



A Systematic Expository Study on the General Epistle of JAMES

Study 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES

James 1: 1

It is interesting and instructive to note the order and arrangement of the last 9 books of the New Testament (Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation). Right through the group, there is a careful balance. Hebrews, which emphasises **faith** is immediately followed by James, stressing **good works**. First Peter then follows as an epistle of **future hope**, with Second Peter encouraging **present growth in grace**. Then the epistles of John with their emphasis on **love**, are balanced by Jude's epistle with its call to **contend** for the faith." And Revelation crowns it all with the promise "to him that overcometh." Faith, good works, future hope, present growth in grace, love, contending for the faith, promise for the overcomer! Christian preachers and churches will do well to maintain a scriptural balance.

The Epistle of James has a practical, life-changing message. Its obvious emphasis is not theoretical knowledge, but practical, christian living, godly behaviour. James wrote with a passionate desire that all who profess to be saved from sin should be uncompromisingly obedient to the Word of God. The Epistle calls us to test and prove how genuine our salvation is by what we do. We must see to it that what we do supports what we say (James 1:22; 2:8,17,20,26; 3:11-13; 4:11,17; 5:8,9,19,20). How is salvation received? Paul reveals that it is by faith. How is salvation verified? James instructs us that it is by good works. There is no contradiction, James complements Paul's emphasis on justification by faith with his own emphasis on bringing forth fruits of righteousness to prove that we have true faith (James 2:26; Ephesians 2:8-10).

JAMES, THE WRITER

James 1:1; Galatians 1:19; 2:9; Luke 2:7; Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55,56; John 7:5; I Corinthians 15:4-7; Acts 1:14; Acts 12:1,2,5,16,17; 15:13-29; 21:17,18.

The name "James" occurs forty times in the New Testament, referring to different persons. In the New Testament, there are at least 5 people bearing the name, James. **1.** There is the James who was the father of one of the 12 disciples (Luke 6:16). **2.** There is James, the son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). **3.** There is the James who is called "James the less" (Mark 15:40). Not much is known about these three people and none of them has any connection with the writing of the Epistle. **4.** There is James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve Apostles (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:17; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). In the gospel story this James was always mentioned with his brother John (Matthew 4:21; 17:1; Mark 1:19,29; 5:37; 9:2; 10:35,41; 13:3; 14:33; Luke 5:10; 8:51; 9:28,54). He was the first Apostle to be martyred - killed by Herod Agrippa the First in the year A.D. 44. (Acts 12:1,2). He could not have written the Epistle because of his early martyrdom. **5.** Finally, there is James, who is called the brother of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. This James was the oldest half-brother of Christ (Mark 6:3) and the brother of Jude (Matthew 13:55; Jude 1). James had at first rejected Jesus as Messiah (John 7:2-5) but later believed (1 Corinthians 15:7). When Acts opens we see Mary, the mother of Jesus and His brothers there with other believers, praying for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). He became the key leader in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 12:1,2,17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 2:9,12), being called one of the "pillars" of that church, along with Peter and John. He wrote this Epistle with the authority of one who had personally seen the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7) and who was the leader of the Jerusalem Church.

JAMES, A SERVANT OF THE REDEEMER

James 1:1; Jude 1; John 12:26; Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 Kings 8:53; Job 1:8; Jeremiah 7:25

Both James and Jude, the brothers of Jesus, referred to themselves as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ without any other qualification. For James, that was sufficient: being "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ". He was so submissive to the Lordship of Christ that he referred to Him so many times, not by name, but as the Lord, his Lord (James 1:7,12; 2:1; 4:10,15; 5:7,8,10,14,15). Being a servant of the Lord is a great privilege. Moses (1 Kings 8:53), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), Caleb (Numbers 14:24), Job (Job 1:8), Isaiah (Isaiah 20:3) and the prophets were all called servants of God (Jeremiah 7:25). And the Apostles were happy to refer to themselves as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

This title, "**servant**", implies (1) absolute obedience. The slave (doulos in Greek) knows no law but his master's word; he has no rights of his own; he is bound to give his master unquestioning obedience. (2) It implies absolute humility. It is the word of a man who does not think of his privileges or rights but of his duties. He has voluntarily lost himself in the service of God. (3) It implies absolute loyalty. Such a man has no interests of his own, because what he does, he does for the Lord. He does not think of his own profit or his own preference; his loyalty is to the Lord. Every believer should see himself as a servant (doulos, slave) of the Lord.

THE JEWISH RECIPIENTS AND THE CHRISTIAN READERS

James 1:1; John 7:35; Acts 8:1; 11:19-24; 1 Peter 1:1; James 2:1,14; 4:11; 5:7-9,19,20

"To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting" (James 1:1). The Epistle was written to Jewish believers who had been dispersed as a result of Stephen's martyrdom and the fierce persecution which followed (Acts 7:54-60; 8:1-4). There were thousands of Christians outside Palestine and the believers (Jews and Gentiles) needed teaching, admonition and encouragement. These believers were worshipping in congregations, referred to as "assembly" (James 2:2). The assemblies did not exclude Gentiles who believed. The author (James) refers to his audience as "brethren" 15 times in this brief epistle (James 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 4:11; 5:7,9,10,12,19). He refers to them as "my beloved brethren" too (James 1:16,19; 2:5).

Persecution scattered them but the Gospel continued to spread. Satan's purpose was to silence and destroy the Church but God used the dispersion of the Jews and the Jewish Christians to evangelize the world. The primary concern of James was that those believers (Jews and Gentiles) outside Palestine would maintain a life of righteousness as proof of genuine salvation, evidence of living faith in Christ.

*If you are blessed by these bible study outlines, we'd like to hear from you.
You can email the pastor@deeperlife-liverpool.org.uk with your comments.*