

The Epistle of  
**James**  
New Testament Letters Series



**Lesson 1-The Trials of Life and the Wisdom of God**

**Focus: Ch. 1 v.1-8**

- 1. Introduction to Book:** *James is perhaps one of the earliest books of the New Testament. Many believe it came to us from the time period of A.D. 46 to 49. There were a number of James' who were mentioned in the New Testament. The name is actually the Greek equivalent of Jacob, which was a popular name. There was (1) "James the father of Judas (not Iscariot)..." (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13), (2) "James, the son of Alphaeus," also known as "James, the less" (Matthew 10:3; Mark 15:40), (3) "James the son of Zebedee" who was the brother of John (Matthew 4:21; Acts 1:14, etc.). This James (3) was one of the very close disciples of Jesus from His inner circle (i.e. Peter, James, and John). However, this James died a Martyr's death very early on in A.D. 44 (See Acts 12:2), so it seems likely that he was not the one who wrote this epistle. The last very notable James that we find was (4) "James, the Lord's brother..." (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:19; Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Galatians 2:9,12). He was one of the "pillars" in the church at Jerusalem. He was a prominent leader at the Jerusalem counsel in A.D. 49 (Acts 15:13-21), where the early Christian leaders had to make a very decided call about the issue of circumcision and other matters in the early church. Tradition points us to this James, the Lord's brother, as the author of this epistle, and the best we can tell from Scripture evidence leads us to the same conclusion. It is believed that James would have been one of the half-brothers or siblings of Jesus, who was born after Him (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; Matthew 1:24,25). Some have thought that possibly Joseph had had a previous marriage in which his wife died or something, and in that case the siblings of Jesus (or some of them) might have been step-siblings. From what we know of James in the gospels it appears that he did not accept Jesus as his Savior until after His resurrection. Jesus showed himself to this James, apart from the other apostles (1 Corinthians 15:7). He and the other siblings of Jesus were present at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 1:14; 2:1). Recognition that this book was written by the brother of our Lord Jesus led to its acceptance as a book of Scripture.*

**The letter of James is addressed to the "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1). The first audience was primarily a Jewish one.** The Greek of James 2:2 mentions a synagogue and the book does not make any reference to the idolatry or other such problems of the gentiles like we see in Paul's writings. James does not mention the issues of the Acts 15 counsel either which again such suggests an early writing (before A.D. 49). The letter itself deals with issues such as pure faith, speech, and the importance of living a righteous life. "Faith without works is dead." It has many similarities to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). **It would seem likely, due to James' place of residence that this letter was written from Jerusalem,** though we do not have any other specific evidence on that point. The Jewish historian Josephus, tells us that James met a martyr's death in the year A.D. 62 (Hegesippus, quoted in Eusebius, put the date of James' death at A.D. 66.). Whichever the case, it was still earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 70 under the Roman armies of General Titus.

- 2. Greetings and address from James (v.1)** *James presents himself as one indebted to God, "a bondservant of God," and are not we all to count ourselves as such, for we were "bought with a price," we are not our own and therefore should glorify God in all things (1 Cor. 6:19,20; 7:23).*

### 3. Facing Trials and lacking wisdom. What's the answer? (v.4-8)

**(v.2-4)** God does not prevent every trial from coming into our lives. No. He allows or permits trials to come. Jesus actually promised, “...**in this world you shall have tribulation**,” but we should “be of good cheer” for He has overcome the world (John 16:33). **We should not “think it strange” to be tried with “fiery trials”** (1 Peter 4:12-16). Too often people have gotten some romantic idea of life and have thought that if they just served God they'd have only peaches and roses, never a cloud in the sky, never a trial to darken their path. But such an idea is entirely false! God did NOT promise us that for this time of life. Just look at the life of righteous Job and be wise. Jesus said, if they persecuted Him, our Lord and Master, they'd surely do so to us (John 15:20). Over and over Jesus spoke about this subject and **how to deal with it by rejoicing**, knowing that our reward in heaven is great (Matthew 5:10-12; Mark 10:30). God knows how to bring to us something good, even from a situation that was bad (Romans 8:28). **These bad situations will be for the improvement of our character, though difficult to endure** (v.2-4; Malachi 3:2,3). Not everything in a cake tastes good, but when you put it all together, then end result does taste good. To God, the most precious and important thing is our character, and our eternal salvation. Sometimes we must just bear patiently and rejoice in God “always” as Paul puts it (Philippians 4:4). Just know that even as Christ never gave up, though He suffered, we should never either. His grace is sufficient for us, and even death itself will not be our end if faithful to Him (2 Cor. 12:9; Matthew 10:28). “Be thou faithful unto death,” He says, and a “crown of life” will be our reward (Revelation 2:10). Do not be one of those people who gave up Christ because they resented the fact that God allowed a trial to come into their life! Such a course is foolish. Even Jesus suffered!

**(v.5-8) Ask for Wisdom, and ask in faith!** God is the source and supplier of all true wisdom! Even the “**fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**” We cannot understand the true depths of wisdom until we begin to understand about the God who is the very source and fountain of wisdom! (See **Colossians 2:2,3; Psalm 111:10**). He gives freely to all and does not withhold. He loves to give generously! That is His character, but we should ask, and we must ask in faith. Jesus also stressed this a lot (Matthew 6:6; Mark 11:24; Hebrews 11:6). **When we ask, we should ask especially for those things that God desires we should seek!** (Those things which are good for our characters and are in harmony with His will). **Wisdom is one of those things He promises** to those who will seek it in Him! (For example see **Proverbs 2:1-7**). **Wisdom is something the even King Solomon asked for!** God granted his request and blessed him with incredible wisdom for life which even all the world wondered after and admired! We do not know of a wiser man who ever lived (besides Jesus) than King Solomon. (See his humble request and noted wisdom in **1 Kings 3:5,6,7-14; 2 Chronicles 9:5-9**). There was something so humble, noble, and right about the prayerful request of Solomon to God. This, God honored and blessed. We should seek to be ever so humble and even noble in our requests before God today! You know that if such a heart and request was pleasing to God at that time, the same is true of the Lord's will today! The wisdom God so blessed him with was well noted by the kings and queens of the earth! Today, you and I can learn from the same source of wisdom; the eternal God who gave it, by prayer, and study of His word we can learn these things. We can also study from the **Proverbs** which were written by King Solomon.

4. **A final thought:** Let us strive to be as those who live to honor God, and you can be sure of His blessed presence to be in our lives. Remember also, that though suffering in this life may come our way, yet the Lord has not forsaken us, for He deeply loves us (even as Jesus His son). Only find cause to rejoice in God during trials and remember that yet some good may come to us, even from this.

### Questions for the Heart:

Can you decide to trust God in all things, by His grace, and will you seek for His wisdom daily? \_\_\_\_\_