

*If any of you lacks wisdom,
you should ask God.*

*Mercy triumphs over
judgment.*



Straight Talk for Holy Living



JAMES

*Show me your faith without
deeds, and I will show you
may faith by my deeds.*





Who wrote the book of James?

James 1:1

The author of this letter identifies himself as James. "James" is the English version of both the Greek and Hebrew name "Jacob."

There are many Jameses listed in the New Testament of the Bible, but only 3 have been considered to be the author of this letter.

- 1) James Zebedee, brother of John, one of the 12 apostles. However, James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I c.a. 43 A.D., making his death too early for the writing of this letter.
- 2) James son of Alphaeus (or James the Lesser) was also one of the 12 apostles, but very little is known about him outside of his mother Mary being present at Jesus' crucifixion. Tradition and history has not ascribed authorship of this letter to him.
- 3) Which leaves us as James, brother of Jude and half-brother of Jesus, as the most likely candidate.

Read through the following portions of the Bible to get an idea of James' faith journey.

Mark 6:1-6

Mark 3:20-21

John 7:1-5

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Acts 1:9-14

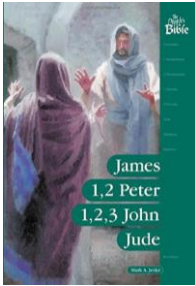
Galatians 1:13-20

Acts 12:16-19

Galatians 2:1-2,9-12 & Acts 15:1-21

Acts 21:18-26

PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: What happened to James?



In spite of James' strong loyalty to his Jewish heritage, he also was hated. Apparently the only thing sparing him from a fate similar to Paul's during those years was the protection of the Roman governor Festus. The Jewish-Roman historian of the first century, Flavius Josephus, wrote that after the death of Festus in A.D. 62, the Jewish high priest Annus II and the Sanhedrin had James stoned to death. The new Roman governor, Albinus, was so outraged at this flagrantly illegal act that he had Annus deposed. Thus ended the ministry of James of Jerusalem, brother of our Lord.

Dating the Letter of James

The letter of James does not have a precise date. Different scholars and commentators will date this letter to anywhere between 40 and 62 A.D. Internal evidence within James suggests that it was written before 50 A.D. The internal evidence is:

1. Its distinctively Jewish nature suggests that it was composed when the church was still predominantly Jewish.
2. It reflects a simple church order—officers of the church are called “elders” (5:14) and “teachers” (3:1), rather than bishops and deacons.
3. No reference is made to the controversy over Gentile circumcision.
4. The Greek term *synagogue* (“meeting”) is used to designate the meeting or meeting place of the church (2:2), which is a local Jewish congregation.

If this early dating is correct, this letter is the earliest of all the NT writings—with the possible exception of Galatians.

Who are the recipients of this letter?

Acts 8:1-4

Acts 11:19-24

Occasion

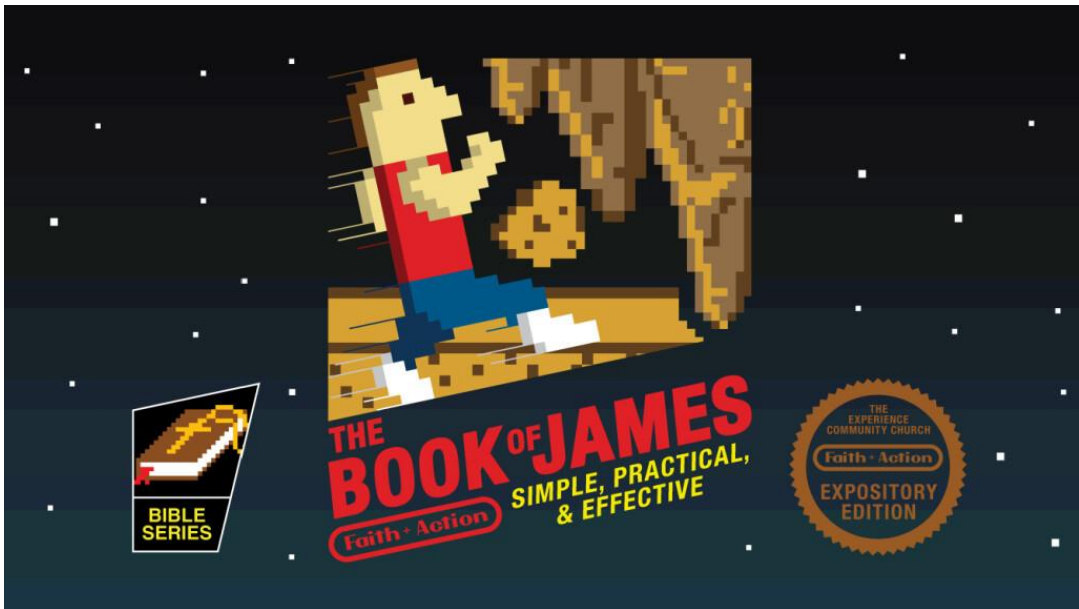
James writes almost nothing of basic Christian doctrine - he assumes that his readers already know of the mighty saving acts of God on behalf of his people. The name of Christ is mentioned only twice, briefly. James' letter is not concerned with evangelism or the difficulties of adjusting to spiritual life with Gentiles. It is, rather, a brilliant essay on Christian living. It is a vigorous attack on phony faith. Phony faith is that which exists in the head and mouth only and not in the heart and hands. James hated the notion of cheap grace, low expectations, careless living, merely theoretical Christianity. He wanted real faith for real life. He knew that God wanted to see faith in action, faith that works. Just as his brother Jude wrote against people who used the gospel as a license for immorality, James challenges his readers to let their faith become visible in how they treated other people.

Style

James writes with calm authority. He is blunt, assured, and direct. He does not discuss theory, he just issues one command after another. There are no words of praise, just bracing words of instruction on how real faith produces real fruit. These are not the words of an illiterate carpenter - his Greek is good, and his vocabulary wide. He loves using down-to-earth, nature-based picture language - the sea, wind, sun, grass, flowers, horses, birds, sea creatures, springs, figs, olives, grape vines, rain, farming.

In this way, James shows numerous similarities to the teachings of Jesus, especially as recorded in Matthew (c.f. **James 1:27** with **Matthew 25:36**; **James 2:10** with **Matthew 5:19**; **James 2:15–16** with **Matthew 25:35–36**; **James 3:11–12** with **Matthew 7:15–19**; **James 3:18** with **Matthew 5:9**; **James 4:10** with **Matthew 23:12**; **James 5:2–3** with **Matthew 6:19**; **James 5:10** with **Matthew 5:12**; **23:34**; **James 5:12** with **Matthew 5:34**; **James 5:19–20** with **Matthew 18:15**).

James is also similar to the wisdom literature of the OT, such as Proverbs, with 54 imperatives in its 108 verses. James describes the type of life a Christian should live and some common sins he should overcome—as a child of God whose life is molded by the gospel of God's grace.



Outline & Theme

Straight Talk for Holy Living

- I. Greeting (1:1)
- II. Trials and temptations (1:2–18)
- III. Hearers and doers (1:19–27)
- IV. Favoritism and love (2:1–13)
- V. Dead faith and real faith (2:14–26)
- VI. The tongue and wisdom (3:1–18)
- VII. Submission and humility (4:1–12)
- VIII. Plans and priorities (4:13–5:6)
- IX. Patience and prayer (5:7–20)

JAMES

FAITH + ACTION

James 1:2-8

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

What does James want us to consider when we experience trials of many kinds?

What would happen if we experienced no trials in our lives? To our faith in Christ?

What do we learn about prayer in these verses? (c.f. **Matthew 7:7-11**)



Self-Reflection: What have I not received from God that I also haven't asked for?

James 1:9-11

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

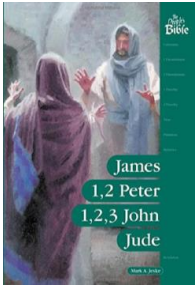
How does a believer in humble circumstances take pride in his high position? (c.f. **Luke 6:20-22**)

How does a rich believer take pride in his low position?

James 1:12-18

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

What is the difference between testing and tempting?



PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: Why Does God Test Me?

While God indeed allows, and sometimes even may send, hardships upon his children, his purpose in that is always good: to test their faith as genuine and to draw them closer to him, away from this sick and dying planet. God never, ever, wants his children to choose evil. Our temptation problem is not from God but really comes from within: cooking away in each person's heart is a sinful self that will never be converted. It restlessly seeks to dominate our thinking and values. It will never submit to God.

Where does temptation and sin come from? Why is it good to realize this?

When we are going through all sorts of trials, what comfort is it to us that God the Father does not change like shifting shadows?

What does James mean by saying that God the Father "chose to give us birth through the word of truth"? (**verse 18**) (c.f. **John 3:3-8,14-21; Titus 3:3-7**)

James 1:19-27

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren,
let every man be swift to hear,
slow to speak, slow to wrath.

James 1:19



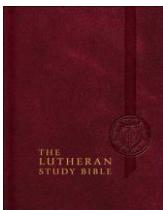
What do you do that helps you to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry?

What does the mirror analogy show you when it comes to applying God's Word in your life?



How does the "perfect law" give freedom? (**verse 25**)

How does a real faith in God become evident in real life?



LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE: Pure and Faultless Religion?

In James, religion is not a set of beliefs or a movement, but the deeds that a person does because of his beliefs. In James, the world encourages values and behaviors that are opposed to God and His righteousness (**3:6; 4:4**). Thoughts and actions that come from God are "pure and undefiled"; those that do not come from God destroy the perfect righteousness He gives.



James 2:1-13

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

How might we show favoritism in our congregation?



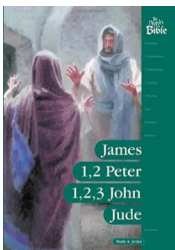
Self-Reflection: How might I show favoritism at church? What can I do to change that?

Why is showing favoritism so evil?

How does mercy help us combat favoritism?

Reread **verse 10**. Compare it to **Matthew 5:48** & **Galatians 3:10**. Let it sink in. What does these passages convict you of? How do **verses 12-13** restore us?

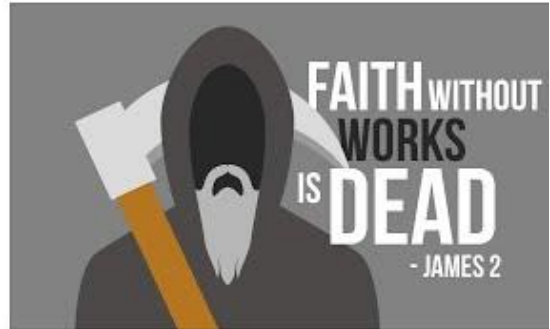
PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: Judged by the Law that Gives Freedom (Verse 12)



James is referring to the whole of God's Word. In the New Testament, we are free from our sins - in Christ. We have risen with Christ and now live with him in service to God. "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" the writer to the Hebrews asks (**2:3**). We are not going to be judged by God's promises. But we will be judged on the basis of whether we have accepted them or rejected them as evidenced by our lives.

James 2:14-26

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

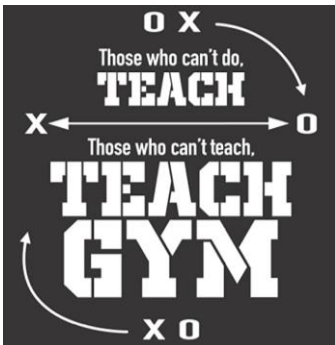


What is the relationship between faith in Christ and good works? Are good works the root of our faith or the fruit of our faith? Consider also **Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 10:1-13; John 15:5-17; Romans 4:1-25; Hebrews 11:8-19; & Matthew 25:31-46.**



James 3:1-12

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:



Do not presume to be teachers? Why do you think James brings up the matter of teaching, urging people to think twice before they strive to teach others?

We all stumble in many ways. (**Verse 2**) Going back to **2:10**, we have it confirmed here that we all have broken the whole law of God. Can we still be the perfect person, never at fault with what we say, keeping our whole body in check?

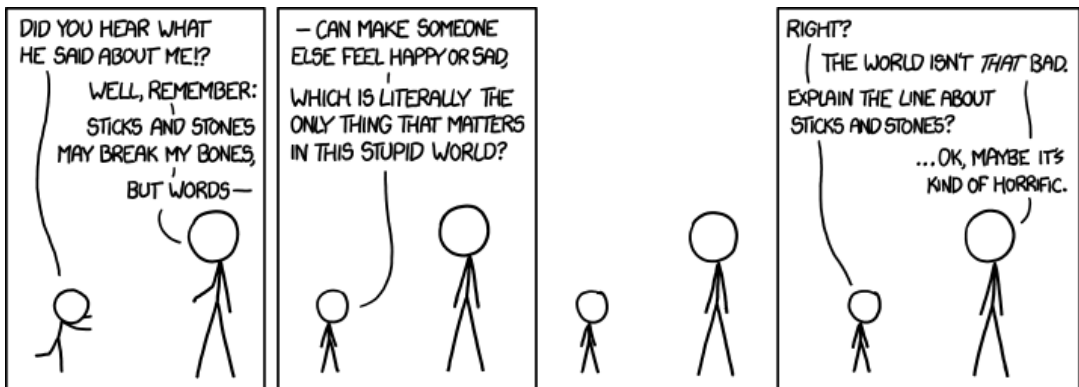
What illustrations does James use to show how powerful the tongue is?

STICKS and STONES
may BREAK my BONES
but WORDS
will INFECT my MIND

Words are powerful.
Use them wisely.

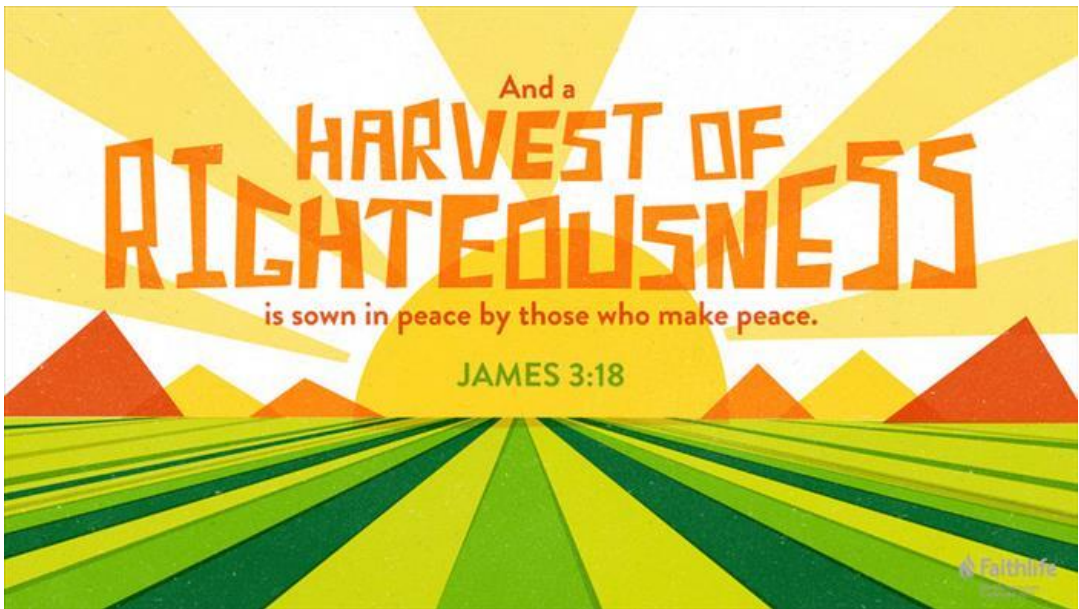
-Beatrice the Biologist

Do we do a disservice to people when we teach them, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me?" What should we teach our children and fellow Christians about words, the use of our tongues?





Self-Reflection: Think of one Sunday when you praised God in church but then went home and used your tongue to gossip or even curse another person. What does this make you repent of? What can help you in the future use your tongue only to praise God and build others up?



James 3:13-18

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

True wisdom comes from God. What is that wisdom like, according to James?



Self-Reflection: Choose one characteristic you would like more of. Pray that the Lord gives you more of that characteristic of true wisdom.

In **verses 14 and 15**, James describes another kind of wisdom. What is that? Why do you think he calls it wisdom?

Why does wisdom make a person humble?



Self-Reflection: How do you think you can be more of a peacemaker in...

- Your Home?
- Your Church?
- Your Work?
- Online?



James 4:1-10

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

What have you noticed causes fights and quarrels between you and other people?

In this section, what are some reasons that James gives us for when we have asked God for things but not received them?

In thinking about asking with wrong motives, how does **Romans 8:26-27** help us in our prayer life?



Self-Reflection: Take time to examine your current prayers and your prayer life in general. With what you learned today with James' straight talk about prayer, how will you modify your prayers and prayer life?

What are some ways that we seek friendship with the world, in the way James is speaking of it here?

How is friendship with the world hatred toward God?

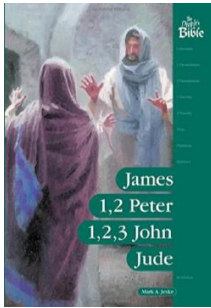
EVANGELICAL HERITAGE VERSION STUDY BIBLE: No Friends in the World?



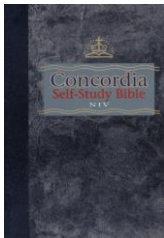
The Evangelical
Heritage Version
Study Bible

[Verse 4] is not suggesting that Christians cut themselves off from the world. Jesus tells his followers they are the light of the world (**Matthew 5:14**) and that they are to carry the gospel into all the world (**Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15**). Christians live in the world, but they are not friends with the world because they do not share the sinful values and lifestyles of the wicked people of this world (**1 Corinthians 5:9–12; 1 Peter 4:2–4; 1 John 2:15–16**).

PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: What's Up with James 4:5?



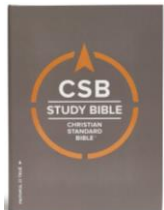
Verse 5 is a difficult verse. There doesn't seem to be any other Bible passage that says those things in those words. James' point is that the Holy Spirit, who lives in us as his temple, cares passionately about our jobs, dreams, priorities, and words. Another way to read the verse is to see it really as two questions (the original Greek text does not have punctuation as precise as ours, and verse 5 could well be two questions): Or do you think Scripture speaks without reason? Does the Spirit he caused to live in us desire envy? The point is clear: the relationship-wrecking poison of envy is a fruit not of the Spirit but of Satan.



CONCORDIA SELF-STUDY BIBLE: Is James 4:5 a Quotation?

Some worry that James was wrong when he quoted a passage that says, "The spirit he made to dwell in us envies intensely," because no such verse exists in the Bible. However, he was not citing an Old Testament verse word for word but was giving a broad summary of several OT statements. Plenty of passages in the OT describe God as jealous and as One who forbids idolatry (e.g., **Exodus 34:14**; **Deuteronomy 4:23–26**; **6:14–15**; **Joshua 24:19–20**).

CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE STUDY BIBLE: What is the Grace in James 4:6?



The phrase "but he gives greater grace" introduces the main point - God's grace is able to overcome unfaithfulness. The exhortation to repent is backed by a stark reality expressed in **Proverbs 3:34** and quoted here by James: God resists the proud. Resist is a military term used to describe an army arrayed for battle. To remain in sinful pride is to invite God's battle array against you. In contrast to this, God gives grace to the humble (**1:17**).

What do **verses 7-10** look like in the life of a Christian?

PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: The Life of a Christian (James 4:7-10)

- 1) *Submit yourselves to God.* When people are living in defiance of the First Commandment, when they do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things, their obedience to all the rest of the commandments will unravel. To submit to God means to believe his claim that you are accountable to him, to acknowledge him as first in your life, to subordinate your will to his, to open your ears and heart to his Word, to let him steer your choices and decisions, to let him set your limits of right and wrong. This is not slavery but the perfect law that gives sweet freedom. Rather, it is obsession with self that is slavery.
- 2) *Resist the devil.* Every military strategist knows that warfare is waged not only with weapons but with psychology. Breaking the enemy's confidence and will to resist can be just as effective in defeating him as a frontal assault. Satan knows this. He floods us with propaganda that his evil ways are inevitable, good, harmless, irresistible, and fulfilling. Resist him! Fight! Armed with God's Word, you are stronger than he, and he will flee from you!
- 3) *Come near to God.* Through the blood of Jesus, it is never too late. Through the miracle of God's grace, a repentant sinner is never turned away. And when God draws near to you, good things happen, and your life gets better in every way.
- 4) *Wash your hands.* This is picture language for repenting for all the evil things your hands have done. Soap and water cannot do what God demands, but faith in Christ gives Christians clean hands.
- 5) *Purify yourselves.* James refers to his listeners as "double-minded." A great trick of Satan's is to persuade people to keep their religious beliefs compartmentalized, "Sundayized," cut off from influencing their day-to-day words and actions in the real world. James urges us to break down the walls that keep our scriptural faith isolated and to be single-mindedly devoted to God.
- 6) *Grieve, mourn, and wail.* This may seem peculiar coming from a man whose letter began with a "Rejoice!" greeting. James is not saying that a Christian's life must be characterized by constant grief. He is saying what his brother Jesus said in **Luke 6:21**: "Blessed are you who weep now." Grieving, mourning, and wailing are appropriate and necessary for people who have been finding joy in sinning. James' point is this: real repentance is not only theoretical but emotional too, affecting the whole person (see **Psalms 32** and **38**).
- 7) *Humble yourselves before the Lord.* There can be no spiritual health and soundness in a person until he acknowledges sinful failures and asks God for mercy instead of demanding wages.



James 4:11-12

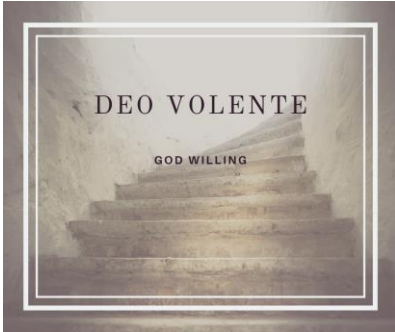
Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

Balance these verses is **Matthew 7:1-5**.

What, then, does judgment by Christians look like?

James 4:13-17

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:



Whenever you make plans, what should you always keep in mind? Compare these thoughts to **Proverbs 16:1-9**.

How does **verse 15** help keep us from boasting and bragging and instead keep us humble?

According to **verse 17**, what is also a sin?



Self-Reflection: How might you better acknowledge the Lord when you make plans or set goals?



James 5:1-6

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

Riches are a blessing from God, but what do people with riches have to be on guard against?

What is so ironic about the wealthy person hoarding wealth in the last days? (**verse 3**)

James makes an equally ironic statement, "You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter" (**verse 5**). What does he mean by this?

What does this “straight talk on holy living” connect to earlier sections of James? (c.f. **2:2-7; 4:13-17**)

If you were not a rich person reading this, what would you take away from these verses?

James 5:7-11

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

To be patient means that we will suffer long. What from these verses help us to be patient and stand firm in our faith in God?

EVANGELICAL HERITAGE VERSION STUDY BIBLE: Patient Farming



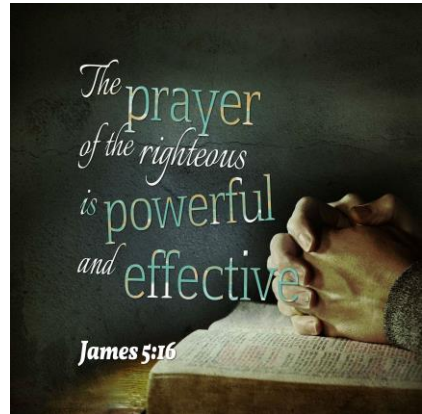
In Israel the early rains fell in October and November and started the growth of the newly planted grain. The late rains fell in March and April and completed the growth of the crops soon to be harvested. Both rains were very necessary for a successful harvest.

What will be the negative impacts on a congregation if the members are grumbling against each other?

James 5:12-18

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

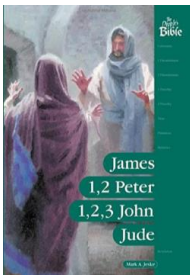
Why does a person who swears imply that he or she is not trustworthy?



What are good ways to use God's name?

Why is the prayer of a righteous person powerful and effective?

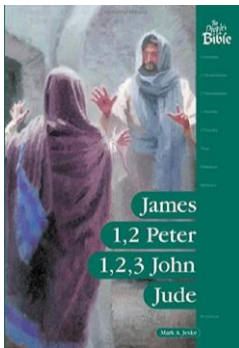
PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: Prayer Honors God



Prayer honors God by showing that we trust and respect his unlimited power, his unlimited wisdom, and his unlimited love. Praying shows that a child of God actually believes that he or she has a personal relationship with the God who is here and who acts. Prayer is verbal confidence in the Lord's promise not just to watch his children from a distance but to intervene in their lives upon their request, to make good things happen for them. Prayer is God's gift to his people to help them see themselves not as helpless prisoners of fate but active participants in how God directs his world. The Savior guarantees access; the Father promises to listen, always; the Spirit promises to fill in the gaps and interpret... God wants us to know that he has many good things for us that he deliberately holds back, waiting for us to ask.

In our day, sickness is often dealt with in a rather clinical way, setting the illness apart from the spiritual life of the sick person. How should God's people deal with sickness?

PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: Understanding the Elders Visit



First, this application of oil does not refer to what some Christians call the "last rites." Putting a dab of oil on various parts of the body of a dead person or of one near death is not scriptural, has nothing to do with this passage, and does absolutely nothing for a person. Second, the Greek word in verse 14 translated anoint is different from the word used for the important Old Testament ceremonial applications of oil. That word, from which come the terms Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek), refers to God's public choice and empowerment of a special man chosen for a big job. The greatest of all the anointings in the Bible is, of course, Jesus' anointing. Third, this verse does not refer to some

supernatural channel for miraculous healing given hereafter to all Christians - **verse 14** is not instituting a third sacrament.

There is no good translation of this other word for applying oil. It means literally to oil something, as we would oil a motor or a door hinge. It doesn't mean to touch a few drops ceremonially but to apply oil as needed for functional purposes. James could mean one of two things here. The first is to realize that in folk medicine in the ancient world, oil was thought to have medicinal qualities. Olive oil was widely used as a soothing balm for sores, wounds, or injuries (as in **Isaiah 1:6**). The good Samaritan in Jesus' parable used oil to dress the wounds of the man beaten and robbed (**Luke 10:34**). The ancient writers Pliny, Philo, and the physician Galen praised this medicinal use of olive oil. James' point then would be to use prayer along with regular medical procedures when a brother or sister was sick.

There is another possible way to understand James' reference. In **Mark 6:13** we read that Jesus' disciples, given special powers from Christ Jesus to heal instantaneously with a word, used applications of oil to the people they were curing. The purpose of that unusual procedure may have been the same as Jesus' use of mud and spit in his healing of the blind men in John chapter 9—to use some special, outward eye-catching substance to focus attention on the miraculous nature of the healing. James wrote this letter early in the

apostolic age, in a time before the New Testament was written and circulated, when the Spirit's special gifts and manifestations of miraculous power supported the preaching of the Word. James may have been referring to the use of oil as an attention-getting device in such miraculous healings performed by leaders in the church. In either case, it is understandable why the church no longer uses olive oil in connection with intercessory prayer or sick visits.

Another important aspect of the healing mentioned by James is the spiritual aspect. When people are burdened with a load of guilt before God, they can become physically sick. When people are consumed with bitterness or anger or hatred toward another person, they can become physically sick or a small illness can blow up into something more serious. In **verses 15 and 16**, James urges the visiting elders to help people repent of their sins and be assured of God's mercy and forgiveness. As they confess their sins and receive absolution, they will also find healing from the poisons of hatred and anger.

James 5:19-20

Straight Talk for Holy Living in this Section:

Why are the last two verses in the book of James a fitting conclusion to this very practical book for Christian living? How do they summarize what our attitude should be?

MANY JACOBS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:

SON OF ZEBEDEE
SON OF ALPHAI
BROTHER OF JESUS
(SEE MARK 6:3)

† = crown

A.K.A.
JACOB
HEBREW: YAAKOV
GREEK: IAKOBOS

THE LETTER JACOB

JESUS' TWELVE DISCIPLES
(SEE MARK 3:16-19)

SEE ACTS 12:15, GALATIANS 1-2

- LEADER OF THE MESSIANIC MOTHER CHURCH IN JERUSALEM
- LIVED THROUGH FAMINE, POVERTY, & PERSECUTION

SUMS UP THE BOOK'S MAIN IDEAS & KEY WORDS

1 INTRODUCTION

REPEATED 7 TIMES!
HEBREW: TAMIM
GREEK: TELEIOS
"WHOLENESS" & "INTEGRITY"
VS.
FRACTURED & INCONSISTENT

v2-1
LIFE'S TRIALS PRODUCE ENDURANCE & CAN MAKE US "PERFECT"

v9-11
POVERTY CAN HELP US TO TRUST & WEALTH WILL PASS

2:1-13 FAVORITISM VS. LOVE

SEE MATTHEW 5:46-48

YOU GOT THIS!


2:17-26 GENUINE FAITH

SEE MATTHEW 7:21-27

3:1-12 THE TONGUE

PRAISE GOD!
YOU IDIOT!
SEE LUKE 6:43-45

3:13-18 TRUE VS. FALSE WISDOM
SEE MATTHEW 5:3-11

4:1-10 A DIVIDED HEART

SEE MATTHEW 6:24

4:11-12 CONDEMNING OTHERS

SEE MATTHEW 12:36-37

2-5 12 TEACHINGS ABOUT WHO

MASTER OF WISDOM

THE LEGACY OF JACOB'S WISDOM
A LETTER TO: ALL OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS

TWO MAIN INFLUENCES:

JESUS' TEACHING
—especially the—
SERMON ON THE MOUNT
SEE MATTHEW 5-7

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS
—especially—
CHAPTERS 1-9

SHORT WISDOM SPEECHES FULL OF METAPHORS & ONE-LINERS



INTRODUCTION

v.5-8 GOD GIVES WISDOM TO THOSE WHO ASK IN FAITH

v.19-27 DON'T JUST LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD, BUT DO IT.
—THE TORAH OF FREEDOM—
CALLS US TO:
• SPEAK WITH LOVE
• SERVE THE POOR
• TO BE WHOLLY DEVOTED TO GOD

JESUS' SUMMARY OF THE TORAH:
LOVE GOD & LOVE NEIGHBOR
SEE MATTHEW 22:37-40

5:19-20 RESTORING OTHERS
SEE MATTHEW 18:15

5:13-18 FAITH-FILLED PRAYER
SEE MATTHEW 21:21-22

v.12-16 GOD IS GENEROUS & GIVES US NEW BIRTH THROUGH JESUS

FORCE GOD AWAY

5:1-6 THE DANGER OF WEALTH
YOUR WEALTH WILL ROT, JUST LIKE YOU!

4:13-17 THE ARROGANCE OF WEALTH
ESTIMATED PROFITS
YOUR LIFE IS JUST A MIST!
SEE MATTHEW 6:28-34

5:12 LET YOUR "YES" MEAN "YES"
TELLING THE TRUTH
SEE MATTHEW 5:37

5:7-11 PATIENCE & ENDURANCE
COME LORD JESUS...
SEE MATTHEW 24:13

HEARTED DEVOTION TO JESUS



LIGHT OF THE VALLEY

—LUTHERAN CHURCH—

SHINING THE LIGHT OF JESUS

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Worship

Sundays at 10:30 am

Mondays at 7:00 pm

Bible Study for All Ages

Sundays at 9:15 am

This Bible study was written and produced by Pastor Jon Klein.

Call, text, or e-mail with any question.

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