

## **OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE JAMES**

**February 27, 2019**

### **Answers to Lesson 41 – Hebrews**

Everything in the Old Testament points to the New Testament. God was instilling principles and concepts into the people so that when Christ finally came they would understand thoroughly the nature and scope of his redemptive work. God was preparing them and molding them to firmly establish what was to come. All the ceremonies and rituals of the Old Testament led up to the ultimate reality of a Christian life.

The whole structure of temple worship was rich and glorious and highly meaningful to the Jews. In contrast the early worship was not impressive. People worshiped in homes and there was little that resembled their long-held traditions. In these homes there was no altar, no priest, and no sacrifice. In addition some thought about abandoning Christianity because of the persecution of the Jewish Christians. The cost of discipleship was too high.

2:1-4 – If the message given by angels to Moses was binding (and if disobedience brought judgment) then much more was at stake with the message of Christ.

3:7-4:13 – Because of their rebellion an entire generation was barred from entering the Promised Land. Author reminded them that some of the people wanted to go back to Egypt. He told them this was just a shadow of the past and the light would come through Jesus Christ.

5:11-6:20 – In this passage the Hebrew Christians are rebuked for their immaturity. By this time they should be teachers but instead they needed to be re-taught all the elementary truths of God's Word.

10:19-39 – Just as those who rejected the Law of Moses were killed, how much more severe is the punishment awaiting those who have trampled the Son of God under foot. The author exhorts them to continue to persevere.

12:14-29 – People were not to refuse the one who spoke to them of these truths.

### *Page 214*

The author asserts the deity of Christ by ascribing to Christ things elsewhere attributed only to God. Christ is the Son of God and stands in a unique relationship to God himself. Christ is superior to everyone and everything held in such high esteem by the Jews.

Although Jesus was completely divine, he was also completely human. Jesus was perfect which made him superior to any other. Because he experienced temptation and suffering he is now able to help us when we are tempted or when we suffer.

Jesus was a priest in the order of Melchizedek in these ways –  
He preceded the ceremonial laws.  
Christ was both priest and king.  
Just as Melchizedek was different from all other priests so Jesus stood out alone.  
Priesthood of Jesus was changeless and he was the final and ultimate High Priest.

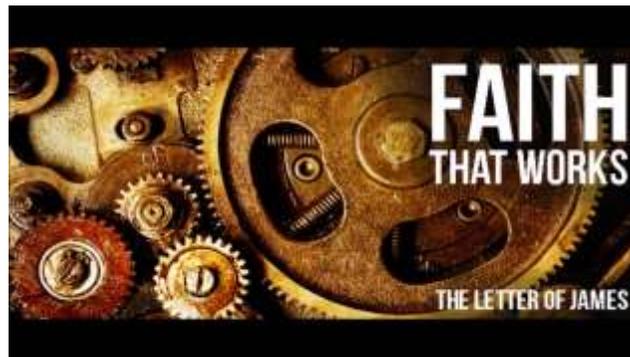
*Page 215*

The old covenant broke down. The old covenant was written on tablets of stone but the new one was written on the hearts of the people. By calling this covenant new he made the first one obsolete and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

When we studied Leviticus, we noted that the sacrifices were repeated day after day, year after year, serving as a constant reminder of the sinfulness of humans. It also reminded the people of their separation from a holy God. There was a certain futility to it all and it never cleansed the conscience. In contrast, as the sinless High Priest, Christ did not need to atone for his own sin. Instead he offered himself as the spotless, perfect sacrificial lamb for all the sins of humanity.

*Page 216*

Faith is the confident assurance that what we long for is a reality.  
The heroes of the faith all exemplified this.  
They were confident of the reward.  
They all trusted God to turn their present troubles into ultimate victory.  
Even in persecution their faith never wavered.  
Faith was superior to sacrifice and was perfected in Christ.



James is the first of the *General* or *Catholic Epistles*.  
Its formal canonization was late but was enthusiastically endorsed by Origen.  
It became part of the canon by the end of the fourth century.  
Luther believed the teachings in James contradicted the teachings of Paul.  
A person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

Book of James is written in a clear and even somewhat elegant Greek.  
Short sentences adhere to the ancient ideal of brevity.  
Although disputed by readers, in the Greek it is carefully constructed.

It presents itself as a letter but lacks some of the elements we have seen in other letters –  
No opening prayer for grace and peace  
No declaration of thanksgiving  
No pronouncement of a blessing on God

It seeks to persuade the reader to live up to the work to which they have committed themselves.  
There are 59 imperatives in its 108 verses.  
James takes the multiple dimensions of the Torah and makes the letter distinctive –  
It has a positive view of the law.  
James uses the voice of the prophets to understand human life as part of the covenant.  
James represents the *Wisdom* tradition of the Torah.

Concern is with morals rather than manners.  
James addressed an intentional community rather than a household.  
James was not hierarchical and spoke in a language of kinship (brother and sister).  
James called for attitudes of solidarity, mercy, and compassion.

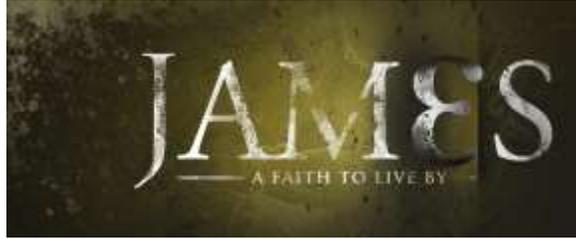
James more resembles the letters of Paul in its style and outlook.  
James has its own distinctive Christology.  
It is based less on the deeds of Jesus and more on the words of Jesus.  
Faith in Jesus means living before God in a manner shaped by the words of Christ.  
It is rich with statements concerning the nature and activity of God.  
God is the living God who is constant.  
God has revealed the perfect law of liberty and will judge humans on the basis of that revelation.  
God has implanted a word within humans that is able to save them.  
God is the source of all reality who calls us into a life shaped according to the gifts given to us.

Circumstances of the composition are difficult to determine.  
If taken literally the *twelve tribes in the dispersion* are the Jewish Christians outside Palestine.  
If taken metaphorically, the original readers could be those who are spiritual heirs to Israel.  
Assumed it was written to the poor and those who were persecuted and oppressed by the rich.  
Best candidate for authorship is James, the brother of the Lord.  
He was a prominent leader in the first generation of Christians in Jerusalem.

### **James 1:1-27**

James challenges readers more directly than do the narratives about Jesus or lessons from Paul.  
Readers are presented with commands.  
Readers must go beyond the testing of the text to the testing of their lives.  
James is inflexible in forcing a choice where most people would prefer a compromise.  
It also challenges a longing for a faith that is secure from trial and testing.  
It insists that faith only matures by what it endures.

God appears in the text as the one who is most real and who defines reality.  
God creates humans, listens to their prayers, and rewards their fidelity.  
Reality is defined by God who gives generously and without reproach.



### **James 2:1-13**

James' privilege of the poor within the community of faith is close to Jesus' own proclamation.

He once more echoes the teachings of Jesus when he talks about love of neighbor.

James makes clear that *the neighbor* must include all who enter our space.

Commandment of love is neither abstract nor lacking in content.

Discrimination is incompatible with love as are slander and judging a neighbor.

Faith and love have a strong and compelling urgency.

Faith in God and love for God cannot be separated from the way the neighbor is treated.

His illustration of faith and love also involves those who are considered insignificant.

Assembly gathered by faith must act on the basis of another set of values.

Those whom the world most despises are to be regarded as heirs of the kingdom.

Woe to the church that does not meet this measure of mercy.

It will face merciless judgment.

### **James 2:14-26**

Faith must be translated into practice.

Some thought that believing in God automatically qualified them as God's people.

Mark of a good Christian can be the constant invocation of the Lord in every conversation.

Such postures of piety must coexist with behavior that is deeply consonant with true faith.

We cannot sit in an assembly of worship in the name of Jesus and scorn the poor.

Such actions confuse correct liturgy with authentic faith.

No disagreement that faith needs to be demonstrated in action.

Issue is what sort of action the faith community considers to be a priority.

One way to test it is to see if our line items in our budget reflect the faith of Jesus Christ.

Is this a ritual that we do annually or are we striving for a moral presence in the world?

Do we ever make our response to the poor a test of the authenticity of our faith?

James does not rail against an economic system that oppresses the poor.

Instead he calls for the formation of communities in which the poor are honored.

In James the poor do not need to get more possessions to become more fully human.

Hope of the poor is in the God who gives every perfect gift to all.

### **James 3:1-12**

We are invited to a deeper reflection on the role of language in human relationships. Speech is first and most important gift that is distinctive to humans. We have the power to name, to create language, and to continue God's own creative activity. Real peril of the tongue is when the word of truth is suppressed. We are aware that the power of speech shapes the world we inhabit. It also shapes human experience.

We have an obligation to pay attention to the language we use. Language of faith is something that cannot be taken for granted but must be nurtured. We must work to keep our language open to the mystery of God's self-disclosure. Language can both enable and suppress human creativity. Those who have the specific task of shaping theological language bear the greater responsibility. We are to keep the language of faith alive.



### **James 3:13-4:10**

Conversion is a continuing process and an essential element in spiritual transformation. James is addressing members of the Christian community. Their attitudes and actions are not yet fully in line with God. Too often conversion is seen as a once-for-all thing. For James conversion is never complete.

Reminder that the evil we experience is not only the result of inadequate social structures. It is above all the result of a diseased human freedom. This human freedom has committed itself to wisdom from below which distorts reality.

Analysis of envy and the way it leads to murder is the most explicit and powerful in the NT. Logic that envy leads to murder spirals to the highest reaches of society. It is the engine generating global conflict and war. It is the craving that demands someone to seize what belongs to another to make one greater. In this James provides a social ethic which makes it unique among the New Testament writings. Any healing comes from turning to God wholeheartedly.

### **James 4:11-5:6**

Envy is a sorrow for something we do not have and lies at the root of arrogance.  
Logic of envy is based on the perception that the world is a closed system of limited resources.  
It leaves humans constantly in competition.  
It is arrogance that spurs the *haves* to boast over those from whom they have taken.  
James shows how subtle and pervasive the manifestations of arrogance can be.

Slander is evil speech done in secret which seeks to tear down another in order to be superior.  
Slander gives oneself divine powers of knowing the hearts of others and then condemning them.  
James reminds us that it is a form of speech that is death-dealing poison.  
We cannot close our eyes to these realities.  
We may not by ourselves be able to change them.  
Somehow we must by our own lives challenge them.

### **James 5:7-20**

According to worldly wisdom, the logical response to any form of threat is self-defense.  
Only the fittest should survive and competition exists precisely to identify them.  
Envy seeks strength at the expense of others.  
Elimination of the sick leaves more resources for those who are left.  
Logic of the world is to isolate the sick from the healthy.

In James the sick are empowered to summon the elders.  
A remarkable reversal of the logic of envy in that the sick are honored rather than scorned.  
James explicitly calls for the recognition of the weakness and failure of all (sin).  
It calls us to self-examine all who are in any way weak and alienated.

Harder issue is how we collude unintentionally.  
We are to have integrity of thought, speech, and action.  
We are to enter into conversation with others who view the world differently.  
Insights and clarity of James offers a genuine social ethic based on solidarity and peace.

### **Assignment for March 13**

Complete the Exercises from Lesson 42 on Pages 219-222  
Read *1 or 2 Peter* or the portions outlined on Page 222