

James

- (1:1) From James to Jewish Christians not in Palestine
 - See 1 Peter 1:1
 - See Galatians 2:7 – 9
 - Why would so much effort be directed toward a small fraction of the total population (Jews)?
 - To the Jew first (Romans 1:8, 1:16, 2:9, 2:10)
 - The promises are irrevocable (Romans 11:29)
- Looking at life
 - (1:2 – 4) Trials
 - Look to the result, not the immediate. This is a truism for many endeavors. The result is not Judgment or heaven, but patience, consistency, and being a whole person rather than a fragmented one.
 - “Perfect” is used twice in 1:4.
 - “Complete” or “entire” is translated “whole” everywhere else, as in whole body.
 - (1:5 – 8) Wisdom
 - Adopting this holistic approach requires wisdom.
 - Without reproach: God does not think you are weak if you ask.
 - Mature faith is required to receive anything. Doubt hinders transformation.
 - See Mark 9:24
 - (1:9 – 11) Perspective
 - The grass withers (1 Peter 1:24, Isaiah 40:6 – 8)
 - Poor yet rich (2 Corinthians 8:9, Revelation 2:9)
 - The poor are elevated in the earthly kingdom to the status of the rich and powerful. Focus on the reality of what you have, not what you don’t have.
 - The rich are reminded of the fleeting nature of their physical wealth so faith is not choked out (Matthew 13:22, 19:22).
 - (1:12 – 16) Temptation
 - Blessed: above the cares of this life, as in the Beatitudes
 - Like the Beatitudes, the sentence can be reversed, “He who is able to endure is he who is above the cares of this life.”
 - Love endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7)
 - The implication of temptation is that to succumb to it would be bad and that the logic of the temptation is somehow defective. God “entices” us with His character, so God does not tempt, but attracts, with positive truth such as kindness (Romans 2:4) and virtue (2 Peter 1:3).
 - At the heart of temptation is deception, either from without or within.
 - (1:17 – 18) Gifts
 - The immediate example of this gift is that we are brought forth by the word of truth, being made first-fruits (which, therefore, belong to God).
 - Other gifts in the context of James 1 are various trials (v2) that produce patience and perfection, wisdom (v5), low status (v9), and enduring temptation by being above the cares of life (v12).
 - See *Gifts of God* handout for complete list
 - Many expand the scope of “good and perfect gifts” to encompass what they like, which is self-deception. We need proof before claiming that something is a gift from God. The same rain may save corn but ruin mowed hay.

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- Looking at myself
 - Having reviewed the attitudes about life, James reviews our expected responses
 - (1:19 – 27) Behavior
 - (20) The contrast between wrath and the righteousness of God implies that the the wrath was a response to something said (19) about God.
 - (21) “Therefore.” This wickedness is a further description of wrath in response to something said. Instead, have the humble attitude that the ideas with which you disagree may have something worth keeping. Evaluate the words of others using the body of thought concerning God that is at the core of understanding. These core concepts are what make us right with God.
 - (22) “For.” As a consequence of hearing that with which we may disagree and considering it in light of the Word in us, good deeds (27) are the logical result.
 - (23 – 24) A lack of response is irrational.
 - (25) Doing good things in response to the implanted Word makes one above the cares of this life. The reference to liberty may be the focus of wrath; people get angry if I am not the same as they are.
 - (26) One who is quick to speak and therefore full of wrath is self-deceived.
 - (27) Being above the cares of life is simple; do good stuff, avoid bad stuff.
 - (2:1 – 13) Equality
 - (2 – 7) The specific example is the age-old problem of honoring the financially successful and excusing a potential lack of faith.
 - (6 – 7) Rather than accusing James of prejudice against “the rich” (pre-judging wealthy people due to the bad behavior of some), it is more likely James refers to a common failing of overlooking a demonstrated lack of faith.
 - (2:14 – 26) Working faith
 - Self-deception is the opposite extreme of self-doubt (1:6 – 8). Both ruin faith.
 - (4:17) Failing to act on an opportunity to do good shows a lack of faith (e.g., 2 Corinthians 9:8 – 11). Covering a lack of action with good words is worthless. The consequence is not the sin of which we have been forgiven, but the lack of effectiveness that results (2 Corinthians 4:7, Romans 12:2).
 - (22) Faith is made consistent with works.
 - (3:1 – 12) Proper speech
 - (1) Being a teacher is the goal. (Hebrews 5:12, 2 Timothy 2:24) Don’t rush it.
 - (2) Therefore, having all the doctrine right is not going to happen.
 - (3 – 6) Do not underestimate the power of words for good or for disaster.
 - (7 – 12) Another reminder about self-deception. The fact that unruly speech is inevitable (8) does not excuse it or make it of no consequence. Although James does not mention in this paragraph the power to overcome this dichotomy, he began the section with the cure (1:21).
 - (3:13 – 4:6) Attitudes
 - (3:13) Wisdom is humble and results in good conduct.
 - This paragraph is a litany of reasons why things in the church go wrong: envy, self-seeking, partiality, desire for pleasure, friendship with the world.
 - The point is to recognize poor motives in ourselves. The cure is the Spirit (4:5), not self-discipline.
 - (4:3) A second reason (with 1:6 – 7) why transformation goes slowly or stalls.

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- Looking at God
 - (4:7 – 10) Submit to God
 - (7) The devil was very active at this time (Revelation 12:12). But, Christians had nothing to fear (1 John 4:4, Ephesians 6:16, Romans 8:38 – 39, John 10:29)
 - (8) God will “draw near,” although He is never far away (Romans 10:8, Deuteronomy 30:11 – 14)
 - (8) “Purify your hands” as described in 1:19 – 27). “Purify your hearts” as in 1:6 – 8. Both are addressed in 3:13 – 4:6.
 - (9 – 10) Taken out of context, this recommends a dismal outlook, which is in conflict with the many “joy” passages. Rather, this mourning is the pathway for those who have not overcome and whose faith is full of doubt. Only after we recognize the futility of achieving success on our own can God lift us up.
 - (4:11 – 12) Judging
 - Most Christians realize that they will have no input at Judgment, so refrain from pronouncing judgment against those with whose behavior or doctrine they disagree.
 - However, many merely circumvent the letter of the law by speaking badly about others who claim to be believers.
 - Certainly we will disagree with the choices and teachings of others. Bringing those differences to light in a respectful and gentle way is required of all Christians. This is the difference between building up and judging.
 - (4:13 – 17) Planning
 - The subject of the Lord’s will is life on earth, not business decisions. And, this does not suggest that God decides when each person dies, or murder would not be a crime. Rather, God will put an end to the whole earth at some point. We will complete our business plans if the earth still exists.
 - The point is to keep the reality of Judgment in the front of our minds, not the back. Business decisions do not seem so important by comparison, and may allow other considerations to enter, such as telling loved ones about the Good News before starting on the trip.
 - (17) In context, this is a reminder that failing to keep the Kingdom of God in the foreground of our planning is serious. Business plans (16) tend to occupy too much of our conversation.
 - (5:1 – 6) Excuses
 - The target audience is composed of Christians, so riches, fraud, indulgence, and murder should be taken metaphorically.
 - (1 – 3) Class distinctions were more stark in that time, with much less mobility. A few Christians were rich, which would be a source of temptation for them and others. (see 1:10 – 11, 2:2 – 7.)
 - (3) Many rich Christians lost everything in this period. Their time would have been better spent building faith to withstand the worst decade of all of history. The habit of focusing on financial security will “burn” in both the loss of assets and in the lack of preparedness.
 - (4) This type of fraud is highly unlikely among early Christians. Rather, it is a metaphor for failing to “pay” those who harvest in God’s field (missionaries).

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- (5) Again, indulgent luxury is unlikely, but metaphorically questions our priorities. We are compared to cattle in a feed lot, eating the best meals of our lives just before being slaughtered.
- (6) Again, literal murder in the assembly is unlikely. Metaphorically, we “murder” fellow believers by undermining (or failing to feed) their faith.
- (5:7 – 11) Patience
 - (7) This patience is not in terms of a lifetime, but a few years. Times were bad and getting worse, but the resolution would come soon.
 - (8) This “coming of the Lord” referred to the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:27, Luke 21:27). Each context determined the type of “coming.” If James were referring to the end of time, he missed this prediction and should be called a false prophet.
 - (9) In those difficult times (and what period has no difficulty?), complaining about others would be easy, perhaps because others suffered less, or because those who suffered less had to help those who suffered more. The context continues with examples of bad times, so that is most likely James’ point.
 - (10 – 11) The histories of some of the faithful of the past are recorded in the Old Testament. These can give us hope that God can handle even this.
- (5:12 – 13) Simplicity
 - Being complicated leads to inconsistency. Go with simple.
 - React to your plight honestly. Both suffering and cheerfulness are normal.
- (5:14 – 20) Prayer
 - (14 – 15) All church elders in the New Testament were appointed miraculously. This promise of healing was from God, so could be invoked with confidence. Without those who had been miraculously appointed, we can still ask, but we have no guarantees.
 - (16) James switches back to the generic. Share bad choices with fellow believers and pray with them in order to heal the damage; excuses evaporate upon exposure so we turn to God with the right attitude.
 - (17 – 18) The example of Elijah was applied to ordinary Christians, that their prayers could cause God to accomplish similarly unnatural events.
 - (19 – 20) Because we have already been forgiven and are to be judged by our faith, bad choices are no longer result in our separation from God. However, bad choices damage our effectiveness and our growth. Helping others with their problems restores our effectiveness because outsiders will see that we really care about others, and restarts our growth as we put love into practice.