives at the expense of others? _____

7. Why did the righteous one not resist their rich persecutors? _____

Lesson 8 Cont.

8. What did James tell the brethren to be patient for? _____

9. What does it mean to murmur against someone? _____

10. What was James' warning against murmuring? _____

11. Who did James tell them to remember concerning patience? _____

12. What lesson did James remind them of concerning the patience of Job? _____

13. What were these brethren not to swear by? _____

14. What were the suffering and the cheerful told to do? _____

15. What were those who were sick to do? _____

16. What was the purpose of anointing the sick one with oil? _____

17. What can the power of prayer do? _____

18. What are we to confess to each other? _____
19. What does James say about the supplications of a righteous man? _____

20. What were the like passions that Elijah shared with the Christians? _____

21. What kind of prayer brought forth the drought and then rain? _____

22. What does it mean to err from the truth? _____

23. What should we understand about converting a sinner? _____
