

The Epistle of James

The goal of this Bible Class is to give the students a working knowledge of the whole book of James. It is based on an expository approach to teaching the Bible, with an emphasis in preparing the students for the worship of our Savior. The various lessons are to be viewed by the teacher as thematic suggestions to help with preparation. While the lessons are not intended to be read to the class word for word, the main ideas should be the substance of what is taught.

The teacher, in preparation for the class, should consider reading through the whole curriculum before beginning the class, as well as the book of James several times. This will provide the instructor with a broad and comprehensive understanding of James as it is being taught. At the end of the course, the class will be concluded with a Bible Knowledge Evaluation. The instructor should be sure to review the material sufficiently that the students are able to correctly answer the questions on the evaluation at the end of the course.

It is important that the instructor be not only knowledgeable about the material, but also able to teach it with enthusiasm and conviction. Students best learn from teachers that are themselves excited about the scriptures. The use of maps, diagrams, white boards etc. is extremely helpful. Some of these have been provided in the curriculum. It is suggested that the class be conducted in an interactive manner. This can be accomplished by having them read short portions of the scripture texts, asking them questions, and wholeheartedly encouraging them to ask questions. All students should be encouraged to bring a Bible to class.

The inclusion of the Westminster Shorter Catechism as part of the curriculum is designed to help the students acquire a broad understanding of Christian doctrine along with the specific Bible teaching. The Elders of the church will coordinate the specific questions and answers to be used in the class.

It will become evident to the teacher that this course curriculum, while not dealing with every verse and concept in the book of James, is comprehensive and deeply theological. It is designed to help the students understand the book of James in its wider biblical context, with emphasis on its place in the redemptive history of God's covenant people. The students will be confronted with and asked to understand and remember fairly difficult concepts. It should be remembered that children are able to comprehend much more than we often give them credit for. While this class will be a challenge for both the

teacher and the students, the rewards for the efforts of those in the class will be surprising and exciting.

In preparation for these lessons, the following resources were used with benefit:

Reformation Covenant Church Bible Class Curriculum for the book of Acts:

<http://www.reformationcovenant.org/ss/default.asp?folder=Acts>

Adamson, James, *The Epistle of James* (NICNT), Grand Rapids, MI: W.B Eerdmans Publishing Co.)

Calvin, John, *Calvin's Commentaries Volume XXII*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1989)

Leithart, Peter, Blog Articles:

<http://www.leithart.com/2008/04/28/chiasm-of-james/#more-3908>

Meyers, Jeffrey J., *The Wisdom of Jacob ben Zebedee*, Biblical Horizons Conference 2006

The Epistle of James

Lesson 1 – Introduction to James’ Call to Patience, Faith & Doing the Word

James 1

Objective – To understand the biblical and historical context of the book of James, and to see that the Epistle is a unified message to the early church.

There will be a **test** on the memory verses, the outline of the book and other material covered in class.

❖ Memory verses for James

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

❖ Outline of the book of James

- A. 1:2-27 – Patience and faith in trials, sin & save your souls
- B. 2:1-7 – Rich and “the poor man”
- C. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the law of liberty
- D. 2:14-26 – Justification [*dikaio*] & works
- E. 3:1-12 – The tongue
- D’ 3:13-18 – Righteousness [*dikaiosune*], Wisdom, & works
- C’ 4:1-12 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver
- B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

I. Biblical and Historical Background for the Book of James

During the ministry of Jesus we learn the following from Matthew 9-10:

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. ³⁶ But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. ³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers *are* few (Matthew 9:35–37).

Then He appointed twelve of His disciples to be His Apostles (lit. “sent ones”) and when He had given them power to do the same works that he had been doing, He sent them out to preach the gospel (“good news”) of the kingdom (Matt. 10:1-4). Then He warned them that they would be persecuted in much the same way that He would be (Matt.10: 5-42), and told them how they should respond to the persecution they would endure from the Jews: they should not worry about what to say (v. 19), flee to other cities (v. 23), do not fear them (vv. 26-31), continue to confess Jesus before men (vv. 32-33) and be willing to die worthily for Jesus, even if persecuted by family (vv. 34-39). Thus, the harvest of souls won for Jesus would come through the ministry of the Apostles (and the Church that followed their leadership) – but it will come at the cost of great persecution. The message of the kingdom would bring division in Israel and horrific suffering and trials to the Church – just as it did for Jesus.

This was a very difficult message for the Apostles to understand and accept. When Jesus began to show the disciples that He would be suffer many things from the Jewish leaders and be killed and raised again on the third day, Peter rebuked Jesus. But Jesus responded strongly by saying that such thinking was Satanic, and of men not being mindful of the things of God (Matt. 16:21-23). When Jesus was finally betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter used violence (Satanic and unrighteous action) to defend Jesus, which Jesus reproached because this is not the way the kingdom would come (Matt. 26:51-53; Mk. 14:47; Lk. 22:49-51; Jn. 18:10-11, 36). The kingdom would come by dying (both Jesus and the disciples).

The disciples, correctly believing that Jesus was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament that will rule the nations, incorrectly thought that the kingdom would be primarily a political reality and that Jesus would be a political King – rather than a suffering savior. They were caught up in the common assumptions of the Jewish culture that the primary thing they needed was to be delivered from the oppression of the Romans. They had to learn from their own experience that it was through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom that they would see the righteousness of God transform the world. Jesus would put all things right in the world that is contrary to the word of God – but it would happen as a result of His death and resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the empowering of the Church to be His witnesses in the world, beginning in Jerusalem and moving out into all the world (Acts 1:6-8).

Soon after this, the Church in Jerusalem began to suffer persecution. In Acts 4 we learn that Peter and John were arrested because of their preaching and healing ministry. As the Church continued to grow by the ministry of the Apostles, the persecution began to increase by repeated imprisonment and beatings (Acts 5). In Acts 7 we have account of Stephan's ministry, arrest and martyrdom at the hands of the Jews – after which came a great persecution against the Church, resulting in the scattering of the Jewish Christians everywhere, preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4). It seems most probable that this is the scattering referred to by James in James 1:1.

II. The Message of James

“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.”

There is much debate about who wrote the book of James.

[Note to Teacher: The name used in Greek by the author is “Jacob,” as with all the names in the New Testament that are translated as “James.” It is a popular legend that “James” is used because James I (of England, who had the King James Bible created) wanted to increase the fame of his name. However this is not the case. “James” is descended from the old English for Jacob, which is ultimately from an old French form for the popular Latin “iacomus” for the Latin “iacobus.” The Welsh for Jacob is "Jams," Gaelic is "Sheamus."]

Who was James? There are three main possibilities: 1) James the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3), 2) James the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55), and 3) James, the Apostle, the son of Zebedee (brother of John) (Matt. 4:21; 10:2). Given the historical circumstance it seems highly possible that it was James the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John.

[Note to Teacher: The primary reasons for this conclusion are: a) He was one of the three "cornerstones" among the Apostles: Peter, James and John; and was with Jesus at key events (Mark 5:37; 9:2; Mark 14:33; Acts 1:13). b) Textual link between James 1:1 and Acts 8:1, 4 & 11:19 (“the dispersion”) indicates the specific context. After Stephen's death, there was a great dispersion of many believers, but the Apostles remained. James wrote to Christians dispersed abroad. He was not writing to the Jewish exiles throughout the Roman Empire, but the Christian Church dispersed. Thus, James wrote at the about same time as Matthew, in the 30's. c) James appears to have been an early leader in the Jerusalem church, and was killed in 44 AD by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2), making the writing of this letter early in the life of the church. d) Since there is no mention of Jew/Gentile issues, the writing of James is likely before Paul, and the discussion of the Jerusalem Counsel (Acts 15).]

The assumption of these lessons is that James, the Apostle, the brother John, the sons of Zebedee, wrote this letter to build an Apostolic foundation of Christian teaching and living for the very early church, not long after the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), probably in the 30's AD. Given the horrific nature of persecution by the Jews (e.g. betrayal by family members, being cast out of the synagogues and the general life of society, ruined financially, violently treated, and loss of reputation for the name of Jesus), the Christians likely struggled to know how to behave themselves in this new situation. How should they respond in light of their new position in the social world of Israel and among the Jews?

James calls for wisdom and maturity, and especially the right kind of action. James addressed the kinds of frustrations, errors, temptations, and questions that would have engaged disciples of Jesus in the first few years of the life of the church. They may have been asking: Stephan was ordained to feed the poor and help the Apostles – now that he is dead what do we do? Maybe we should fight & be zealots. Or maybe we should be nice to the rulers and give them special honor in our Church meetings. James' emphasis is on what they were supposed to *do* in such extreme times. Just as Jacob of the Old Testament (Gen. 25:19-32:32) unjustly suffered many things at the hand of unrighteous men (his brother Esau and uncle Laban), and later learned that it was with God he wrestled all his life, so too, the church (under James'/Jacob's instruction) will also struggle with trials from God.

Because of their time with Jesus, the Apostles had at least an intellectual understanding what they were to do now that He had ascended to heaven. They were to follow him, and what happened with Jesus would be repeated in them and the church. But they needed to grapple with it when it happened. What were they hoping for? A new age, where they would go forth in conquest, baptizing the nations. They expected the righteousness of God to be manifested in the world through their ministry (James 1:20). They would see their hopes fulfilled by the tremendous growth of the Church, but it would happen through persecution by the very people they always looked up to and trusted (Chief Priests, Scribes, Pharisees, etc). Jesus was gone, and the Church would have to trust the Apostles. The early believers were being told by those whom they always respected and trusted that Jesus was a hoax, a discredited false-messiah, and the disciples were lying and stole the body of Jesus; Rome is still supreme and the Jewish rulers are still in charge. They lost everything. The Jews had killed Stephan – but to their surprise, God did not avenge the church. The Jews were likely empowered in their persecution. This would

be very confusing and disorienting to the new church: what should they do? Now that they are attacked, how should they respond? With Anger? Speaking in kind? The leaders of the church were probably tempted to write nasty speeches – and even take up the cause of zealotry and violence (Ch. 4 is not metaphorical violence). James teaches them about how to behave – how the righteousness of the kingdom of God comes. That is what James is about.

III. James 1

A. Patience and Faith in Trials 1:2-11

In 1:2 James addressed his “brothers.” This word “Brothers” is used 15 times, and could be referring to Christian believers generally or congregations. It could also be a sort of theological reference to Christian brothers in conflict (e.g. Cain & Abel and Jacob & Esau; brother/brother hatred, anger and murder), which James deals with later in the letter. But the repetition of the word brothers could refer to the ministers/leaders/pastors; those being trained by Apostles to lead the churches. In the book of Acts we see that it is the leaders of the brothers that are initially persecuted – and then later others. The word “brother(s)” is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to leaders (3 Jn. 3, 5, 10), and specifically those who speak for the Lord (as prophets Rev 19:10; 22:9). James clearly focused on those who speak for the Lord in the church (i.e. leaders, ministers, teachers), with the central section of the book dealing with teachers, sins of the tongue, and the need to be wise and mature so that they can control the body (of the church) (3:1-18). James is a circular letter to the brothers/ministers (1:19) to train them to lead the church. The pastoral ministry should be a model for the church, and is therefore applicable to all. But the focus in James is on the pastors/leaders who do not know what to do to lead the people in these troubled times.

The first thing he wants the brothers to understand and do is to lead the people in counting it all joy when they fall into various trials (vv2-8).

Various Trials → Patience → Maturity (vv 2-4) vs. Lacking wisdom → Doubting → Double-mindedness (vv 5-8)

James begins with a shocking command that gets right to his purpose in writing: Be joyful when you encounter all kinds of trials. This joyfulness, which is the posture of faith, will give you patience (literally, to stand or endure) as God works into your life maturity. Maturity is the goal (the word “perfect” means being mature and complete,

lacking in nothing). At that time the new church was immature and frustrated. James' call to joy and patience is the way to maturity in their new situation.

Anyone (pastors and members of their churches) who lacks wisdom and understanding of how to live in the midst of the trials they were going through needs merely to ask God – who will give them all the wisdom they need in abundance. But it must be the kind of asking that comes from faith in God, not from doubt. Those who doubt that God will give them wisdom to deal with their trials will receive nothing from God – and will be as unstable as the waves on the sea.

In vv. 9-11 James seems to change the subject, but in reality gives us a clearer picture of the kinds of trials the church was facing. James says: “Let the lowly brother glory/boast; but rich person in his humiliation.” Rich/poor here is deeper than just money. The Jews at that time have all the riches and resources – but they are judged because they use the riches wrongly. They will pass away. The church is poor, but is blessed. This is not an abstract condemnation of the rich. Later, in Ch. 2 and Ch. 5 (the matching section on the outline), we will see more about this issue of wealth and poverty. There are those that want to be catered to because they are rich; or in some cases, the poor may want to cater to the rich so that they will stop the persecution. James is saying to the suffering poor: You are exalted and blessed – don't be confused about what you see around you. Things will not always be this way.

B. Trails/Temptations and Sin 1:12-20

1:12 “Blessed is the Man who endures temptation/trial.” The word translated “temptation” is the same word used in 1:2 for “trial.” The temptation referred to is something that comes from within a man (depravity of man) The desire/deception is thinking that God is not giving me good gifts – that he is not our Father. James is saying that we should not read into the situation an indication of God's disposition toward us. God is the Father of lights that give good gifts (1:5). He will not change – our situation/trials are not an indication of God's disfavor. To doubt this makes one double-minded and unstable – and unable to lead the people of God into righteousness of God.

Something is coming and anticipated: that through the church will come the righteousness of God (which He has promised in Jesus) into the world, that God would make everything right in a sinful and wicked world. Vv. 19-20 says that righting the wrongs will not come through anger (words and actions). Brothers are tempted to think

that it is right to respond to the trials with angry words and actions. It is natural for to us to feel that way. Like Peter in Gethsemane; or when he reacted to Jesus' announcement of betrayal (Matt 16). Peter thought he was righteous and had wisdom, but Jesus said it was Satanic thinking – not wisdom from above (James 3:15).

C. Be Doers of the Implanted Word of Truth 1:21-27

In conclusion of this section, James says: “Therefore, lay aside (various sins)...vv. 21, and receive with meekness the implanted word, for it will deliver them, save their lives (souls). Instead of quickly spoken angry works, filthiness and overflowing wickedness vv 22-25 – Leaders/ministers should be like God commanded the kings of old to be (Deut 25) and remain in the word. Ministers should be changed by the implanted word, and do what it says. Those who look into the law of Christ/gospel will be blessed.

Being religious is not just talk – don't be ministers that are unrestrained in speech, and with self-deceived pride become useless. Ministers: Speak carefully and act biblically and consistently with gospel – have active undefiled religion: serving orphans & widows (of those killed or imprisoned in the persecution) – and keep yourself unspotted from the ways of the world around you. By so doing, the leaders of the people will lead the people in the way that produces the righteousness of God.

Homework assignment: Read the handout entitled “[How James \[Jacob\] Came to Be Written](#).” This will provide, in story form, a background to the message of James.

The Epistle of James

Lesson 1 – Introduction to James’ Call to Patience, Faith & Doing the Word

James 1

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I. Biblical and Historical Background for the Book of James

Ministry of Jesus included warnings: Matthew 9-10

Acts 1: Church will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness around the world

Acts 4-8: Church persecuted and dispersed /scattered around the world

II. The Message of James

The assumption of these lessons is that James, the Apostle, the brother John, the sons of Zebedee wrote this letter to build an Apostolic foundation of Christian teaching and living for the very early church, not long after the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), probably in the 30's AD.

Gen. 25:19-32:32

III. James 1

A. Patience and Faith in Trials 1:2-11

“Brothers” = Leaders ministers (3 Jn. 3, 5, 10; as prophets Rev 19:10; 22:9)

Various Trials → Patience → Maturity vs. Lacking wisdom → Doubting → Double-mindedness

B. Trails/Temptations and Sin 1:12-20

C. Be Doers of the Implanted Word of Truth 1:21-27

Homework assignment: Read the handout entitled “[How James \[Jacob\] Came to Be Written](#).” This will provide, in story form, a background to the message of James.

How James [Jacob] Came to Be Written

March 21, 2008 by [Jeff Meyers](#)

“. . . and just when are you guys going to live up to your Sons of Thunder reputation? Huh? A lot of us are wondering about you two.” With that, the young man got up, climbed down the ladder, and stalked up the street toward the old city.

Jacob [James] turned from watching the man and looked at his brother. This was not the first time he saw that expression on Johanan’s [John’s] face. What was it? Bewilderment mixed with sadness maybe, but then too a hint of fear. Jacob empathized. For months now they had been hearing similar angry speeches. The younger men especially were given to reacting to the persecution with a show of strength, even force. Every apostle in Jerusalem has been approached with similar proposals. But now the situation appeared to have gotten worse. This man reported on activity that crossed the line. He actually urged them to join with the resistance.

“Johanan, do you think his report is credible? Or might he have been exaggerating in an attempt to get us to join the cause, so to speak? What do you think?”

“Well, I don’t think he’s making it up. Perhaps he’s embellished the incident somewhat, but I’ve heard similar stories this week from other brothers who’ve been driven out of Jerusalem.”

“Wait. Similar stories? Do you mean different accounts of this one incident or similar incidents in different places?”

“The latter, Jacob. Many of the brothers are losing patience. They tell me that they are no longer able to control angry disciples. I guess we should have seen this coming. As you know, since the tribulation began last year there has been a steady deterioration of order in our assemblies. . . . Look, Jacob, here comes brother Levi, Peter, and Peter’s deacon Mark. They don’t look very happy.”

Jacob went to the ladder and called the three up. After arranging a few more cushions for their friends to recline with them, Johanan called down to his wife and asked if there was an extra jar of wine downstairs for the five of them. She said there wasn’t, but that she would send Joseph down to the market before it closed to purchase a bottle of that wonderful vintage port from the Negev. “Thank you, dear,” Jacob said.

Jacob then turned toward the three visitors. “Why the dour looks, brothers?”

Levi spoke. “You would think that as my account of our Lord’s life circulates, the disciples would connect the dots with their own situation. But I don’t see it happening. The brothers that do see the connection are being drowned out by these loudmouthed young wannabes who counsel violent action against the persecutors.”

“Violent action. You’ve heard about it, too? We just heard a report from a brother who claims it has moved beyond mere talk. Johanan just now tells me that he’s heard similar reports. I can see from your expressions that it must be true.”

Peter said, “Yes, it’s awful. In Bethel the servant of an agent of the Sanhedrin on a mission to find disciples has been killed. I don’t know all the details. But the reliable word on the street is that the deed was done by disciples that are being described as zealots.”

“We’ve also heard,” Mark added, “that some brothers are cursing the persecutors in their assemblies and privately organizing bands of men bound by oaths to establish the righteous rule of Jesus. What a mess!”

Everyone was quiet for a while. Then Peter spoke up.

“Too many brothers apparently believe that the success of the Lord Jesus’ cause must be measured the way our apostate nation measures success. If their assembly has no political influence or power, no material wealth or visible signs of prosperity, then how can they claim to be the Messiah’s new people? So they mimic their rich persecutors and think that by responding in kind they will prevail.”

Jacob said, “But this kind of attitude and behavior is diametrically opposed to the way of our Lord Jesus! If we disciples are going to covet the power and wealth of apostate Jerusalem, then we may as well just become pagan Romans. After all, Jerusalem simply mimics Rome these days. I’ve just read an insightful essay on this by a young brother named Rene ben Girard from the Gadarene region. Can’t the brothers at least discern what’s going on? Such pride will cause the Lord’s judgment to fall on us, not just on Jerusalem and Rome. Friendship with the world is enmity with God!”

Peter said, “So we are all feeling the same way, I see. This is a sign from the Spirit to us that something needs to be done.”

“I agree,” said Levi. “Remember how we came to a consensus about this when I was commissioned to write my account of Jesus’ ministry?” Everyone nodded. “Okay. I believe we need to write something to the churches now, specifically to our brothers who are shepherding the assemblies that have been formed outside of Jerusalem since the persecution and dispersion. Do you men agree?”

Peter: “Yes, Levi, I believe this is exactly the right thing to do. And since your account of our Lord’s ministry is now being copied and circulated, the new work ought to draw out the implications of our Lord’s life and teaching for the persecuted church. People should be able to see the connection between Levi’s account and this new work’s presentation of proper behavior for disciples of Jesus. Does everyone agree?”

Johanan said, “Yes, I think the Spirit is moving us in precisely that direction. Let me add that I think this work ought to be a circular letter written to our brothers, the pastors and leaders of the persecuted assemblies. Every disciple will be able to learn from it, of course, but if we write the leaders and ask them to read and explain it to their people, we will be addressing the source of the most of our problems. These brothers are supposed to be mature, able to lead their people with meekness and mercy. They seem to want to rule like the Gentiles. Someone needs to remind them of the royal instruction given by our Lord in his mountainside sermon! If we want to continue to reign with the Lord Jesus, we better start

acting like true kings and leave off imitating apostate Jewish blowhards and pagan Roman warmongers.”

Peter: “Good idea, John. We need to make sure that this concern for how the brothers lead the congregations by means of their words is at the heart our exhortation. Words are powerful, but words will not save us. Our Lord told us ‘wisdom is justified by her works.’ We need to make sure that our appointed teachers understand this.”

“Speaking of words,” Jacob interjected, “I would like to see us address the true heart and soul of faithful Christian piety – caring for the poor and needy, especially widows and orphans. The churches are being sidetracked from this by our persecutors. Stephen was a great example of this. But I gather that some bigmouths think that Stephen’s death proved his ministry was ineffective. They don’t seem to remember that Stephen was following in the footsteps of our Lord. They were both murdered by envious Jewish rulers whose own failures were illuminated by Jesus’ and Stephen’s righteous service to the poor. Our people can talk about faith all they want, but putting one’s faith in Jesus means doing the kinds of works he did. Perhaps we need to remind everyone of the uselessness of empty talk, even empty confessions of faith.”

“Well, men, do we have anyone more passionately concerned about this than our brother Jacob?” Peter asked. “I think not. I think it is especially appropriate that Jacob write this pastoral letter given that he now functions as the lampstand of the assemblies in Jerusalem. Most of the men and congregations that have been displaced last year were under his shepherding care. It only makes sense to have him write these brothers. What do you all think?”

Everyone nodded vigorously, while Jacob looked a bit apprehensive. “I’ll need your help, men. For I’ll need to avoid just the kind of angry speech that I wish to warn the brothers against. This is an honor, but I don’t feel up to it.”

Peter then got to his feet and motioned everyone to gather around Jacob. They did so, laying hands on him, and praying fervently. Peter petitioned the Lord to grant them all humility and patience in the midst of these great trials. He prayed that they would have the grace to count even these tribulations as blessings. Mark prayed that the Lord would judge those apostate Jewish leaders who failed to honor the apostles and disciples of the Messiah. He prayed that the cries of the laborers that were sent to harvest the fields of Israel would reach the Lord of armies and that he would act swiftly to bring in the reign of righteousness he promised. Levi prayed that the disciples of the Messiah would remember the suffering and patience of the prophets, and that the Lord would reward their steadfast faith with the harvest of righteousness they all longed for. Finally, Johanan prayed for his brother, that God would grant that through his words many who are wandering from the truth might be rescued and that this pastoral letter might be the means whereby the Lord would cover a multitude of sins.

When they had finished praying, Jacob got up from his knees and saw his son Joseph standing by the ladder with the promised bottle of wine. After everyone had a glass, he raised his cup and blessed the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone shouted amen. They enjoyed each other’s company for a little while longer, but Jacob’s mind was already busy with the letter he would begin to write early the next morning. He kept hearing the prayers that were spoken over him a few moments ago. His letter was taking shape in his mind.

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<http://biblicalhorizons.wordpress.com/2008/03/21/how-mark-came-to-be-written/>

The Epistle of James

Lesson 2 – The Rich & “the poor man,” Partiality, Justification & Works

James 2

Objective – To see how James links faith to obedience to Christ’s royal law – the law of liberty; and to understand what James means by justification by faith and works.

❖ Memory verses for James

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

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- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

❖ Review

Last week, in the introduction to the book of James, we learned from the internal evidence of the letter that the most likely dating of the book is very early in the life of the new Church. It is written by James, to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. It is possible that it is James, the brother of Jesus, but it seems more likely that it is James the brother of John – one of the 3 key disciples of our Lord. Regardless of which James it is, the book was still written early (before the Jerusalem Council) because there is no mention of the controversy in the Church about the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Church, which was so very important by about 50 AD. The best way to understand the historical context of James is to see that the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad”

are those Jewish Christians driven out after persecution in Acts 7 and martyrdom of Stephan (Acts 8:1-4). It is the infant church – Firstfruits church, first converts. Read 1:18: They are the firstfruits of the gospel – brought us forth by/in/from the word of truth [the word firstfruits is also used in 1 Cor. 15:20-23, which says that Jesus, by His resurrection, is the firstfruits of the Church that will also be raised from the dead on the last day. Rom 11:16; 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15; Rev. 19:4 speak of the first converts in Asia]. What happened to Jesus will also happen to the Apostles and to the rest of the church through history (i.e. ministry, persecution and dying, future resurrection and a promise of more fruit to come). The Apostles instructed early church by the word of truth – Bible. The early church sets the pattern for the rest of the church in history, and these Christians are examples to the coming generations – specifically in their steadfast faithfulness in trial – which inspires us to joyfully and patiently enduring suffering of every kind unto maturity, wisdom and righteousness.

[Teacher may want to have brief discussion of the story provided as homework.]

It is possible that there were those in the church that were struggling with how to deal with the persecution. James tells his brothers (both leaders in the church and Christians in general) that they are to not only be joyful during their trials because they will gain maturity, but also to ask the Father for wisdom, without doubting the goodness of God because of their circumstances. They should bridle tongue avoid sinful anger (1:19-20, 26), have a pure religion (1:27) that obeys the word of God (1:21-25) by visiting the poor widows and orphans in trouble and keeping oneself unstained (from the world) by meditating on the mature law, the law (instruction of Jesus) of liberty = true religion.

James 2

I. 2:1-8 – Rich and “the poor man” – Showing Partiality

In the book of James (as with elsewhere in the New Testament), discussions of the poor and rich are not abstractions or generalizations. He is not making a broad condemnation of all rich people. James tells us who they are: they come into assembly with gold rings and want attention. Both rich and poorer Christians are tempted cater to them. The reality is that they will pass away like flowers of the field (1:9-11). James is saying the same things that Jesus did in the Gospels about the poor: Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5; James 2:5). As we will see, the rich were those who oppress and blaspheme the name (of Jesus) called out over them (2:7). Their riches will perish in judgment (5:1-3); they have murdered the righteous one (5:6, i.e. Jesus/Stephan?). James is saying that faithful believers, even under persecution and

oppression by the rich, are exalted (1:9-12). “Blessed is *the man*” (not person) v.12 – Will receive the crown of life (the name “Stephan” in Greek is the word for “crown” – the righteous man, Stephan, received a crown of life because he remained faithful under trial – as will all believers). We will see this addressed again later in the matching section on the outline.

On the handout today is another outline of the book that shows that the issue of poverty and riches is a big theme in the book of James.

- A. Joy in trial, 1:2-8
 - B. Rich fade, 1:9-11
 - C. Lustfulness, 1:12-15
 - D. Perfect Gift, 1:16-25
 - E. Restraining the tongue, 1:26
 - F. Religion in deed, 1:27
 - G. Distinctions of rich and poor, 2:1-13
 - F'. Faith in works, 2:14-26
 - E'. Restraining the tongue, 3:1-12
 - D'. Wisdom as perfect gift, 3:13-18
 - C'. Lustfulness and sin, 4:1-12
 - B'. Ways of the rich, 4:13-5:6
 - A'. Patience in suffering, 5:7-20
- <http://www.leithart.com/2008/04/28/chiasm-of-james/>

In James 2 people are acting like the world – especially in the way they make judgments about people in terms of their worth. They are mimicking the world in their fights and quarrels – not imitating Jesus.

James is saying that the Christians were showing partiality against the poor in favor of rich people in their assemblies – presumably to gain their favor and avoid persecution and oppression. They would give benefits to the rich at the expense of the poor. In so doing they were setting themselves up as judges over people wrongly demonstrating by their partiality that they had evil thoughts (2:4). They dishonored the poor (whom God had chosen to be rich in faith) in favor of those who oppress and persecute the poor, and blaspheme the honorable name of Jesus (2:5-7). Because of their suffering and persecution – the believers that James was writing to were using improper judgment to make things better for themselves.

James 2:1-13 is about showing partiality toward the poor and how they should live like heirs of the kingdom (v. 5), who follow the royal law (v. 8). Jesus is the “Lord” (i.e. king) who has given us His royal law to follow, enabling us to make righteous judgments. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18 – see wider context before; quoted by Jesus in Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39-40). If we (both Christians in general and leaders of the churches) are to see the righteousness of God among us (1:18), we must fulfill the law of our King (1:25; 2:8, 12). Throughout the scripture, kings are shown as

those who to take care of the poor (like David and Solomon and Jesus). How do we know the kingdom has come? Jesus feeds the poor and heals the sick. Jews (worldly) were looking for a different kind of king. Jesus dies like a king – giving himself as a king would for his people. 2:1 – As you hold to the faith of Lord Jesus Christ – Lord of glory - do not show partiality. If you want to be like the King – act like Him. It is his royal law of the kingdom we need to live by – not the world. Don't make superficial judgments about people – keep Christ's royal law. This is consistent with the honorable name (2:6-7) that was literally “called out over you” (at baptism). The rich blaspheme the name of Jesus (Father, Son, Spirit given at baptism) by partiality – don't be that way – treat people with love, with Kingly/royal love and make right judgments toward people, do not be superficial. These poor people are heirs of the kingdom, looking for the crown of life, looking for righteousness in the world.

People are always tempted to give favors to the rich, and not love the poor. This is a very important principle in the church: Do not show partiality toward the rich and neglect the poor. [Note to teacher: It may be good to ask the student to give examples of how this can be applied today.]

II. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the law of liberty

The Royal law that they should be obeying is what they were violating. By setting aside the royal law of love James says that his readers sinned and are convicted and condemned by the whole law (2:8-11). The people James wrote to were probably justifying themselves by saying they were keepers of the law; but James says that they were in fact law-breakers because they failed to keep the Royal Law of love. This sections is very much like Jesus' sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) where He commands His disciples to keep the whole law faithfully (and in Matt 5:21-32 the only two commandments Jesus spoke directly was of adultery and murder; just like James 2:11). In James 2:12 he said that we will be judged by the same standard we judge others; exhorting us to use the law of liberty (i.e. Royal Law) as the standard for our judgments. Then James continues in v. 13 to speak of mercy and forgiveness as the primary basis for judgment, just as Jesus did in Matt. 6:9-15. Love and mercy should be the basis for our relationship with people, just as it is with our relationship to the Lord. In Matthew 18:21-35 and 25:31-46 we have parables of Jesus that illustrates this principle. We will see this addressed again later in the matching section on the outline.

III. 2:14-26 – Justification [*dikaio*] & works

In the first half of James 2, James is talking about making judgments that are righteous and consistent with the Royal Law of love (2:8) that brings liberty/freedom in relationships (1:25; 2:12). In the second half of the chapter James takes up the question of what kind of faith people are to have if they are living faithfully to the Royal Law of

Christ. This section has been very difficult for people to understand because they place James’ statements about faith and works next to those of Paul in Romans and Galatians, which look on the surface contradict each other. It must be understood that both James and Paul are talking about the *kind* of faith that saves.

<p>“Therefore we conclude that a man is <u>justified</u> by faith apart from the deeds/works <u>of the law</u>” (Romans 3:28, NKJV)</p>	<p>“knowing that a man is not <u>justified</u> by the works <u>of the law</u> but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be <u>justified</u> by faith in Christ and not by the works <u>of the law</u>; for by the works <u>of the law</u> no flesh shall be justified.” (Galatians 2:16, NKJV)</p>	<p>“You see then that a man is <u>justified</u> by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24, NKJV)</p>
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We need to begin by understanding what James is saying before we can see how it agrees with the rest of the New Testament’s teaching on justification, salvation, faith and works. Notice first the difference between the works James refers to and those that Paul writes of. Paul specifically refers to the works “of the law,” whereas James is talking about works of love and mercy to people and general obedience to the Lord (as he has been writing about). Paul is writing to those who are being told that justification/salvation by God comes by doing the works of the law (e.g. being circumcised, keep Sabbath, eating the right foods, etc); whereas, James is writing to those who say that they do not have to do works of love for other people (i.e. the poor; 2:3, 8, 15-16).

James’ readers are those who *talk* about having faith (2:14, 16, 18) – but, as we just saw in 2:1-13, they are not living according to the Royal Law of Christ. James asks, “what profit is it if someone *says* he has faith – but does not have”/do the works of the law of liberty? Can that the kind of faith that saves him” (v. 14)? The obvious answer that James implies is “NO!” Just as thinking you are religious but not bridling your tongue means your religion is useless (1:26); so too, just saying you have faith but not doing works of love is useless. That faith is useless in the sense that *it cannot save* (2:14-16). James is saying that faith is complete/perfected/brought to maturity by works (2:22). A person is justified by works – not by faith alone (vv. 24, 26).

What follows between v. 14 and the end of the chapter is a line of argument that concludes that faith without works is dead, just as the body without the spirit is dead (vv. 20, 26). The word “justify” in v. 24 is talking about salvation (as in v. 14), so that if you are saved you are justified. The basic Greek word translated “justified” (2:21, 24, 25) is the same word translated “righteousness” (2:23; 1:20; 3:18; 5:16). Thus, the ideas of righteousness (living righteously) and being declared righteous or justified are all related terms for the same reality. Those who are justified/declared by God to be righteous are those who both believe and do works of love. By their faith and works of love together, they are those who are accounted by God to be righteous.

Repeatedly, Jesus Himself said that those who refuse to love and forgive and to show mercy (Matt. 6:9-15; 18:21-35; 25:31-46) will themselves not receive the mercy of God. In these passages, as with James 2:14, the Day of Judgment is in view when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. In the court of judgment, those who had faith that works will be declared to be just and righteous.

This whole section uses language that would be used in a courtroom scene where people are being judged. As we have seen in the previous section (2:1-13), the standard of judgment is to be the Royal Law of Christ. In this case the Judge is the Lawgiver Himself: God. The implication from the previous section is that the judgment of mercy will be given to those who live according to the law of liberty (v. 13). Since some of the readers of James have not shown mercy (showing partiality without love and mercy for the poor), they are sinners who are liable for condemnation for being law-breakers (vv. 9-13). Thus, the salvation spoken of in v. 14 is salvation from condemnation when we stand before the Lord for judgment. Salvation from condemnation, is justification (v. 24); it is the declaration by God that our sins are forgiven. In His judgment of us, we are declared to be righteous in His court of justice. His justification saves us from condemnation, and gives us eternal life because we are saved.

James says that works demonstrate faith (v. 18). He says that mere faith does not save, any more than it saves the demons that believe in God and tremble (v. 19). He goes on in vv. 20-23 to prove his point by using Abraham as an illustration. Abraham is said to be justified by works and not by faith alone, his sacrifice of Isaac fulfilling the declaration of Gen 15:6 that "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." And nestled in this discussion is James' claim that Abraham was "called the friend of God" (v. 23). Being justified and being called a friend of God are two ways of describing the same reality for James: To be reckoned righteous is to be reckoned a friend of the righteous God. James, in short, is talking about Abraham's legal standing, and he says that Abraham came into this standing by a faith that works.

James also uses another illustration to make his point. Even the Gentile woman, Rahab, was justified/saved by her works of mercy in saving the messengers of Israel. His point is that faith without works is dead; it is worthless in salvation. Only those with a faith that works (love and mercy) will be declared by God to be justified in the Judgment.

Common myth: When you die God will ask you a series of questions and if you answer right you will get into heaven, as if just saying the right thing saves you. James is saying that just saying that you are saved by faith, reciting the creeds and confessions, is not what Jesus taught.

““Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name,

and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ ” (Matt. 7:21–23)

Like a body without breath is dead, so too, faith without works is just as dead. If you want to be saved – you just don’t say things about faith. Your faith will be manifested as the faith of a justified one by what you do. People were being persecuted; if you don’t take care of the widows and orphans, no matter what you say about faith you are not a justified one. Your faith will necessarily guide your actions; without loving actions you evidently do not have faith. This is the same thing that Paul meant by justification, and should not be controversial if we just use James’ own words in context; our first task is to know James’ meaning – and then secondarily reconcile it with Paul. Note: both James and Paul are addressing proud boasting – one on his faith and the other on his works. Both Paul and James can be summarized from Gal. 5:6: Saving faith is a “faith working through love.”

Homework assignment: Read the entire book of James and be prepared to discuss how James 3 can be a summary and primary application of the whole epistle.

The Epistle of James

Lesson 2 – The Rich & “the poor man,” Partiality, Justification & Works

James 2

Objective – To see how James links faith to obedience to Christ’s royal law – the law of liberty; and to understand what James means by justification by faith and works.

There will be a **test** on the memory verses, the outline of the book and other material other material covered in class.

❖ **Memory verses for James**

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

❖ **Outline of the book of James**

- A. 1:2-27 – Patience and faith in trials, sin & save your souls
- B. 2:1-7 – Rich and “the poor man”
- C. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the law of liberty
- D. 2:14-26 – Justification [*dikaio*] & works
- E. 3:1-12 – The tongue
- D’ 3:13-18 – Righteousness [*dikaioisune*], Wisdom, & works
- C’ 4:1-12 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver
- B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

❖ **Review**

Written by James (either the brother of John, the Apostle; or James the brother of Jesus) – Before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

To the “twelve tribes” scattered abroad from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4) into the world follow the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7)

Written to encourage the church and her leaders to be patient in suffering, mature, wise and righteous.

I. 2:1-8 – Rich and “the poor man” – Showing Partiality

Not broad condemnations of all rich people – Specifically about showing partiality

The Royal Law of the King “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18 – quoted by Jesus in Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39-40)

- A. Joy in trial, 1:2-8
 - B. Rich fade, 1:9-11
 - C. Lustfulness, 1:12-15
 - D. Perfect Gift, 1:16-25
 - E. Restraining the tongue, 1:26
 - F. Religion in deed, 1:27
 - G. Distinctions of rich and poor, 2:1-13
 - F’. Faith in works, 2:14-26
 - E’. Restraining the tongue, 3:1-12
 - D’. Wisdom as perfect gift, 3:13-18
 - C’. Lustfulness and sin, 4:1-12
 - B’. Ways of the rich, 4:13-5:6
 - A’. Patience in suffering, 5:7-20
- <http://www.leithart.com/2008/04/28/chiasm-of-james/>

II. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the law of liberty

Love and mercy should be the basis for our relationship with people – just as it is with our relationship to the Lord (Matt. 6:9-15; 18:21-35 and 25:31-46).

III. 2:14-26 – Justification [dikaio] & works

<p>“Therefore we conclude that a man is <u>justified</u> by faith apart from the deeds/works <u>of the law</u>” (Romans 3:28, NKJV)</p>	<p>“knowing that a man is not <u>justified</u> by the works <u>of the law</u> but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be <u>justified</u> by faith in Christ and not by the works <u>of the law</u>; for by the works <u>of the law</u> no flesh shall be justified.” (Galatians 2:16, NKJV)</p>	<p>“You see then that a man is <u>justified</u> by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24, NKJV)</p>
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Homework assignment: Read the entire book of James and be prepared to discuss how James 3 can be a summary and primary application of the whole epistle.

The Epistle of James

Lesson 3 – The Tongue and Righteousness, Wisdom and Works

James 3

Objective – To understand the importance of the tongue, and wisdom from above in producing the righteousness of God.

❖ Memory verses for James

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

❖ Outline of the book of James

- A. 1:2-27 – Patience and faith in trials, sin & save your souls
- B. 2:1-7 – Rich and “the poor man”
- C. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the law of liberty
- D. 2:14-26 – Justification [*dikaio*] & works
- E. 3:1-12 – The tongue
- D’ 3:13-18 – Righteousness [*dikaiosune*], Wisdom, & works
- C’ 4:1-12 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver
- B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

❖ Review

Who are the two most likely choices for author of James? [Brother of Jesus or The Apostle James, the brother of John]

When is the epistle most likely written? [AD 30’s]

What is the historical context? [The “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” are those Jewish Christians driven out after persecution in Acts 7 and martyrdom of Stephan (Acts 8:1-4).]

James calls on the “brothers” he is writing to “count in all joy when they fall into various trials.” The word “brothers” throughout the book are most certainly all the believers that read the book, but it could also be that James is writing to the leaders of the churches that

the letter would be read in – which becomes more evident in Ch. 3. He is calling on them all to have patience in their sufferings because through these difficult times the church will grow in maturity, so that they lack in nothing (1:4; 2:22; 3:2). What they lack is wisdom – and so they should pray to God in faith (without doubting) that they would have wisdom (1:5). As we will see today – James is concerned that his readers understand what wisdom is and who really has it (3:12-18).

Very important also to James is how people speak. In 1:19 James commands his beloved brothers to be slow to speak and quick to listen, because the wrath of man (probably referring to angry words spoken because of persecution) does not produce the righteousness of God. Rather, those who have pure and undefiled religion should bridle their tongues (1:26). The leaders of the churches were apparently showing favoritism to rich oppressors in the church (2:1-13), instead of fulfilling the royal law of Christ by showing loving mercy, and judging rightly. There were those who were speaking words about believing – but they were not living faithfully as those who not only believe the gospel, but do the works of love called for in the scriptures. Thus, faith without works is dead. Just saying one believes, but not having works does not save.

The word “justify” in v. 24 is talking about salvation (in v. 14), so that if you are saved you are justified. The basic Greek word translated “justified” (2:21, 24, 25) is the same word translated “righteousness” (2:23; 1:20; 3:18; 5:16). Thus, the ideas of righteousness and being declared righteous or justified are all related terms for the same reality. Those who are justified/declared by God to be righteous are those who both believe and do works of love. They, by their faith and works, are accounted by God to be righteous.

I. Righteous Use of the Tongue 3:1-12

The righteousness of God is what James and the brothers are looking to see in the world. But 1:20 tells us that the righteousness of God is not the product of quick, angry speech. In fact, as we see in 3:6, the tongue is a world of unrighteousness (sometimes translated “iniquity” – which is the same Greek word (negatively) used in the rest of the book for righteousness or to be justified/just: 1:20; 2:21, 23, 24, 25; 3:18; 5:6, 16). We will see today that the righteousness that is to be produced in the church comes from mature speech and wisdom from above (3:18).

As we have said before, during the persecution that the early Christians suffered (primarily from the Jews), it is likely that they were very confused about how they should respond. Should they just take the abuse, or should they fight back? It is possible, and given our text today, likely that the leaders of the churches were making angry speeches about the people that were persecuting them, and causing angry and even violent reactions among the believers in Jesus. They do not know what they are doing, and outrageous things are resulting from their lack of righteous restraint of their tongues.

Here, in the middle of the epistle, James is addressing his “brother” leaders to be very careful about *who they allow* to be teachers in the churches (notice: in 3:1 the words “of you” are not in the original Greek – meaning it is directed to “My brothers” = leaders). Those who aspire to be teachers should understand that they will receive a stricter judgment about what they have to say than those who are not teachers. As 3:2 says, we all stumble in many ways. But those who are mature (as teachers should be) have the ability to “bridle” and control the whole body of the Church. Thus, not may should be teachers.

Why? Because the way they teach and what they teach has an incredible impact on the church. In these verses James uses illustrations about how the use of the tongue impacts and controls things – other people. Bits in horses’ mouths cause them to obey us – controlling the whole body (meaning the body of the church, v 3). Large ships, driven by fierce winds (like persecution), are controlled by a very small rudder (v. 4). Like bits and rudders, the tongue is a little member of the body that has a tremendous impact on the life of the body of the church. Thus, it is very important to carefully choose who will be teachers in the Church because they, in large measure, determine the way people will think and act. As we will see in the next two chapters, there were many things that James has to forcefully correct in the churches, probably because too many people presumed to be teachers and were leading people into bad behavior.

Everyone must keep in mind the impact that their speech has on other people. With our tongues we can boast many things – but it can be an incredible force for destroying people – just as a small fire can consume a whole forest (v.5). The tongue is said to be a fire, and a “world of iniquity,” the word meaning a “world of unrighteousness” (literally in Greek). If maturity and righteousness are primary goals in the church, the tongue must be carefully controlled. The use of speech is so important to the church that it has the capacity to defile the whole body of the church (v. 6). The tongue is likened to an unruly beast that cannot be tamed and like a deadly poison (vv. 7-8). The tongue is something that we should be very afraid of, so that we are slow to speak and quick to listen to others (1:19). Out of the same mouth we can bless God and curse men who have been made in the image and likeness of God. But it should not be like this in our relationship with people (vv. 9-10). The church was set upon by enemies, primarily the Jewish leaders. The brothers were blessing God with their tongues (words, songs), and cursing their enemies. The church can become a place of angry, hate filled speeches. We cannot curse people made in the image of God with the same mouth that blesses God. The bridle and ruder are steering the church in the wrong direction with contradictory talk about how the church should respond to the enemies of the gospel. They can pray to God to confuse/destroy enemies, but they must not speak to one another with cursing about enemies. (cf. 5:19 – internal betrayal). What this speech is producing is confusion and division in the church. How are we supposed to behave toward our enemies? Jesus taught and modeled for us

how we are to treat our enemies, and he never counsels cursing or direct/violent action against them. Matthew 5:43–48 says:

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? ⁴⁸Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

It should seem just as strange and impossible to us that we should see both blessing God and cursing other people as, 1) a spring with both fresh and bitter water flowing from it, or 2) fig trees bearing olives or grapevines bearing figs vv. 11-12). It shouldn't be happening.

But it does; and so we should in our churches, our homes, our places of work and our interactions with people in public be very careful about what we say. We live in a time when people care very little about how they speak (think of Facebook, email, political speeches, television). Few things are more harmful than how we speak to others.

II. Wisdom From Above and Righteousness [dikaiousune] 3:13-18

In 3:13-18, James turns his attention again to the subject of wisdom. In 1:2-8 James says that our various trials bring us to maturity. But in the midst of suffering and difficulty we often lack wisdom to know how to deal with things. He tells us to have faith in God our good Father in heaven that liberally gives good gifts to us when we pray and ask Him for wisdom. But we must not look at our circumstances and doubt that He is good. In doing so we will be double-minded about everything and our prayers will come to nothing.

Now, in 3:13-17 James poses the question: Who among you in the churches is wise and has mature understanding? Who will lead the church into a harvest of righteousness? It is those who show it by their good conduct; those whose works are done in the meekness of wisdom. In vv. 13-17 James contrasts what appears to be wisdom in the world with what is true wisdom that comes from above (from the Father of lights who gives wisdom liberally, 1:5-8, 17-18).

A. Wisdom that is earthly, sensual and demonic 3:14-16

Wisdom that is earthly, sensual and demonic is characterized by bitter envy (a Greek word, to be “zealous.” See the same word in Acts 5:17 of high priests filled with zealotry) of those who have power and who are oppressing the righteous. It results in self-seeking, or selfish ambition (a word that is used to describe political and public ambition). James says that if you want to be wise, you should not have hateful zeal, political/selfish

ambition in your hearts: don't boast against the truth. Where zealotry and political ambition exist, confusion/anarchy and every evil thing will follow.

This kind of earthly wisdom appears to be successful and useful, but is in reality destructive and will not produce the righteousness of God.

B. Wisdom that is from above 3:17-18

<p><i>“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the <u>meekness</u> of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.</i></p> <p><i>But the wisdom that is from above is first <u>pure</u>, then <u>peaceable</u>, gentle, willing to yield, full of <u>mercy</u> and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of <u>righteousness</u> is sown in <u>peace</u> by those who make peace.” (James 3:13–18, NKJV)</i></p>	<p>³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the <u>meek</u>, For they shall inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for <u>righteousness</u>, For they shall be filled. ⁷Blessed are the <u>merciful</u>, For they shall obtain mercy. ⁸Blessed are the <u>pure</u> in heart, For they shall see God. ⁹Blessed are the <u>peacemakers</u>, For they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3–10 (NKJV)</p>
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Notice [underlined words] how closely James’ description of wisdom from above parallels Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount on the blessedness/happiness of the kingdom of God.

James calls on leaders of the church to discern who is wise and understanding, to determine if they have true wisdom. It’s as if he asks: ‘Which tongue do you listen to and follow? Those who think they are wise should step forward, and let’s evaluate and let him prove his claim. Those who speaks for Jesus should do so wisely with understanding. It is easy to be persuaded, and moved by angry rhetoric (e.g. Hitler). Angry hateful speech that all sounds good and pious can turn people against one another in the church. The marks of Christian wisdom are not just talk, but involve works done in meekness of wisdom.

Leaders with false wisdom (vv. 14-15) can easily be mistaken for true wisdom: They use words that are politically charged (hateful zeal – zealots) resulting in violent actions. Zeal motivates and is a methodology of the Jews against Christians (see Acts 5:17). The church experiences unrighteous zeal and is tempted to respond in the same way; imitating it in order to win by being even more zealous. In Acts 13:45 we see that the Jews were jealous/zealous and cursing Christians and acting with violence in persecution. Paul was zealous in persecution (Phil 3:6). For Christians to respond in the same way is not wisdom from above, but satanically inspired and unrighteous.

The result will be lawlessness and every vile practice will result: not righteousness. James is not writing about pious private religion and wisdom generally. He wrote about how they are to live wisely in the existing social order of persecution and violence. Peacemakers will be sons of God (Beatitudes). By denouncing peace-making they would be false to Jesus and His message. Wisdom comes down from above, just as Jesus came down from above. Human/earthly wisdom comes from below (demonic), and the Jews were using demonic wisdom from below. Spirit led Christians need to have Jesus' wisdom from above. Otherwise there will be anarchy and all kinds of evil. In Luke 9:54-56 James and his brother John wanted to call down fire on those who refused to believe in Jesus. James now seems to have learned his lesson that Jesus (and the church) did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.

Homework assignment: Read the entire book of James and be prepared to discuss how chapter 4 can be applied to our lives.

The Epistle of James

Lesson 3 – The Tongue and Righteousness, Wisdom and Works

James 3

Objective – To understand the importance of the tongue, and wisdom from above in producing the righteousness of God.

❖ Memory verses for James

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

❖ Outline of the book of James

- A. 1:2-27 – Patience and faith in trials, sin & save your souls
- B. 2:1-7 – Rich and “the poor man”
- C. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the law of liberty
- D. 2:14-26 – Justification [*dikaio*] & works
- E. 3:1-12 – The tongue
- D’ 3:13-18 – Righteousness [*dikaio*sune], Wisdom, & works
- C’ 4:1-12 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver
- B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

❖ Review

Who are the two most likely choices for author of James?

When is the epistle most likely written?

What is the historical context?

I. Righteous Use of the Tongue 3:1-12

Righteousness, justified: 1:20; 2:21, 23, 24, 25; 3:18; 5:16

Matthew 5:43–48

II. Wisdom From Above and Righteousness [dikaiosune] 3:13-18

A. Wisdom that is earthly, sensual and demonic 3:14-16

B. Wisdom that is from above 3:17-18

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:13–18, NKJV)

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3–10 (NKJV)

Homework assignment: Read the entire book of James and be prepared to discuss how chapter 4 can be applied to our lives.

The Epistle of James

Lesson 4 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver

James 4:1-12

Objective – To understand the conflicts and struggles in the book of James, and make application to our lives.

❖ Memory verses for James

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

❖ Outline of the book of James

- A. 1:2-27 – Patience and faith in trials, sin & save your souls
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- E. 3:1-12 – The tongue
- D’ 3:13-18 – Righteousness [*dikaio*sune], Wisdom, & works
- C’ 4:1-12 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver
- B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

❖ Review

We have seen that James was written early in the life of the church in a time of great persecution and confusion. James calls upon all Christians, and especially the leaders of the church, to not only endure trials, but to do so joyfully in faith, knowing that it will produce maturity in them. There are several key themes that we have seen so far in the book of James:

- 1) Proper use of the tongue: Throughout the epistle James talks about the fact that improper use of the tongue does not produce the righteousness of God (1:19-20, 26; 2:3, 12, 14-18; 3:1-12).

- 2) Righteousness/Justification: James teaches that the righteousness of God comes not merely by saying the right things, but by being doers of the word (1:20-27; 2:14-26). The same Greek word is used in James to refer not only to righteousness (in action), but also justification (1:20, 2:21, 23, 24, 25; 3:6 for unrighteousness; 18; 5:6 for “just” 5:16), so that those who are justified and counted as righteous before God are those who do the works of love required by the royal law of love (1:25; 2:8, 12).
- 3) Wisdom: James says that during times of trial we are to pray (without doubting) to the Father of lights who gives wisdom from above liberally(1:5-8, 12-18; 3:13-18).

This wisdom from God is especially important for leaders in the church because they will guide the people into righteousness or sinfulness by the way they speak and teach. False Christian wisdom (3:14-15) can easily be mistaken for true wisdom. The words of the worldly wise are politically charged (v. 14, 17 “bitter envy” is where we get the word zealous & zealots; and is used in Acts 5:17 of high priests filled with zealotry). Zeal motivates and is a methodology of the Jews against Christians. Acts 13:45 – Jews were jealous/zealous and cursing Christians with violent persecution. In Phil 3:6 Paul was zealous in his persecution of Christians. The church experiences hateful political and religious zeal and is tempted to respond in the same way in order to win out in the struggle by also being zealous.

James says in 3:15-16 that the result of such worldly wisdom, zeal and selfish ambition will be confusion and every evil practice – not righteousness. James is not writing about pious private religion – he wrote about how they are to live in the existing social order – wisely. Peace-makers will be sons of God. By denouncing peace-making they would be false to Jesus and His message. Wisdom comes down from above (3:17), just as Jesus came down from above. Human/earthly wisdom comes from below (demonic). 2:19 – demons believe in God (synagogues were demonic) – Jews had demonic wisdom from below. Spirit led Christians need to have Jesus’ wisdom from above. Otherwise there will be anarchy and all kinds of evil. Sow the seeds of peace and the fruit of righteousness will be the experience of the Church. Notice that sowing peace does not necessarily bring peace, but it does produce the righteousness of God (1:19-20). In Luke 9:51-56 we see that James & John want to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans that did not receive Jesus. But Jesus said that He “did not come to destroy men lives but to save.” James now seems to have learned his lesson

A. Friend of the world – Enemy of God James 4:1-6

In 4:1-6 James gets much sharper in his words to his readers. In vv. 1-2 he says the same things twice about them: wars/battles and fights – fights and wars/battles. The early Christians apparently were having battles and fights both within their midst, and with those on the outside of the church. Where, James asks, do the violent attitudes and actions

come from? Do they not come from passions/lusts for pleasure that war in your “members?” You lust and do not have what you want – so you fight and war. It is likely that the Christian brothers, suffering under persecution and need, desired to have more money and an easier life (which is not wrong in itself). But when they did not get what they wanted they became filled with anger, bitter envy (zealous hatred) and selfish ambition and turned to violence, battles and fights with those in the church and those outside. Instead of trusting the Father of lights who is the giver of every good and perfect gift (1:12-18), they are tempted to be like the world around them (4:4). As they struggle with the trials in their lives, their desires for pleasure work against them. Even when they do prayer, they do so selfishly, motivated merely by their pleasures (4:3) – not the righteousness of God.

And so, James called them an adulterous people. Friendship with world is being at war with God. Throughout the scriptures we see God’s people (God’s Bride) turning away from Him to serve other gods – which He likens to adultery. It is spiritual adultery that makes the Lord jealous and causes His anger to burn against His people. Spiritual adultery is a turning away from God who provides the righteousness they seek. In 4:5 it says: “The Spirit he caused to indwell us is intensely jealous” (cf. Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 5:24; 6:15; 29:20; 32:16, 21; Josh. 24:19; Nah. 1:2), which means God wants them to be single-minded in devotion to God and doing things his way; as opposed to double-minded and doing things the way the world would (1:6-8).

They were being taught the opposite of the truth: oppress the poor, judgment without mercy, fight for our righteous cause, be zealous and politically ambitious. Fight/quarrel and war/battle. It could be that they had or were tempted to kill for their cause – it could be literal murder. “You are zealous fanatics!” he may be saying. It could also be that their fanaticism has led people to their deaths unnecessarily, and they were still not getting what they wanted (righteousness of God). Violence and murder is not the way to get it. They probably did not think themselves as murderers, but rather, “Freedom Fighters.” [Analogy – Ruanda Christians fighting back] When you are in this mindset you can justify every evil thing. Political activism that is close to violence, or actual violence (e.g. against abortion doctors) is a form of friendship with the world, which God opposes and makes you an enemy of God.

Rather, leaders should be teaching Christians the way of peace, humility, loving, meekness, orderliness and the righteousness of God. James says, in 4L6, that God gives more grace when His people humble themselves. He “resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (quoted from Prov. 3:34, cf. 1 Peter 5:5).

B. Summary: Submit Humbly to God James 4:7-10

James, in 4:7-10, goes on to tell his readers how they should humble themselves. They do not need to be God's enemies. What they need to do is submit to God. He has brought them into the trials they have in order to make them mature and to bring forth His righteousness in the world. Submit to God and do not resist Him or His providence in their lives. Rather, they are to: Resist the devil: he is a liar that deceives and murders; deceiving them into thinking that they should be like the Jewish world and be murderous. Demonic wisdom (3:14-15). When Christians resist the demonic temptation to be like the world, the Devil will flee from us. He cannot overcome God's people when they are living humbly and righteously. We need to draw near to God (not the world), knowing that He will draw near to us. We need to cleanse our hands of evil and violence. We need to purify our hearts of our desires for pleasure that war within us against the will of God. Otherwise we will continually be double-minded, not believing that God is still good and will bring forth His righteousness in and through us (cf. 1:6-8).

He said that they needed to lament and mourn and weep over THEIR sins. The problem was not just with those who sought to do them wrong – It was their sins that made them an enemy of God. We can never blame other people for our sins. If James' readers do not come to understand their own sin and humble themselves, he will turn whatever joy they have into the gloom of judgment. The same is true for us. If we humble ourselves, He will lift us up out of our troubles. We can know this because we know that He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:5-7).

C. Live as one judged by the Lawgiver James 4:11-12

James concludes this section by telling his Christian brothers, and the leaders of the churches, not to speak evil of one another. Clearly, there was a war within the church about what to do about the persecution. They are speaking against each other. James exhorted them to get along with each other, because they are speaking against the law and the Lawgiver: Jesus. They need to live as those who will, themselves, be judged by the Lawgiver. It is He that is able to judge properly, and so we must entrust ourselves to Him by living according to the law of love.

This is the same message earlier in the book in 2:1-13 (the matching section on the outline). The perfect law of liberty (1:25; 2:12) is the royal law of love: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8). Those who sinfully judge their brothers and refuse to love them are in fact setting themselves up as judges against the law of God, as if God's law does not meet with their standard of justice. James says, do not become judges of the law by speaking evil and judging your brothers. Rather, be a doer of the law and love your brother. In so doing, God will lift you up and grant His righteousness to you.

Lesson summary: Conforming to the ways and wisdom of the world leads to all manner of evil and sinfulness. It is a form of idolatry and unfaithfulness to God, which is a pride that he opposes. Compromise and friendship with the world to make life better and easier will only bring resistance and judgment from God, making life harder and more troubled. We need to continually submit to God, resist the temptations of the world, the flesh and the Devil and fulfill the royal law of love.

Homework assignment: Read the entire book of James in one sitting and be prepared to discuss how chapter 5 can be applied to our lives.

The Epistle of James

Lesson 4 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver

James 4:1-12

Objective – To understand the conflicts and struggles in the book of James, and make application to our lives.

❖ Memory verses for James

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

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- E. 3:1-12 – The tongue
- D’ 3:13-18 – Righteousness [*dikaio*sune], Wisdom, & works
- C’ 4:1-12 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver
- B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

❖ Review

There are several key themes that we have seen so far in the book of James:

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- 2) Righteousness/Justification: James teaches that the righteousness of God comes not merely by saying the right things, but by being doers of the word (1:20-27; 2:14-26). The same Greek word is used in James to refer not only to righteousness, but also justification (1:20, 2:21, 23, 24, 25; 3:6 for unrighteousness;; 18; 5:6 for “just;” 5:16), so that those who are justified and counted as righteous before God are those who do the works of love required by the royal law of love (1:25; 2:8, 12).
- 3) Wisdom: James says that during times of trial we are to pray (without doubting) to the Father of lights who gives wisdom from above liberally(1:5-8, 12-18; 3:13-18).

“Bitter envy” and zealotry – 3:14, 17; Acts 5:17; 13:45; Phil 3:6

Luke 9:51-56

A. Friend of the world – Enemy of God James 4:1-6

Vv. 1-2: wars/battles and fights – fights and wars/battles

“Spirit he caused to indwell us is intensely jealous” (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 5:24; 6:15; 29:20; 32:16, 21; Josh. 24:19; Nah. 1:2)

“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (quoted from Prov. 3:34; 1 Peter 5:5-7)

B. Summary: Submit Humbly to God James 4:7-10

C. Live as one judged by the Lawgiver James 4:11-12

Homework assignment: Read the entire book of James in one sitting and be prepared to discuss how chapter 5 can be applied to our lives.

The Epistle of James

Lesson 5 – Humble Patience and Faith During Hard Times

James 4:13-5:20

Objective – To see how we are to patiently await the coming of the Lord, both in judgment and salvation.

❖ Memory verses for James

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

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- B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

❖ Review

The book of James was most certainly written early in the life of the church by either James the brother of John or James the brother of Jesus. In the late 50’s AD, Paul mentioned the name of Clement (Phil. 4:3), who later became one of the important leaders of the church at large. In his letter (from Rome) to the Corinthian church he indicated that the Corinthians had begun well in the faith, but had fallen into some “shameful and detestable sedition,” which he goes on to explain:

“For this reason righteousness and peace are now far departed from you, in as much as everyone abandons the fear of God, and is become blind in His faith, neither walks in the ordinances of His appointment, nor acts a part becoming a Christian, but walks after his own wicked lusts, resuming the practice of an unrighteous and ungodly envy, by which death itself entered into the world.”

Clement then recounts the story of envious murder of Abel by Cain, and then many other biblical and historical examples to apply it to their own situation. Namely, that they are led by their own envy and to also do acts of violence:

“Let us, therefore, brothers, be of humble mind, laying aside all haughtiness, and pride and foolishness, and angry feelings...It is right and holy, therefore, men and brothers, rather to obey God than to follow those who, through pride and sedition, have become the leaders of a detestable imitation of envy” [of the world] to fanaticism and zeal.

Reading Clement is like reading James, sharing the same concerns just a few years later. In both cases, leaders were addressed to put aside all bitter envy and selfish ambition in the face of persecution, and humbly work to see righteousness and peace (James 3:13-18). Envy and pride in leaders divide the church and cause immeasurable harm to the name of Christ and to the loving fellowship of brothers in the Lord. It leads to anger, harsh words, and even physical violence both outside and inside the church (4:1-10). The remedy for this is humility before God, and submission to Him that is the ultimate Judge and law-giver who commands us to love one another (4:11-12; 2:12-13).

A. Proud Boasting About The Future

James 4:13-17

Chapter 4 concludes in a way that is somewhat confusing, as if James is completely changing the subject. It appears to be moving away from the discussion of pride, and self-seeking ambition that speaks evil of other believers to talking about business and profit (which these verses certainly apply to). It is possible that James is addressing tent-making ministers/brothers who would have bi-vocational (having two jobs) pastors. Maybe, something deeper and more in line with the message of the book of James is being spoken about.

Proverbs 27:1 says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth” (cf. Ps. 62:9; 39:5; 103:15-16) This seems to be the main idea that James is trying to communicate: that the brothers have come to think that they can control what will happen among them by making plans and taking matters into their own hands. But all of life, and especially the future are a “vapor [mist] that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (4:14). This is the same message of the book of Ecclesiastes, which indicates that all human effort and success in life does not last, but is so much vapor and mist than just dissipates over time. Boasting about what we will accomplish is an arrogant evil because we do not control the outcomes of life: God does. We are free to

humbly plan for the future, but we must hold our plans lightly and in faith to God. Whether it is business, or our life in the church, we must submit ourselves to the will of God in history.

This section ends very interestingly, in v. 17: “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” The conclusion of the section is that there is good to be done, and failure to do it is sin. These arrogant brothers who are making elaborate plans for the future are, apparently, not doing their duty in the present. In context, it would seem that the envy and selfish ambition that has caused them to be angry and unloving to their brothers is leading them to neglect their brothers, and not to do the good works of the righteousness that the law of love requires (2:14-16). James is saying, don’t allow your plans for business profit shut your hearts to the obligations you have to your fellow Christians.

B. The Rich and the “righteous one” James 5:1-6

Chapter 5 brings the book to a conclusion.

5:1-6 begins with the same words as 4:13-17 with “Come now, you...” This is language like the Old Testament prophets, as in Isaiah 1:18-20:

“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword”; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

James has, throughout the letter, spoken of the sins of the rich against the poor (1:9-11; 2:1-9, the matching section of the outline; 14-16; 4:13-17). He does not ever say that being rich is evil; rather, he specifically condemns the rich who mistreat the poor, and refuse to do the good works for the poor that the royal law of love requires. Now, in 5:1-6, James speaks about what will happen to the arrogant rich. They will be judged. Their only hope is the humble themselves under the mighty hand of God and He will give them grace and lift them up (compare with 4:6-10). But James knows that they will not repent and will suffer the consequences that will surely come upon them. The gold and silver and fine garments (cf. 2:2) they so love have rotted with corruption and will become witnesses against them before the Judge when He comes (vv. 2-3). Even the unpaid wages that they defrauded from their employees will cry against them, and will be heard by the Lord of Sabaoth (“Hosts”). The Lord of armies/hosts will send the Romans against Jerusalem to destroy it, and the persecution of rich Jews against Christians will be experienced throughout the empire. This is the same judgment that God brought against His people in times past for the same sins of oppression (Ex 22:21-27; Jer. 22:13).

James goes on in vv. 5-6 to say that they (the rich and powerful Jews) have condemned and murdered the “just/righteous” one who did not resist them (see the matching section of the outline). Who what this? Jesus and/or Stephan and the Church. It was more than an

economic travesty that caused the judgment and destruction of Jerusalem: it was the persecution of Christians and the church. Because we know that Christian leaders may have been trying to imitate the world of rich Jews, this warning of judgment may be something he was also applying to Christians at time (2:1-13, the matching section of the outline). We need to be very conscious of the fact that how we handle the gifts of God has implications for both ourselves and the world around us. God will judge righteously both in time and in eternity.

C. Patience in Suffering and Sin James 5:7-18

The last major section could be outlined in this way:

- A. 5: 7-8 – be patient, as a farmer waiting for rain, fruit of the earth
- B. 5: 9 – do not grumble against each other
- C. 5:10-11- prophets/Job example of suffering, v10 “name of the Lord”
- D. 5:12 – above all, do not swear
- C’ 5:13-15 – how to deal with suffering, v14 “name of the Lord”
- B’ 5:16 – confess your sins to one another and pray for one another
- A’ 5:17-18 – pray, as Elijah prayed for rain, earth bore its fruit

The conclusion of the book (“Therefore”) is that Christians must be patient as they await the coming of the Lord. From the historical stand point of the readers of James’ epistle, the coming of the Lord was His coming in judgment in 70 AD, as promised in the Gospel for that generation. We too, must be patient as we await the second coming of Jesus to right all the wrongs of the world, and to bring His judgments to the world.

The English word “patience” is used first in 1:3-4 for standing firm and enduring trials and suffering. But the word in 1:3-4 is different than the word used in 5:7, 8, 10, which means being long-suffering, and having perseverance while waiting for the coming of the Lord. It is used in this way several times in the New Testament. The first Greek word emphasizes remaining constant and enduring in suffering, the second emphasizes being patient in time for God to do something about the suffering.

And so, James says that they are to be patient like a farmer who waits for his work in the earth to produce fruit (v.7). God will reap a harvest of judgment – patiently wait for it because it is surely coming. The harvest we are looking for is the harvest of righteousness spoken of in 3:18; anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (1:20). Therefore, we are to sow peace and love, expecting God to bring forth His righteousness among us, and judge those who sow anger and wickedness.

James is saying that they must be patient, not only in waiting for the Lord, but also with one another. If we have to be patient with the Lord we have to be patient with one another. Impatience often creates irritation & anger and grumbling. If they continue to act

badly they were in danger of sharing in the judgment because they would be no better than unrighteous. We must not grumble and sin against one another in frustration about the difficult times they are suffering: The Judge is coming and is at the door and will deal with the wicked (5:8-9). James calls upon them to remember the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord (like the leaders of the churches): they were an example of both suffering and patience, like Elijah who prayed for rain (5:17-18, cf. v. 7), and Job who lost everything like the early Christians. Job was concerned that his three friends were going to kill him because everyone was suffering and if Job can be blamed and condemned they would all be saved. But look at the end that God intended for Job. The present suffering was not the end of the story.

5:12 Above all: do not swear (no condemnation)...Swearing is a way expressing impatient bitterness. In times of persecution it is easy and tempting to express anger against those who persecute you. It is tempting to swear against them, taking oaths of revenge, pledging to get back at them or do something; often in private, or as a conspiracy. James says that we are to make our words public and accountable. Our speech must not only be loving, and filled with wisdom from above, but it must be forthright and true.

In 5:13-18 James says that if anyone is suffering he should pray, which is a practical patience. The example that James gives of suffering is illness. This has application to sickness generally. If people have ongoing sickness, they should call for the elders to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. This remains a commandment in the church (vv. 13-15). It is one way in which God provides a visible means for His people to see that He will come to our aid. God uses the prayers of faith and restores people to health by this means. Not always, but often. These prayers and anointing are done in the context of confessing sins to one another. James is likely talking about the sins talked about in this letter. If a person has been guilty of the sins James has spoken about, they are to confess even these, and they will be both forgiven and healed. The prayers of righteous men are effective and are of great benefit to the church (v. 16).

Elijah was persecuted and thought his cause was dead and gone. But he prayed about rain and God answered his prayers (vv. 17-18; 1 Kings 17-18). The point James makes is not that Elijah was a particularly godly and righteous man. Rather, Elijah was a man just like us. Therefore, we need to be patient like Elijah, and pray like Elijah knowing that God will answer our prayers as well.

D. Sin and Saving his soul from death James 5:19-20

The final words in 5:19-20 are a reminder that no sinner is beyond being turned back to faith and righteousness. These are people that are not finding it all joy and tempted to wander away. If anyone wanders from the truth by sinning in any of the ways James spoke of in the letter, it is possible to turn them back and be saved from both the error of their ways and the judgments that come upon such people. He concludes by telling ministers/brothers to turn them back, which will cover a multitude of sins.

The Epistle of James

Lesson 5 – Humble Patience and Faith During Hard Times

James 4:13-5:20

Objective – To see how we are to patiently await the coming of the Lord, both in judgment and salvation.

❖ Memory verses for James

James 1:2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (NKJV)

James 3:7-18:

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

❖ Outline of the book of James

- A. 1:2-27 – Patience and faith in trials, sin & save your souls
- B. 2:1-7 – Rich and “the poor man”
- C. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the law of liberty
- D. 2:14-26 – Justification [*dikaio*] & works
- E. 3:1-12 – The tongue
- D’ 3:13-18 – Righteousness [*dikaioisune*], Wisdom, & works
- C’ 4:1-12 – Members at war; Judged by the Lawgiver
- B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- A’ 5:7-21 – Patience in suffering, sin & save his soul

❖ Review

A. Proud Boasting About The Future James 4:13-17

Proverbs 27:1; Ps. 62:9; 39:5; 103:15-16

B. The Rich and the “righteous one” James 5:1-6

Isaiah 1:18-20

James 1:9-11; 2:1-9; 14-16; 4:13-17

Ex 22:21-27; Jer 22:13

C. Patience in Suffering and Sin James 5:7-18

James 5:7-18

- A. 5: 7-8 – be patient, as a farmer waiting for rain, fruit of the earth
- B. 5: 9 – do not grumble against each other
- C. 5:10-11- prophets/Job example of suffering, v10 “name of the Lord”
- D. 5:12 – above all, do not swear
- C’ 5:13-15 – how to deal with suffering, v14 “name of the Lord”
- B’ 5:16 – confess your sins to one another and pray for one another
- A’ 5:17-18 – pray, as Elijah prayed for rain, earth bore its fruit

1 Kings 17-18

D. Sin and Saving his soul from death James 5:19-20

James Student Evaluation

Name _____ Date _____

1. The Epistle of James was probably written by either: the brother of _____, the Apostle; or James the brother of _____.
2. The Epistle of James was probably written before the _____ Council (Acts 15)
3. The Epistle of James was probably written to whom, when James addresses the letter to the “twelve tribes” scattered abroad? _____
 - a. The twelve tribes of Israel scattered into the nations during the exile of Assyria/Babylon
 - b. The twelve tribes spoken of in the book of Revelation persecuted in 70 AD
 - c. Jews from Jerusalem & Judea scattered following the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7)
4. Why was the Epistle of James probably written? _____

5. Outline of the book of James

A. 1:2-27 – _____ and faith in trials, sin & save your souls

B. 2:1-7 – Rich and “the _____ man”

C. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the _____

D. 2:14-26 – _____ [*dikaio*] & works

E. 3:1-12 – The _____

D’ 3:13-18 – _____ [*dikaiosune*], Wisdom, & works

C’ 4:1-12 – Members at war; Judged by the _____

B’ 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the _____ one”

A’ 5:7-21 – _____ in suffering, sin & save his soul

6. Memory Verses for James

James 1:2-4: _____

James 3:7-18: _____

7. What does James mean when he said that Christians should count it all joy when they endure trials, knowing the testing of our faith produces patience, making us perfect and complete? _____
- a. We will always be happy because we will be absolutely perfect
 - b. It is a joyful thing to know that our trials bring forth maturity in us
 - c. Suffering is happiness, and trials are what we should seek
8. James teaches that all rich people are wicked, and all poor people are righteous. _____
- a. True
 - b. False
9. The basic Greek word translated “justified” (2:21, 24, 25) is the same word translated “righteousness” (2:23; 1:20; 3:18; 5:16). The ideas of righteousness (living righteously) and being declared righteous or justified are all related terms for the same reality. Those who are justified/declared righteous by God be are those who both _____ and do _____ of love.
10. Anyone that becomes a teacher and leader in the church must take great care in the use of the tongue, and be mature with wisdom from _____.
11. Angry words and physical violence: _____
- a. Are justified to get want you really want and need
 - b. Does not produce righteousness of God
 - c. Are the God ordained means of establishing justice against enemies
12. People who wander from the truth can be turned back and have their souls saved. _____
- a. True
 - b. False

James Student Evaluation Answer Key

1. The Epistle of James was probably written by either: the brother of John, the Apostle; or James the brother of Jesus.
2. The Epistle of James was probably written before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)
3. The Epistle of James was probably written to whom, when James addresses the letter to the “twelve tribes” scattered abroad? C. Jews from Jerusalem & Judea scattered following the martyrdom of Stephen
 - a. The twelve tribes of Israel scattered into the nations during the exile of Assyria/Babylon
 - b. The twelve tribes spoken of in the book of Revelation persecuted in 70 AD
 - c. Jews from Jerusalem & Judea scattered following the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7)
4. Why was the Epistle of James probably written? To encourage the church and her leaders to be patient in suffering, mature, wise and how the righteous of the kingdom of God would come.
5. Outline of the book of James
 - A. 1:2-27 – Patience and faith in trials, sin & save your souls
 - B. 2:1-7 – Rich and “the poor man”
 - C. 2:8-13 – Royal law & partiality, Judged by the law of liberty
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“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NKJV)

7. What does James mean when he said that Christians should count it all joy when they endure trials, knowing the testing of our faith produces patience, making us perfect and complete? b. Maturity
- We will always be happy because we will be absolutely perfect
 - It is a joyful thing to know that our trials bring forth maturity in us
 - Suffering is happiness, and trials are what we should seek
8. James teaches that all rich people are wicked, and all poor people are righteous. b. False
- True
 - False
9. The basic Greek word translated “justified” (2:21, 24, 25) is the same word translated “righteousness” (2:23; 1:20; 3:18; 5:16). The ideas of righteousness (living righteously) and being declared righteous or justified are all related terms for the same reality. Those who are justified/declared righteous by God be are those who both believe and do works of love.
10. Anyone that becomes a teacher and leader in the church must take great care in the use of the tongue, and be mature with wisdom from above.
11. Angry words and physical violence: b. do not produce the righteousness of God
- Are justified to get want you really want and need
 - Do not produce righteousness of God
 - Are the God ordained means of establishing justice against enemies
- 12 People who wander from the truth can be turned back and have their souls saved. a. True
- True
 - False