

# ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **Faith and Wisdom in James**

August 2020

Winter Quarter

**August 1, 2020**

## **Lesson #1 – Faith and Wisdom**

### **Scripture Focus – James 1:1-11**

#### **ICE BREAKERS –**

1. How can doubting affect a person's prayer life?
2. What are some ways to encourage a friend who feels that God is not answering his or her prayers because of a lack of faith?
3. What should you do when you begin to recognize double-mindedness in yourself?

**Key Verse: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. —James 1:5**

#### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

There may be as many as five men by the name of James in the New Testament, so we take care not to mix them up (see Mark 1:19; 3:18; 6:3; 15:40; Luke 6:16). Tradition has taken the author of the book of James to refer to James who was the half-brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19).

Jesus and James grew up in a large family (see Mark 6:3, lesson 7). Along with the other brothers of Jesus, James did not believe in Jesus during Jesus' lifetime (John 7:3-5). But when the Day of Pentecost arrived after Jesus' resurrection, they had come around (Acts 1:14). Paul indicates that James himself had been a witness of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-7).

The chronology is not entirely clear, but perhaps by the mid-40s in the first century, James had become a leader in the Jerusalem church. His exact role is not specified, but Paul associates him with the apostles on at least one occasion (Galatians 1:19). Paul also lists James among the “pillars” of the church (2:9); James was a leader in a group that included apostles and elders (Acts 15).

The significance of this is heightened when we consider the centrality of Jerusalem in the thinking of the earliest Christians, who were of Jewish background. The Jerusalem church was more than just one congregation among many; it was the mother church. What happened there mattered to the entire church (example: Acts 15:4, 22-29). We see James's impact on the first-century

church in the account of what is called the Jerusalem Council as he gave the final, decisive word on the matter at hand (15:13-21). That was about AD 51.

The letter of James therefore had to have been written prior to James's death in AD 62. Given the other details of his life, a reasonable supposition is that the letter was written in the 50s, making it one of the earliest of the New Testament documents. Very likely it was written from Jerusalem, given the status of the writer there (see above).

Structurally, the epistle lacks many of the features of an ancient letter, features that we see throughout Paul's letters. It opens with the standard opening features of sender, recipients, and greeting. Beyond that, however, it lacks a thanksgiving (characteristic of Paul's letters; example: Romans 1:8-10), a standard letter body, and a closing (example: Romans 16).

The letter proceeds loosely from subject to subject, repeatedly returning to a handful of prominent topics. Those include trials (example: James 1:2-4, below), wisdom (example: 1:5-8, below), and wealth (example: 1:9-11, below).

The letter approaches Christian living from the obvious backdrop of Judaism. This is evident in the author's use of the Old Testament: he quotes from it five times (in James 2:8, 11 [twice], 23; 4:6) and alludes to it at least that many more times (see 1:10; 2:1, 21, 25; 5:11, 17, 18).

## **LESSON COMMENTARY**

### I. Salutation ( 1:1)

1:1. James (see Introduction: Author) is God's bond-servant ( *doulos*, "slave"), a term used of Christ's willing submission to the Father ( *Php* 2:7). He wrote to Jewish Christians ( twelve tribes; cf. *Lk* 22:30) who were dispersed abroad, a likely reference to the scattering of *Ac* 8:1. Greetings ( *chairō*) also means "rejoice" (cf. v. 2).

### II. Prologue of the Letter: Testing of Faith ( 1:2-18)

#### A. Perfect Design for Testing (1:2-8)

1:2-3. The readers are to consider their trials with all (not some) joy. Trials are unpredictable (encounter means "fall into") and not all the same ( various). The testing of... faith is designed to reveal the quality of one's faith and to produce stamina. Testing could also be translated "the approved part" of one's faith. It is

not just the tested faith that produces endurance; it is the approved or genuine part of one's faith that produces maturity.

1:4-8. Believers must cooperate with God and let endurance have its beneficial outcome. The words perfect [two times, teleios] and complete introduce the theme of maturity (see Introduction). In maturity, believers are lacking in nothing spiritually (cf. 1Co 2:15; Heb 5:14). In trials the believer often lacks wisdom, or "skill for living" ( v. 5). "Wisdom" is not primarily knowledge, but godly behavior in difficult situations (cf. 3:15). The solution is to ask... God for it. The readers may have viewed God as miserly and critical, but God gives to all generously and without reproach. The prayer for skill for dealing with trials is answered liberally and willingly. Requests must be offered in faith without any doubting ( v. 6), since in the NT doubting is usually treated as sin and that which opposes faith (cf. Mt 14:31; Rm 14:23). The imagery of the surf of the sea that is tossed by the wind depicts the instability of the immature. The man who doubts ought not to expect that he will receive anything of wisdom from the Lord ( v. 7), since he is double-minded (cf. 4:8). Caught between following Christ and the world ( 1:27; 4:4), the doubter becomes unstable in all his ways.

#### B. Proper Perspective in Testing ( 1:9-11)

1:9-11. Joy is dependent on how believers "consider" ( v. 2) their circumstances. The follower of Christ who is poor ( brother of humble circumstances) needs to glory or boast in his trials because God is lovingly developing his character through trials. This is a high position. The rich man ( v. 10) is to glory in his humiliation, i.e., his mortality. The rich are no different from beautiful, but temporary, flowering grass. James probably had in mind physical death for the rich person, which might come suddenly, even in the midst of one's pursuits. At that time, wealth is of no advantage.

**LESSON NUGGET** – You need wisdom in trials so you will not waste your suffering and miss the spiritual growth that should result. When you trust God, trials work for you and not against you; but be sure your heart is wholly yielded to Him. If your heart and mind are divided, trials will tear you apart.

**Sources:** *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*