

James (HH, 3/16/18)

Who wrote: Many think James the half-brother of Jesus; James was leader of Jewish-Christian Church in Jerusalem.

When written: If so, likely 45-61 AD.

Who written to: Likely Jewish Christians scattered throughout Roman territory (the diaspora) who were persecuted and driven out of the city.

Genre: Epistle, but reads more like a series of sermons; loosely connected moral sayings and essays rather than linear, developed theology (cf. Pauline epistles). It is a pastoral epistle (14 times addresses “my [dear] brothers and sisters”).

Emphasis: Not new theological information or development (like Paul’s epistles), but statements on how to apply theology to everyday life -- faith in action; Many exhortations: 54 commands (in 108 verses); He doesn’t just say “do it” (because I say so and I’m a major leader), but gives the reason WHY to do it.

Sources: Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7, which he constantly quotes and builds from) and Proverbs (esp. 1-9) and other intertestamental wisdom literature (unconnected pieces of wisdom); Also major use of Lev. 19:12-18.

Structure of epistle: Main body is chapters 2-5 – consists of 12 short, independent teachings that call people to live as a true Christian.

Structure of chapter 1 (The Bible Project, 2016): A stream of ideas that overview the key themes of the epistle:

V1. Salutation

V 2-4: Life’s trials produce endurance and can make us perfect

V 5-8: God gives wisdom to those who ask in faith

V 9-11 Poverty can make us trust in God; wealth will pass away

V 12-18 God is generous and gives us new birth through Jesus

V 19-27 Don’t just listen to God’s word, do it. The Torah of freedom calls us to: speak with love, serve the poor, and be wholly devoted to God.

Questions: James 1:1-8

1. In verses 2-4, James talks about our response to difficulties in our life. First, he states that the appropriate response is joy – joy in what? If one has the right perspective on difficulties, what will the difficulties do? Is the end result of difficulties meant for this world, the next world, or both? Is the testing of our faith to see if we will pass or not?
2. Practically, do you think it is possible to develop the positive characteristics of persistence, maturity, and humility, WITHOUT going through difficulties? Are difficulties *necessary* for growth? What else leads to a similar type of growth?
3. In your experience, HOW do difficulties build endurance and maturity? For you, do difficulties always have positive implications or do they sometimes have negative implications? When? Why?
4. Think of a difficulty you have been through recently (or are currently going through). Are you joyful in it? If yes, what helps you have this perspective? If no, what is keeping you from this perspective?
5. Verse 5 nicely illustrates the integration of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:7a “Ask and it will be given to you” and Proverbs (2:6a “The Lord gives wisdom”). The Greek word “wisdom” here is the ability to make good judgments and to speak the right words – effectively applying Christian principles to real world situations. We receive this wisdom by asking for it. The Greek word “ask” here is a present imperative verb, meaning it is not “ask once”, but “continually ask”. Is wisdom something you ask God for? Do you continually ask? Why would God want us to *continually* ask?
6. Verses 6-8 encourage asking in single-minded faith and suggests that if we have doubt, we will not receive wisdom. What exactly is single-minded faith here? What exactly is doubt here?

Sources: Bauckham, R. (1999). *James; Dictionary of the later NT and developments (1997)*; Johnson, L. T. (2004). *Brother of Jesus, friend of God: Studies in the letter of James*; Keller, T. (1995). *Benefits of facing trouble* (sermon); McCartney, D. (2009). *James*; Moo, D. (2015). *James*; Samra, J. (2016). *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude*; Selvaggio, A. (2008). *The 24/7 Christian: Practical help from the book of James*; *The Bible Project* (2016)

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*James would have had unprecedented access to Jesus's life; James didn't believe in Jesus (John 7:5) until Jesus appeared to him (alone!) post-resurrection (I Cor 15:7)

*Peter moved on from the Jerusalem church (the 1st Christian Church) to start new churches, and James rose to prominence to become the leader of the Jerusalem church. James gave Acts 15:13-21 speech at Jerusalem Council -- Peter, Paul, John would have been available, but James gives the speech – major leader.

When written: If JBJ, likely 45-61

*JBJ martyred in 62; stoned when he would not recant

Who written to: Likely Jewish Christians scattered throughout Roman territory (the diaspora) who were persecuted and driven out of the city (after Stephen was stoned).

*Driven out of the church after Stephen's stoning; the Church fell on hard times during James' 20 years as leader there (persecution by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem; famine in region led to great poverty)

Genre: Epistle, but reads more like a series of sermons; loosely connected moral sayings and essays rather than linear, developed theology (cf. Pauline epistles). It is a pastoral epistle (14 times addresses "my [dear] brothers and sisters").

*Unlike many epistles written to a particular person or a particular church – written to Jewish Christians in general

Emphasis: Not new theological information or development (like Paul's epistles), but statements on how to apply theology to everyday life -- faith in action; Many pastoral exhortations: 54 commands (in 108 verses); He doesn't just say "do it" (because I say so and I'm a major leader), but gives the reason WHY to do it.

*More imperative verbs than any other NT book

*Only mentions Jesus twice, Holy Spirit zero times; some disparage (Luther – “epistle of straw”);

Sources: Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7, which he constantly quotes and builds from) and Proverbs (esp. 1-9) and other intertestamental wisdom literature (unconnected pieces of wisdom); Also major use of Lev. 19:12-18.

*Some think it is an extended homily on Sermon on the Mount

Structure of epistle: Main body is chapters 2-5 – consist of 12 short, independent teachings that call people to live as a true Christian.

*Although separate, there are connections through words and phrases.

Structure of chapter 1 (The Bible Project, 2016): A stream of ideas that overview the key themes of the epistle:

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Questions: James 1:1-8

1. In verses 2-4, James talks about our response to difficulties in our life. First, he states that the appropriate response is joy – joy in what? If one has the right perspective on difficulties, what will the difficulties do? Is the end result of difficulties meant for this world, the next world, or both? Is the testing of our faith to see if we will pass or not?

*James isn't a masochist – the joy is in the anticipated good that it will do. It is about having perspective. “Consider” in the Greek it means to render a deliberate cognitive judgment about something. It is a rationale, deliberate choice.

Difficulties → endurance → maturity and perfection.

*The word “perfect” is very important in James – he used it 7 times throughout the book. It means living a completely integrated life where one's actions are consistent with one's Christian beliefs and values.

*This is for NOW (in v. 12, the focus shifts to the future). The testing of our faith is putting it under fire to burn off the impurities, it isn't a test to see if we will pass or not.

2. Practically, do you think it is possible to develop the positive characteristics of persistence, maturity, and humility, WITHOUT going through difficulties? Are difficulties *necessary* for growth? What else leads to a similar type of growth?

*I think Christian community and accountability can have the same impact

3. In your experience, HOW do difficulties build endurance and maturity? For you, do difficulties always have positive implications or do they sometimes have negative implications? When? Why?

*Difficulties: a) give us perspective in life – make us stop and get out of our entitled, automatic mode, b) make us rely more on God, not just ourselves, c) make us more compassionate.

4. Think of a difficulty you have been through recently (or are currently going through). Are you joyful in it? If yes, what helps you have this perspective? If no, what is keeping you from this perspective?

5. Verse 5 nicely illustrates the integration of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:7a “Ask and it will be given to you” and Proverbs (2:6a “The Lord gives wisdom”). The meaning of “wisdom” here is the ability to make good judgments and to speak the right words – effectively applying Christian principles to real world situations. We receive this wisdom by asking for it. The Greek word “ask” here is a present imperative verb, meaning it is not “ask once”, but “continually ask”. Is wisdom something you ask God for? Do you continually ask? Why would God want us to *continually* ask?

6. Verses 6-8 encourage asking in single-minded faith and suggest that if we have doubt, we will not receive wisdom. What exactly is single-minded faith here? What exactly is doubt here?

*The faith is faith in the character of God. The doubt is not uncertainty, it is a wavering in one’s commitment to God – a divided commitment to God and to other things.

*In the Greek, “double-minded” literally means “double-souled” – indicating the depth of the division within the person. (like Jesus’ statement that you can’t serve two masters). It is a divided loyalty – both believing God will give what He says He will give, and doubting He will do it at the same time.

Sources: Bauckham, R. (1999). *James; Dictionary of the later NT and developments (1997)*; Johnson, L. T. (2004). *Brother of Jesus, friend of God: Studies in the letter of James*; Keller, T. (1995). *Benefits of facing trouble (sermon)*; McCartney, D. (2009). *James*; Moo, D. (2015). *James*; Samra, J. (2016). *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude*; Selvaggio, A. (2008). *The 24/7 Christian: Practical help from the book of James*; *The Bible Project* (2016)