

Grace Assembly of God Church Notes

Bible Study – The Book of James- Practical Christian Living

Week-Wise Overview

WEEK 1 James Chapter 1 - Living Out Faith	WEEK 2 James Chapter 2 - Faith in Action
WEEK 3 James Chapter 3 - Taming the Tongue	WEEK 4 James Chapter 4 - Submitting to God

SELF STUDY - WEEK 5 James Chapter 5 – Patience in Suffering
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Plan for Week 1 –

- 1. Sharing the Week Wise Overview followed by sharing the - Background of the Book of James**

Author

The author of the Book of James is identified as James, the brother of Jesus. This James became a prominent leader in the early Christian church in Jerusalem. He is often referred to as **James the Just**.

James was not a follower of Jesus during the **Saviour's** time on earth (Mark 3:21-35; John 7:5) but eventually became an apostle as one who had seen and believed the Lord post-resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19). After witnessing the Lord's resurrected body, James became one of the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Peter specifically mentioned James to the other Christians after Peter was miraculously released from prison (Acts 12:17). James gave the final important speech at the Jerusalem Council (15:13-22), and Paul called James one of the pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9).

Audience

The letter is addressed to the "twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (James 1:1). This phrase refers to Jewish Christians living outside of Palestine, dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. These believers faced various trials and challenges, including persecution, economic hardship, and social oppression.

Context

When Jesus ascended to the Father, he left his disciples with a Commission to bring the gospel to the whole world. Within two years, the community of committed Christ followers had grown greatly but so had opposition. It was at this time that **Stephen was martyred**: the first **Christian to lose his life** for being associated with Jesus. After Stephen's death, a local persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem. Some Jewish religious leaders broke into homes to drag people to prison, just for being Christians. This was the first organized assault that the young church would experience. Most fled Jerusalem for their lives, traveling as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Only the Apostles and other church leaders remained in the city.

At first, these scattered Jewish believers were passionate about their faith and proclaimed the good news in all the lands to which they travelled, initially only to other Jews. Their message about Jesus, however, was largely rejected by Jewish communities beyond Judea. As a result, they too were rejected. They no longer fit in with those Jews who did *not* believe that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. At the same time, they also didn't fit in with Gentiles, who viewed them as just another Jewish sect that avoided pagan temples and idolatrous festivals.

As the years of their exile stretched on, these Christian refugees grew increasingly weary and downhearted. God wasn't showing up to help them in the ways they expected. As a result, their trust in God and his faithfulness decreased. Instead, they began placing their trust in the wealthy for provision and protection. **Selfishness and individualism ruled their hearts, leading them to turn against and slander one another.** Exhausted by the circumstances, good works became optional rather than faith's essential fruit.

These worn-out **Christians needed wisdom and encouragement** to put them back on track. It finally came to them in the form of a letter from none other than the half-brother of Jesus himself: James.

He was one of the leaders who remained in the city after the persecution began. He used it as a base to provide oversight and pastoral care to the scattered Christian community. For them, he was a pillar in difficult times. His spiritual strength and devoted faithfulness to Jesus was a model for

others and a great comfort. It was this strength that James offered the discouraged believers scattered in and beyond Judea. As their devoted leader, his heart longed to encourage them to **remain steadfast, and even to grow, despite the difficult season.**

James explains **that two paths lay before them with two very different ends.** They could continue down their current path; giving in to the temptations of their evil desires, which would result in death. Or they could course correct and apply God's wisdom to help them be faithful and persevere through the trial, which results in life.

Style of Writing

James's writing style is practical, direct, and rich with metaphors and vivid imagery. It includes elements of **wisdom literature**, like the Old Testament Proverbs, and echoes the **teachings of Jesus, particularly the Sermon on the Mount.**

Key Characteristics:

- Imperatives: The letter contains over **50 commands in 108 verses**, emphasizing **action and ethical behaviour.**
- Metaphors and Analogies (similarities) : James **uses everyday images** (e.g., waves of the sea, flowers of the field) to illustrate his points.
- Wisdom Literature: The letter shares similarities with Jewish wisdom traditions, focusing on **practical living and moral conduct.**

Central Idea/Theme

The central theme of the Book of James is the integration of faith and works. James argues that genuine faith must manifest in righteous living and good deeds. **Key themes include:**

1. Faith and Works: True faith is demonstrated by actions (James 2:14-26).
2. Wisdom: Believers are encouraged to seek godly wisdom, which leads to righteous living (James 1:5; 3:13-18).
3. Endurance through Trials: Trials are seen as opportunities for spiritual growth and maturity (James 1:2-4).
4. The Power of the Tongue: The importance of controlling one's speech to live righteously (James 3:1-12).
5. Social Justice: The letter condemns favouritism and urges care for the poor and oppressed (James 1:27; 2:1-13).

6. Humility and Submission to God: Believers are called to humble themselves before God (James 4:6-10)

Conclusion - When going through hardship, the last thing we want to think about is how to **keep growing as disciples of Jesus**. We usually focus on just surviving, while the many areas of our lives that need **transformation** fall to the wayside. But the letter of James challenges this tendency, and instead tells us that God wants to use these times to bring us **to greater maturity in Christ**.

2. Sharing about how we plan to go through the Bible Study

~ **Comprehension** - When we read for comprehension, we ask ourselves “What does it say?”

~ **Interpretation** - Interpretation asks, “What does it mean?”

~ **Application**- “How should it change me?”

Three supporting questions for application

- What does this passage teach me about God?
- How does this aspect of God’s character change my view of self?
- What should I do in response?