

BIBLE EXTENSION COURSE PROGRAM

Introduction

Lesson No.1

Required Reading
James 1:1-27

Epistle of James – EJ Series
by Clifton H Carpenter

- **The Writer**
- **The Readers**
- **The Greetings**

Key Verse: James 1:1 James, A servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, greeting.

INTRODUCTION The Epistle of James is listed among the General Epistles. Letters written by *Peter, John, James* and *Jude* comprise the list of General Epistles.

The location of these books in reference to the New Testament Canon are placed at the end, not because they are less important, but “*because of their size in comparison.*”

The Epistle of James, along with Paul’s letter to the Galatians was written between A.D. 45 and 48. These two Epistles “*circular letters*” were the first to be distributed among the New Testament saints.

The design of the Epistle of James is on the one hand to encourage those to whom it is addressed to bear their trials patiently; and on the other hand to warn them against certain errors of doctrine and practice.

Therefore, the purpose of this potent letter is to “*exhort the believer to Christian maturity and holiness of life.*” This letter deals more with the practice of Christian faith than with its precepts.

James told his readers how to achieve Spiritual Maturity through “*a confident stand, compassionate service, careful speech, contrite submission, and concerned sharing.*”

He deals with every area of the Christian’s Life.

- What the Christian **Does**
- What the Christian **Says**
- What the Christian **Feels**
- What the Christian **Has**

The Book of James is as much a lecture as it is a letter. The Epistle is prepared for public reading – the tone is clearly authoritative. James includes “*54 imperatives*” in his 108 verses, an average of one “*call for action*” out of every two verses listed.

Practical Christianity is what James has in mind.

Key Verse: James 2:20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Much controversy surrounds the Epistle of James as to its authorship, its date, its recipients, its canonicity, and its unity.

The Writer. Determining the human author has not been easy, seeing that the New Testament mentions at least three men name James.

The Greek name James is “*the Hebrew equivalent for Jacob*” – Lit. **he that supplants**

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1. **James the son of Zebedee** – coupled with his brother John, they were fishermen along with their father. Their mother's name was Salome, the sister of the Virgin Mary.

We have no recorded words by this James. He was one of the first disciples to become a martyr for Christ. Acts 12:1-2

2. **James the son of Alphaeus** – known as "*James the Little*" to separate him from others with the same name. Perhaps, he was short in stature. His mother was one of the women found at the cross and tomb of Jesus. Matthew 10:3; John 19:25

3. **James the half brother of Jesus** – reared in the same house with the Lord Jesus. James and his brother Jude, "*the Hebrew equivalent to Judas*" did not become believers until after Jesus' resurrection. Matthew 13:55-56; John 7:5; 1 Corinthians 15:7

It is after this experience that we find James among the disciples in the upper room. This James became a pillar of the Church in Jerusalem. He was known for his piety and was named – "*James the Just*"

The Man with Camel's Knees – James was a man who believed in the power of prayer. Because of his habit of always kneeling in intercession for the saints, his knees became calloused like a camel's.

Rising to eminence in the Church of Jerusalem, with his strict adherence to the Law, "*James the Just*" has become recognized as the Writer of the Epistle which bears his name. Acts 21:18 and Galatians 2:9

Apart from Paul and Peter, no figure in the church of the early days play a more substantial part upon the historic stage than James, considered the first Jerusalem Bishop.

A Servant of God – Lit. "*a bond-servant*" James did not refer to himself as Jesus' brother or the church's leader. He purposed not to know Jesus "*after the flesh*" but only as his Lord and God. He placed Jesus equal with God by declaring himself a servant to both.

Being "*a bond-servant*" of God was his most important relationship. Therefore, the theme of his letter challenges the Christian to answer this most important question:

- **How shall we live as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ?**

Paul, Peter, John, Jude and others saw themselves in the same relationship to God as did James. Romans 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1 and 2 Corinthians 5:16

The Readers. To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad – "*Greetings*" a common Greek salutation familiar to his readers. "*My brethren*" used 15 times in the letter.

The Dispersion. Jewish believers from the 12 tribes were likely members of the Jerusalem church who left Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom. Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19-20; 26:7

James was writing to the Jews dispersed from their homeland. The technical term "*scattered*" occurs in only two other places in the New Testament. John 7:35 1 Peter 1:1

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The Jewish brethren that James speaks of were scattered among the Gentiles as their ancestors had been in the days of captivity. Though they have been scattered, they are never lost to the all seeing eye of God.

The dispersion of the Nation was usually two-fold.

- The Judgment of God – the disobedience of Israel
- The Love of God – the knowledge of God to all nations

The rejection of Jesus as the Messiah resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Acts 1:6-14 Click the icon to read more about the history of Israel and the conquest they faced as a nation.

 Modern Israel

The Epistle of James. The letter is energetic and vivid, filled with crisp, well-chosen words. The sentences are short, simple and direct.

It is also filled with figure of speech, analogies, and imagery from nature. Exhortations, rhetorical questions, and illustrations from everyday life give spice to this little book. James' epistle stands as a literary masterpiece.

References to Jewish Culture. The letter has a marked Jewish flavor. The substance and authority is like that of the Prophets, the style and beauty of the Psalms. He makes reference to Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah, to the Law and the Ten Commandments. 21 Old Testament books including Genesis through Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Reference to Nature. The imagery from nature includes language about the sea, sun, rain, flowers, grass, trees, etc. His teachings and illustrations contain spiritual depth.

The Aim of Study. Spiritual Maturity, well-rounded and mature believers in Christ. The number one problem in the churches today is that of **Spiritual Immaturity**. The root difficulty of Christian believers lies in a distorted conception of the nature of salvation by faith and its relation to daily life as the proving ground for the development of Christian character.

The Relation of Faith and Works. Paul and James provide a full dimension of Faith and Works. As previously stated, the themes of the writer vary, but each accomplishes its purpose.

The Teaching of Paul. Faith is essential to Salvation, apart from man's works. Man's standing before God is in view.

The Teaching of James. Works are essential as evidence of a genuine Faith. Man's standing before People is in view. Therefore, the two themes compliment each other.

The Theme of Study. Christian Conduct is woven within the major principles found in the letter.

- Christian persecution from outside the fellowship
- Christian problems within the fellowship

How the Christian's **Attitude** and **Actions** relate to these opposing forces is the focus of James' message to the Churches. They were born again, and expected the coming of the Lord. Yet the full understanding of "*the one body*" had not dawned upon all the believers. James 1:18; 5:7

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Universal Application. Although Hebrew flavor exist throughout the Epistle of James; and the early believers were Jews by race; nevertheless, there is a Universal Application for every Christian. “*These people needed to grow up in the Lord*” It is true for believers in our day.

Christian Attitude and Actions. The Epistle of James is divided into five chapters, with a specific topic given to each chapter:

- Chapter 1 – **Trials**
- Chapter 2 – **Partiality**
- Chapter 3 – **Speech**
- Chapter 4 – **Submission**
- Chapter 5 – **Wealth**

These five topics relate to Christian Conduct. James uses a frontal approach in identifying those things and pointing out the **Proper Attitude** and **Proper Actions** we should take.

Therefore, the Epistle of James is relevant to our need, because it deals with the same mundane things that affect us. Family life, Community life, Business life, Church life and Work life are areas of concern.

A Person of Action. Spiritual Maturity involves a **Proper Attitude** and **Proper Actions** with clearly attainable goals.

The Ladder of Inference. The process of setting goals helps you choose where you want to go in life. Christians fail in the area of Spiritual Maturity because they do not know precisely what they want to achieve, neither do they seek to find out.

The Epistle of James presents five clearly defined goals. These properly set goals should become our individual **Lifetime Goals**.

Measure Your Progress. STOP! Change your thinking. As we work our way through the five topics of the Epistle of James, consider your thoughts as it relates to each topic.

The Ladder of Inference

The Ladder of Inference is a suggested method to help you achieve your desired goals.

The approach to using this method should be voluntary and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to accomplish your goals. Human efforts apart from His enabling power, rarely produces Christ-like results.

Using the Ladder as a guide, think about how each principle on the rung of the ladder relate to the Topic given in the chapters.

- Answer the five questions on the chart honestly
- Re-adjust your “*principle of thoughts*” accordingly

NOTE – Please visit the Text with PowerPoint Format for more details.

- Rung 5 – **ACTIONS**
Will this decision lead to Christ-like results?
- Rung 4 – **BELIEFS**
Why should I believe this?
- Rung 3 – **CONCLUSION**
Is this the right conclusion?
- Rung 2 – **ASSUMPTIONS**
Why am I making these assumptions?
- Rung 1 – **REALITY**
Is this reality based on all the facts?

