



James

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Luther Schwartzkopf

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**LIVING WAY**  
BIBLE STUDY



# LWBS

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

## Welcome to Living Way Bible Study

Thank you for your order! It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* 2 Peter 3:18

### WHO WE ARE

Living Way Bible Study, Inc. is an auxiliary of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). All studies are written and/or edited by LCMS pastors. We have been providing studies to churches throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1982.

### YOUR ORDER

These studies are available by email (pdf-file) or snail-mail (hard copy). For a *suggested* donation of \$1-per-lesson within a study (e.g., 23-lesson study of John is \$23) you receive an original of the study, from which you are then free to make copies for your class. Please honor our copyright of these materials.

All studies have the same basic format, using an effective four-step approach for Bible study. Please see the following pages for additional information on these four steps, as well as helpful hints for facilitating these studies.

As a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that relies solely on freewill donations, *additional donations are much appreciated* and enable us to continue to produce and promote the study of God's Word.

### CONTACT US

If you have any questions or comments on this study or any part of it, please contact us. We are always eager to hear from "our students" and appreciate your comments.

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*May God bless you as you walk in His Living Way!*

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## LWBS Four-Step Method

Living Way Bible Study suggests this four-step method:

1. **PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
2. **SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
3. **THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
4. **THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

**Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page.** The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.



# LWBS

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

## What our Students are Saying...

### **Lakeside Community Lutheran Church (Webster, WI):**

"Our Bible Study in Genesis is in full swing and I had to let you know so far it is a great success. We have been struggling for some time attracting people to our studies and finally I think we have hit the jackpot! We have a full house (room) of enthusiastic, constant participants, including MEN! Our lessons are animated to say the least and everyone participates fully. ... We have been using your studies since 2003 and really enjoy them as they are very precise and informative, easy to understand and uplifting."

**Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church (Anza, CA):** "We will be beginning our fourth year of Living Way Bible Study... It has been such a blessing for our church...nurturing the women of our congregation and as an outreach to our community. The Lord has blessed us with women from the community and brought at least three of them into membership in our church."

### **Palisades Lutheran Church (Pacific Palisades, CA):**

"Our breakfast Prayer Group again finds your studies helpful and rewarding."

### **St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church (Stryker, OH - Pastor):**

"Our group leaders are very pleased with the additional background information that is provided with Living Way courses."

**Faith Lutheran Church (Sequim, WA):** "Currently in our 10th year ...continue to be blessed... have between 70-90+ men and women... some are non-members of our church... use to plug new members in."

**St. James Lutheran Church (Cleveland, OH):** "...we greatly appreciate the ministry of Living Way Bible Study! They're all very good! ..."

**Faith Lutheran Church (Sequim, WA):** "I'm looking forward to our study that your ministry has blessed us with ... Your study allows one to go as deep as time permits or give the simplest most direct answer ... providing materials for us to become proficient in His living and active Word."

**Holy Cross Lutheran Church (San Diego, CA):** "The women...continue to enjoy the lessons you provide. We have had many lively discussions over the questions in the lessons."

### **Lakeside Community Lutheran Church (Webster, WI - ELCA):**

"Your studies are excellent and we look forward to each study we undertake."

### **Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (Olympia, WA - ELCA):**

"We're starting into year 12!...We've been enjoying all of the studies and appreciate your service."

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (Tacoma, WA):** "Living Way Bible Study has been an excellent study that we have used for almost 30 years."

**Bethany Lutheran Church (Long Beach, CA):** "We are going on our 30th year in LWBS. Our group of about 40 really loves it and grows in our faith with each new study."

**Crown of Life Lutheran Church (Sun City, AZ):** "I used the Thessalonians study for the Ministry Staff Retreat (7 of us) and will be repeating a small portion of the study for a three week session with approximately 50 adults. The material is excellent and very helpful to me as I prepare to teach."



## The Epistle of James

REVEREND LUTHER SCHWARTZKOPF

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Reverend Luther Schwartzkopf

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*The Last Word*, Carpenter and Griffin, CPH, St. Louis, MO.





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LWBS Courses: *The Epistle of James*

*The Letter of Paul to the Colossians*

*The First Epistle of Peter*

*The Second Epistle of Peter & Jude*

*Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*

Born in China of missionary parents (1922)

Graduated from Concordia College (Milwaukee) in 1940 and Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in 1945

Received degree in Sociology and graduate studies in Counseling Psychology from California State University (San Bernardino, CA)

Spent entire ministry in the Southern CA District (1945-1988)

Missionary-at-large, E. Sierra area (1945-48)

Immanuel, Oceanside and Fallbrook (1948-50)

Trinity, San Bernardino (1950-72)

First full-time Director of Arrowhead Lutheran Camp (1972-88)

Served on District Bible Institute staff in the 1950's; developed and taught courses: *How to Study the Bible and God's Purpose for Lutheran Women*

Graduate *Bethel Bible Series* Bible Study Institute

Served twenty (20) years on Synodical District, Mission Services Department, six years as chairman

Retired from full-time ministry in 1988, with wife (Ruth) moved back to Bishop, CA to be with grandchildren and enjoy the outdoor activities as well as the beauty and majesty of the High Sierras

Called to Glory — May 13, 2006



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*“The council of Carthage in the year 397 officially placed the church’s stamp of approval upon the Epistle of James and established its canonicity.”*

### THE BACKGROUND

The Epistle of James is included in the grouping commonly designated “The General Epistles.” In this classification, James takes its place along with the two letters of Peter, the three letters of John and the short Epistle of Jude. Eusebius (ca. A.D. 265–340) reports that these letters were called “catholic” (general) by the Christians of his day.

What they appear to have in common to qualify for the title “general” is that they do not appear to have been written for any particular congregation or group of Christians.

The Interpreter’s Bible makes the observation: “Indeed, the teaching of the epistle is so free from concrete applications to any specific time or place that for the most part it is as fresh and as useful today as when it first was written; it is this very fact that gives James its enduring appeal.”

It would be difficult to find fault with this splendid tribute to the universal timelessness of the message in the Epistle of James. As we study this letter, I think that we will be impressed with its *timelessness*.

### THE INTENDED FIRST READERS

While we heartily agree with the observation regarding the universality of the message of this letter, we do find a specific clue from the author as to the people he had in mind when he was moved by the Spirit to pen these words. In chapter 1, verse 1, he identifies the original addressees as “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.”



At the same time, we can point to examples in the New Testament where titles and attributes of Old Testament Israel are applied to the New Testament “People of God.”

Taken in this way, this salutation or greeting might very well indicate that the author was addressing all Christians, wherever they might be, and in whatever age they might be living. Perhaps, it might help to make this letter more personal for us as we begin this study, to think of it as a message with our name included “at the top.”

Having made this point, we need to say that there are several present-day Bible scholars who have become convinced that the author of this letter did have in mind a specific group of people when he referred to them as “the twelve tribes of the Dispersion.”

Drawing from internal evidence in the letter, these scholars suggest the probability that when the author used the term “the twelve tribes” he had in mind, first of all, the Christians of Jewish heritage and religious practice who were members of the first Christian Church in Jerusalem.

Our study of the letter will give us a chance to make up our minds about the validity of these recent conclusions. It is our hope that considering the letter from this perspective will in no way detract from the sense of “personalness” we might otherwise feel about this message.

On the other hand, there is this to be said about accepting the newer interpretation: The more that we can put ourselves into the frame of mind or viewpoint of the person writing the letter, the more precise we can be of what the author is trying to communicate to them. The more we understand what he is trying to teach them, the easier it might be for us to appreciate his message for ourselves and apply it to our own life.

### THE SPECIFIC OCCASION FOR WRITING

Although it is quite apparent that the author of the Letter of James was very well acquainted with the circumstances of the people for whom the letter was originally intended, there do not seem to be any references which are specific enough to pinpoint any particular event or set of circumstances as the immediate reason for the letter.

### AUTHORSHIP

The man who penned the letter identifies himself as “James, the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The name of James, in its original form “Jacobus,” was an extremely common name among the Jews and the early Christians. Come to think of it, the name James is still quite popular, isn’t it? Reflect for a moment or two on how many people you know who have that name or a derivation from that name — like Jim or Jamie? How many did you come up with?

As we might very well expect, there are differences of opinion among Bible students as to the identity of the particular “James” who wrote this letter. It gets to be a contest, not unlike that guessing game which was on television a few years ago. You find yourself frustrated, saying, “Will the real “James” please stand up?”

When we hear the name of “James” our tendency would be to think of the disciple of Jesus who was very prominent in the Gospels. With his brother John, this James was called into discipleship very early on. He and John were sons of Zebedee. Along with his brother, and their friend Simon Peter, this man was part of the so-called “inner circle” of the disciples of Jesus. On several occasions, we recall, this trio was singled out for special service and experience by our Lord. Most notably there was the event of our Lord’s transfiguration at which it was Peter, James, and John who were invited to accompany Him to that sacred spot. When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane for His struggle in prayer on the night of His betrayal, Peter, James, and John were invited to go with Him.

Considering the closeness of this James to the Lord, he might be our first choice as the possible author of this book of the Bible. However, his name is quickly ruled out because the book of Acts (12:2) reports that he died a martyr’s death not too long after our Lord’s ascension. In fact it was his martyrdom and the accompanying circumstances of persecution that triggered the “dispersion” which the greeting at the top of this letter speaks.

### JAMES, APOSTLE AND SON OF ALPHEUS?

Attesting again to the popularity of the name “James,”

among the twelve disciples of Jesus, there were two with the same name. The other disciple is referred to as “James the son of Alphaeus” (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Acts 1:13). Dr. Paul E. Kretzmann, editor of the Walther League’s *The Popular Commentary* published by Concordia Publishing House in 1922, makes a case for this James as the author of this epistle. This position does not have the support of other scholars who point out that this quiet, unassuming Apostle had very little to do with the Christians in and around Jerusalem in those early days. He would have needed to identify himself with more than just his first name.

### JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JESUS?

The Biblical record shows that this James, known as “Brother of our Lord,” centered his ministerial activity in Jerusalem. When controversy arose in the Early Church regarding the question of the need for Gentile Christians to observe the Ceremonial Laws of the Old Testament, a church council was called (A.D. 50). The chairman of that momentous meeting was this James.

The great Christian Scholar, Origen of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 185–ca. 254) is the first Church writer who explicitly quotes this epistle as Holy Scripture, ascribing it to James, “The Lord’s brother.”

Early reliable tradition supports this position that it was the brother of Jesus who authored the letter.

### DATE OF WRITING

James is very likely one of the first of the New Testament books to have been written. If, as is most commonly accepted, James the brother of Jesus was its author, it obviously had to have been composed prior to his martyrdom. He was murdered somewhere between A.D. 62 and 66. Another point of reference is the Jerusalem Council held A.D. 50. There is no mention of this in the Epistle, so scholars pretty much agree that something of such prominence in the life of the Early Church at Jerusalem would certainly have been referred to, if the letter had been written after this event.

An early date for writing this letter seems to be supported by the letter itself. Consider the simplicity of the greeting or salutation, the use of the word

synagogue for a Christian place of worship, and the reference to the “elders” only as officials in the Church. This would put its date of writing somewhere around A.D. 45. Think of it — only a decade and a half after Christ’s Ascension!

### THE LITERARY STYLE OF JAMES

Most Bible scholars are quick to observe and point out that there is a close similarity between the style of James and the so called “Wisdom Literature” of the Old Testament. For example, there is a great deal of poetic “parallelism.” We are familiar with this form in the Psalms. Some have even referred to the Epistle of James as “The Christian Psalm.” Others have tagged it “A homily in the Letter Form.” Its style is strongly “hortatory,” filled with one exhortation after another. In the 108 verses which make up the letter there are about sixty (60) imperatives!

Most commentators seem to take the position that it would be a fruitless search to try to find a traditional outline for the thoughts presented in the letter. At first glance, so it would seem, the letter appears to be more like the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, with a series of independent exhortations and directives strung together “like a string of pearls.”

Without a doubt, for those who regard it as such and study all of the injunctions in this way, there is bound to be spiritual blessing. Nevertheless, we humbly add that there are a few Bible students who have managed to come up with some fairly clear and logical divisions of thought and at least “sort of an outline.” That has been our experience, too, that for the sake of an organized Bible study, such as this one, such an outline might prove helpful.

### THE PLACE OF JAMES IN THE SCRIPTURAL CANON

Over the years, there have been some church leaders and students of Holy Scripture who have had second thoughts, yes even looked with suspicion upon this Epistle of James. Most notable of these, perhaps from our point of view, was Dr. Martin Luther, from whom the Lutheran Church gets its name.

In Luther’s “Preface to the New Testament” of 1522, James was stigmatized by the good Doctor Luther as an “Epistle of straw.” He probably picked up this analogy from

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*...it was the same Holy Spirit who directed the New Testament Church to recognize His divine involvement in the writing and His influence in moving the Church to place it among what we refer to as the “Canonical books of the Bible.”*

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Jeremiah 23:28, or 1 Corinthians 3:12. Luther even remarked that he “would give his doctor’s beret to anyone who could reconcile James and Paul.”

Dr. Roland Bainton in his popular biography of Luther, “Here I Stand,” makes the observation that Luther “earned his own beret” by reconciling the theology of James and Paul himself. He sounded very much like James when he wrote: “Faith is a living, restless thing. It cannot be inoperative. We are not saved by works; but if there be no works, there must be something amiss with faith.” James couldn’t have said it better.

A search of Biblical references in Luther’s Works shows that Dr. Luther quoted or referred to various passages of James over 150 times. Most of these were in a positive way, using James to support a particular idea or teaching. This seems to show that he had high regard for this little Epistle after all.

As we move into a detailed study of this wonderful letter, asking for the Holy Spirit’s blessing, we will surely be strengthened in our belief that the Holy Spirit was the real author of these 108 verses we refer to as the Epistle of James. We will also conclude that it was the same Holy Spirit who directed the New Testament Church to recognize His divine involvement in the writing and His influence in moving the Church to place it among what we refer to as the “Canonical books of the Bible.”

The Council of Carthage in the year 397 officially placed the church’s stamp of approval upon the Epistle of James and established its canonicity.



**PERSONAL APPLICATION – JAMES 1:1**


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*Thank you, Father in Heaven, for sending Your Holy Spirit into the hearts and minds of the writers of Holy Scripture. Send that same Spirit into my heart and mind as I seek to know and do Your will. Amen.*

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James 1:1

1. In the space below write a concise “bio” of “James, the Brother of Jesus.” Use one word “summaries” of qualities and traits. Think of it as a brief characterization of a pastor being considered for a divine call to your congregation. (Matthew 13:55; Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:17-19; John 7:2-5; Galatians 1:19, 2:9; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Jude 1:1).
2. Complete the following sentence: “I think that I would/would not consider it a blessing to have James as my pastor, because...”
3. Tradition and historical evidence point to the author of the Epistle of James as being a “brother” of Jesus. Why might some Christian people find this conclusion unacceptable?

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How do you feel about the idea that Mary and Joseph had a normal marriage after the Birth of Jesus?

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4. What does Jesus say about our relationship to Him in Matthew 12:46-50?
  5. In the first verse of his Epistle, James identifies himself as a “servant.” The Greek word for this is “doulos,” which is generally translated “slave.” What do you think James is intending to communicate about his relationship to God and Jesus by using this term?
- 
- As you consider your relationship to God and Jesus, how would you feel about applying this term “slave” to yourself?
- 
6. Can you pick out two words in verse one which show quite conclusively that James believed in both the Deity of Jesus and that He was the promised “Messiah”? (Acts 2:36, John 1:1).

- 
7. James addresses his letter to “the twelve tribes.” How are they described?
-

8. In a few words describe the situation which members of the newly founded Christian movement had to deal with at the time that James, the brother of Jesus, was supervising pastor for the church in Jerusalem. (Acts 4:1-3, 5:17-18, 27, 33, 40, 7:54-58, and 8:2-3). What was happening? Who was responsible for the problems? What was the underlying reason for the hostility?  

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9. Consider the harassment and persecution, which caused the “Dispersion” of Jewish Christians. What “redeeming” value was there to this movement? (Acts 8:4, Matthew 5:13).  

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10. In the United States, especially on each coast, we are observing the influx of many different ethnic groups. They are being “dispersed” in many directions as a result of problems in their homelands. How might this phenomenon fit into God’s plans?  

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11. What lessons can we learn from this as we think about our own personal life and the contacts we might make?  

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12. In many places James sounds a lot like Jesus, which would not be too surprising if, as we believe, this James was brought up in the same household with Jesus. In the following partial list, match the words of James to the words of Jesus.
  - a. James 1:6            \_\_\_\_\_ Matthew 22:39
  - b. James 2:8            \_\_\_\_\_ Luke 4:25
  - c. James 3:6            \_\_\_\_\_ Mark 4:26-27
  - d. James 5:7            \_\_\_\_\_ Matthew 7:7
  - e. James 5:17-18        \_\_\_\_\_ Matthew 12:36-37



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*“In spite of their poor and dangerous circumstances, James understood that they knew the source of true joy.”*

In Lesson One we discussed the authorship of *James* and decided to agree with the Church Father Origen (A.D. 200). He refers to the authorship of James and ascribes it to “James the Brother of Jesus”; in a way that suggests that this is something which has been commonly accepted in the Church for many years prior to that time. Therefore, until some conclusive evidence is brought forth which makes it impossible to consider James, we will hold to the conclusion we came to in lesson one.

### JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JESUS

We are sensitive to the fact that in some Christian circles, the reference to James as a “brother” of Jesus does not sit too well. There are very religious people for whom the idea that the Virgin Mary had other children with her husband Joseph is totally unacceptable. They prefer to think of Mary as a special instrument in the hands of God, whose sole function in life was to be the mother of Jesus. In some cases this is just a matter of personal preference; in others, it is dictated by their church’s theology. For these people, the way out is to take the term “brother” and use it as a synonym for cousin or close relative.

We are ready to admit that this is not a big enough point to let it be divisive. Yet, for purposes of our Bible study and an intention to take the Scriptures at their word, it seems appropriate for us to examine the term used. On the question of the physical relationship between Jesus and James we can start by checking out the translation for the Greek word used in the original text for “brother.”

In Thayer’s Greek-English dictionary we find the definition for the word used: “adelphos” means “from the same womb.” In summary, he declares that the **most reliable** translation would suggest that James and other brothers and sisters mentioned in the New Testament were **not** half-brothers and sisters



born to Joseph **prior** to his marriage to Mary; nor were they simply *cousins*.

James' name shows up in the gospels on numerous occasions. Following Jesus' **post-resurrection** appearance to James he "saw the light" and came to faith in his brother Jesus as the promised Messiah. He soon rose to a position of leadership in the Jerusalem Church and his prestige grew among the Apostles of our Lord. Paul mentions him as one of the "pillars of the church" (Galatians 2:9).

What a magnificent conversion it was in the case of a brother of Jesus, who at first was so reluctant to accept the Messianic mission of his older brother! It almost seems that James was empowered by a holy determination to make up for lost time! What an inspiration he can be for us!

### **SIMILARITY OF TEACHINGS OF JAMES AND JESUS**

Although James did not become a believer in Jesus until after our Lord's resurrection, we need to keep in mind that this did not mean he was not a religious person. Quite the contrary! Along with big brother Jesus, as well as the other brothers and sisters in his immediate family, James had received a thorough education in the religion of the Old Testament both at the feet of his devout parents, Mary and Joseph, and at the local synagogue.

One of the characteristics of the letter of James is its similarity to the teachings of Jesus. James and Jesus had many years together as part of a close family. Without doubt there had been many discussions between them on a variety of topics, but especially in the area of theology. It would be most natural that they would have similar values and religious beliefs. Even the way that they expressed their beliefs would likely reflect common vocabulary and figures of speech. In fact, it seems that it would be strange if their commonalities would not be present.

### **JAMES — EXEMPLAR OF THE GODLY LIFE**

The subject of holy living to which the Epistle of James so effectively points us, apparently could have found no better spokesman. He truly practiced what he preached. He was a person with real credibility when he spoke or wrote on the subject. This is important in getting a serious hearing on the part of those receiving this instruction.

In spite of many vicious threats to his life, James remained faithful to the brother he had come to believe in as God's Son and mankind's Savior. According to tradition, James was thrown from a wing of the temple in Jerusalem by cohorts of the High Priest. When his fall failed to kill him, he was stoned to death. There is some question about the exact date. Historians vary in dating the event from A.D. 62 to 66.

### **JAMES, SERVANT OF GOD AND OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**

More important than his family ties with Jesus, as far as James was concerned, is his new identity as "servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." The term he uses for servant is the Greek word for "slave." He intended to make it plain that he belonged totally to his God and God's Son, Jesus Christ. His brother, Jude, in his letter similarly refers to himself as "a servant of Jesus Christ." Other New Testament writers employ this strong word about themselves and their attitudes toward God and Christ (Romans 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1, Revelation 1:1).

For those who contend that there is little theology in this book of the Bible, we say that all they have to do is take a good look at this salutation. The author begins this communication with a declaration regarding belief in Jesus Christ as God and "Messiah" (Acts 2:36, John 1:41). This would be particularly significant for the intended readers who were quite sensitive to the implications of the appellation "Lord." The Septuagint uses this very word "kurios" for its translation of the Hebrew word "Yahweh." Belief in the Deity of Jesus is proudly proclaimed by one who was slow in coming to that conviction.

### **THE TWELVE TRIBES**

The expression "the twelve tribes" is part of the generally Judaic coloring of the Epistle of James. A quick review of the first chapters of the book of Acts will show that the Early Church remained essentially Judaic in character. The disciples and followers of Jesus were faithful in observing the precepts of the Old Testament Law, just as they had done before their conversion to the Christian faith.

Remember the discussion which took place on the subject of clean and unclean foods in Acts 10:14? Christians of the Jerusalem Church also maintained the practice of observing the traditional hours of prayer (Acts 3:1, 10:9,

& 30). When they arrived in a new town or city, either as a result of the involuntary dispersion or simply in their personal travels, they were generally quick to make contact with the local synagogue (Acts 11:19).

This continued adherence to the Old Testament practices might seem to us as being inconsistent on their part. If we keep in mind that the New Testament is essentially a fulfillment and a flowering of the prophecies and ceremonies of the Old Testament it won't seem quite so strange to us.

Furthermore, it was also a very practical thing for these people to do if they were to maintain any hope of winning their fellow Jews to join them in their newfound faith. They needed to keep their ties with Judaism. To break off from the Temple and the time-honored rituals of Israel would be to have themselves branded as radicals and renegades. Then they would have little or no chance of getting a hearing for their soul-saving message.

The main thrust of the Epistle of James seems to be aimed at people who were followers of Jesus who had come from the Jewish church. Consider the specific sins and shortcomings, which are the topic of discussion in the letter. What was it that Jesus singled out as the major problem with the religiousness of the religious leaders of His day? More than anything else, wasn't it the blatant inconsistency and incongruity which existed between what they professed and what they actually did? He talked about the scribes and Pharisees as "whited sepulchers" belying the stench within. Refer to Luke 11:37-53 if you need support for this observation.

There seemed to be a carry over into their newly formed Christian faith. They apparently felt that as long as they said they accepted certain formulations of belief that was all they needed to be concerned about. This is the problem that James focuses upon. This was the typical sin of Judaism, only in new form. The problem of sexual license, which is so prominent in the letters to Gentile Christians, is conspicuous by its absence in the sermon letter on holy living.

That the intended primary recipients of this letter were part of the Judaic Christian Church is further brought out by the

many references to the Old Testament and to the things that would have been familiar to people of Jewish heritage. The letter assumes that they were quite familiar with the Old Testament, something that wouldn't have been true if they were non-Jewish. James refers in one way or another to all three major sections of their Hebrew Bible: The Law (2:10); The Prophets (5:10); and The Wisdom Literature (5:11). In chapter 5:4 James uses the Hebrew title, "Kyriou Sabaoth," translated "Lord Almighty."

All of this seems to indicate that as he wrote these words James had in mind the people of the Christian fellowship headquartered in Jerusalem — people whom he knew very well.

### **TWELVE TRIBES IN "DISPERSION"**

This term "dispersion" refers to the scattering of many of the members of the Jerusalem church as a result of persecution, mostly at the hands of officials of the Jewish Church. It began shortly after the stoning of Stephen. Acts 11:19 reports that they traveled "as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch."

This term "dispersion" also hints at the situation which existed for these Christians. In a way they were like refugees who had already made sacrifices for their allegiance to Christ, having to uproot their families and move to strange cities in order to survive. Even the circumstances for those still in Jerusalem were quite precarious. They had to be ready to do the same at a moment's notice — all for their faith in Christ! Their similarity to the nomad tribes of Israel in the Old Testament was all too similar!

### **"GREETINGS!"**

When James uses this term, he wants to do more than say, "Hello!" Greetings has been the common Greek salutation for centuries. It comes from the stem of a verb, which means to rejoice. Our "cheer up" contains the same stem and gives a fairly accurate idea of what James wished to convey to his readers. This wasn't an empty word. In spite of their poor and dangerous circumstances, James understood that they knew the source of true joy. His greeting of "Good Cheer" wouldn't be received by their equivalent of our expression, "Yeah, right!" James knew they would understand.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION – JAMES 1:2-27**


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*Lord God, in many ways my life is like a walk through unfamiliar territory in the darkness of night. I am so glad I have Your Holy Word, which shines upon my pathway with the light of Truth. Give me the power to walk in the way Your Word teaches. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

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James 1:2-15

1. According to verses 2 and 3, what benefits or “dividends” can accrue for a person who perseveres in his personal faith and convictions in the face of sometimes vicious oppositions?

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Is this something you can relate to? If so, describe the circumstances of your experience and list any personal blessing which came your way as a result.

2. All Christians have times when circumstances of life send them “reeling” and they don’t quite know what to do! What do verses 4 and 5 tell us to do?

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Relate an instance in your life when you found this to be true.

3. With what attitude must we approach God in prayer? (vs. 6)

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What words are used to describe a wrong attitude? (vs. 8)

4. In chapter 1 the author uses four illustrations from nature.  
1:6

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1:10-11

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1:17-18

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1:26

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Of whom does the author’s style (of drawing from nature to make a point clear) remind you?

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5. What do verses 9-11 say to you about “personal status” and the “socio-economic” makeup of the early Church?

6. What do you think James means by the term “crown of life?” (2 Timothy 4:8) How is it attained?

7. Can we rightfully put the blame on God when we find ourselves in circumstances loaded with temptation? Why or why not?

James 1:16-27

8. Which important attribute of God is set forth in verse 17 and why is this reassuring to you?

9. What does verse 18 teach us about the process by which a person becomes a Christian and child of God? (John 1:13-14, Ephesians 1:13)

10. When it comes to improving our spiritual performance James points to three things over which we should have control. What are they?

11. Why is anger such a bad thing according to verses 19-20?

If you have feelings of anger, how do you deal with them? (Ephesians 4:26)

When was Jesus angry? (Matthew 21:12-13)

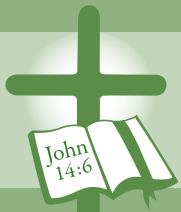
12. What are we told in verse 21 would definitely interfere with spiritual growth, since it would negate and impair the power of the Word?

Where do we receive the power to overcome this?

13. How is a person who gives “lip-service” to the Word of God like a person who glances at himself in a mirror?

14. In what way is the Word of God a “law of liberty” (vs. 25) to people who have been born anew? (1 Peter 1:3)

15. In verses 26-27, James points to three things that should characterize the life of a person who truly wants to be a “doer of the Word.” What are they?



**OUR QUEST FOR GODLY MATURITY — WITH GOD’S HELP**

**14**

**PERSONAL APPLICATION – JAMES 2:1-26**

**17**

*“For a faith without love is not enough, rather it is not faith at all, but a counterfeit of faith, just as a face seen in a glass/ mirror is not a real face, but merely a reflection of a face.”*

**THEME: “IT’S NOT ALWAYS EASY TO LIVE A GODLY LIFE!”**

“Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?” It’s rather easy to sing the words of this hymn, which acknowledge that maybe the Christian life is a bit easier these days, compared to the early years of the Christian movement.

The first chapter of James is before us to remind us that if we are truly concerned about living the godly life to the fullest, we should not expect to be carried along on “flowery beds of ease.” In fact, the flip side of this observation is a warning that if we are not experiencing any struggle as we live out our Christian life, if we never experience opposition from without or within, perhaps there is something lacking in our understanding of the life our Holy God wants us to live.

**OBSTACLES AND ROADBLOCKS – JAMES 1: 2-15**

James had given the usual greeting, using the common Greek word: “Cheer up!” He may have been aware of how such a cheery greeting might come across to people who were experiencing a variety of difficulties brought about precisely by their involvement with the Christian movement. He picks up on the word of greeting by using the same basic word to tell them that no matter how tough the times were for them, they had reason to rejoice. In fact, he points out that these tough times themselves could be the occasion for joy, if they viewed them in the proper light (Matthew 5:11).

When James uses the term “brethren” he implies that the people to whom he was writing were not only fellow believers; they were also, and especially, people whom he knew and loved dearly. This supports the idea that his words were first addressed to people whom he had served as pastor. The personal nature and warmth of the relationship between author and recipients is reflected by the number of times the term “brethren,” or “my beloved brethren,” occurs in this short epistle. There are fourteen such references.

The trials, which they were facing, were many and varied. Most of them grew out of the opposition of the Jewish religious leaders, and by the Roman officials who were influenced by them. The “heat was on” in the area of

Jerusalem, starting with the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr for the faith.

For them it must have been like people hearing a hurricane is heading their way. They didn't know where the fury of persecution would strike next. James points out that the reason these people could have joy in their hearts because of the trials they were experiencing, is the blessed result of a strong faith. As faith is exercised, it becomes stronger. It's almost an echo of the physical fitness slogan: "No pain, no gain!" Their endurance in the face of these trials would leave them with a stronger spirituality and bring them to greater maturity as children of God.

There could also be personal blessing for them inasmuch as their troubles could bring them closer to God. They were totally unprepared for the harassment and persecution that came their way. It left them perplexed and unsure. They were "at their wit's end." They didn't know what to do. James reminds them to turn to God with confidence, knowing the kind of God He is — generous and giving. These words remind us of Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7-11.

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*"Rather we should use it as an expression of our faith that God indeed hears our prayers, and that He is more than ready to answer them."*

Not only would they have the beneficial experience of being drawn closer to the Heavenly Father, they could be assured that they would receive instruction appropriate for the particular situation. However, they needed to pray with confidence. Martin Luther spoke about the importance of such faith in praying. For one thing, he saw the word "Amen" as operative here. When we say this word, it is not just a sigh that we are through with our prayer. Rather we should use it as an expression of our faith that God indeed hears our prayers, and that He is more than ready to answer them.

Luther also used a rather graphic illustration to picture this aspect of prayer. If a child asks for a drink of milk from his mother or father, and holds the cup waiting for the milk to be poured, it is important to hold the cup steady. The

person pouring is ready to answer the request, but will not start pouring until the cup is held steady. When we pray, we must not only believe that the effort is worthwhile, we need to poise ourselves in faith so that we are ready to receive God's answer.

Another problem which had to be dealt with among the brethren was the emotional and psychological impact of sudden poverty, which hit so many of the early Christians. Different generations can identify with high unemployment and recession — with people who gave their lives "for the company," and were fired after thirty or forty years! What a jolt! Their work was their identity. Even though the cause is different for the early Christians, there is similarity between the consequences.

The answer, however, can be the same in both cases. In verse 9, James suggests that Christians have an identity, which would be difficult to improve upon: "Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation." Translation: "Let the person without material things remember that he is a brother of Christ and a child of God the Father." He may also have been hinting at another kind of exaltation, which was endorsed by the apostles. After they had been beaten by the council they left, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for His name" (Acts 5:41).

At the same time, the wealthy person in the fellowship of Christians can find satisfaction and blessing. He knows how unreliable and transient material things really are. James uses an illustration, which was quite telling for the people who lived in the desert region of Palestine. It was familiar also because it is a direct quote from their great prophet Isaiah (the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 40:6). The rich person who trusts in his riches will fade away as quickly as the wild flower in a desert when the southwest wind, the sirocco, blows. James seems to imply in these verses that the trials shared erase any superficial distinctions which separate the rich brother from the poor one.

In verse 12, James highlights another reason for his beloved people to recognize the potential blessings that can result from their unpleasant circumstances. When he says, "Blessed is the man...", he uses the same word for "blessed" that his brother Jesus used in His famous Sermon on the Mount. Jesus wasn't the first to use it,



either. It is quite common in the Psalms (e.g. Psalms 1:1, 32:2, 84:12). Proverbs uses it in 8:34, as do Isaiah (56:2) and Jeremiah (17:7). The Greek word (makarios), which Jesus and James used refers not to a shallow kind of happiness, but a distinctively religious joy, a durable, pervasive inner joy, which no one can take away from you. This joy, this state of blessedness, will be the possession of those who persevere in the struggle. The terms used here indicate that it is not a **passive enduring**, with a fatalistic ring to it. But rather an aggressive attitude filled with determination to be victorious in the struggle.

*“When the struggle is over, and the Christians have hung in there, and they have passed the test with flying colors, the ‘Crown of Life’ will be theirs.”*

When the struggle is over, and the Christians have hung in there, and they have passed the test with flying colors, the “Crown of Life” will be theirs. This is a picture taken from the athletic field, maybe even the Olympics. The word “stephanos” means wreath — the victor’s wreath. This picture could refer to the prize of salvation itself. This is not a prize, which the persevering Christian has earned, yet it is certainly worth every bit of the struggle, which God enabled the individual to handle. The “Crown of Life” may very well refer also to the new quality of life, which the Christian experiences as a result of this perseverance. The person comes out of it with this blessing of being able to live life on a higher level, with a new quality. What a precious, priceless thing this is!

James raises a caution flag in verses 13-15. Although good **can** come from the trials and tribulations which have an element of temptation in them, remember, he says, the dynamics of this process. Don’t **ever** think that God sends things that have in them this element of temptation to do evil. That you can count on! The persecutions were the work of Satan. James doesn’t mention Satan because his focus here happened to be upon the idea of helping his readers to understand and be aware of their own inner weakness and inclination to be sidetracked from their commitment to Christ.

Whatever you do, James counsels, don’t allow yourself to

blame circumstances “out there” for any spiritual failures on your part. The dynamics of temptation to sin involve, first and foremost, **that over which you have control**. “Each person is lured and enticed by **his own desire**.” The metaphor is taken from the world of hunting or fishing.

As game is lured from its cover, so human beings are led by their own lust away from the safety of self-restraint to sin. The language suddenly shifts to the terminology of obstetrics to show how desire is involved in the temptation and gives birth to sin. When sin takes place it gives birth to death! The bottom line is to recognize the temptation for what it is and not entertain it in your mind for a single moment — lest you be caught off guard and give in to sin. What an important guideline for us. It’s a matter of spiritual life and death. **So get it straight!**

#### OUR QUEST FOR GODLY MATURITY — WITH GOD’S HELP JAMES 1:16-27

In what James wrote in the previous verses and in what he says in verse 16, he was responding to a problem regarding his people. It was a serious matter for people to have **misconceptions** about how to respond to the circumstances into which they had fallen because of their allegiance to Christ and the Christian way of life. James has to do his best to show them that God wasn’t behind these temptations. Therefore, verse 16 begins with a present tense imperative, which is best rendered: “**Stop being deceived!**”

Then he makes the point emphatically that only what is good and holy can come from God. It **can’t ever** be otherwise, because God doesn’t change. He’s not like the lights in the heavens, which go through their daily cycle of appearing to change between light and darkness due to the rotation of the earth on its axis. The point is, God is always good, and does only good things, period!

James goes on to say, remember this as you think about God’s involvement in the circumstances of your life: It was God’s idea to bring us to faith. In fact, it was **all** His doing. He accomplished this wonderful thing in our lives by the “Word of Truth.” In his translation of this verse, Martin Luther puts it this way, bringing out the idea of human birth: “of His own gracious will He gave birth to us through the word of Truth.” James doesn’t elaborate a whole lot

on this, probably because he knows he isn't telling them anything they don't already know. However, in saying what he did, James shows that he fully understood the idea of justification by faith through grace. Our faith, which brings us into a blessed relationship with God, is God's **gift** to us.

In giving this "second birth" to us, God also had in mind that we should be "a kind of first fruits of His creatures" (vs. 18). The people with Jewish background knew about the "first fruits." The first fruits of the trees and the crops were to be offered to God as part of their worship. Furthermore, they were to be without spot or blemish according to Levitical Law. That certainly was God's wish for the new members of His earthly family to whom He had given birth. He wanted them to reflect His nature, His innate goodness. This was not a new idea for the children of God in that day and time. It sounds a lot like the Apostle Paul who wrote to the Ephesians, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).

The bottom line is that if God has gone to so much trouble to bring us to faith and set our feet on the pathway of righteousness, does it make sense that He would try to put obstacles in our way and try to trip us up? No way! And don't ever forget it, "my beloved brethren" (vs. 19). The point is, each person has responsibility to take care of his or her life if this new God-given life is to flourish and express itself to the fullest. James spells this out in the rest of chapter one.

What are some things that can interfere with the important development of the spiritual maturity of the sons and daughters of God? There are things that will interfere with a profitable involvement with the "Word of Truth." One of these personality traits seems to be a tendency to talk a lot and unwillingness to listen. When you are talking you are not learning. This is especially important when it comes to our relationship with God.

Another obstacle to the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word, according to James, is the emotion of **anger**. The people he was trying to minister to had reason to be angry with the sources of hostility towards them. Deep down inside they may have even been angry with God

for letting these awful things happen to them and to their loved ones. James nails anger as totally non-productive when it comes to developing a growing in spirituality.

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*"James referred to this former way of life as a stained garment, to be taken off and tossed aside."*

Another thing to get rid of would be any bad habits of thought or behavior which were carry-overs from their way of life prior to conversion (vs. 21). James referred to this former way of life as a stained garment, to be taken off and tossed aside. Doing this will clear the way for the "engrafted (implanted) word" to be received into their minds "with meekness." Meekness is a word that describes an attitude of openness, of willingness to be taught, of eagerness to learn!

It is the implanted Word — not their firm resolve — which is the source of power for people who honor God. James understands very well that not only our justification is totally the work of God's Holy Spirit, our sanctification is too! And God works through means. When we receive with meekness the implanted Word, the Holy Spirit can energize us and enable us to be and to do what God wills in our lives. This is something we should be concerned about, maybe even more than about getting to heaven when we die. God will take us to heaven when our time comes. Meantime, we have a job to do: live to His glory.

Verse 22 is probably the theme verse for the entire Epistle of James. "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Again, this sounds like Jesus in Matthew 7:21 (RSV). "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father, Who is in heaven."

Apparently this was a problem with those new Christians to whom James wrote. It would not have been too surprising to find a carry-over from the former ways of their religious thinking. They had been instructed by scribes and Pharisees who knew the Scriptures well, but didn't have such follow through in their lives. They could argue and debate the question: "Who is my neighbor?" for hours, or even days, but they could "pass by on the other side"

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*God does not want hearers and repeaters of words (James 1:22),  
but followers and doers, and this occurs in faith through love.*

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without helping a man in real need, and feel perfectly okay about it.

James says a person who “hears and doesn’t do,” is like a man who looks into a mirror; he studies his appearance, but goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. Why bother? Listening to the truth is not an end in itself anymore than looking in a mirror is — except for a vain person! The right way to look deeply into the mirror of the Word is to see the law of liberty and see something we **want** to do. It means making a note of what needs changing, and with God’s help, be determined to do it. It’s the law of liberty, which enables the Christian to find true freedom in the service of God.

Verses 26 and 27 are examples in which the truth is put into practice...“Bridling the tongue” points to the need for God’s people to be on their guard against using their tongue in a vicious manner. Maybe the persecuted Christians from the Christian church in Jerusalem were prone to use vicious words against their persecutors. We don’t know. Martin Luther says: “The widespread vice of backbiting and judging the sins of others is just about the most accursed sin on earth. All other sins contaminate and harm only him who commits them, but this miserable yelping cur has to befoul and ruin himself with the sins of others.”

Doing deeds of love shows that there is genuineness in the religiousness of a person, as far as God is concerned. In this case, James refers to visiting the orphans and widows in their affliction. Psalm 68:5 (NIV) speaks of this as the works of God Himself: “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.” This is “faith expressing itself in love,” in the spirit of Galatians 5:6.

And finally, the person who is sincere about living God’s way is careful not to allow the evil world to pollute his values. He doesn’t “go with the flow.” He is discriminating about the influences to which he exposes himself. He keeps himself unspotted, unstained, from the world. He knows he is vulnerable — and he takes care!

Is any of this out of line as we compare it with Lutheran theology? Dr. Martin Luther in a sermon on March 9, 1522 said: “Dear friends, the Kingdom of God — and we are that Kingdom — does not consist in talk or words (1 Corinthians 4:20), but in activity, in deed, in works, in exercises. God does not want hearers and repeaters of words (James 1:22), but followers and doers, and this occurs in faith through love. For a faith without love is not enough, rather it is not faith at all, but a counterfeit of faith, just as a face seen in a glass/mirror is not a real face, but merely a reflection of a face (1 Corinthians 13:12).”