

Lesson #19 - JAMES 2019

Before starting this lesson, **read the 5 chapters.**

The background of this book comes from the book of Acts. The Church, the Body of Christ was formed on the day of Pentecost, in Jerusalem. A local church was also formed.

31 - 42 AD.

Peter was the leader of this Jerusalem church. **James** and **John**, from that inner circle of Jesus, were also considered as major leaders. Gal. 2:9

In 42 AD, James was killed by the Roman leader, Herod Agrippa. He then put Peter in prison, intending to kill him. But God miraculously set Peter free and told him to leave Jerusalem immediately. Peter then went underground - into hiding.

42 - 62 AD.

Another man named **James** took Peter's place as head of the Jerusalem church. He was killed in 62 AD.

In 49 AD, when all the local churches met to settle important issues he was head of the first council.

In 56 AD, when Paul finished his 3rd missionary trip, he went to Jerusalem to give an account to James and the elders. Acts 15:13-21; 21:18

Paul explains who this James was in Galatians 1:19. He says that when he went to Jerusalem, *I saw none of the other apostles - only James, the Lord's brother.*

Ordinarily I do not mention areas of conflict between God's people, but this is an exception. Most of you know that Catholics believe Mary never had any other children after the birth of Jesus. Protestants believe she had several. They use verses like this to prove it. What they do not realize is the Greek word for *brother*, *adelphos*, means *any near relative*. It also means *people with similar interests*. So Catholics believe *brother* in this verse means *cousin*. Protestants say it means half- brother.

Because the Greek word is vague and the issue is controversial, I prefer to use a phrase we can all agree with. This man named James was a **blood relative** of Jesus. Using this term gives us freedom to appreciate who he was and the special role that he was given.

He knew Jesus longer than the apostles.

He knew Jesus in ways different than the apostles.

He was qualified to verify so many things about Jesus.

How wonderful he could be the 2nd leader of the Jerusalem church - a blood relative of Jesus.

It is this James that is the author of the book we are studying.

He writes c. 45 AD, just 3 years after taking leadership of the church.

He is writing to the 12 *tribes* in the Dispersion. 1:1

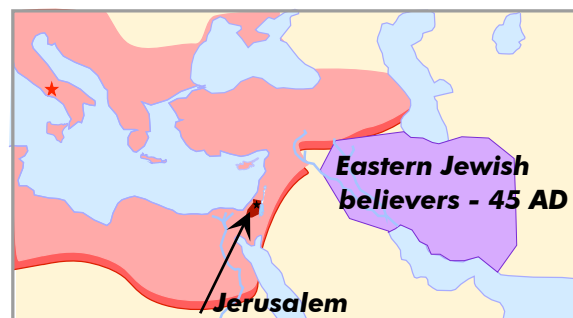
The technical word is *Diaspora* - Jewish believers who live outside the land of Israel. Most Bible scholars believe it is the eastern dispersion - Jews from Babylon and areas to the north and east. Their large Jewish communities had been there for 600 years, since the Babylonian exile in the Old Testament.

BACKGROUND

To understand **why** James is writing and **what** he is saying

In the 1st century, every year, 2 million Jews came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and the Feast of Weeks. The majority lived outside the land of Israel. These Jews were there in 31 AD, when Jesus died and rose again. They were still there 50 days later during Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. On that day, Peter told the huge Jewish crowds that Jesus was their promised Messiah - the One they had been waiting for all their life. On the cross He had made payment for their sin. They should accept His payment and believe He was their Messiah.

Three thousand of these Jews believed. It was the beginning of the Church, the Body of Christ. They were all Jewish and most of them were from other countries. A week later, at the end of the Jewish holy days, they went back to their countries and large Jewish communities. This included Jews that came from the east - places like Elam, Parthia, Media and Mesopotamia.



In Israel, Jewish believers continued worshipping in local synagogues.

But within a year, because of their belief in Jesus, they were kicked out of the synagogues. It is why they began to meet in private homes.

However, in the large Jewish communities in the east, things were different.

New believers in Jesus returned to their areas. They immediately became teachers in their synagogues and explained about Jesus. Their only knowledge was the one sermon they heard from Peter, plus the 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 of the Jews in the synagogues believe.

But they do not have any written instruction. As yet, there are no New Testament books. So from **31-45 AD**, their “Christian lives” are based only on Old Testament teaching.

James becomes leader of the Jerusalem church in **42 AD**.

Over the next 3 years he observes these believers when they come to Jerusalem for Jewish holy days. He knows they are believers, but they are not showing the life of Jesus in their conduct.

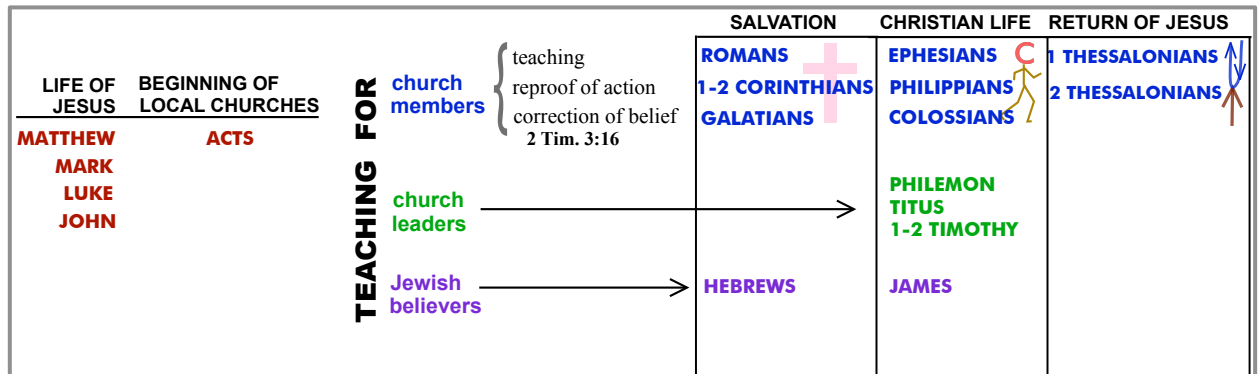
In **45 AD**, the Holy Spirit guides him to write the first book of the New Testament to help these believers in their Christian life.

It is written from Jerusalem, 1 year before Paul begins any of his travels and 6 years before he writes any of his books.

James is the first New Testament book to be **written**, c. 45 AD. But as we know, it is not the first book of our New Testament. The books are not in chronological order - they are arranged by topic.

How logical to start with the **Life of Jesus**, explaining who He is and what He did.

Then an explanation of how local churches were formed.



After that there is teaching, first for **members** of those local churches...

over the topics of **SALVATION**, the **CHRISTIAN LIFE** and the **RETURN OF JESUS**.

Then there is teaching for the **leaders** of the local churches over their **CHRISTIAN LIFE**.

Lastly, there is teaching for **Jewish believers**, again...

over the topics of **SALVATION**, the **CHRISTIAN LIFE** and the **RETURN OF JESUS**.

They are written specifically from the Jewish point of view to answer Jewish issues and questions.

HEBREWS deals with **salvation**. **JAMES** is about the **Christian life**.

This book is completely Jewish in its style, similar to the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament.

There is repetition and lots of picture language.

It is circular in thought and centers on their conduct in various areas of life.

In chapter one, James mentions 7 areas.

In chapters 2-4, he develops these areas.

In chapter 5, he once again mentions 5 of the 7 areas he started with. In other words, he ends the book like he started it. This is called circular writing, circular thinking.

Because the book deals with multiple topics that are repeated thruout the chapters, there is no obvious outline.

We know James is writing to believers because 19 times he calls them *brothers*, meaning *people with similar interests* - Jewish believers in Jesus. Altho the word “brothers” in English implies only the male gender, in the Greek, it includes male and female.

James is writing Jewish men and women about their conduct in the Christian life. It involves 7 topics or areas...

Trials, temptation, obedience, speech, relationships, wisdom and prayer

Their conduct...

In **TRIALS**, have the right attitude.

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

In **TEMPTATION**, understand what it is and what it does to your life.

1:13-17; 5:19-20

OBEDIENCE to God’s Word - why it is important.

1:18-25; 2:14-25

SPEECH - be accurate in teaching, godly in conversation and truthful in statements.

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

RELATIONSHIP with others and with God - what to do and not do.

1:27; 2:1-13; 4:1-12; 5:19-20 5:1-6 is about unbelievers

WISDOM - the results of Satan’s wisdom and God’s wisdom.

1:5; 3:13-18

PRAYER - know what to ask for and how to ask.

1:5-6; 4:2-3; 5:13-18

This overview will enable you to go thru the book and study each of the topics on your own. In this lesson I want to focus on the 1st century background of James’ instruction and explain verses that raise questions in our minds.

INTRODUCTION

In 1:1, James identifies himself as a **servant**.

If we were James, we probably would have started, *James, a servant of God and a blood relative of Jesus*. The implication

would be, *look at my connection. That is why you should accept this letter*.

But James writes in complete humility - a servant of God the Father **and** of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord refers to His sovereignty and authority

Jesus points to His humanity

Christ is the translation - *Messiah*, which points to Jesus’ deity.

James is saying, *I am a blood relative of Jesus, but I certainly am not His equal - Jesus is unique*.

Jews started their letters with the word “**peace**.”

Greeks usually started their letters with the word “**grace**.”

James starts his letter with the word “**rejoice**.”

Our Bibles translate it “Greetings.” But the literal Greek means “rejoice,” “I wish you joy,” or “Joy be with you.”

TRIALS

1:1-12

Before we can understand James’ first instruction, we need a basic concept.

It is impossible to **command** emotions and feelings.

Try telling someone, *I command you to love me. I command you to be happy*. Emotions and feelings are spontaneous and changeable. They cannot be controlled. They are either there or not there. It is impossible to command emotions and feelings. This means, when the Bible commands us *to love* or *have joy*, it cannot be talking about **emotions**. It is talking about **attitudes** that can be chosen and controlled.

We also need another piece of information.

In the Old Testament, God promised the Jews, as a **nation**, if they obeyed, they would not have trials or problems. So when these Jews, as **individuals**, put their faith in Jesus, they expected a life without trials. But over the last 14 years there have been problems and trials, one after another. They have reacted and have resentment. God *is not fair. He has not protected us. Why are we suffering?*

This is why James first deals with their **attitude about trials**. 1:1-12

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds. 1:2

Some trials in life are consequences from things we have done or said.

Other trials just happen and we had nothing to do with them.

These are the kind James is talking about. Older translations said, *when you fall into trials*. The Greek means the unexpected kind that are not your fault and that seem so unfair. James says God uses **these** kinds of trials as tests.

Because James is **commanding** them to have joy, we know this cannot be an emotion. He is talking about their attitude.

When the New Testament commands people to have **joy**, it means **inner stability**.

The word *count* or *consider*, in the Greek, is a strong form of the verb - *to direct or lead*.

James is commanding his readers, **Lead your minds into an attitude of inner stability**.

And why should they do this?

You know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything of these things. 1:3

In order for this to happen, they will need wisdom. In our Bibles, verse 5 begins with *if*. In the Greek, it is 1st class condition, which means, *if and it is true*. In good English grammar, we would translate it with the word, *since*.

Since you lack wisdom, ask God in faith and without doubting.

When the Greek includes additional concepts, we need to see it put together in a paraphrase. In these verses, James has told his readers,

When you face unexpected trials, lead your mind into the attitude of inner stability by how you think. (For example, that you and God can get thru it - 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. 1:2-5

James continues with 2 examples of **economic trials** in verses 9-11.

Some of the Jewish believers are limited in their finances and there is nothing they can do to change it. They should lead their minds into the attitude that God will provide what they need. They can be thankful for the relationship they have with God. They have great spiritual riches.

Other Jewish believers had been rich, but just recently lost their riches. The Jewish man-made laws - the Mishnah, had taught them it was riches that proved they were right with God. It said, *The one the Lord loves, He makes rich*. These Jews can be thankful that as believers, their assurance of being right with God is not their riches - it is their faith in Jesus.

As a final encouragement, James tells them,

Blessed, (meaning, enriched by the Holy Spirit) is the person who perseveres under trial, because having stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. 1:12

In the 1st century, crowns were connected with victory and success after going thru hardship. James tells them that in eternity, God will reward them for their faithfulness in the hardship of trials.

James deals with **TRIALS** in chapter 1.

He talks about them again in chapter 5.

He mentions trials of **injustice**, **suffering** and **sickness** and explains how to handle them.

TEMPTATION

1:13-17

The Greek word is *peirasmos*. It can be translated either as *trial* or as *temptation*.

Altho their meanings are very different we always know which word to use by the context.

We are to **accept** trials and testing.

We are always to **resist** temptation.

We are to **accept** trials because they come from God to bring out the best of *His* nature within us.

We are to **resist** temptation because it comes from Satan to bring out the worst of our human, sinful nature.

James tells his readers,

When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 1:13-14

God created us with basic needs. They include hunger, thirst, need to be loved, acceptance, sex, ownership and the need to succeed. Because God made us with these needs, they are legitimate. But how we meet the needs is the issue.

God offers to meet our needs within His boundaries and rules. But we may have to wait. It may not be exactly the way we wanted.

So Satan makes a counteroffer to meet our needs outside of God's boundaries. What makes it so appealing is that we can get it right away – and in the way we want. Hearing Satan's offer is called *temptation* - that is never sin. It is when we accept his offer that it becomes sin.

Satan's offer will look like the best, the most wonderful answer possible. It is why James tells his readers,
All good and perfect gifts come from God. 1:17

If they want the very best for their life, they need to wait for God. What He gives them will be fulfilling and satisfying.

James tells the Jewish believers, *God does not tempt anyone.*

However, they also know Jesus told his disciples to pray, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

That may sound like a contradiction until we realize Jesus gave two Jewish phrases as opposites.

But, deliver us from the evil one is the phrase that is easiest to understand.

Jesus means, *But give us the strength to say "no" to Satan's offer.*

Lead us not into temptation, is a phrase that is meant to convey the exact opposite.

So it means, *Do not let us say "yes" to Satan...*

James confirms that interpretation by assuring us, *God does not tempt anyone.*

In summary, temptation does not come from God.

It is Satan who uses our sinful nature to entice us. If we listen and follow thru, it will become sin that is destructive to our lives and separates us from our enjoyment of God – our fellowship with Him.

OBEDIENCE

1:18-25

At the synagogue

During the synagogue service, the Jews listen to 3 different readings from the Old Testament. Almost before the readings are finished, some are saying to themselves, *I disagree with that*. After the service, some are quick to tell others, *Those verses in the reading - they do not apply to us. We are different; times have changed*.

Sometimes one of the readings mentions a specific sin that some of the believers are guilty of. Because they have no desire to change, instead of listening and responding, they become angry with God. They resent His restrictions and limitations.



So James writes,

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for the anger of man does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.
1:19-21

In simple English, he is saying these Jewish believers should go to synagogue ready and eager to hear God's Word. They should be slow to say it does not apply to their lives. They should be slow to become angry when God's Word tells them they are wrong. Rather than be angry with God, they should be angry with themselves for saying "yes" to Satan. Instead of rejecting what God says, they should reject the evil in themselves. The Word of God will **save them from wrong conduct** in their Christian life.

Obedience at the synagogue

But it is not enough to go to services on the weekend just to listen.

There needs to be...

Obedience during the week

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

To show that God has always considered obedience to be important, James reminds his readers of Abraham.

*Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by **works** and not by **faith** alone.* 2:22-24

Because this sounds like a contradiction to Paul's writing, we need an explanation.

In Paul's day, false teachers said Gentiles had to convert to Judaism - they had to be circumcised to be right with God - to have salvation.

Paul said that was wrong. He used the example of Abraham to prove it. In the book of Romans, he explains, Abraham believed God. God then declared that Abraham was right with Him strictly on the basis of his faith. It was not until 15 years later that he was circumcised. Circumcision had nothing to do with his being right with God. Remember, in the book of Romans, Paul is dealing with the topic of salvation - being **right** with God.

James wrote his book 10 years earlier. His readers have no doubts or questions about their salvation. In fact, they are so sure they are right with God, they think they are now free to live as they want. They think obedience to God's rules is optional. So James writes them - not about salvation - he writes them about their Christian life.

He also uses Abraham as an example but in a different way. Abraham *said* he was right with God, but anyone can say anything. How did Abraham prove it? Not by his words but by his life. Thirty years after believing, he was still obeying what God told him to do. He showed the reality of his faith thru his works of obedience.

Faith **has** to come first. But works of obedience **have** to follow. One without the other is incomplete.

SPEECH

In connection with teaching 3:1-12

These eastern Jewish believers of the first century are arrogant, thinking they know all the answers. They do not seek out more instruction from James and the other apostles. Instead, they are satisfied with the knowledge they received from one sermon they heard from Peter plus their Old Testament study. With that, they think they are qualified to be teaching everyone else in the synagogues. So James tells them,

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 3:1

This is the English translation. In the Greek, James is much more blunt. He says, *The majority of you should stop assuming the role of teachers. Stop being teachers.* He says this because he knows the majority do not have the gift of teaching and they do not have adequate training. Teachers need knowledge and preparation so that what they say is accurate.

In chapter 4, James talks about the struggle they are having between their relationship with the world and with God. *You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 4:4*

The word “world” has 2 different meanings in Scripture.

We are told that God loved the *world*. When used that way, the word refers to **people** living in the world.

When James tells his readers **not** to have friendship with the *world*, he means the world system with the values of Satan. Satan is the prince of this world and has created a value system that reflects his character - power, greed, corruption, violence and deceit.

The word “adultery” in this verse means spiritual adultery. God used this term thruout the Old Testament as He dealt with the Jewish people. James says the Jewish believers of his day are in love with and value Satan’s system more than they love and value Jesus. Writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, James says when Jewish believers choose to become like the world, they are turning their back on God.

He now gives instructions of what they should do.

Verse 7 *Submit to God. Resist the devil.* They are to say *yes* to God and *no* to Satan.

Verse 8 *Come near to God. Wash your hands; purify your hearts*

The unholiness of the world has contaminated their actions and attitudes. They need to get rid of sin in their life.

Verse 9 *Be distressed and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*

These are not instructions for their everyday life. It is the attitude they should have when they realize they have disobeyed God. In the past they had taken it lightly, thinking it was no big deal. They laughed at what they had gotten away with. James tells them they should be grieving over their disobedience.

Verse 10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord.*

They are to agree that God is right and they are willing to obey what He says.

James is the first book in a series about the Christian life. James deals with 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 and problems...

This is not talking about the kind of consequences from what we have done or said.

It is referring to trials that just happen. We had nothing to do with it. This is why it seems so unfair.

As a result, all sorts of thoughts come into our minds. There is no way to control what just *comes* to our minds.

But what we **do** with those thoughts **IS** under our control.

What we choose to *keep* thinking about will determine our attitude.

God uses as tests...

The things He allows to happen in our life

What we do with our thoughts – what we choose to keep thinking about

Thru James, God tells us He wants us to lead our minds into an attitude of inner stability - joy.

With our thinking, we can focus on what we know about God...

...God knows our situation

...He cares about us

...He has the power to change the situation or to change us

...By God’s grace and with His help, we will get thru it

...God can use it for good

We will need lots of wisdom, so we are to ask for it in full confidence that God will provide answers.

- Sometimes He gives us answers thru Scripture. But more often, He does it in other ways.
- Sometimes He has us seek out people that have an area of expertise that we need.
- Or He has people cross our path at just the right time in the right place.
- God can give us answers thru something we see or hear.
- Sometimes He puts creative thoughts into our minds that show us what to do.

As we go thru unexpected trials, if we guide our thoughts and use God's wisdom, we will have...

...Stronger faith

...Spiritual maturity

...A balance and spiritual healthiness in our Christian life

Our conduct in facing temptation...

We are 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 and wanting to see how it applies to our lives

We should be accepting correction and wanting to change

We are not just to talk about what we learned; we should also be putting it into practice

There should be a desire to obey

There will be times we fail because we are human, but the desire to obey should be there. That is the evidence of our salvation.

According to James, if a person says he believes in Jesus, but never has had any desire to obey God, it is only empty words. There is no true spiritual life of the Holy Spirit in him.

The works of obedience are the evidence of genuine faith.

Our conduct when teaching God's Word...

Because it is a sacred responsibility, we need to spend time in adequate study and prayer

Our conduct in relationship with the world and with God...

James did not tell the readers of his day and he does not tell us...

To become like the world so the world will accept us

To accept the ideas of the world so others will listen to our message

James says that to accept the values of the world and become like the world...

is turning our back on all that God values - what He desires.

The literal Greek says that if we become like the world, we *are taking a stand to be God's enemy*.

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

We are to reject Satan's offers

We are to admit we have compromised our thinking and actions

We should grieve over our loss of sensitivity to what God says is right and wrong

We need to ask God's forgiveness

In our conduct, God never commands us to become like the world.

God commands us to become like His Son, conformed to the image of Jesus.

EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

Additional Verses explained

2:19 *You believe that there is one God. Good. Even the demons believe that and shudder.*

Because James is writing to Jewish believers who still worship in their synagogues, and practice Judaism during the week, he refers to the most important and special prayer of the Jewish people. It is called the Jewish Shema. The first line is, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Deut. 6:4 Since the days of Moses, all Jews recited this as a declaration or profession of their faith.

Jewish believers of the 1st century thought if they were attending services and repeating the right prayers, they could then live any way they wanted to. Their actions were not important. James corrects them by saying,

You think if you believe and say the prayer that God commanded - that God is One - you have met God's requirements. But even the demons know and agree with that. True profession of faith is not what you repeat in a prayer or liturgy. It is how you live during the week. Your faith is shown by your actions, not just by your words.

Salvation is a decision to accept and then a life to live.

3:1, 13, 17

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly...Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom...But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

1st century Jewish believers had become teachers because they thought they had so much wisdom. James tells them that true spiritual wisdom is not telling other people what **they** should do. Spiritual wisdom is how they – the teachers - respond and act towards other people.

5:1-6; 7-9

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

James knows that unbelieving Jewish landowners are mistreating Jewish believers that work for them. Both the landowners and the workers attend the same synagogue services. Since James' letter will be read to the entire congregation, he gives a message to both.

He warns the unbelieving landowners of God's judgment on them – vss. 1-6

He encourages the believers that God is aware of the injustice and in His time, He will deal with it – vss. 7-8

5:13-16 Praying for the sick

Some sickness is due to spiritual issues.

When people have known, willful disobedience in their life and they refuse to deal with it, God sometimes uses illness to get their attention. When there is unresolved anger, resentment or bitterness, God will allow the natural consequences to take their toll.

James says when sickness is due to spiritual problems we should get spiritual help.

Confessing sins to one another is not talking about a church service, but a sick room. If there are spiritual issues that are unresolved, the sick person should deal with it by talking to a church leader or by admitting it directly to the person he or she had wronged.

Other sickness is purely physical.

This means we should get medical help.

When James talks about using oil, he is speaking of both the spiritual and the physical.

In the first century among believers in Jesus, oil was used for spiritual purposes –
prayer and anointing with oil.

It was also used by everyone as a form of medical treatment.

James is telling these Jewish believers they need teachers and leaders who have spiritual discernment. When they visit someone who is sick, they need to talk with them and discern if the problem is spiritual, medical or both. Then in addition to prayer, they should respond according to the need.