

THE WHY AND HOW OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

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Lesson 13

REVIEW:

By way of introduction to our study of James, we noted some of the general rules which are applicable to the study of any book in Scripture. Our first objective was to discover the human author of this epistle. He is commonly held to be James, the half-brother of our Lord. We examined the biblical data concerning this man, as well as his recorded statements at the first Church council. **What do you remember about James, the man?**

(An unbeliever during the Lord's earthly life and ministry; converted, saw the risen Savior. Present in the Upper Room, awaiting the Day of Pentecost. Rose to be the leader of the Jerusalem Church and received the title "apostle." Visited by Paul on several occasions. Informed of Peter's miraculous delivery from prison. A gracious, religious man; apparently adhered to Judaic mode of living after his conversion. Martyred in A.D. 62 or 63 by stoning.)

What do you recall about the Epistle of James?

(The earliest epistle; A.D. 45 or 46. Not accepted as part of the Scriptures until the end of the fourth century, in A.D. 397, although accepted as inspired by the early Church. Objection: lack of Church-related truths or doctrines; controversial verses and statements; too Jewish in content. Luther called it "an epistle full of straw." Epistle harmonizes with what we know about the writer. It is Judaic in thought, rich in imagery, and parabolic in style--the Christian interpretation of the Law.)

What can you tell me about the original recipients of the Epistle?

(They were believing Jews of the Dispersion. Many had heard the Gospel in Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost, believed it and had taken it with them upon their return. Their conversion to Christianity brought on unexpected problems they could not handle. They encountered persecution from the Gentiles as well as from the Jews. James' letter was designed to help these people begin to grow and put their faith into operation.)

The message of the Book: THE PRACTICAL ASPECT OF CHRISTIANITY: FAITH TRIED AND PROVEN VALID; FAITH MANIFESTED IN LIVING AND STRENGTHENED IN SUFFERING!

OUTLINE:

- I. NOTEWORTHY FACTS
- II. KEY CONCEPTS
- III. GENERAL OUTLINE OF JAMES
- IV. JAMES, CHAPTER ONE

APPROACH:

In no wise does our salvation guarantee that we will LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER! The believer's happiness this side of heaven is potential. It does not depend on life's circumstances but on inner resources and the application of the Word to experience (John 13:17). In the EVER-AFTER LIFE eternal bliss is ours for certain; we can bank on that! In the HERE-AND-NOW we can count on problems to arise. More often than not, 2 Timothy 3:12 becomes a harsh reality in a faithful believer's life: "Yea, and all that will (desire to) live godly (lives) in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

The original recipients of the Epistle of James experienced first-hand the animosity of the world. They were plagued (as we are at times) with petty annoyances and frictions in their midst and conscious of the great inner struggles they now faced. James' letter to them contained practical advice and solutions.

In portions of his letter James points these Jewish converts to the example of other believers; in other parts, to the Lord and His Word. To show believing Jews how they should live their lives as Christians, James must speak on their level. Like a thorough physician, he probes until he finds the hurt or sore spot; then he prescribes a remedy. He is concerned with both the intake and the output of the spiritual life, and he is intent on getting his "patients" back on their feet and on to productivity. Even as the physical well-being is of paramount importance, so is the spiritual health and soundness of God's people! James goes a long way toward establishing that soundness in the Faith!

I. NOTEWORTHY FACTS

Let us **skim through James** and pick up some of the **distinguishing features of this Epistle**. We have already noticed some, and those will constitute a review.

(1) **James is a GENERAL EPISTLE**. It is addressed, not to an individual, nor to a church or churches, but to Jewish believers who are scattered throughout the world.

(2) **James is a disputed Epistle**. Unlike the Pauline Epistles, which deal with the DOCTRINAL CONTENT OF OUR FAITH, James deals with the OUTWORKING OF DOCTRINE IN THE LIFE.

(3) The **overall message of James** is that FAITH AND WORKS GO HAND IN HAND

(4) James **mentions Jesus Christ twice** (Jas. 1:1; 2:1), **God seventeen times**.

(5) **James does not refer to the Lord's resurrection, nor to the Rapture, nor to the Gospel.** This poses no problem because the letter is addressed to believers who know these things but need practical information!

(6) **James does not contradict Paul's stand on FAITH WITHOUT WORKS!** Nor does he seek to refute Paul's claim of JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH! **James** speaks of **works as a result of salvation; Paul**, of **works as a means of salvation.** **James** refers to **justification in the sight of the unbeliever; Paul**, to **justification in the sight of God!** It is interesting to note that **it is Paul who uses the expression "RICH IN GOOD WORKS"** (I Tim. 6:18), while James speaks of those who are "RICH IN FAITH" (Jas. 2:5)!

PAUL AND JAMES BOTH AGREE ON THE NECESSITY OF WORKS AS A RESULT OF SALVATION (Eph. 2:10; Jas. 2:14-26)!

(7) **James' statements** frequently resemble those of the Lord, made in the Sermon on the Mount. (Example: Jas. 1:12; cf., Matt. 5:10, 11; Jas. 2:5; cf., Matt. 5:5; Jas. 2:10; cf., Matt. 5:19; Jas. 3:12a; cf., Matt. 7:16-20). There are **twenty-three** of these statements in James.

(8) **James touches** on the Wisdom-Books. (Example: Jas. 1:5, 6a; cf. Prov. 2:3-6; Jas. 3:6; cf., Prov. 16:27; Jas. 4:6; cf., Prov. 3:34, etc.)

(9) **James makes frequent use** of the term "BRETHREN." The term occurs **fifteen times in James**, often accompanied by the modifier "BELOVED" --the same Greek word God used of His Son in Matthew 3:17, ἀγαπητός, AGAPETOS, meaning "beloved" or "worthy of love." It is an outflowing of God's love and concern for the believer regardless of his imperfections and failures.

(10) **James' use of the verb "to save."** σώζω, SOZO, is **mentioned five times.** Each time the verb refers to **physical deliverance.** Spiritual deliverance is not the issue in this letter!

THERE ARE THREE USAGES OF SOZO IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. THESE ARE:

1. **Deliverance from peril, injury, suffering** (Matt. 8:25; Matt. 24:13).
2. **Deliverance in healing** (Matt. 9:22; Mark 10:52; Jas. 5:15).
3. **Deliverance in the three stages of salvation** (past, present and future).
 - a. Salvation from the penalty of sin (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5).
 - b. Salvation from the power of sin (Jas. 1:21; 5:20).
 - c. Salvation of the body; i.e., ultimate sanctification (Heb. 7:25).

(11) **James coined a word** (Jas. 5:11). Our modern English scarcely conveys the thought James had in mind when he coined the word πολύσπλαγχνος, POLUSPLAGCHNOS. A compound word, made up of POLUS, meaning "great in magnitude, many, much, large," and SPLAGCHNON, meaning the "tender affections of the heart." It was translated "pitiful," a pitiful translation!! Were it not clumsy, the word should be translated "MANY-COMPASSIONED." It parallels the Hebrew concept of **Psalm 103:8**: "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." James coined this word (its only use in the New Testament) in order to appeal to believers to treat one another as God had treated them--in grace. Paul uses this idea in Ephesians 4:32.

(12) **James begins and ends his letter** with the topic of prayer (Jas. 1:5; 5:13-18).

You will recognize that these facts may be categorized under the heading of OBSERVATION! Also, in this category of Book study would be our taking note of KEY CONCEPTS. Key concepts help us think our way through a book; they give us a peg to hang our thoughts on. What are some of the key thoughts of this letter? Let us summarize them in words.

II. KEY CONCEPTS

In selecting KEY CONCEPTS, you do not pick up every single subject mentioned in a chapter, only the main subjects! What are they?

James 1: TESTING (1:2, 3, 12, 13, 14).

James 2: PARTIALITY (2:1, 3, 4, 9); WORKS vs. FAITH (2:14-26).

James 3: TONGUE (3 :5, 6, 8); EARTHLY vs. HEAVEN LY WISDOM (3:15-18).

James 4: LUST vs. HUMILITY (4:1-7, 10).

James 5: PATIENCE (5:7, 8, 11, also Jas. 1:4); PRAYER (5:13-18).

III. GENERAL OUTLINE OF JAMES

The **GENERAL OUTLINE** of the Epistle may be reduced to **four captions**. Since the ultimate goal of James is MATURITY, let us approach the outline from a positive angle. (We will see the negative aspect when we go into the actual study of the Book.)

1. THE TRIAL OF FAITH (Ch. 1)
2. THE WORKS OF FAITH (Ch. 2)

3. THE CONDUCT OF FAITH (Ch. 3-4)

4. THE STABILITY OF FAITH (Ch. 5)

Students in school often memorize information by learning a jingle or by some other little trick to spark their memory. I thought of two ways which might help you **remember (1) the number of chapters in this epistle, and (2) its content.**

(1) The name J A M E S has five letters; the Epistle has the same number of chapters!

(2) JAMES IN A JINGLE. This little rhyme lists **the GENERAL OUTLINE of the Book in the first five lines, and its impact on the unbelieving world in the last two.**

(Ch. 1) CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL STANDS

(Ch. 2) IN WORKS

(Ch .3) IN WORDS

(Ch .4) IN LIFE

(Ch .5) IN THOUGHT!

"SHOW ME YOUR FAITH," THE WORLD DEMANDS,
"THEN I MAY TRUST YOUR LIVING GOD!"

IV. JAMES, CHAPTER ONE (verses 1-3)

With the background and the general outline in mind, let us take a more detailed look at the first chapter of this Book. Remember that both chapter and verse breaks are artificial, but they are very helpful to us. We will cover the first three verses.

James 1:1: SALUTATION. As the half-brother of our Lord, James could have made his claim to fame. He could have mentioned his exalted position as the leader of the Jerusalem Church, but he did neither. Instead, he refers to himself as "**a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.**"

The Greek word δούλος, DOULOS, and its Hebrew equivalent עֶבֶד, EBED, means "bondman" or "slave." **A slave is not a hireling; he is owned by his master.** Slavery is a **humble estate.** A slave has **no rights or privileges, only duties!** Of him is demanded **unquestioning obedience** and **absolute loyalty.** To the free man there is no more dismal fate than that of slavery! The Bible has a good deal to say about slavery. Yet, note, great believers, both male and female styled themselves as God's slaves (**Moses**--Ex. 4:10; **the Patriarchs**--Gen. 50:17; **Samson**--Judges 15:18; **Hannah**--1 Sam. 1:11; **David**--Psalm 18; title; **Simeon**--Luke 2:25, 29; **Mary**, the mother of our Lord's humanity--Luke 1:48; **Paul**--Rom. 1:1; **Peter**--2 Pet. 1:1; **Jude**—Jude 1). They were proud of belonging to the Lord; **they had found freedom**

in total submission. (Even Jesus Christ is prophetically known as the "servant" (EBED) of Jehovah (Isa. 52:13; 53:11)! Thus, SLAVERY TO GOD IS AN HONOR, NOT A DISGRACE!

As the DOULOS of God and Christ, James now addresses believers among the dispersed tribes. Unlike the opening salutation of the other epistles, which begin with the words "grace and peace," James uses the brief secular greeting of his day, "greeting" χαίρειν, CHAIREIN). We find this **same greeting in two** other passages in the **New Testament, in Acts 23:26** (in a letter written by the Roman officer, Claudius Lysias, to Felix), and in Acts 15:23 (in a letter stating the decision made in the first Church Council --over which James presided--to admit the Gentiles into the Church).

James 1:2: ATTITUDE IN TESTING. After this brief greeting James comes right to the point; these young Christians had problems galore; they had encountered testing, and they did not know how to cope with the pressures. James strikes at the heart of their problem--their attitude in a pressure situation. **The Christian life is not an easy life.** The Lord warned us of that in **John 15:18-21** (read). **Our attitude** should be the **same as His had been--Hebrews 12:2**--one of JOY!

James says, "If you should become involved (περιπίπτω, PERIPIPTO; translated "fall") in various forms of testing, welcome those tests gladly."

That sounds like a big order, does it not? But wait, James will explain the reason for his statement.

James 1:3: REASON FOR TESTING. He wants them to come to know that there is a purpose in their testing. In academic life the student is tested and graded by the teacher. In athletics there is the test of individual and team performance. In daily living there is a testing of experience. It stands to reason that **faith, too, must be put to the test to be proven valid!**

The word "temptations" is the Greek πειρασμός, PEIRASMOS. It means **"testing, for the purpose of approval."** God does not subject us to the testing ground of hardships in order to make us feel miserable; **He tests us to prove us true and right and faithful!** If we do not pass those tests the fault is ours, not God's! **The testing ground is man's soul, not the circumstances of life; and on that ground is fought the Holy War of the Ages.** Look behind the scenes of this verse; James does, even though he mentions it elsewhere.

James 5:11 --the "patience of Job." Why did God allow Job to be tested? So that Job's faith and conduct might be vindicated (Job 1:8-12; 2 :1-6).

James 3:15 - - this "wisdom ... is devilish". The statement recognizes the harmful, demonic influences in life, warns against them!

James 4:7 -- "submit ... to God; resist the devil." Total submission is the safeguard in testing, the defense against Satan!

This principle is best illustrated in the "temptations" of our Lord (Matt. 4; Luke 4). You will notice that it was the Holy Spirit Who led a Spirit-filled Jesus into the wilderness to be tested: (πειράζω, PEIRAZO) by the devil (Luke 4:1, 2). The **purpose of that test** was the **vindication of the sinless Son of God**; the **means** of His victory--**submission** to the will of God; the result of that submission was that the devil "departed from him" (Luke 4:13).

"The testing (or trial) of your faith worketh (produces) PATIENCE" (Jas. 1:3b).

Human nature reacts quite differently to the pressures of life. You or I might experience joy if we get out from under pressure or escape it altogether! We might get irritable and have our patience snap in testing! But PATIENCE IN THE FACE OF TRIALS is another matter; that is God's plan and purpose in our lives!

That this is not impossible can be seen from Job's experience. (Read Jas. 5:11). When God had finished testing Job, Job did indeed emerge from the crucible of testing "as gold" (Job 23:10). God could then tell Satan, "You see, there is none like him in the earth" (Job 1:8)! Can He say this of us?

The "patience of Job" has become proverbial, but it can be yours! What is this patience? Again, let us consider the Greek word. It is ὑπομονή, HUPOMONE and implies much more than passive endurance. It denotes more than a grin-and-bear it attitude. Rather, it means "STEADFASTNESS, PERSEVERANCE." **It is the long-distance runner of our faith! It is the secret quality which turns apparent defeat into victory.** It is the confidence that GOD WILL INDEED WORK ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR OUR GOOD! (Even though the things that befall us may be bad in themselves!)

APPLICATION: If we focus on the RESULT OF TESTING rather than the MEANS OF TESTING, we can and will count it "all joy." The joy of the Lord will be our strength, and we **will KNOW** that God will not suffer (allow) us to be tested beyond our capacity, but will with the testing bring deliverance or the ability to bear it (I Cor. 10:13).

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Lesson 13

A. INFORMATION PLEASE!

(Read the following questions and answer them in your own words.)

1. What makes "JAMES" a general epistle?

2. What is James' concept of FAITH and WORKS?

3. Of which Book of the Old Testament, and of which message is "JAMES" reminiscent?

a. _____

b. _____

4. What is James' use of the verb "SOZO" -- "to save"?

5. Which important topic is found at the beginning and end of this epistle?

B. THINK FOR YOURSELF!

How would **you** outline the Book of James?

C. CORRELATING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE!

In our study of verses 1-3 we correlated Scripture with Scripture. Look up the following verses and match them to their related verse in this section of the Epistle, listing verse and "clue."

- 1. Colossians 1:11 _____
- 2. I Peter 1:1 _____
- 3. I Peter 1:7 _____
- 4. Philippians 2:17 _____
- 5. 2 Peter 2:9 _____
- 6. Romans 8:18 _____
- 7. Romans 14:8 _____
- 8. Galatians 3:26 _____

Note sample answer:

Hebrews 11:36 Verse 3, trial of faith.