James: Overview and Biblical Principles

Suffering, James 1

Tongue, James 3

Prayer, James 5

1. **Introduction**

1.1. James was written by James, the half brother of the Lord and leader of the Jerusalem church (James 1:1; Matthew 13:55; Acts 12:17; 15:13; Galatians 1:19; 2:7).

1.2. James was the first New Testament book written; its date was about 45 AD. Not much church age or mystery doctrine had been taught and circulated by this time.

1.3. James wrote to Jewish believers who were spread out in many geographical areas. They all faced trials form people and circumstances. James wanted them to approach day-to-day life by the faith application of the Word of God (James 1:1, 22; 2:14).

2. **James 1: Tests, Temptation, and Doers of the Word**

2.1. Whenever your faith is tested can be a time of great delight because testing is an opportunity to gain spiritual endurance, spiritual development, and spiritual health so that you will have everything necessary to live the Christian life (James 1:2-4).

2.2. When you do not know how to cope with the test, ask God for wisdom; ask Him to remind you of the doctrine and spiritual skill you have that should be used to benefit from the test (James 1:4)

2.3. James gives a procedure for coping with tests:

2.3.1. Identify the trial clearly and precisely, then describe it;

2.3.2. Remind yourself that this test is a chance for a big spiritual victory, an opportunity for success and blessing – that should delight you;

2.3.3. Ask God – believing that He will give you the wisdom you need – to bring to your attention the doctrine and spiritual skill you need for total spiritual victory (James 1:2-7).

2.4. Humility and humiliation make both our position in Christ and God's grace much more prominent and valuable to us (James 1:9-11).

2.5. Trials plus faith plus God's wisdom produce spiritual growth and spiritual health. When everything in life has been added together and refined through trials, the only things that last are those that are part of God's plan. Neither poverty nor wealth change the pattern. The crown of life – the highest award for this spiritual victory – is available to every believer (James 1:9-12).

2.6. God does not tempt believers to sin, but as long as we live in our physical bodies we will be tempted. Temptation comes from the world, our sin nature, and Satan. Susceptibility varies with the individual. Human volition either rejects the temptation or changes the temptation into sin (James 1:13-15).

2.7. God is the source of all good things, not the source of temptation or spiritual failure. Unlike heavenly lights which cast changing shadows when they or another object moves, God never changes; He gives only good and valuable things and "just right" gifts. One example is that He, through regeneration, made believers first fruits – a unique group of people who are consecrated to God for blessing and service, and to show what God is like to creation (James 1:17-18).

2.8. If you want to have God's righteousness – spiritual maturity – then listen carefully, especially to the Word of God taught by the pastor-teacher. Do not always be talking, do not react with anger, get rid of the world's viewpoint and its reactions, and

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2.9. The Word of God that is a part of your life can save or deliver you from the dangers of life – dangers like reactions against testing, double-mindedness, bad decisions, choosing to sin when tempted, accepting the world's viewpoint, talking instead of listening in church, temper tantrums, discouragement, and prejudices (James 1:21).

2.10. You must apply or use Bible doctrine in order for it to do you any good. It doesn't help your Christian life to listen to Bible doctrine taught, but then never apply it. When you do use Bible doctrine you enjoy spiritual freedom, you save yourself from a lot of trouble, and find happiness in what you are doing (James 1:22-25).

2.11. Genuine religion is outward application of doctrine, especially help of others, without accepting the world's view of human good (James 1:26-27).

3. **James 2: Christian Life Faith**

3.1. It is wrong to ignore the poor or unknown believer and then show favoritism to others who have money, fame, or a good position in life. It is also impractical, since the very ones you try to impress may turn around and oppress you (James 2:1-7).

3.2. Believers who lack the world's goods will more often depend on the Lord than those who have all they want. The poor and unknown tend to develop faith, grow in the Christian life, and become rich in spiritual goods instead of the world's goods (James 2:5).

3.3. To show rich man-poor man partiality is a sin just as much as the more obvious sins. Believers are to have divine love toward others (the royal law); divine love triumphs over partiality; partiality contradicts divine love (James 2:8-11).

3.4. The law of liberty is another name for the Word of God. It emphasizes freedom from partiality, freedom from judgment by others, and freedom to show mercy. Mercy rejects partiality and is evidence of divine good, while lack of mercy removes the possibility of some reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ (James 2:12-13).

3.5. Christian life faith, the subject of James 2:14-26, will apply Bible doctrine and so will save or deliver the believer during life. Both God and people see this active or living faith (James 2:14-16).

3.6. An active or live Christian life faith will have the following results. (Please refer to the publication ***Dead Christian Life Faith*** for a more complete discussion of James 2:14-26.)

3.6.1. Deliver believers from being controlled by tests and problems of life (James 2:14);

3.6.2. Put divine love (source dependent or unconditional love) into action for others (James 2:15-16);

3.6.3. Witness about your beliefs (James 2:18);

3.6.4. Justify or demonstrate your Christian way of life to God and people (James 2:21, 23-25);

3.6.5. Cause your faith to grow (James 2:22); and

3.6.6. Make you God's friend (James 2:23).

4. **James 3: The Tongue and Wisdom From Above**

4.1. The Bible teacher has a responsibility to teach truth; what he says affects many people for blessing or cursing; he needs to have authority orientation and humility; he will be evaluated by God, and will be criticized, praised, rejected, and judged by people. The teacher must have the spiritual gift, study before he speaks, teach clearly and thoughtfully, explain and support what he says, and remember that ultimately he does what he does for the Lord. So, don't try to be a teacher unless you are sure that is God's will for you (James 3:1).

4.2. Everyone, including the Bible teacher, has a sin nature and will fail. One area of failure common to all is the tongue – your speech. Control of the tongue is difficult, but if a person can control the tongue, it shows he has some spiritual maturity and the self-discipline that goes with maturity (James 3:2).

4.3. What you say can cause enormous damage, just like a forest fire. The tongue can destroy you; it incites the ups and downs of history; and it seems to be driven by its potential for destruction (James 3:3-8).

4.4. Believers use the tongue to curse and bless. This is not right. Since believers are in Christ and since believers have had Bible doctrine taught to them, they ought to bless or benefit others with the tongue, not cause them trouble (James 3:9-12).

4.5. Every believer ought to be a wise person – someone learned and skillful in living the Christian life. Gentleness and noble behavior accentuate his divine good production. The wisdom of a wise person comes from knowledge of and then application of Bible doctrine over a period of time. A wise believer is pure (free from the stain of earthly, natural, and demonic values), peaceable (neighborly, not belligerent), gentle (reasonable, flexible in different life situations), reasonable (teachable, listens instead of always attacking), full of mercy (gracious to those who need it and do not deserve it), full of good fruits (very helpful to others, divine good), unwavering (impartial), and without hypocrisy (not a phony) (James 3:13-18).

4.6. In contrast, the world's wisdom promotes jealousy, self-seeking, arrogance, turmoil, and human good. Avoid the world's wisdom (James 2:13-18).

5. **James 4: Friend of the World or Friend of God**

5.1. The sin nature wages war inside each person in order to gain personal pleasures; this inner war breaks out into conflicts among people – believers arguing, competing, and fighting each other (James 4:1-2).

5.2. The pleasures of self and the world often exert a greater attraction than the pleasures that God gives. Believers must decide if God's values are greater than human and world system values (James 4:1-2).

5.3. God wants to answer prayer requests, but one reason for unanswered prayer is that the motives behind the request are wrong (James 4:2-3).

5.4. The Holy Spirit wants believers to be friends with God. He gives grace to the humble – those who submit to God's authority and gracious plan in life, who view life the way God looks at life and so put friendship with God first – to promote this kind of relationship. In contrast, believers often choose the wrong kind of relationship – friendship with the world (James 4:4-6).

5.5. The wrong kind of relationship with the world means that you adopt the world's viewpoint instead of God's viewpoint (James 4:4-5).

5.6. Recovery of your friendship with God will happen when you accept His authority and plan, say no to the devil and his will, and confess and isolate any sins (James 4:7-10).

5.7. Do not slander another believer. It is the same as judging another. When you judge another you are placing yourself above the Word of God and above God. Furthermore, slander and judging other believers is a sure way to destroy Christian camaraderie (James 4:11-12).

5.8. People often plan and act as if God did not exist or as if they, instead of God, control life. This is senseless and wrong. People cannot determine what will happen tomorrow, only God can. The sensible conclusion is to live in fellowship with God each day instead of attempting to strike out on your own (James 4:13-14).

5.9. All believers (including merchants) must plan ahead, yet they need to plan with a consciousness of God. Do not forget God. Take into account God's plan with His mission, preparation, love environment, and practical application (James 4:15-17).

6. **James 5: Money, Patience, and Prayer**

6.1. A preoccupation with the accumulation and preservation of wealth will hurt your ability to enjoy the wealth you have been blessed with (James 5:1-3).

6.2. Whatever is of supreme value to you will set the standards for everything else in your life. When you put something or someone in God's place, you will have trouble adjusting to life. Your capacity to enjoy life will lesson and you may hurt the person or thing that you place ahead of the Lord (James 5:1-3).

6.3. Misused wealth is like uninvested capital. It becomes a lost opportunity for spiritual investment and spiritual profit – ministry and blessing in time, and for rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ – and a source of self induced misery and divine discipline (James 5:3-6).

6.4. When you are oppressed or victimized – whether from people or circumstances – do not strike back; instead try to solve the problem. Remember: be patient, strengthen your heart, and do not complain against other believers. This focuses your attention on the Lord and His help, while at the same time protecting you and the body of Christ against mental attitude sins, verbal sins, and disruption of camaraderie among believers (James 5:7-9).

6.5. *Patience* is the ability to wait under pressure from people without reacting. Patience is directed toward others when they do not meet your expectations, and it prevents reaction. *Endurance* is the ability to wait under pressure from circumstances without quitting. Endurance is directed toward yourself when you are in hard circumstances, and prevents you from quitting. The prophets and Job illustrated patience and endurance (James 5:7-11).

6.6. Believers strengthen their hearts in the same way a person strengthens muscles – by good food, exercise, and rest. In this case the food is divine viewpoint or Bible doctrine, the exercise is thinking divine viewpoint or application of the doctrine, and the rest comes from faith in the Lord and His word. The benefit is the ability to handle people problems and circumstance problems.

6.7. One reason we can be patient is because help is on the way; things will change for the better – the Lord is coming for us, and before that He intersperses blessing and renews spiritual strength as Isaiah 40:31 tells us (James 5:8). *Isaiah 40:31 "Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."*

6.8. When a person is in deep water, he should keep his mouth closed. In the same way, when a believer faces people problems or circumstance problems, he should not complain, criticize, or judge other believers (James 5:9).

6.9. If you judge another believer, God will judge (divine discipline) you in order to correct and bless you (James 5:9).

6.10. God is compassionate and merciful to believers – He knows what believers are going through, He sympathizes with them, and so graciously supports and helps them (James 5:11).

6.11. Another reaction to avoid is swearing that something will happen because you have suffered. This amounts to complaining or judging, which is sin; it is also committing yourself to a course of action that you probably cannot fulfill. Instead, give an appropriate "yes" or "no" to what has happened and to what you should do about it. The first thing that you need to do about the suffering is continue to live the Christian life without allowing this suffering to spawn a reaction against God or people (James 5:12).

6.12. Believers will suffer misfortune, enjoy some cheering prosperity, and have illnesses – some will have long-standing illnesses due to sin that medicine cannot solve. There are right responses to each. Pray in response to misfortune; sing praises in response to cheering prosperity; and if you have an illness caused by sin against another believer – sin that you both know about and will not go away – make sure you have confessed the sin to God, ask some church leaders to pray for you and anoint you with oil (a symbol that you want God's blessing and restoration to fellowship with God and believers), and privately clear up the conflict with the other believer and pray for each other (James 5:13-16).

6.13. James gives three principles that deal with people conflicts and the divine discipline illness that results (James 5:14-16):

6.13.1. *Recovery Principle* – confess to God, call the church leaders, and clear up the hostility with the particular person involved;

6.13.2. *Preventative Principle* – solve the hostility with another believer before God brings in divine discipline illness; and

6.13.3. *Mutual Support Principle* – pray that God will restore each other to spiritual and physical health.

6.14. The right kind of prayer gets things done. The right kind of prayer can be prayed by any believer – Elijah was far from perfect; he had many failures and fears – who is in fellowship with God, who prays according to the Word of God, and who prays under the control of the Holy Spirit (James 5:16-18).

6.15. Gracious Biblical encouragement helps each other, especially a believer who has wandered from Bible truth. If you will say the right thing at the right time under the Holy Spirit's direction, you can help the wanderer to begin anew to value the truth and to make it the basis for his life. You will save that individual from a lot of trouble, grief, and even physical death, besides pointing the way to cleansing of personal sin (James 5:19-20).