

#1 James Intro, Chapter 1a

©Tom Tillman

Today we will begin studying the next letter written to Hebrews. We just finished 6 months studying a letter specifically to a group of Hebrews somewhere in Asia Minor. Now we come to the next letter specifically written to Hebrews, there are three, (Hebrews, James and 1 Peter) but the Epistle of James was written about 15 years before the other two. This one was written by James and we know it was written to Hebrew Christians because that is who he addressed it to. It's good that we just completed our study of the Letter to the Hebrews because the things we learned in that study will help us as we allow God to teach us everything He has planned for us in this short letter of just 5 chapters but they are 5 chapters which are filled with much wisdom for our growth and maturity.

This letter, unlike Hebrews, tells us clearly who the author is; in fact the very first word tells us his name: James. But which James is he? There are 4 James in the New Testament.

First, there is James the son of Alphaeus who was one of the 12 Disciples but about whom we know almost nothing except that he was probably the brother of Matthew who is also identified as the 'son of Alphaeus.' Next is James, the father of Judas, not Iscariot, the other Apostle Judas, also about whom we know nothing else. The third James is the brother of John; they were the 'Sons of Thunder.' They're the ones whose mom wanted them to have a special place in the Kingdom, sitting on either side of the Lord Jesus Christ. That James was actually one of the 'inner circle' consisting of Peter, James and John. We might think he could have written this letter but, in fact, he was the first Apostle to be martyred, we see that in Acts 12:1, so he would have been gone too early to have written this book. That leaves only one other James who is the most likely to have been the author of this letter and that is James the brother of Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph. He wasn't one of the 12.

In Galatians chapter 1 Paul mentions James the brother of Jesus. In the next chapter, Paul says he was a leader in the Church at Jerusalem. He was the oldest brother of Jesus; he was younger than Jesus, born after Jesus; his parents were both Joseph and Mary, whereas only Mary was Jesus' 'birth' parent. Mary and Joseph had several children after Jesus was born; she was only a virgin until Jesus was born. In Matthew 1, Jesus is referred to as Mary's 'firstborn' son, not her 'only' son. After Jesus' birth, Mary became a wife and mother just like any other in Israel. In Mark 6 it says, 'Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon and are not His sisters here with us?' So they were offended at Him.' She is not 'The Virgin Mary;' that title is an invention of Catholicism. She is Mary, who was the virgin mother of Jesus Christ when He left His Heavenly Throne and chose to take on human flesh in order to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all those whom the Father would draw to Him. After that, she was Mary the wife of Joseph, the mother of James, Joses, Judas, Simon and more than one daughter.

This letter was most likely written by James, the brother of Jesus. His name wasn't really James, and Jesus' real name wasn't really Jesus. They are both anglicized versions of *the Greek* versions of their Hebrew names which were: Yehowshuwa and Iacobo... Joshua and Jacob. Jesus' name is the same as Joshua which means, Jehovah is Salvation and James' name is the same as Jacob; he was named after his grandfather, the father of Joseph... but we will call him James.

In Hebrew they are: Yehowshuwa and Ya'acob; in Greek they are: Iesous and Iacob and in English they are: Jesus and James

James was Jesus' younger brother and he became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was not an apostle, he was not a 'sent out one,' which is what apostle means... he stayed where he was planted and became the pastor in Jerusalem. This letter was written around AD 45... about 10 to 15 years after the Crucifixion. When the Church began, at Pentecost in the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit came on all those gathered and Acts 2 tells us that they began to speak in other tongues, languages that they didn't already know. These were 'known' languages and the purpose of that miracle was that Jews from around the known World, who had come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, heard the Gospel in their own languages. When Peter stood up and preached, many of those foreign Jews placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the

Church began to grow.

In Acts 7 we read of the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Then in chapter 8 we read that the Church was scattered because of growing persecution by Saul (Paul) and others. From there the Christians, who were, to that time, almost exclusively Jews, were further scattered throughout Greece, Turkey and all of Asia Minor. These scattered Jewish believers are the ones to whom James is writing his letter.

Like the readers of the Letter to the Hebrews, the readers of James' letter were also facing persecution. Most were real believers but some were not and that is the point of the entire letter of James: the testing of faith... how to know if you are a real believer or one who is deceived. It is a series of tests by which those in the church could know whether or not they or someone else was truly born again.

From the very beginning, Satan has sought to deceive people into thinking they were saved while they were, in reality, lost and on their way to Hell.

James does not write Christian doctrine as to how someone becomes saved. He assumes that his readers already fully know the doctrine of Salvation. He knows that salvation is only by God's Grace through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and that no works are involved in Salvation. He knows that salvation is only by God's election to salvation. In 2:5 he writes, 'Has not God *chosen* the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to them that love Him?' He knows salvation is by God's Grace and that righteousness is imputed to us by God on the basis of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection. In 2:23 he writes, "Abraham believed God, it was imputed to him for righteousness." He is not describing how to be saved. What he is describing are the marks of true saving faith as opposed to being deceived into thinking one is saved when they are not.

This letter from James is very needed today because the Church is filled with those who have been deceived into thinking that Salvation is based on our works while James is telling us that true Salvation will be evidenced by certain works and characteristics but works do not result in salvation... they only give evidence of salvation. When he says in chapter 2 that 'faith without works is dead,' he is not saying that faith is accomplished by works or that faith needs works to be alive but he is saying that if faith is alive, it will be accompanied by certain works that prove it is alive.

For example: When God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, Abraham believed God; he had faith in God. The work that proved that his faith was alive was that he then proceeded to build the fire, bind his son and lift his hand with the knife to plunge it into Isaac. That work was what showed his faith to be 'alive.' His faith was what was accounted to Him, by God, as righteousness... not the act of being willing to sacrifice Isaac. He could have said, I believe God, I trust Him but I'm not going to offer Isaac because... well... just because... but I do believe. That would have been evidence that his faith was not alive, but dead.

James will show us many tests for the 'aliveness' of faith.

In chapter 1 he writes, 'Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial.' Trials are tests of our faith and the faith that perseveres under trial is a true, saving faith that is alive and well. Throughout the letter, he gives us many such tests for determining whether or not a person's faith is true saving faith or if they are being deceived into thinking they are saved when they really are not. If you have true, saving faith, trials will cause your faith to grow; if not, trials will cause you to shrink back and run.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus gave a test of true faith... faith in which the good seed of the Gospel grows to withstand the trials of life.

Of John the Baptist, railing at the Pharisees, it says, 'But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ **Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,** ⁹ and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. ¹⁰ And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore **every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**' Matt 3:7

He was saying, 'Do the works that show true repentance. A good tree bears good fruit. Good fruit proves a good tree.'

Salvation is based on **what we believe**, but what we believe is only **proven out by what we do**.

Paul wrote in Eph. 2: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; **it is the gift of God,⁹ not of works**, lest anyone should boast.' Salvation is only through faith by God's grace... but then he wrote: 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.' We were **saved for good works** but we were **never saved by good works**.

What is of most value in life here on Earth? What do most people consider most valuable? Whatever people consider to be of value, they test it. No one would buy a bag of gold without opening the bag and inspecting the contents. If someone questions whether or not a diamond is genuine, they might test it by seeing if it will scratch glass, like a mirror; diamonds are much harder than glass. If you put a diamond under water, it will still sparkle brilliantly whereas an imitation will become dull. James is saying that in the waters of adversity, in the flood of trials, genuine faith, like a diamond will shine brightly but a false faith will be dull and failing... trial by water. You might wonder whether or not a gold coin is genuine; you've seen on TV or movies as the grizzled old prospector bites down on the gold coin. He is testing its genuineness. Pure gold is relatively soft and he would be able to dent it with his teeth... testing it by biting it... trial by dent. A merchant can test a hundred dollar bill by using a special type of marker to see if it is genuine. If it is counterfeit, the marker will leave a purple streak... trial by marker.

Diamonds, gold and even paper money, they are all valuable but eventually they will all be destroyed. There is only one thing we can possess on Earth that is of eternal value; we, who are born again, possess that which is most valuable in all time and eternity; faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which saves us unto eternal life and that faith is a free gift which only comes from God. Our faith is more valuable than anything on Earth and the testing of our faith produces endurance and patience which is part of God's number one goal as He works in His children's lives, to form us into the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But some people have a faith that is only imitation: iron pyrite-fool's gold, monopoly money, costume jewelry. It's nice to look at and it can fool some people; it can look like the real thing but when that kind of faith is tested it reveals itself for what it really is: false, imitation, even though it can look so genuine that even the one who possesses it can be fooled so that they are unwilling to even listen when an expert tells them that what they hold dear is worthless.

James isn't the only one who writes about the tests which reveal genuine faith. John wrote, 'If we **say** we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we **say** we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and still righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we **say** we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us.' 1 Jn 1

Those are all tests of genuine faith: walking in the light, confessing our sin, admitting that we sin.

James writes, 'But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.'

John is writing about those who say what is different from what they do... he could be saying, 'And be doers of the Word and not just 'sayers' only.'

James is writing about hearers vs doers while John is writing about 'sayers' vs doers

Paul writes about testing yourself; he writes, 'Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you are disqualified.' 2 Cor 13

What we believe, what we think determines whether or not we are truly born again. What we do illustrates what we believe. What we say is material only in that it illustrates what is really in our hearts. The fruit of our tongue will prove the branch of our mind and the root of our heart. Jesus said, 'Either make the tree good

and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. ³⁴ Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For ***out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.***' Matt 12

The tongue might sound as though it is saying the right things, but if it is speaking lies it is because what it says proceeds from a heart of lies. The test is how we live and ***how we respond to trials.***

Trials are what bring out the truth of what is in a heart.

James is writing to Hebrew Christians; these were Hebrew believers who had come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and had left Judaism. Some of them might have been among the Jews who were saved on the Day of Pentecost when they heard those who had been in the upper room telling of the wonders of God in their own languages, after the Holy Spirit had caused them to speak in other languages. Then they had been scattered because of the persecution that came upon the Church which we read about in Acts chapters 7 and 8.

Let's begin studying **James chapter 1:**

Verse 1: 'James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. My brethren, count it all joy ***when*** you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the ***testing of your faith produces patience.*** ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may ***be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.***'

James refers to himself only as a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

James is writing to Hebrews who know exactly what he means by 'bondservant.'

In the Law, Moses writes, regarding God's commands on servitude: 'If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. ³ If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he *comes in* married, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴ If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. ⁵ But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' ⁶ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever. Ex 21:2

If a man becomes a slave voluntarily because of financial debt, he goes free after 6 years. It would be like declaring bankruptcy and then becoming a slave for 6 years. If he is married when he becomes a servant, his wife and children return to freedom with him. If, however, he marries while he is a servant, the wife and children remain in servitude while he goes back to 'real life' alone. See the brilliance! The master has every motivation to see that his servant becomes happily married as soon as he goes into service; it becomes an automatic slave-baby making machine; the master wins either way. After 6 years, if the servant chooses to leave, the master has all those free slave children to make use of... but... if the servant has fallen in love with his wife and children... like most normal humans would... then the master not only gets to keep the woman and the children but now he has the man also to be his servant forever.

That's what James is saying to his readers; 'I have voluntarily chosen to commit myself as a bondservant to the Lord Jesus Christ, not for just 6 years, but forever. I have given up my own rights and I seek only to do His will. Now, for the rest of this letter, I am going to give you a number of 'tests' to see if you too are a genuine bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ or if you are simply a hireling... counting the days until you can go your own way.

What makes this even more dramatic is the fact that James is the half brother of Jesus but he doesn't say, 'Oh and by the way... in case you didn't know... I'm THAT James... I'm Jesus' brother... yes... that's right... as a matter of fact... I'm His ***favorite*** brother!' The only claim he makes to Jesus is that He is his Savior, the same relationship that any other one of us has. He surely remembered how humbled he was when He and their mother and the rest of the family were outside wanting to speak to Jesus: it says, 'Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. ³² And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." ³³ But He answered

them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?"³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!"³⁵ For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." Mark 3:31

The first thing James tells his readers, he cuts right to the heart; he says, 'Count it all joy **when** you fall into various trials...' Not if... not maybe... but **when**... when... **there will always be trials**... it will never end. Jesus Himself said, 'In the World, **you WILL have tribulation**... but I have overcome the World.' 'Every trial is a test of your faith,' he says. 'Every trial is a testing of your faith but if you will respond correctly, if you will trust God and patiently endure that trial, that test will produce in you a harvest of **the most valuable commodity on Earth: patience, endurance and even stronger faith**. Then, the next trial, and it will come, will be just a little more endurable and you will be able to meet it and pass through it with a little more patience.' He is saying, 'If you will choose to be a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you can always remember Who your Master is and that He is a wise Master Who only wants and causes the very best for His servants because His purpose is to use every servant and every situation to glorify His Father Whose purpose is to glorify His Son... so if you can remember that God's plan is for you to be a part of that plan, you will be able to more easily move through that trial and the next and the next. Choose to be His bondservant and remember that He loves you and is in complete control.'

Patience is the most valuable thing a child of God can possess because as patience works in us it will complete every other work God is accomplishing within us. God's Word says that as patience works within us it will cause us to be perfect and complete in every way. The Greek words for perfect and complete are: **teleois** and **holokleros**; they are similar and mean: **brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness, perfect, full grown, adult, mature, complete in all its parts, in no part wanting or unsound, complete, entire, whole, faultless, complete in all respects, consummate...**

The Holy Spirit is saying, that is what trials are meant to accomplish in you; stop fighting against the trials and willingly, joyfully embrace and move through each one. Cherish each one; see it for the extreme value it represents. Each trial is an indication that God loves you completely, that you are His workmanship and He takes great pride in you. His desire is to hold you up, as a trophy, for all eternity, before all the angels, elect and nonelect, and before all humans, elect and nonelect, so that He will be glorified as they see what He is miraculously accomplishing in you as you meet each trial with patience and endurance.'

God is teaching us how to successfully go through trials and come out on the other side victorious. First, we must choose to have and maintain a joyful attitude, understanding, training our minds to recognize and remember that God is in this trial and He has a plan and purpose for me in it, that He is in control and is causing this to work for my good and His glory. I must choose to believe that and then to fully submit to His will and purpose in my life but to do all of that takes something very important. It takes wisdom from God; sometimes we lack the wisdom to recognize that God at work in us and around us and that He is using this trial to produce patience in us.

Verse 5: 'If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.'

It takes a certain amount of wisdom to recognize that we lack wisdom and it takes a certain amount of humility to ask for wisdom.

Wisdom, like patience, is a priceless treasure. Proverbs 3 says:

Happy *is* the man *who* finds wisdom,
And the man *who* gains understanding;

¹⁴ For her proceeds *are* better than the profits of silver,
And her gain than fine gold.

¹⁵ She *is* more precious than rubies,
And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.

¹⁶ Length of days *is* in her right hand,

In her left hand riches and honor.

¹⁷ Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness,

And all her paths *are* peace.

¹⁸ She *is* a tree of life to those who take hold of her,

And happy *are all* who retain her.

To gain patience, we must go through trials but to gain wisdom all we need to do is ask God for it, as long as we ask for it believing that God will give it to us.

Verse 6: But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ *he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

This is God's direct promise to us that if we want wisdom, which God definitely wants us to have; if we believe His Word that He will give us wisdom. Now, of course, wisdom is not something you can hold in your hand so it is easy to doubt and wonder if He really gave it to you. But if we will exercise that wisdom, we will recognize that we have it in increasing amounts. A trial comes, we ask for wisdom to see it for what it is: God at work in us to produce patience. If we will believe that, we will then definitely see patience in ourselves toward that trial and toward other trials.

To doubt God, what He has said and His promises is very serious to God. It is an attack on His character; it is to call Him a liar and therefore to consider Him as being no different than Satan, the father of lies. The most famous incident of doubting God in the Bible is found in Exodus when Moses sent the 12 spies into the land; they came back and only 2 of them believed God and encouraged the people that, with God's help, we can do this. 10 came back with a fearful, doubting report and all the people believed them. Because they disbelieved God, doubting His power and His promises, God condemned all of them, 20 years old and above, to die in the wilderness. The only two who were allowed to remain alive and enter Canaan were the 2 who believed God and did not doubt Him... Joshua and Caleb. Joshua even became their leader after Moses died. He said to the people, 'Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.' Joshua 24

Elijah said, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' 1 Kings 18

If God has said something, He means it and to doubt Him is a very serious matter to Him. He said if we ask for wisdom He will give it to us. Ask for wisdom every day.

P.S. When we believe and trust God, we are glorifying Him because we are declaring, 'God is righteous and holy, He will not lie, He can be trusted!' We are declaring, 'I believe and trust God.' When we trust God, we are declaring what we believe.

When we doubt, we are also declaring something that we believe. We are declaring that God is untrustworthy, that He is a liar.' When we trust Him, we give Him glory. When we doubt Him, we steal that glory for ourselves because we are saying, 'I know better than God.' We are saying the same thing that Lucifer said, 'I will be like the Most High!'