

New Hope Sunday School: Study of James Lesson 1

Purpose and Theme

- The Test of True Faith
- Thinking you are a Christian without actually Being a Christian
- Help Through the Conflicts
 - With our sin nature 1:13-16
 - With the world
- How to Live as Christians – Proactive Holiness vs Reactive Holiness
- The Local Church
- Care for each other
- Poverty and Wealth (1:9-11; 2:1-7,14-17;4:13-17; 5:1-6)
- The Tongue (4:11-12; 5:9)

Theology

- Nature of God (1:1; 1:5; 1:13; 1:20; 1:27; 2:5; 4:4-6; 4:8)
- Nature of Man (1:13-15; 1:19-27)
- Eschatology (1:12;2:5;4:10;5:20)
- Law (1:25; 2:8; 2:9; 2:10; 2:11; 2:12; 4:11)
- Nature of Faith (Chpt. 2)
- Wisdom (1:25; 2:8; 2:9; 2:10; 2:11; 2:12; 4:11)

The Readers of the Epistle

Jewish Christians

- Twelve Tribes in Dispersion (1:1)
- They meet in a Synagogue (2:20)
- Belief in one God (2:19)
- Centrality of the Law (1:21;24-25;2:8-13; 4:11-12)

The first of Paul's missionary journeys had not yet taken place and the church was made up almost entirely of either Jews or Jewish proselytes -- Gentiles who had undergone circumcision and who had become Jewish.

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Characteristics

There are a number of characteristics that set the Epistle of James apart from the other New Testament epistles.

- A Lack of Personal Notes.
- Little Mention is made of Christ.
- Absence of Gentiles in the Church.
- Christianity and Judaism.

Authorship and Date

The opening salutation identifies the writer as James. The Greek text describes him as Ιακωβος -- or as we would say, "Jacob." The problem is that there are a number of different men in the New Testament possessing this name.

- James the brother of John and son of Zebedee (Matthew 10:2).
- James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3).
- James the half-brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19).
- James the son of Mary (Matthew 27:56).
- James the father of Jude (Acts 1:13).

Early church tradition points to the writer of this epistle being James, the half-brother of Jesus.

- This James is first mentioned as coming with his mother and his other brothers to meet Jesus as He was preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. *Matthew 13:54-56*
- Initially did not believe in Jesus "*For not even His brothers were believing in Him*" (John 7:5).
- Jesus appeared to James with the apostles after His Resurrection (*1 Corinthians 15:3-7*)
- James met with the disciples and Mary soon after the ascension of Jesus (*Acts 1:13-14*)

Over the course of the next several years, James rose to prominence as a leader within the Jerusalem church.

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- Paul refers to James as one of the leaders of the church with whom he met during his first visit to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:19).
- When an angel broke Peter out of prison, he directed that James be told of the news (Acts 12:17).
- James stood up at the Council of Jerusalem and hammered out a workable compromise in bringing the Gentile Christians into the church (Acts 15:13-21).
- Following that council, James was one of the three leaders in the church who commissioned Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:9).
- It was a delegation from James that stirred up the controversy between Paul and Peter concerning whether a Jew ought to eat with Gentile Christians (Galatians 2:12).
- When Paul presented himself before the Jerusalem elders after having planted churches in Europe, James is mentioned in a way that suggest his role as leader within the Jerusalem church. In Acts 21:18 we read that *Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.*

It is commonly thought that this epistle was written around 45-50 A.D., making it one of the first epistles to be written

STYLE OF WRITING

- Similarities with the Jerusalem Council
 - The phrase “beloved” (James 1:16, 19; 2:5 and Acts 15:25).
 - The exhortation, “Listen, my beloved brethren” (James 2:5 and Acts 15:13).
 - The use of the infinitive salutation, “Greetings” as the opening of the letter (James 1:1 and Acts 15:23).
 - The idea of a man turning back to the truth (James 5:19-20 and Acts 15:19).
 - The use of the word “soul” (James 1:21; 5:20 and Acts 15:24).
- Similarities with the Sermon on the Mount

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<i>Epistle of James</i>	<i>Sermon on the Mount</i>
Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials (1:2).	Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you (Matthew 5:12).
And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (1:4).	Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).
But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (1:5).	Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).
But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position (1:9).	Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).
For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away (1:11).	Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19).
Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God" (1:13).	And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matthew 7:13).
For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (1:20).	Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court (Matthew 5:22).
But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (1:22).	Everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock (Matthew 7:24).
If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well (2:8).	Therefore however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12).
For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all (2:10).	Do not think that I came to abolish the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17).
For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment (2:13).	But if you do not forgive men, then your heavenly Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:15).
But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (2:18).	Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).
You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone (2:24).	Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21).
Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh (3:11-12).	You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? (Matthew 7:16).
And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (3:18).	Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God (Matthew 5:9).
You lust and do not have; so you commit murder (4:2).	You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" (Matthew 5:21).
You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (4:4).	No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24).
Be miserable and mourn and weep (4:9).	Blessed are those who mourn (Matthew 5:4).
He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law (4:11).	Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged (Matthew 7:1-2).
Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten (5:2).	Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy (Matthew 6:19).
But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath (5:12).	But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by earth (Matthew 7:34-35).
...but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment (5:12).	But let your statement be, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"; and anything beyond these is of evil (Matthew 5:37).
Let him pray (5:13).	Pray then in this way (Matthew 6:9).