

NT Reading Plan 2020

Living Hope Fellowship

James

Conversion

James was the physical (half) brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55). Before the cross and resurrection, he did not believe that his oldest brother was the Christ, the Son of God (John 7:5). But a dramatic conversion had taken place with James since calvary.

1. How does James refer to himself in relation to his brother Jesus (1:1)? Who is Jesus in relation to James in 2:1?

Trials & Temptations

James starts out with one of the hardest commands in the NT: to be joyful in every trial. The same Greek word for trial can be translated "temptation" as it is 4 times in 1:13-14. God uses trials to produce good fruit in us and that the genuineness of our salvation would be evident. Trials are a catalyst to endurance. But it is equally important to see that God never tempts anyone to sin (1:12-15). God never sets traps for us to fall into sin, he puts us in difficult positions which strengthen our resolve to continue in the faith. As a premier example that he means to do us good, not harm, read verses 16-18.

2. Why would we consider trials a joy (he gives the reason "for" this in verse 3-4)?

3. As James is wrapping up, he brings the subject back to the endurance of the saints in 5:7-11. What Old Testament characters does James use as a godly examples of saints persevering through trials?

4. What is God's purpose in trials according to 5:11?

Faith & Works

The proper relationship between faith and works is essential to understand Christianity. The order of the two is critical! James has often been misunderstood because he appears to contradict Paul in Romans.

"You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24).

"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Romans 3:28).

How "justified" is used is vital to properly interpret these passages. Paul's use of justification in this passage is looking at the **root** of salvation which is faith. Paul's uses "justified" to mean God declares sinners righteous based on faith. However, James uses an alternate meaning of "justified," meaning vindication, as he looks at the necessary **fruit** of salvation. Paul is talking about how salvation is produced: faith. James is looking at what saving faith produces: works. How is one declared to have a righteous standing before God though he has sinned? Faith. How is one's faith vindicated to be genuine saving faith? Works.

5. While Paul is the theologian of the doctrine of justification in the Bible, and he nearly always uses this word to mean God declares a sinner to be righteous based on his faith in Christ's righteous life, death, and resurrection, Paul also uses the alternative meaning of

"justified" that James uses, meaning vindication. Why **can't** Paul mean "declared to be righteous based on faith (though a sinner)" in 1 Timothy 3:16 (ESV translation says "vindicated")?

6. Far from saying that faith does not save, James asks "Can **that** faith save him (2:14)? What kind of faith is James talking about?"

Salvation

- Faith (1:3, 6; 2:1, 5; 14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26; 5:15)
- Perseverance/steadfastness/endurance (1:2-4; 1:12-15; 5:7-11)
- Regeneration (1:16-18)
- Sanctification (1:19-21, 27 contrast 1:22-26; 2:1 contrasted with 2:2-7; 2:8, 12-13 contrasted with 2:9-11, 14-17)
- Election (2:5)
- Calling (2:7)
- Justification (2:21, 24, 25 is here used in the sense of vindication, not declared righteous as is common in Paul's writings. See **Faith & Works** above).
- Forgiveness (5:15)
- Confession (5:16)
- Salvation (2:14; 5:20)

7. Certainly the word of God is the instrument he uses to save us (he regenerated us by the word of truth, 1:18). But the word is also "able to save" those souls he just said were already brought forth by the word (1:18, 21). In 1:21, do you think James, when he says "save" is referring to initial conversion or a Christian progressing in sanctification in (the context of 1:19-25)?

What Kind of Law?

James' has a high view of the Scriptures and finds them to be the source of God's wisdom.

8. James never mentions the word "gospel" but he has many synonyms for it. What are some (see 1:25; 2:8-13)? What does he compare this to (look carefully!)?

Wisdom

God's wisdom in Scripture is needed in order to apply it in our daily lives, to navigate every trial, grow in grace through sanctification, and correct erring thinking. Conversely, there's a lot of competing knowledge out there that isn't wisdom at all but "earthly, unspiritual, demonic" (3:15).

9. What authorities are you listening to? Where is your "truth" coming from? When evaluating a voice, ask three things: Who says? On what authority? What do they want me to do?

Words, Worldliness & Wealth

James zeroes in on three primary examples of our greatest struggles in sanctification: words (3:1-18), worldliness (4:1-12), and wealth (4:13-5:6; see 2:1-13).

Warnings

James bounces back and forth between exhortations to sanctification and warnings about sin's deceptive nature. To press both points, he returns to the Word. We need to let the Scripture cleanse us from and warn us about the very real problems of sin in our lives. James wants his people to really think through the fruit that they are bearing as an indication of the presence of saving faith in them (or not). But he doesn't stop there. There's still sin to deal with as we press on in sanctification, remembering God's grace in salvation.

10. For James, the answer to each of these questions is the same.

What helps us through trials and/or temptations?

Where do we find wisdom?

What saves us?

How do we know what good works are so that we have assurance of our faith?

What exhorts us to greater sanctification?

What tells us the truth about sin and clears up our deception?

What are we prone to wander from?

How do you restore a wandering brother?

Outline

James is a difficult book initially to see its outline or how James organizes his thoughts. The connections between paragraphs aren't immediately apparent. He's very Jewish by circling around his themes and comparing and contrasting them by juxtaposition versus the much more linear and analytical (Greek) argumentation of Paul for example.

The main themes presented as headings in these notes are layers that James continues to overlay one on top of the other, circling around and around them all the while bringing in illustrations along the way to make his point and exhortations for his people to respond to. My humble attempt to capture this book's flow is this:

- A.** Saving faith is only strengthened by trials resulting in greater endurance (This should give you joy because true faith always perseveres).
- B.** Warning! You have enough sin in you to be deceived so be careful to continue looking to God to give you wisdom through his word.
- C.** God used his word to save (regenerate) you. He also uses his word to sanctify you. Good works is an evidence of God's sanctifying work in you.
- D.** I'll give you examples of things to do and not to do as you walk by faith. I'll keep pointing you to "the word," "the perfect law," "the law of liberty," "the royal law" which bring freedom and mercy rather than condemnation like the Law of Moses did for only breaking one law.
- E.** What! You think saving faith can be separated from a sanctified life of good works? That's a misunderstanding of God's mercy and grace. Let me give you 3 examples: Demons believe in God and they're not saved. Their actions aren't in keeping with saving faith. No, saving faith results in good works. Remember Abraham and Isaac, Rahab and the spies? We know God

saved them because of how they responded with action.

F. Warning! Perhaps the greatest trial you face is controlling what you **say**. Watch you're boasting about your own sanctification here, you'll be found to be false to the truth. Instead, you need wisdom from above.

G. Warning! Remember you don't need the devil to sin, you have enough **worldliness** "at war within you" for that. Remember to keep looking to God's word to convict you and give you grace.

H. If you try to judge the Bible, you're obviously not obeying it. The lawgiver judges you, not the reverse, but he's also able to save you.

I. Warning! **Riches** are also a roadblock to sanctification.

J. In all of these difficulties, continue to patiently endure in light of Christ's return. Remember how God had a purpose in the prophet's trials? In Job's suffering? Through those trials, God shows his compassion and mercy (remember Exodus 34:6-7!).

K. How should we deal with suffering practically in the church? Prayer, anointing, confession of sin. Don't forget to PRAY (God miraculously answered Elijah's prayer)! Did I mention you should pray?

L. Remember this warning but also God's grace. Sin is deceptive and can lure people to wander away from the Bible's teaching. Bring the wanderer back so he can be saved and his sins covered!

Your endurance of trials, your good works, your suffering, your wrestling with sin, your continuing to look to his word for wisdom to clear up your confusion all are evidence that God really, mercifully regenerated you through his word. In this, you can greatly rejoice!