

Joyful Life Bible Studies

JAMES

Introduction and Background

Lesson 1

Welcome to the Joyful Life Bible Study

If you were to draw a profile of a Christian woman in the 1990's, what would she look like? How would she differ from the non-Christian woman? What attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors would identify her as a follower of Christ? The book we have chosen to study this year, James, helps us in a very practical way to do this. This letter (epistle) was written to people "just like us". They, too, lived in a time of moral decadence, political instability, and social chaos. They experienced failure, disappointments, doubts, and fears but they learned through the inspired teaching of this letter how these could be transformed into something eternally profitable. They were instructed to affirm their love for God and their faith by their attitudes and actions. James probed, pierced, and exposed their carelessness, indifference, and disobedience with love and directness. His intent was to press them to a stronger faith and a deeper commitment. He punctuated his message with the importance of perseverance and endurance in that critical climate. One of the greatest truths concerning answered prayer is revealed by James in this letter.

This letter spans the centuries and speaks to us today as powerfully as it did to these first-century believers. It pulls us out of the commercial, competitive, conflicted culture - out of our own complacency and spiritual shallowness or staleness, and challenges us to *live the Christian life* while we patiently and joyfully wait for the coming of the Lord.

BACKGROUND TO JAMES

Author of the Letter:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, (James 1:1) is generally believed to be the brother of Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph. What must it have been like to grow up in the same household as Jesus? James was the oldest of the brothers of Jesus and along with his other brothers was not a believer until he saw Jesus after the resurrection. James later became an overseer of the church in Jerusalem. He was respected as a Christian leader and spoke with great authority at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). The historian, Eusebius, preserved the following account: "James, the brother of the Lord, who, as there were many of this name, was surnamed 'the Just' by all, from the days of our Lord until now, received the government of the church with the apostles.... He was in the habit of entering the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, so that his knees became as hard as camels' knees."

Tradition reports that James was martyred by stoning in 62 A.D. His final words were the same as those of our Lord Jesus, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Written To:

The twelve tribes which are scattered abroad. (James 1:1) Genesis 49 describes the twelve tribes as the twelve sons of Jacob. Throughout history, the tribes of Israel have been scattered among the nations, to be one day gathered again into the land, as we have had the glorious privilege of witnessing in our lifetime. In the days of the early church, which was made up mostly of Jewish believers, Christians were also scattered throughout the Mediterranean world because of persecution, so this letter was intended for all believers.

Date of Writing:

Sometime between 45 A.D. and James' death in 62 A.D., 10-30 years after Christ's resurrection. Several factors indicate that this may have been one of the earliest writings of the New Testament. Some Bible scholars believe this was the first epistle (letter) to Christians.

Written From:

There is no record of James' absence from Jerusalem after his assumption of the leadership of the church there. Therefore, it is generally accepted that the letter was written from Jerusalem.

Purpose for Writing:

James confronts his readers with the fact that Christianity must not only be believed, it must be lived. The evidence of real faith is a changed life. The book of James does not contradict Paul's statements that our salvation is due to faith and faith alone, but emphasizes what genuine faith will produce.

FIRST DAY: The importance of Bible Study and Prayer

1. Refresh yourself in the value of studying God's Word through the following verses:

- a. Psalm 19:7
- b. Psalm 119:50
- c. Psalm 119:105
- d. II Timothy 3:16

Challenge: Add other verses that speak of the benefits of reading the Word.

2. What do you think is the difference between reading and meditating on the Word of God?

- a. Share how meditating on God's Word has affected your life.

3. It is important to pray before we begin to study God's Word. Why?

4. Observe David's desire for God's Word through his prayer in Psalm 25:4,5. Write this prayer here personalizing it (substituting your name for the pronouns).

5. Commit yourself to prayer and to the study of James. Ask God to provide for you special times to be with Him and commit to take those times and use them. Thank Him that He desires to spend time with you and reveal Himself to you. Write your prayer here.

*Open my eyes to see
wonderful things in Your Word.*

Psalm 119:18 TLB

SECOND DAY: Who wrote the book?

1. As you read the background information, what did you learn about the author of the book of James?

- a. Record what II Timothy 3:16 reveals about the Author of all scripture.

2. What does Matthew 13:55 reveal about the author, James?

- a. Add to this any additional information from Mark 6:3.
3. James could have opened his letter by writing, *James, the brother of Jesus or James, the apostle.* (Galatians 1:19) Instead, according to James 1:1a, how does James describe himself?
 - a. The word *servant* in the Greek is *doulos*, meaning a slave or a bondservant. How would you describe a bondservant?
 - (1.) In light of James' earlier unbelief in Jesus what does this description tell you about the change that took place in James' life?
 - (a.) Think about the word *servant* in relationship to your life. Write your thoughts here.
 4. After his conversion, James, the bondservant of Christ, became a prominent figure in the church. From these verses what position did James have in the early church?
 - a. Acts 12:17
 - b. Acts 15:13-29
 - c. Acts 21:18

*If you want to be great in God's kingdom,
learn to be a servant of all.*

selected

THIRD DAY: *Whom* was James written to?

1. Review the Background to James and read James 1:1. To whom was the letter of James written?
2. The word *scattered* in James 1:1b is *dispersed* in the Greek. In addition to the twelve tribes of Israel who else was *scattered* and about what time did this occur? (Acts 7:59) Acts 8:1
3. Why is it important to establish that the book of James applies to all Christians?

FOURTH DAY: *When* was the book written?

1. According to the background information, give the approximate date of the writing of James.

Challenge: What might be some of the factors that would indicate that James may have been one of the earliest writings of the New Testament?

2. Imagine yourself as a Jewish new believer. You have been *tutored* to follow the Mosaic Law. Now you have discovered grace through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. What questions might you have about how to walk in your new found faith?
3. If you were a first century Gentile believer, what questions do you think you would want to ask James?

Optional: Write an article for the *Lifestyle* section of your newspaper describing what family life might have been like in the days of the early church with some family members professing Jesus as the Messiah and others clinging tightly to Jewish tradition.

FIFTH DAY: *Where and Why* was the book written?

1. History does not reveal to us where James was when he wrote this book. However, we do know what city he lived in while he ministered. Where was this? Acts 21:17,18
2. Referring to the Introduction on page 1 and scanning the book of James, what are some of the subjects covered?
3. Although this book was written almost 2,000 years ago, briefly state how these subjects are relevant to us today?

a. Which one(s) are you looking forward to studying further and why?

SIXTH DAY: Review Introduction and Background to the Book of James

1. Share one verse from the book of James that captures your attention.
 - a. Why?
2. Search for a current newspaper headline or article that covers a subject that James deals with in his letter. Share this with your group.
3. What is your greatest desire as you contemplate studying the book of James?
 - a. Express that desire in writing and commit it to the Lord in prayer.

*Do not merely listen to the Word,
and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

James 1:22 NIV