

LESSONS FROM JAMES

I love the letter that James wrote to those Jewish converts to Christianity who had been scattered from Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen. Of course, we know James as the brother of our Lord Jesus, and his take on his brother's teachings are simple and to the point. Maybe that's why I like the letter of James so much—it is filled with practical lessons for how all of us are to live to please God.

Most certainly, some of the things James says sound impractical and illogical to the ears of those whose lives have not been changed by the words and example of Jesus Christ. Take **James 1:2** where James says for us to **“consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”** How in the world can facing trials, temptations, and persecution be considered **“pure joy”** in the view of anyone? James explains that our hearts should be filled with joy because those trials produce the perseverance that allows us to endure those difficulties. The ability to see things in this way comes from God's wisdom, which James says God gives generously to those who ask. God will show us how to endure. We also know that a reward is available for those of us who are successful at persevering. **(verse 12)**

James also says that we should not be conceited. That's somewhat difficult to many of us. We have a tendency to think pretty highly of ourselves. The fact that James is saying this to wealthy Jewish converts makes the lesson even more difficult. The “specialness” that the Jews had felt and the favor that they thought God had showed them was hard to let go of. The acceptance of poor Gentiles into the “Israel of God” was a tough pill for them to swallow. However, James tells them in plain language that they were no better than anyone else. Both will **“fade away.”** It seems as if James is channeling Jesus when Jesus said in **Matthew 20:16** that **“the last will be first, and the first will be last.”** Those who assumed superiority would be brought down. Those the world considered “losers” would be exalted.

James tells his readers in **verses 13-15** that we are responsible for our own sin. It's not God's fault for making us with free will. **“When tempted, no one should say ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, is dragged away and enticed.”** Then a natural progression takes place: desire leads to sin and sin leads to spiritual death. Ezekiel said it in **Ezekiel 18:20**: **“The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.”** Our sin is nobody's fault but our own, and we will be held accountable.

It is my intention to continue looking at the practical letter of James in the next several editions of our **NEWSLETTER**. I hope everyone will find them as informative as I have.