

COMMENTARY

James Chapter 1:

James was written by an individual by the name of James. It is accepted by many that it is the one who would have been a half-brother to our Lord (Galatians 1:19). It is supposed that he wrote this letter around 62 A.D. The basic message of the book is, "PERFECTION". James gives many instructions about how we can be perfect.

vs. 1 This verse is simply an introduction to the book. James describes himself briefly. He mentions that he is writing to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations. This would be the Israelites.

vs. 2-18 James starts off telling them the need to endure hardships of all kind, reminding them that the hardships help them to grow and will teach them how to persist in their faith. Only by persisting will we become the people that God wants us to be.

 He talks about the need that we have for wisdom. He tells us that God can and will supply that need if we ask and trust that He will answer. James states that one who doubts is unstable and will not remain firm in anything in this life. Later James will discuss more about the wisdom that God gives to His people.

 The writer shows us that all of us are equal in death. Possessions and wealth will not save anyone from dying here on this earth.

 James reminds us that those who endure trials and temptations will be rewarded by God with eternal life. He then talks about temptation. He lays to rest the idea that God is out there tempting us. This cannot be for God is not capable of that (He being holy). Our temptations come from the desires that we have. If the desire goes unchecked it will lead to sin and eventually eternal death.

 God gives us only good things. He always has and He always will. He is unchanging. As an example, James reminds us that God offers us eternal life through the word.

vs. 19-27 James gives more practical advice here. In verses 19-21 he tells us what to do and what to put off. The reason that we should do the things that James recommends is that they will help us develop the PERFECT life that God wants us to have.

 James warns us not to be like some who will listen but won't do anything about what they have heard. He gives an illustration of this type of individual. Those who not only listen but obey will be blessed by God.

 In the last verses here, James talks about religion. He states that our religion is worthless and we are just deceiving ourselves if we can't even control our tongue. The religion that is acceptable to God is to care for those in need (orphans and widows) and to keep ourselves free from sin.

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James Chapter 2:

vs. 1-13

In this section, James deals with the problem of showing favoritism. The point that he is making is that all are equal in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, Christians were failing to recognize that. They would on occasion treat a rich individual with special attention while ignoring another individual. He states that in so doing they have become judges with evil thoughts. This would be a sharp rebuke to any Christian who really is trying to serve their Lord.

James reminds the people that many times it is the rich who are causing the problems that the rest of the world faces. In showing special treatment to the rich we are breaking the entire law and the principles upon which it was founded. Also, this type of attitude is one that lacks mercy and he warns us that if we fail to show mercy to people today then we also will not be shown mercy in judgement. He challenges us instead to keep the loyal law which is, "Love your neighbor as yourself". This is right and just and merciful in God's sight.

vs. 14-26

In this section, James delves deeper into the idea that he briefly stated in chapter 1 about not only be a hearer but a doer also. He asks 2 questions which he implies the answers are "NO". He shows in practical terms that there is a great difference between believing or saying something and it actually being done. It doesn't help anyone out by us just wishing them the best. The point? Faith and deeds need to go together.

James continues on in his explanation. The demons believe in God, does that mean that they will receive eternal life? Why not? Because they are not living for God. That is exactly the same reason that will apply to people. Not only must we believe, but we will have to live for God.

He now goes to Abraham. Abraham would have been familiar to these individuals as one who was known for his faith. Yet, James shows that Abraham's faith was joined with works and because of that he was made righteous and without sin in the sight of God. By displaying this attitude it also led him to be called God's friend. That would be quite an honor and testimony to those around.

James now goes on to another person from Israelite history. Rahab [Joshua 2:1-24; 5:13-6:25] had come to believe in the God of Israel, but had she not housed the spies, she would have perished when Jericho was destroyed.

The emphasis is clear. If we are going to be PERFECT then we need to believe and demonstrate our belief by the way that we live.

COMMENTARY.

James Chapter 3:

vs. 1-12 In chapter 1 verse 26, James makes a passing comment that he now explains to a greater degree. The point is concerning the taming of the tongue. He challenges the people that when they teach they will be held responsible for what they say. Since they are leading others they will be judged more strictly. He cites the fact that all make mistakes in what they say from time to time. If a person could control his tongue completely, James says, he would also be able to have complete control over his body at all times. He is not excusing any behavior but simply stating that we all stumble from time to time.

He shows the power of the tongue by demonstrating other small items which wield great power or control over the item that they have become a part of. James compares the tongue to fire which uncontrolled can do great damage. It can corrupt the entire person and be used for Satan's work if let go. Man has controlled so many things but has failed in his desire to conquer the tongue.

James shows how we use the tongue in such contradictory ways. We use it to praise and also to curse. He shows that in nature such contradictory things never take place and it should not in our lives either.

vs. 13-18 In chapter 1 verse 5, James spoke of asking God for wisdom. He now goes on to show that there are two types of wisdom and that they are very different in composition and results. The wisdom that comes from God that He freely gives leads to a person living a good life, being humble, pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Such wisdom makes the world a better place and brings people closer to God as they see God-like qualities displayed by individuals such as themselves.

The earthly wisdom is unspiritual and comes from the devil. It is joined together with bitter envy, selfish ambitions and will lead to disorder, and sin. Quite a contrast. An individual should be able to quickly distinguish between the two and we should also realize which one we need to be seeking and asking of God.

STUDY GUIDE

James Chapter 1:

1. Who is writing, and who is he writing to?
2. What are we to consider pure joy?
3. Why must perseverance finish its work?
4. What should we do if we lack wisdom?
5. What is said about the one who doubts when he asks of God?
6. What should the rich man take pride in and what will happen to him?
7. Why is the man who perseveres under trial blessed?
8. What should we not say when we are tempted and why?
9. What comes down from the Father of the heavenly lights?
10. What should we be quick to do and slow to do? Why?
11. What should we do in addition to hearing the word?
12. Who deceives themselves and find their religion is worthless?
13. What is pure religion that God accepts?

BONUS:

1. Explain how Christians can count trials, joy.
2. What does James teach about temptation? Why do you think he sees a need to mention this?
3. How does James view of "religion" compare with what Christians practice today? Why is that?

STUDY GUIDE

James Chapter 2:

1. As believers, what are we not to show?
2. When we discriminate among ourselves, what do we become?
3. What has God chosen the poor in the eyes of the world to be?
4. What does James say the rich are doing?
5. What is the royal law?
6. What happens when an individual stumbles at just one point of the law?
7. What is faith by itself? What does it need to be accompanied by?
8. To show that belief is not enough, who does James point to as believing?
9. How was Abrahams faith made complete?
10. How is a person justified?
11. What is dead, just as the body without the spirit is dead?

BONUS:

1. Do Christians today show favoritism? How?
2. What is the significance of stumbling in one point makes you guilty of all?
3. Prove, from James 2, that "Believe and you shall be saved" is an incomplete message.

STUDY GUIDE

James Chapter 3:

1. Why should many of us not presume to be teachers?
2. Who is a perfect man and able to keep his whole body in check?
3. What is a small part of the body and what does it do?
4. What is said about the tongue?
5. What can no man tame? What is this?
6. What should not be in regards to the tongue?
7. How is a person to show that they are wise and understanding?
8. What shows that "wisdom" of this type is not come down from heaven?
9. What do you find where there is envy and selfish ambition?
10. How is the wisdom that comes from heaven described?
11. What will peacemakers who sow in peace, raise?

BONUS:

1. How do people abuse the tongue today? How are Christians guilty of this?
2. What type of wisdom is most prevalent in the world today? How can you tell?
3. What type of wisdom is found most frequently in Christ's church? How can you tell?