Sin will keep you from the Bible, or the Bible will keep you from sin.
Unknown Scottish Preacher

Prayer Study #485

THE BOOK OF JAMES
CHAPTER ONE

Perry First Love Ministries, Inc., of Perry, Georgia

GENRE: Letter written to the 12 tribes of Israel, which at this time were scattered abroad

AUTHOR: Four men are named James in the New Testament:

a. James, the father of the disciple Judas (not Iscariot) (Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13
b. James, the son of Alphaeus, in Mark 15:40 called James the Lesser, who was one of the twelve and is mentioned in Matthew 109:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, and Acts 1:13
c. James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matthew 4:21, 10:2, 17:1; Mark 3:17, 10:35, 13:3; Luke 9:54; Acts 1:13) and one of Jesus' intimate disciples (He was martyred in AD 44 (Acts 12:2), and thus most likely could not have written this epistle.)
d. James , the Lord's brother (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3, Galatians 1:19) and the head of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17. 15:13-21, 21:18, Galatians 2:9 & 12) (In the Catholic tradition, James is either a cousin of Jesus or a stepbrother, son of Joseph from a previous marriage.) James was not a believer until after the Lord appeared to him after His resurrection (1st Corinthians 15:7). He was in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14) and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Tradition says that he was known as James the Just and as "The Man with Camel's Knees," because he knelt on his knees and prayed so much for the saints. He was martyred by the Scribes and

Pharisees. They threw him from the high pinnacle of the Temple. This, however, did not kill him so the beat him to death with a club.

SETTING: James was in Jerusalem when he wrote this letter. He sent it to Christian Jews who had been scattered to various Roman provinces. James died in 62 AD so he had to have written this book before then. It is thought that he wrote this some time between 46 and 49 AD. Many think this is the earliest writing of the New Testament. A clue to this is the fact that there is no mention of Gentile Christians or their relationship to Jewish Christians, nor is there any mention of the issues involved in the Acts 15 Council in Jerusalem in AD 49.

PLOT SUMMARY: The book of James is the Proverbs of the New Testament. The first part of the book deals with the qualities of faith in the face of trials and temptations. The latter part of James tells us that true faith causes us to act. Our acts should be in obedience to God's Word, and we should resist the strong pulls of worldliness and the pleasures of worldliness. James tell us that we should guard our tongues and patiently endure the sufferings of this present life so that we will be ready for the coming of the Lord. James deals with the ethics of Christianity rather than the doctrine, the practical walking out of the faith rather than the theory and theology.

THEME: The Characteristics of True Faith

JAMES FROM THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE

THE RECEPIENTS OF THE LETTER

1 *James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*
To the twelve [Hebrew] tribes [scattered abroad among the Gentiles] in the dispersion: Greetings

(rejoice)!

Only James and Jude, both thought to be the brothers of Jesus who did not believe in Him until after the Resurrection, give themselves the type of bondslave or *doulos,* in the New Testament, without any qualification. He does not refer to himself, for example, as a bondslave of Jesus Christ and His apostle, as Paul did. This denotes a very humble attitude. Yet James was a man of great statue in the early church. It was James, for example, who presided over the Council in Acts 15 in Jerusalem.

The greeting of the letter is to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora, the technical word for the Jews scattered in countries outside of Palestine or what we know as Israel today. These tribes include the ten tribes who were carried away into captivity in Assyria and never returned to Israel. The Jews believe that at the end of all things all Jews will be gathered together in Jerusalem, but they believe that these ten tribes will never return until then. The Jews were also carried into Babylonian captivity in about 580 BC, where they never assimilated into Babylonian culture but did prosper there. The third compulsory removal of Jews from Palestine occurred in 63 BC when Pompey captured Jerusalem and took many Jews to Rome as slaves. But far greater numbers of Jews left Israel to live in more prosperous and more comfortable lands, especially to Syria and Egypt. These Jews scattered out in these foreign lands numbered into millions.

TESTED

2 *Consider it nothing but joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you fall into various trials.* ***3*** *Be assured*

that the testing of your faith [through experience] produces endurance [leading to spiritual maturity, and inner peace]. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed [in your faith], lacking in nothing.

James is telling us here that, contrary to humanistic reasoning, we should rejoice when God is testing us. In fact the writer of Hebrews tells us: *For whom the LORD loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives.* J. Vernon McGee says that this chastening literally means *child training,* and he comments further: "Trials are meaningless, suffering is senseless, and testing is irrational unless there is some good purpose for them….When the external pressures of testing are upon us, and we are placed in the fires of adversity and tragedy and suffering, the attitude of faith should be that God has permitted it for a purpose, and He has a high and lofty goal in view."

Of course we will not always understand *why* we are going through these trials, but we are to walk by faith and not by sight and to rejoice in spite of the suffering. For this testing grows us up in the things of God producing patience or endurance, spiritual maturity, and inner peace. These qualities are really an out flowing of the Holy Spirit, and patience is actually one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul also writes in a similar vein in Romans 5:3-4: *And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope.*

And the Apostle Peter reminds us to rejoice in a

word similar to James 1:2-4: *In this greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, and may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ…*(1st Peter 1:6-7).

GOD'S GIVING AND OUR ASKING

5 *If any of you lacks wisdom [to guide him through a decision or circumstance], he is to ask of [our benevolent] God, who gives to everyone generously and without rebuke or blame, and it will be given to him.* ***6*** *But he must ask [for wisdom] in faith, without doubting [God's willingness to help], for the one who doubts is like a billowing surge of the sea that is blown about and tossed by the wind.* ***7*** *For such a person ought not to think or expect that he will receive anything [at all] from the Lord,* ***8*** *being a double-minded man, unstable and restless in all his ways [in everything he thinks, feels, or decides].*

James has just told his readers that if they use all the testing experiences of life in the right way, they will emerge with a complete or mature Christian. But he knows that some will not know how to use these experiences in the right way so he encourages them to ask God to give them that wisdom. Barclay says about this wisdom, "In the Christian wisdom there is, of course, knowledge of the deep things of God, but it is essentially practical; it is such knowledge turned into action in the decisions and personal relationships of everyday life."

These verses show us that God gives liberally, but our asking must be done in faith. We must believe,

without doubting, that God is willing and able to give us wisdom. We cannot be double minded and expect much from the Lord. Sometimes He acts on our behalf because of His mercy and grace, but He is more interested in our character than our comfort, and learning to walk by faith without doubting is a very necessary trait of the Christian walk.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

9 *Let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his high position [as a born-again believer, called to the true riches and to be an heir of God];* ***10*** *and the rich man is to glory in being humbled [by trials revealing human frailty, knowing true riches are found in the grace of God], for like the flower of the grass he will pass away.* ***11*** *For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; its flower falls off and its beauty fades away; so too will the rich man, in the midst of his pursuits, fade away.*

Christianity shows the poor and downtrodden that they matter in the Church. In Christianity there are no class distinctions. But the poor also matter in the world, and they are useful for the Kingdom of God. John Wesley taught in the priesthood of *all* believers.

The rich, on the other hand, must learn to walk in humility and to realize that their riches can give them a false sense of security, making the rich feel that they can buy themselves out of any situation.

Then James paints a picture that all people in Palestine would understand. When there is a shower of rain in the desert places of Palestine, green grass sprouts, but one day in the hot sun causes that grass

to disappear as if it had never been. Just like that, someone can easily lose his riches or his riches can become of no value to him in certain situations. Riches, for example, cannot always bring health to a sick man, cannot always fix a runaway child who has caused heartache to a parent, and cannot bring back a loved one who has passed away.

THE CROWN OF LIFE

12 *Blessed [happy, spiritually prosperous, favored by God] is the man who is steadfast under trial and perseveres when tempted; for when he has passed the test and been approved, he will receive the [victor's] crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

Salvation is a free gift from God to all whom the Holy Spirit draws and who accept Christ. But we are rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ for the works we do on earth. There are several crowns mentioned in scripture. They include the following:

a. Crown of Rejoicing: *For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?* (1st Thessalonians 2:19)
b. Crown of Righteousness: *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing* (2nd Timothy 4:8).
c. Crown of Life (see James 1:12 above)
d. Crown of Glory: *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the*

flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (1st Peter 5:4).

e. An Imperishable Crown: *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown* (1st Corinthians 9:24).

BLAMING GOD AND AVOIDING RESPONSIBILITY

13 *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God" [for temptation does not originate from God, but from our own flaws]; for God cannot be tempted by [what is] evil, and He Himself tempts no one.* ***14*** *But each one is tempted when he is dragged away, enticed and baited [to commit sin] by his own [worldly] desire (lust, passion).*
15 *Then when the illicit desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin has run its course, it gives birth to death.*

James here is rebuking those who put the blame on God for temptation. Blaming God for faults and failures and messes ups of all kinds is a common problem of mankind. This started all the way back to Adam and Eve when Adam said, " *The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."* Of course we can be tempted, as Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, but the temptation to sin is ALWAYS from the enemy or the flesh nature, and NEVER from God.

One of the main reasons that God does not want us to sin is the wages of sin is death. He does not want us to spiritually die.

GOD'S CONSTANT GOODNESS

16 *Do not be misled, my beloved brothers and sisters.*
17 *Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above; it comes down from the Father of lights [the Creator and Sustainer of the heavens], in whom there is no variation [no rising or setting] or shadow cast by His turning [for He is perfect and never changes].* ***18*** *It was of His own will that He gave us birth [as His children] by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits of His creatures [a prime example of what He created to be set apart to Himself—sanctified, made holy for His divine purposes].*

James is exhorting his brothers and sisters not to wander away or stray from the faith. He then describes a Heavenly Father who loves to give gifts to His children and who is the same yesterday and today and forever and who always gives good gifts. In the time James lived, it was the law that all first fruits were sacred to God. These first fruits were offered in a sacrifice to God because they really belonged to Him. When we are born again, we become a kind of first fruits who are the property of God.

WHEN TO BE QUICK AND WHEN TO BE SLOW

19 *Understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Let everyone be quick to hear [be a careful, thoughtful listener], slow to speak [a speaker of carefully chosen words and], slow to anger [patient,*

*reflective, forgiving]; **20** for the [resentful, deep-seated] anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God [that standard of behavior which He requires from us].*

These verses give very practical life lessons for us. The old adage, *Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me,* is totally false and probably demon inspired. We all know the power of words to hurt us, and we, probably all, have deep regret of some words that *we* have spoken that we wish we could take back. We also must be very careful of words we technologically send, through avenues like Facebook and e-mail.

We see this theme (Be slow to speak and quick to listen!) throughout the Bible but especially in Proverbs. Proverbs 10:10 reads: *When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the prudent are restrained in speech.* Proverbs 13:3 says: *Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives; those who open wide their lips come to ruin.* Proverbs 17:28 tell us: *Even fools who keep silent are considered wise.* And Proverbs 29:20 reports: *Do you see someone who is hasty in speech? There is more hope for a fool than for anyone like that.*

Zeno of Elea said, “We have two ears but only one mouth, that we may hear more and speak less.” The scholar F.J.A. Hort says that those who are really good will be much more anxious to listen to God than arrogantly, loudly and stridently to shout their own opinions.

James also admonishes us to be slow to anger. This is interesting because he does not say, “Don’t be angry!” There are times when we need to be angry about the godless things going on around us.

A TEACHABLE SPIRIT

21 *So get rid of all uncleanness and all that remains of wickedness, and with a humble spirit receive the word [of God] which is implanted [actually rooted in your heart], which is able to save your souls.*

Some translations use the more correct word *strip* [yourselves] instead of *get rid of.* The word used in this case is the word used for stripping off one's clothes. All of this uncleanness and wickedness is sin. We replace sin with the Word of God, allowing it to root in our hearts.

HEARING AND DOING

22 *But prove yourselves doers of the word [actively and continually obeying God's precepts], and not merely listeners [who hear the word but fail to internalize its meaning], deluding yourselves [by unsound reasoning contrary to the truth].* ***23*** *For if anyone only listens to the word without obeying it, he is like a man who looks very carefully at his natural face in a mirror;* ***24*** *for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he immediately forgets what he looked like.*

This is one of the most important and most well-known passage in James. James is telling us that what we read or hear or study concerning the Word of God, we then must live it out wherever we are. An unknown poet put this theme this way:

The Gospel is written a chapter a day
By deeds that you do and by words that you say
Men read what you say, whether faithless or true,
Say, what is the Gospel according to you?

James is addressing true believers here. This is not

being written to the lost. *Doing* for the unsaved ones is simply believing in Christ. In the case of the unsaved Jesus has already done the *doing.* But as a Christian, we must do the *doing*, that is obeying the Word of God.

In those days people did not glass. High polished brass was the mirror of that day. Mirrors, like the Word of God, will show you what you are, flaws and all. The Word is a mirror revealing what is wrong with us and who we really are. When we walk away from the Word of God, we sometimes forget who we really are, i.e. a sinner saved by grace.

THE TRUE LAW

25 *But he who looks carefully into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and faithfully abides by it, not having become a [careless] listener who forgets but an active doer [who obeys], he will be blessed and favored by God in what he does [in his life of obedience].*

The perfect law is not the Mosaic Law. It is the New Covenant law of grace and faith, but nevertheless a law that is to be obeyed and followed. It is only in obeying the law of grace and faith that we become truly free.

TRUE WORSHIP

26 *If anyone thinks himself to be religious [scrupulously observant of the rituals of his faith], and does not control his tongue but deludes his own heart, this person's religion is worthless (futile, barren).* **27** *Pure and unblemished religion [as it is expressed in outward acts] in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit and look after the fatherless and the widows in their distress, and to*

keep oneself uncontaminated by the [secular] world.

James is talking here about religious worship in the sense of the outward expression of religion in ritual and liturgy and ceremony. J. Vernon McGee writes, "…you cannot call a religion Christianity simply because it conforms to certain outward forms of ritual. Christianity is not a religion; it is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ-you either have Him or you don't have Him." James is saying that, if you cannot control your tongue, your Christianity is all in vain. True Christianity involves looking after the poor, especially the fatherless and the widows, and keeping yourself pure.

AWAKE, O ISRAEL

Awake, O Israel! Put off thy slumber
For the truth shall set you free.
For out of Zion comes Thy Redeemer
In the year of Jubilee!
In the furnace of affliction I have chosen thee, behold!
And for iron I'll give you silver, and for brass I'll give thee gold.
You are my chosen, for I have called thee,
Thou art engraved upon My hand!
And I will gather all those I scattered,
They shall come back into their land!