

PREPARATION FOR LESSON: Read the book of James**BACKGROUND**

On the day of Pentecost, c. 31 AD, dispersion Jews were in Jerusalem for Jewish holy days. After listening to Peter's sermon, 3000 believed in Jesus. It was the beginning of the Church, the Body of Christ. The following week they returned to their own countries and large Jewish communities. Many came from the east, in Elam, Parthia, Media and Mesopotamia.

In 31 AD, in the land of Israel, Jewish believers continued worshipping in local synagogues. But within the year, because of their belief in Jesus, they were kicked out of the synagogues. They began to meet in private homes.

However, in the large Jewish communities in the east, the new believers in Jesus became teachers and explained about Jesus in their synagogue services. Their only knowledge was the message they heard from Peter plus Old Testament teaching about Jesus. Over the next 14 years in the east, belief in Jesus as Messiah is considered part of the Jewish faith. Many other Jews believe. But during this time there is no written instruction for the local churches. No New Testament books have been written.

By 42 AD, the apostles have been scattered. In Jerusalem, John has left, James his brother is killed and Peter has to go underground, into hiding. James, a blood relative of Jesus (Gal. 1:19) is now appointed the leader of the Jerusalem church. He is leader for 20 years, from 42-62 AD. During the first three years of his leadership he observes the eastern Jewish believers as they come to Jerusalem for Jewish holy days. He knows they are believers in Jesus, but they are not expressing the life of Jesus in their conduct.

So in 45 AD, the Holy Spirit guides him to write the first book of the New Testament to help these Jewish believers in their Christian life. This book is written one year before Paul begins any of his missionary activities and 6 years before he writes any of his books. While the book of James is written to Jewish believers who worship in the synagogues, there is one paragraph (5:1-6) for Jewish non-believers in Jesus who worship in the synagogues.

This book is completely Jewish in style. There is repetition, picture language and is circular in thought. It is like the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament.

THEME The conduct of their Christian Life**OUTLINE** It is easiest to study the book by topics**THEIR CONDUCT IN...**

Trials - 1:1-12; 5:7-8, 10-11, 13-15

Temptation - 1:13-17; 5:19-20

Obedience to God's Word - 1:18-25; 2:14-25

Speech - 1:26-27; 3:1-12; 4:13-17; 5:9, 12

Relationships with others and with God - 1:27; 2:1-13; 4:1-12; 5:19-20; 5:1-6

Wisdom - 1:5; 3:13-18 the results of Satan's wisdom and God's wisdom

Prayer - 1:5-6; 4:2-3; 5:13-18 know what to ask for and how to ask

EXPLANATION

Feelings/emotions such as love and happiness cannot be commanded because they are spontaneous and changeable. So when the Bible commands us to love or have joy, it is not referring to feelings, but to a choice, an action we are capable of doing.

Love that is commanded means *to do what is right*. **Joy** when commanded means *inner stability*.

TRIALS of finance, injustice, suffering and sickness

Chpt. 1:1 Altho James is a blood relative of Jesus, he refers to himself as a servant of God the Father and Jesus. In true humility, he is saying Jesus is unique. His greeting is one that Hellenist (Greek-speaking) Jews used - *Rejoice*.

Conduct in Trials: 1:2-12 Jewish believers should have a right attitude.

In the Old Testament, God promised the Jews as a **nation**, they would not have trials or problems if they obeyed. So in the New Testament, when **individual** Jews put their faith in Jesus, they expected a life without problems. But over the years, they have had many trials and tests. They are resentful, believing God is not fair and has let them down. James deals with unexpected trials that have nothing to do with what they said or did.



TRIALS continued

1:2-5 *Consider/count* means *lead your mind*. *Joy* means an *attitude of inner stability*. A right attitude develops perseverance and patience that brings spiritual maturity. But this takes wisdom that God will freely give if you ask.

1:2-5 **Paraphrased**

When you face unexpected trials, lead your mind into the attitude of inner stability by how you think. (For example: You and God can get thru it and God can use it for good.) Trials with a right attitude will develop perseverance and patience so that you spiritually mature and have balance in your life. Since you lack wisdom in doing this, ask God how you should handle the situation.

1:9-11 2 examples of economic trials and how to lead the mind into a right attitude

The Jewish believer, limited in finances, can be thankful for his relationship with God, knowing God will provide.

The Jewish believer who loses riches can be thankful that riches are not the proof of being right with God; it is by faith in Jesus. The Jewish Mishnah taught, *The one the Lord loves, He makes rich*.

1:12 Final encouragement

Crowns were connected with victory and success after much hardship. In eternity God will reward them for their faithfulness in trials.

TEMPTATION - Understand what it is and does to your life

The Greek word *peirasmos* means both *temptation* and *trial* or *test*.

• **The meanings are different**

Test/trials - we are to accept them because they come from God to bring out the best of His nature within us.

Temptations - we are to resist them because they come from Satan to bring out the worst of our human nature.

• 1:12-15 God created us with basic needs and desires such as love, acceptance, hunger, need to succeed, sex, etc.

God offers to meet these needs within His boundaries; we may have to wait; it may not be the way we wanted. *Temptation* is Satan's counteroffer to meet our needs outside of God's boundaries. It is appealing because we can get what we want, when we want it.

Hearing Satan's offer is called **temptation** - it is never sin.

Accepting Satan's offer is **sin**.

Satan's offer will look ideal. It is why James says all good and perfect gifts are from God.

• 1:13 God does not tempt anyone

When Jesus told his disciples to pray, *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*, He meant, *Do not let us say 'yes' to Satan; give us strength to say 'no' to his offer*.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD - Why it is important**Response in the synagogue 1:19-21**

Come ready and eager to hear God's Word; be slow to say it does not apply to you.

Be slow to be angry when God's Word says you are wrong; get rid of evil and let Scripture fill your life.

Response during the week 1:22-25 It is not enough to listen on the weekend; you must practice it during the week.**Faith and works**

In Paul's day, false teachers said Gentiles had to convert to Judaism (be circumcised) to be right with God.

Paul used Abraham to prove that was wrong. Abraham was right with God on the basis of faith.

Circumcision was not until 15 years later. Salvation - **to get right with God** is **by faith in Jesus** - nothing more.

James was writing 10 years earlier to Jewish believers about their Christian life. They had salvation - their problem was the Christian life. Because they were sure they had salvation, they thought obedience to God's rules was optional. So James uses Abraham as an example, but in a different way. Abraham said he was right with God. The proof was not his words, but his life. Thirty years after believing, he was still obeying what God told him to do. He was showing the reality of faith thru his works of obedience.

Faith comes first. Works of obedience must follow. One without the other is incomplete.



SPEECH Be accurate in teaching; godly in conversation; truthful in statements.

3:1 Jewish believers in the 1st century were arrogant, thinking they had all the answers. Instead of seeking out more information from James and the apostles, they were satisfied with the knowledge of one sermon. They thought they were qualified to teach others in the synagogues. So James warns them of their responsibility.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD AND WITH GOD What to do and not do

4:4 "God loved the **world**" refers to the *people* living in the world.

The command to "**not** love the **world**" means the world system with the values of Satan.

Adultery means spiritual adultery. God used this term in the Old Testament with the Jewish people.

James says that Jewish believers, in his day, are in love with and value the world more than Jesus.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, James says when Jewish believers choose to become like the world, they are turning their backs on God. He then gives a list of what they should do.

- Vs. 7 *Submit to God; resist the devil* - Say *yes* to God; *no* to Satan.

- Vs. 8 *Come near to God; wash your hands; purify your hearts.*

The unholiness of the world has contaminated their actions and attitudes.

- Vs. 9 *Grieve and mourn* - Their disobedience should cause them to grieve.

- Vs. 10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord* - Agree that God is right and then obey.

APPLICATION The book of James is the first in a series about the Christian life. He writes about their conduct.

Altho they were Jewish believers in a different time and culture, there is much that applies to our conduct as believers today.

Our Conduct in Trials that we did not cause

We are to lead our mind into an attitude of inner stability - joy - by knowing there are 2 things we can be sure of.

With His grace and help we will get thru it. And He can use it for our good. We will need wisdom so we are to ask for it. He will provide answers - thru Scripture, other people, something we see or hear or by putting an idea into our mind.

As we go thru unexpected trials, if we guide our mind and use God's wisdom, we will have stronger faith, spiritual maturity, a balance and spiritual healthiness in our Christian life.

Our Conduct in Temptations is to say *no* to Satan's offers and *yes* to God's direction

Our Conduct in Responding to God's Word

As we hear God's Word being taught, we should be eager to learn, wanting to see how it applies to our lives, accepting correction and wanting to change. During the week we are not just to talk about it, but also put into practice what we learned. There should be a desire to obey. There will be times we fail, but the desire should be there. If we **claim** to be a believer in Jesus, but never have had a desire to obey God, our claim is only words. We do not have any spiritual life of the Holy Spirit within us. The works of obedience are the evidence of our genuine faith.

Our Conduct when Teaching God's Word

Because of the responsibility, we must prepare with adequate study and prayer.

Our Conduct in Relationship with the World and with God

We are not to become like the world so the world will accept us or listen to our message. James says that when we accept the values of the world and become like the world, we are turning our back on all that God values and desires. The literal Greek says we are taking a stand to become God's enemy.

If we find ourselves enjoying what Satan offers in the world, we are ...

- To reject Satan's offers

- To admit we have compromised our thinking and actions

- To grieve over our loss of sensitivity of what God says is right and wrong

- To ask God's forgiveness

God never commands us to become like the world.

God commands us to become like His Son - conformed to His image.

