

Background

In any sort of Bible study, a study of the background is a must. There is usually an historical setting to which the words have been specifically applied. If you are able to know what the background to a subject is, the more power you can gain from the whole study and the force of what is said is not missed.

So how do you dig out the background?

Well, simply by asking questions! "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt 7:7).

The Writer

Who was this man? What was his background? What was his character? Why was he chosen to write this letter? These are questions to ask yourself as you try to build up a picture of the author.

A good place to start is the salutation (opening remarks) at the beginning of the Epistle (James 1:1). A greeting in the epistles normally gives the whole key to what the letter is about. Consideration of the opening remarks often helps us to understand the whole message and spirit of the book.

So, what can we find out about the writer here?

James actually tells us quite a lot. Not only does he give us his name, he also reveals how he views himself in relation to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the title of the epistle and the first verse you'll know that the writer's name is James. However there are at least four men called James in the New Testament. How do we know which one is this writer, since he keeps so quiet about himself? Is it significant that he does, and if so what is the principle involved?

So how do we answer these questions? One way is to use Strong's and list the unique references into columns (some references in the various gospels will refer to the same incident). However, we have done the hard work for you here, and listed the verses and the four James' that are cast in the gospels:

1. the son of Zebedee (Matt 4:21);
2. the son of Alphaeus (Matt 10:3);
(both of these were members of the twelve disciples)
3. James "the little", the son of Mary and Cleophas (cp Mark 15:40; John 19:25); and
4. James "the Lord's brother" (Matt 13:55; Gal 1:19).

It was James the Lord's half brother who was the writer of James. This will soon become apparent when you put together the information of his life. The son of Zebedee died before the Epistle was written (Acts 12:2 - about AD 44), and there is no evidence that either of the other two wrote this letter.



In coming to this conclusion you need to have worked backwards. In Acts 15, we find a James who is a leader in the Jerusalem ecclesia. A comparison of the letter and the speech show some remarkable similarities -

James 1:1 "Greeting" - "*chairo*" - "wisheth joy". This word is only used as a salutation outside the Gospels in two other places - Acts 23:26 (Lysias to Felix) and Acts 15:23.

James 2:5 "Hearken brethren". These words are only used together elsewhere in this way in Acts 7:2 (Stephen's defence), in Acts 22:1 (Paul's defence in Jerusalem) and in Acts 15:13.

James 2:7 "Name ... called" - This phrase is only used elsewhere in this way in Acts 15:17.

James 2:7; 5:10,14 James places an emphasis upon "the Name". Compare Acts 15:14,17,26.

These comparisons show a strong link between the writer of the Epistle and James, the leader of the Jerusalem Ecclesia. By examining the information on James the leader, you will discover that he was James the Lord's half brother (cp Gal 1:19). This opens up a whole new area for discovery. What can we find out about Christ's brethren? What was it like to grow up in the same family as our Lord? What was it like to have him as an older brother?

As we go through the life and character of James, try to build a picture of James' early life from these references and his later life from the verses mentioned above. Remember that this was a real man, who lived in a real family, facing the same trials as you do. As you construct his life, think about the principles that come out and how you can apply them in your own life.

James the Just



His childhood and instruction

James was probably the second eldest in a family of seven (cp Matt 13:55). He was also the brother of Jude (Jude 1), and the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 1:19; Matt 13:55). His parents were obviously then Joseph and Mary, the mother of our Lord, who were both very faithful to God (Matt 1:19; Luke 1:28,30; 2:41). Their guidance and instruction to their children created a family who knew the Law backwards. Having an elder brother who would test his parents' knowledge of the Scriptures to their very limit and more, would have given James a keen thirst to understand the Law thoroughly. He was also taught not just the academic side of the Law but the practical. He urged Christ to action (John 7:2-5) and he wrote an epistle full of belief in action; "DO" was the key word of his life. Above all, his parents instilled in him a love for his brethren. This is shown in his references to Leviticus 19 which serves, among others, as a basis for his Epistle. Overall he had great respect for the Old Testament (cp Acts 15:19-21; 21:18-25).

It would have been a simple life in the carpenter's house. James ate, played, worked and slept with Christ and would have seen him develop and manifest a character quite different from the other children.



His attitude to Christ during our Lord's ministry

Christ's brethren were with him early on in his ministry (John 2:12; 7:3,10; see also the repeated allusions to the Sermon on the Mount. This testifies that James was amongst the multitude), but they misunderstood his zeal (Psa 69:8-9) and did not believe in him (John 7:5). They couldn't get past the fact that Christ was their natural brother and therefore couldn't elevate him to the Divine relationship he had with his Father. They were "without" (Luke 8:20) - they had to learn to come TO Christ, not desire that he come to them.



In fact James seems to have remembered this one incident for the rest of his life, as he refers to the principle in his epistle. His mother, his brethren and himself had stood "without" the crowd and had passed the message to Christ that they wanted to speak with him. James heard the reproving answer as Christ stretched forth his hands to his disciples and exclaimed, "Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt 12:49-50). That would have offended James to the utmost for he would have thought Christ had dishonoured his mother. Even worse than this was the fact that his brother had elevated himself to be the Son of God! However, when he later came to understand his brother's true relationship with God, he

would apply those words in every facet of his life. Luke quotes this incident in a slightly different way: "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it" (Luke 8:21). James later exhorted the readers of his epistle: "be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only" (Jam 1:22).

The fact that James quotes extensively from Christ shows that the Lord's words had made an impact on him. Due to his brothers' attitude towards the Law and their respect for the elders, they objected to some of Christ's activities (Mark 3:21; cp Mark 2:24; 3:2). Christ warned them of the consequences of their action, that their family would be divided (Mark 3:25,31-35), but it seems that they had little to do with him from then on except to try to force his hand six months before his crucifixion (John 7:2-9; cp John 2:3-5). Christ had expected his family to reject him (Mark 6:4). James would have viewed Christ's death with sorrow but would have seen it as an inevitable outcome of Christ's actions. We know he wasn't there at Christ's crucifixion because John was commanded of our Lord to take Mary as his mother and to care for her from that time forth. He would have stuck to the letter of the Law and prepared the Passover.



His conversion

Although James grew up with Christ, it appears that he was not converted until after Christ's resurrection became a reality to him. Imagine James' reaction when Christ made a special appearance to him (1 Cor 15:7). Christ chose James because he was going to be ideal in bringing together the Jewish and Gentile believers. Having seen the resurrected Lord, James would have bemoaned his lost opportunities of learning from Christ. Being humbled, he now saw the need to look beyond the letter of the Law to the true spirit of its teaching (Gal 3:23-26).



The Bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ

We next read of all Christ's family gathering together in the upper room (Acts 1:14). As the eldest it is possible that James was the one who had moved the family against Christ and now that he was converted, he brought them back again. They become associated with the apostles (1 Cor 9:5).



This was the turning point for James. He became a pillar in the Jerusalem Ecclesia (Gal 2:9,12). The apostles showed great respect for him. He was the only person seen initially by Paul apart from Peter (Gal 1:19). It was James that Peter requested to be told of his release from prison (Acts 12:17). James presided over the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15:13,19) and it was to James and the elders that Paul reported the work that was being done

amongst the Gentiles (Acts 21:18). Jude uses his name to give authority to his letter (Jude 1). James was so well known that he didn't need to specify which James he was in writing the Epistle of James.

James was a man of dignity and authority. He was the one who concluded the Jerusalem Conference after Peter and Paul had spoken, and it was through the misuse of his name that Peter was influenced to cease fellowship with Gentiles (Gal 2:12). When he spoke, it was the summary of what had been said, and what was then acted upon (cp Acts 15:13-21,28-29). The Jews themselves were so impressed by his manner of life that they gave him the title of James "the Just" (Josephus - Antiquities of the Jews 20.9.24). To them, to be "just" was to be a holy and strict upholder of the Law. Such was James' attitude to the Law that even the Jews honoured him.



In his letter, James showed his modesty in referring to himself as a bondservant of Christ (See notes on Jam 1:1). He did not call upon his relationship with Christ as his authority because he knew that God is not a respecter of persons (cp Jam 2:1-9). He placed his authority on the spirit and not the flesh (cp Mark 3:35; John 6:63; 2 Cor 5:16). The contribution his flesh had made was to reject Christ's work.

In his epistle, he recognized his position to his Lord.

1:1	James calls Christ by a title that he would never have used for his brother before his conversion - "the Lord Jesus Christ"	➤ James now recognises Christ's Messiahship
2:1	James sees Christ as God manifest - "THE Glory"	➤ He acknowledges Christ's resurrection, splendour and glory
3:7 - 9	James realises Christ will return in judgement - "the Judge"	➤ He declares Christ's authoritative return

James was a man who had been zealous for the Law and had come to see it as the schoolmaster to lead the Jews to Christ. He recognised that salvation was extended to the Gentiles (Acts 15:14-15). In his conduct he had developed a balance between the Law and liberty (cp Acts 15:19-21; 21:18-25), yet he did not claim to be perfect (cp Jam 3:2). He was practical in character, strong and assertive, earnest and sincere, yet not lacking warmth. He had a great understanding of human nature, which is shown in his letter and he gives help and guidance to overcome the fleshly tendencies within us. These qualities made him ideal to preside over the centre of Jewry in Jerusalem and to strengthen the believers both in Jerusalem and scattered abroad.

His Death

According to Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews 20.9) and Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History - Book 2, Chapter 23) the Sanhedrin raised false accusations against him and he was stoned to death in about AD 62 (cp Heb 11:37).

The following table shows some of the events recorded in James' lifetime.

JAMES' AGE	YEAR	EVENT	REFERENCE
Late 20's	AD 30	Christ's death and resurrection	1 Corinthians 15:3-7
Mid 30's	AD 35-36	Saul's conversion	Acts 9; Galatians 1
Early 40's	AD 44	Peter's imprisonment	Acts 12
Mid 40's	AD 44-46	The Epistle written	James
Late 40's	AD 49	Jerusalem Conference	Acts 15
Mid 50's	AD 57	Paul in Jerusalem	Acts 21
Early 60's	AD 62	Death of James	Josephus



When was the Epistle written?

The Epistle of James was probably written about AD 44-46. There is no mention of Gentiles at all in the Epistle. There is also no mention of the Jerusalem Conference and its result. Allusions to Christ's words and not direct quotes suggest that this letter was written before the Gospels. These all indicate that it is an early letter (cp 1 Peter which was written to the same people but does refer to Gentiles (1 Pet 2:12,14; 4:3)). Sufficient time needed to elapse for his authority to be established and to be known by name only (cp Gal 1:19 - AD 35-36). At that stage he still needed to be distinguished from the son of Zebedee). Therefore we can suppose that the letter was written after the death of John's brother (AD 44) and before Paul's first missionary journey to the Gentiles (AD 46-48) and the Council of Jerusalem (AD 48-49). This means that it was written only 14-16 years after Christ's death and resurrection.

Who was the Epistle written to?

The first verse in James gives us the clue to this question as well. It was written to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad". The original dispersion was of the ten tribes of Israel by Assyria (the dispersion of the remaining two tribes of Judah was to be finally completed by the Romans in AD 70). Representatives of the tribes were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:5). They took the Truth back to the cities of their dispersion (cp Acts 2:8-11). The Jews maintained their contact through the great feasts. The work of Pentecost was later supplemented by the dispersion of the Jerusalem believers due to persecution (Acts 8:1; 11:19; 15:21). This is why James writes to the TWELVE tribes - he is only concerned with the true twelve tribes of God (cp Rev 7:4).

Why was the Epistle written?

The epistle satisfied the needs of believers from the time of the first conversions at Pentecost until the ecclesias were completely separate from the Synagogues. Here were new ecclesias in need of sound instruction to make their foundation firm. The Epistle was written to advise and encourage, and many issues were addressed in the letter. There was persecution to be endured. There was a need to match their faith with deeds, and act beyond the rituals and formalism of the Law (1:26-27; 2:14-26). James covers the problem of riches (1:9-11; 2:1; 4:13). He warns against misusing the tongue (1:19,26; 3:2-12; 4:11; 5:12). He deals with contentious spirits within their midst (3:13-4:10), and he provides advice on overcoming sickness through the use of prayer (5:13-18).

Features of the Epistle



Over the next few pages there are a few tables of references to other books and epistles. These are good boxes to put in the margin of James or the other reference.

James uses a similar style of teaching to that which Christ used. Some commentaries say that there are as many as 30-40 allusions to the Sermon on the Mount alone. Christ's words at this time must have had a great impact on James for him to have remembered them, as the gospels were only written after James.

JAMES	SERMON ON THE MOUNT
1:2,3 - count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations	Matt 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23 - blessed are they which are persecuted
1:12,25; 2:5; 4:10; 5:10,11 - poor of this world...humble yourselves	Matt 5:3; Luke 6:20-23 - blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
4:9 - be afflicted, and mourn, and weep	Matt 5:4 - blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted
2:5 - poor of this world... heirs of the kingdom	Matt 5:5 - blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth
2:13 - mercy rejoiceth against judgement	Matt 5:7 - blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy
4:8 - draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. cleanse your hands...purify your hearts	Matt 5:8 - blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God
3:17-18 - the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace	Matt 5:9 - blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God
1:2,12;5:10,11 - count it all joy	Matt 5:10-12 - rejoice and be exceeding glad
1:19,20; 3:6,9,10; 4:2 - curse we men	Matt 5:22 - whosoever is angry with his brother
2:6,13 - draw before judgement seats	Matt 5:25,26; Luke 12:21,58,59 - cast thee into prison
5:12 - swear not, neither by heaven, neither by earth... yea be yea...nay, nay	Matt 5:34-37 - swear not at all... yea, yea; nay, nay
1:25; 2:8-12; 3:9-12; 5:20 - love your neighbour... so speak ye and so do	Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27,28,35,36 - love your enemies... do good
1:4; 3:2 - that ye may be perfect	Matt 5:48 - be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect
2:13 - he shall have judgement without mercy that shewed no mercy	Matt 6:14; Luke 6:36,37 - forgive and ye shall be forgiven
4:4; 1:8 - double-minded man... enmity with God	Matt 6:24 - no man can serve two masters
4:13 - ye know not what shall be on the morrow... for what is your life	Matt 6:25; Luke 12:22-31 - take no thought for your life
1:9-11 - as the flower of the grass he shall pass away	Matt 6:30 - grass of the field
4:13,14 - ye know not what shall be on the morrow	Matt 6:34 - take therefore no thought for the morrow
2:4,13; 4:11; 5:9 - speak not evil one of another	Matt 7:1-5; Luke 6:37,38,41,42 - judge not, that ye be not judged
1:3-6,17; 4:2,3 - if any lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally	Matt 7:7-11; Luke 11:5-13 - ask, and it shall be given you
1:25; 2:8,12; 5:20 - a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his "doing"	Matt 7:12; Luke 6:27-36 - do good
3:12,17,18 - can a fig tree bear olives? Wisdom of above... full of good fruits	Matt 7:16 - ye shall know them by their fruits
1:22; 2:17 - be ye doers...faith without works is dead	Matt 7:21; Luke 6:46 - he that doeth the will of my Father... shall enter the kingdom
2:9 (Gk); 5:9,20 - commit sin	Matt 7:23; Luke 13:25-27 - ye that work iniquity



The letter has similarities with Peter's first Epistle showing the consistent teaching that the Spirit gave to these people.

JAMES	1 PETER
1:1 - to the twelve tribes scattered abroad	1:1 - to the strangers scattered
1:2-4 - divers temptations... the trying of your faith worketh patience, perfect	1:6-7 - Manifold temptations...the trial of your faith...found unto praise
1:2-3 - count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations... the trying of your faith	4:12-13 - The fiery trial which is to try you... that ye may be glad also with exceeding joy
1:10-11 - As the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun...withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth	1:24-25 - For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away
(Both allude in detail to Isaiah 40:6-8)	
1:11-12 - So also shall the rich man fade away... the crown of life which the Lord promised	5:4 - A crown of glory that fadeth not away
1:18,21 - the word of truth... wherefore putting away all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, receive with meekness the engrafted word	1:23; 2:1-2 - the word of God...putting away therefore all wickedness...as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word
1:21 - which is able to save your souls	1:9 - the salvation of your souls
1:21 - putting away all filthiness	3:21 - not the putting away of the flesh
2:1 - Respect of persons	1:17 - Respect of persons.
2:6 - Ye have dishonoured the poor.	2:17 - Honour all men
3:13 - shew out of his good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom	2:12 - having your conversation honest amongst the Gentiles... by your good works... glorify God
4:1 wars and fightings... come they not... of your lusts that war in your members?	2:11 - abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul
4:6 - God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble	5:5 - God resisteth the proud and giveth grace unto the humble
4:10 - Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up	5:6 - Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time
4:7 - Resist the devil, and he will flee from you	5:8-9 - Your adversary the devil...whom resist stedfast in the faith
5:8 - be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh	4:7 - but the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer
5:10 - 11 - take the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord...behold we count them happy which endure	4:14 - If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye
5:20 - he that converteth a sinner...shall hide a multitude of sins	4:8 - love covereth the multitude of sins
5:20 - Converteth the sinner from the error of his way	2:25 - Going astray... now returned

James is also influenced by the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs.

JAMES	PROVERBS
1:5 - if any lack wisdom, let him ask of God	2:6-7 - for the Lord giveth wisdom
1:5 - giveth to all men liberally	11:25 - the liberal soul shall be made fat
1:13-14 - Let no man say... I am tempted of God...every man is tempted... of his own lust	19:3 - the foolishness of man perverteth his way and his heart fretteth against Yahweh
1:16 - do not err	7:25 - go not astray
1:17 - every gift is from above	25:14 - Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain
1:19 - let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak	18:13 - he that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him
1:19 - slow to wrath	14:29 - slow to wrath is of great understanding
2:1 - have not... respect of persons	24:23 - it is not good to have respect of persons in judgement
2:5 - poor of this world, rich in faith	13:7 - maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches
2:6 - despised the poor	14:21 - despised his neighbour
2:16 - say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled... ye give them not those things... what doth it profit?	3:27-28 - withhold not good to whom it is due when it is in the power of thine hand to do it
3:2 - if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man	10:19 - he that refraineth his lips is wise
3:6 - the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity	16:27 - in his lips there is as a burning fire
3:13 - who is a wise man	3:13 - happy is the man that findeth wisdom
3:18 - the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace	11:18,30 - to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward
4:6 - God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble	3:34 - he scorneth the scorers: he giveth grace unto the lowly
4:10 - humble yourselves... he shall lift you up	18:12 - before honour is humility
4:13-16 - ye know not what shall be on the morrow	27:1 - boast not thyself of tomorrow for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth
5:16 - the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much	15:8,29 - the prayer of the upright is his delight... he heareth the prayer of the righteous
5:20 - hide a multitude of sins	12:12-13 - the just shall come out of trouble

He applies Christ's words to the specific circumstances for which he is writing. James also uses similar illustrations from daily life and nature (e.g. 1:6,11; 3:6,18; 5:7). Other features of the style are the stern tone (e.g. 4:1-4; 5:1), the earnestness (e.g. 2:5; 5:7-8. Compare Elijah or John the Baptist.), and the parallelism common in Hebrew poetry (e.g. 1:9-10; 1:15; 4:7-8).

Many of James' practical exhortations are summarised in Romans 12 and Psalms 34, 39 and 62.



Analysis



Usually you will find that one verse summarises the main message of a book. This is known as the Key Verse.

For James it is -

1:22 "But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

In addition to this, it is useful to break down the book into natural sections and provide a summary title for each section. It is not critical what breakup you come up with, as long as it gives you a good overview of the book before you begin the detailed verse by verse study, and helps you to see at a glance what a section is dealing with.

Have a go at splitting the book up and summarising each section. Compare it with the suggested analysis below and mark your final breakup into your Bible against the relevant verses. There are also some other useful breakups in Neville Smart's *"The Epistle of James"* and H.P Mansfield's *"James to Jude Expositor"*.

"Be Ye Doers Of The Word" Chapter Breakup

1:1 Salutation

1:2-12 Endurance of Trials

1:2-4	Rejoice! Faith tested gives patience and perfection
1:5-8	Seek Godly wisdom in single-mindedness
1:9-11	Be not influenced by temporary riches
1:12	The blessing for enduring trials

1:13-27 The Word and Action Needed to Overcome Temptations

1:13-16	The source of temptation
1:17-18	The unchangeable Father has called us for His purpose
1:19-21	Word received, not flesh, accomplishes righteousness
1:22-27	Word must be enacted in our lives

2:1-13 Respect of Persons

2:1-4	Partiality leads to wicked reasoning
2:5-7	Partiality is inconsistent with God's calling
2:8-11	Lesson from the Law
2:12-13	Need to keep whole Law of liberty

2:14-17 Faith Without Works is Dead



- 2:18-26 Faith Shown by Works (Abraham and Rahab)
- 3:1-12 Control of the Tongue
- 3:1-2 Responsibility of teachers
 - 3:3-5 Small things can control large objects
 - 3:6-8 The tongue is a dangerous force
 - 3:9-12 Inconsistencies of speech unacceptable
- 3:13-18 Wisdom from Below and Above
- 3:13 Wisdom shown in way of life
 - 3:14-16 Wisdom from below brings envy and ambition
 - 3:17-18 Attributes of wisdom from above
- 4:1-10 Envy and Strife
- 4:1-5 Cause of contentions
 - 4:6-10 Solution is to submit to God
- 4:11-12 Judging Others
- 4:11 Warning against speaking evil or judging
 - 4:12 God is the only judge
- 4:13-17 Presumptuous Speaking
- 4:13-14 Vanity of relying on future
 - 4:15 Life in perspective
 - 4:16-17 Sinfulness of arrogant boasting
- 5:1-11 Abuse of Wealth; Encouragement to Victims
- 5:1-6 Judgement to come upon rich
 - 5:7-11 Reward to come to patient
- 5:12 Avoidance of Oaths
- 5:13-18 Sickness and Healing; Power of Prayer
- 5:19-20 Importance of Turning From Sin



Overview of James' thought flow



At first glance, the Epistle of James seems to be a series of disjointed exhortations on various aspects of our walk in the Truth. But when we look at it further we find that it flows naturally from one subject to the next. The purpose of this section is to explain the flow of thoughts James has in presenting his advice to the brethren.

James' style is interesting in that as he is writing, he is bearing in mind what his readers would be thinking as they read his words, and he addresses the issues as they would be thought through before returning to his original theme (e.g. 1:5-6; 4:2-3). This is very similar to Christ's teaching style (cp Matt 12:25; Mark 2:6-8; Luke 6:8; 9:47).

Chapter 1:1-12

James first introduces himself as a servant and wishes joy to his readers - the Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire. He begins by addressing the trials that they faced and lifts their minds above the immediate sufferings to look towards the effect their trials would produce - the development of patience, maturity, and ultimately a whole offering of service to Yahweh. James qualifies the patience that is required and encourages the believers with the joy set before them. To overcome trials we need to understand the purpose of them, so it is necessary to look upon them from God's point of view and not man's. James shows the believers the need for Divine wisdom and the need to seek it at its source. God is always willing to give wisdom to those who ask in single-minded faith. Those who doubt that God can and will help, are limiting themselves in gaining that wisdom. As long as they are of two minds, they will remain unstable in all their ways. The cares of this life are a common cause of double-mindedness whether we are poor or rich. James compares the fleeting nature of worldly riches with the eternal prize promised to those who love Christ and have endured temptation. It is this that they are to count all joy.

Chapter 1:13-27

James then shows his readers that there is a difference between being subject to temptations and succumbing to them. It is our own lusts which cause us to sin, not God. God is of singleness of mind and only gives what is beneficial for us. His desire is for us to be regenerated through His Word, that we might manifest His character as children of light. It is not natural for us to do this. The way to learn of God's character is to hear His Word, not to say what we think He wants us to do before we hear Him, and to accept what He says without being resentful. Although the Word has been implanted into our hearts and we have received it, it is still necessary that it brings forth fruit pleasing to God. This involves continually looking into God's Word and applying the lessons practically in our lives. Pure religion is seen in selfless works of faithful assistance to others whilst maintaining a purity of conduct unspotted by the ways of the world.

Chapter 2:1-13

The main problem which prevents pure religion from being practised is respect of persons. James addresses this and shows that partiality based on outward appearances is wrong and inconsistent with their faith in Christ. He shows them God's basis of judgement and warns that without change they will find themselves in opposition to God both now and in the day of judgement.

James anticipates an objection that might be raised - that they were fulfilling the Law of Leviticus 19:18 in loving the rich by showing honour to them - and in answering demonstrates that a correct appreciation of the future judgement will dictate our present lives.

Chapter 2:14-26

James then develops his main theme further by showing that faith without the works of faith is of no use. He demonstrates that works are the outward testimony of our faith. He shows that a belief in doctrine without a corresponding change in the way of life is actually useless, and gives two shining examples of true works of faith in Abraham and Rahab.

Chapter 3:1-12

James concluded chapter 1 with a warning about bridling the tongue. Through chapter 2 he showed that the believers' speech was not in accordance with the Law of liberty and that their tongues were active and not their faith. Now he addresses the issue of the tongue directly, particularly in regard to teachers. There was a danger that those who held the false belief concerning faith and works would actively promote it in the Ecclesia. James warns about the responsibility of teachers and the danger of seeking an office for which a person is not suited. In dealing with the use of the tongue, he gives two illustrations of how powerfully small things can affect larger objects and shows that, although little, the tongue boasts great things and can create great havoc. He shows that we cannot be satisfied with half an effort to control it, comparing the tongue with every type of creature from the natural world to show how inconsistent human nature is with the orderliness of God's creation.

Chapter 3:13-18

Those who wish to be teachers must be very aware of the danger of the tongue and James shows how they should conduct their lives. He then reveals that the reason why they are not attaining to the ideal is because they lack God's wisdom and are motivated by their own fleshly nature. True teachers will display their wisdom by their actions and not by the tongue. Their works will declare where their wisdom comes from.

Chapter 4:1-10

Identifying the strife and envy amongst the members of the Ecclesia, James reaches the climax of his condemnation, revealing that in fact their whole attitude and behaviour is caused by their friendship with the world. This will inevitably put us at enmity with God and James rebukes them sharply. He shows them the process that they needed to undergo to correct their relationship with the Father. God's way is far more satisfying than what the world can offer. He will oppose those who are proud and refuse to submit to Him, but will exalt those who humble themselves and seek the means to rid the spirit of the world from their lives.

Chapter 4:11-12

Once we recognise our own personal failure, we will appreciate better the failings of others and be less hasty to condemn them. All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God. There is only one who is able to administer true judgement.

Chapter 4:13-17

Becoming aware of the truth of our own nature will also highlight the uncertainty of life and will help to protect us from arrogant independent plans for the future. We must never forget our



dependency upon God. James brings to the brethren's attention their unbalanced view of life and then directs their minds to the correct scriptural approach.

Chapter 5:1-6

James now returns to discussing the ways of the rich who had so blinded their eyes to the requirements of Yahweh that they were persecuting the Ecclesia. He warns of God's anger and exhorts them to change their ways. The wealthy Jews had sinned against God in not believing His Word. After denouncing them for hoarding wealth, James indicts them for specific evils of which they were guilty. Three charges are laid against them - exploiting their fellow man, engaging in riotous living, and condemning and causing the death of the righteous one.

Chapter 5:7-11

With Christ's example of non-resistance before them, James encourages the brethren in their time of persecution. Patience can be displayed when the end is focused upon. James encourages them with an example of a husbandman waiting for fruit, warning that patience will not necessarily be rewarded overnight and involves not holding grudges against our brethren. James then gives two strong examples to look to - the prophets for patience in affliction, and Job for endurance in trial.

Chapter 5:12-18

James exhorts them to avoid exposing their feelings in oaths that would blaspheme God and shows his readers the truly satisfying expression of our feelings (both sorrowful and joyful), while at the same time addressing the problems of sickness. The effects of trials take a toll on us. We can become sick both physically and spiritually. Prayer and singing will go a long way to overcoming our weaknesses, but sometimes due to the burdens of our trials it is necessary to seek additional strength. James provides the cure to overcoming our weakness - through prayer and in seeking the aid of stronger brethren. He uses the example of Elijah as an outstanding illustration of one who, although subject to the exact human nature as us, was heard in his prayers to God.

Chapter 5:19-20

James concludes his Epistle with words of encouragement for those who stray from the Truth, and those who work for the spiritual welfare of the Ecclesia.

