

“True Religion”

A five week study in the book of James

James (English) = JACOB
Greek- Iakobos
Hebrew- Ya’Akov

After Peter left Jerusalem to plant other churches, James became the leader of the messianic mother church there in Jerusalem for over 20 years- living through famine, poverty and much persecution. (Acts 12 & 15; Galatians 1-2)

James combines the wisdom of his brother Jesus with the book of Proverbs in his own challenging call to live a life wholly devoted to God.

Overview of James:

Written by Jesus' half brother Jacob, the book of James shares sage wisdom for all the churches and followers of Jesus. It's influenced by Proverbs and frequently quotes Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The introduction summarizes the words and themes found throughout the book, which is filled with short, challenging wisdom speeches that are full of metaphors and easily memorized one-liners.

While James doesn't teach new theology, it does challenge believers on how they should live. Topics covered include words, favoritism, love, wealth and hardship. When believers listen to and obey God's word, they love Him and others. Their actions match their words, and their lives are made whole, complete and perfect.

“Reading James is like taking a punch in the gut”

“He’s not concerned with teaching new theological information rather, James wants to get in your business and challenge how you live.”

Chapter 1: serves as an Introduction (sums up the books main ideas and key words)

Chapters 2-5: include 12 teachings about wholehearted devotion to Jesus (not exactly linear but purposeful nonetheless)

5 Areas the book of James covers:

Life’s Circumstances

Life is hard, but trials produce endurance, shape character, encourage trust and make believers whole and “perfect” (mentioned seven times in the book of James).

Perfect Torah

Jesus transforms believers into a new humanity that listens to and obeys Gods Word, the Perfect Torah that motivates us to love God and others.

Favoritism and Love

Believers who say they have faith in God will always obey Jesus' teachings and love others, not show favoritism or neglect the poor and needy.

Words Reveal You

James discusses words three times. The way believers talk about people shows their hearts and core values. Their words reveal the truth about their character.

Wealth Dismantled

God's kingdom community dismantles divisions created by wealth and social status. Instead, believers should live with patient hope for Jesus' return and say faith-filled prayers.

James 1 (ESV)

1 James, a servant[a] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:

Greetings.

Testing of Your Faith

2 Count it all joy, my brothers,[b] when you meet trials of various kinds, **3** for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.**4** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. **6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. **7** For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; **8** he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,**10** and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass[c] he will pass away. **11** For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. **13** Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. **14** But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. **15** Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.**17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.[d] **18** Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Hearing and Doing the Word

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; **20** for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **21** Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24** For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. **25** But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. **27** Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

v. 2-4: Life's trials produce endurance and can make us perfect

"Perfect" Repeated 7 Times in James

Hebrew: Tamim / Greek: Teleios (Wholeness & Integrity vs. Fractured & Inconsistent)

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

v. 9-11: Poverty can force us to trust 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, but do it! "The Torah of Freedom" calls us to:

1. Speak with Love

2. Serve the Poor

3. To be Wholly Devoted to God

-Jesus' summary of the Torah:

LOVE GOD & LOVE OTHERS (Shema in Deut. 6:4-5)