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This session we will study the book of James. It is one of the 21 epistles (letters) among the 27 books of the NT, and the only one by this particular human author.

Others named James are mentioned in the NT, but it is widely understood that the author of this epistle was James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Scripture records that Jesus had at least six siblings - James, Joseph, Simon, Judas and unnamed "sisters" in *Mark 6:3*. Judas (Jude) authored a NT epistle also.)

It is apparent that James (and some if not all of the siblings) did not believe in Christ as God's Son until after His death and resurrection. Christ appeared to James (*1Cor. 15:7*) after the resurrection which is likely when James came to faith.

James became a "pillar" in the early church (*Gal. 2:9*). As a respected leader in Jerusalem, he moderated the important church conference described in Acts 15. It is not recorded in Scripture, but tradition holds that James was martyred for the faith about AD 62. He was so hated by the Pharisees that they are said to have cast him down from the temple and then beaten him to death.

There are more than fifty imperative statements (commands) in the book of James. Often there are statements similar to Christ's "Sermon on the Mount", recorded in Matthew 5-7.

James' primary audience at the time is Jewish Christians (*1:1*). He quotes Scripture from the OT five times and alludes to many OT passages. These Jewish Christians were still living in the shadow of the OT law and had difficulty adjusting to the new covenant.

They were Jewish, but make no mistake that James is addressing the church (Christians). He addresses them as "brethren" at least 19 times. The terms "brethren" and "saints" are used most often in Scripture to refer to believers.

His primary audience was also dispersed (*1:1*) in more ways than one. The twelve tribes of Israel were indeed dispersed due to persecution. But the Greek term used carries the connotation of scattering seed - as they were scattered, the seed of the gospel went to many places.

James is a book of very practical instruction. It is often described as like "the Proverbs of the NT". The instruction is timeless and addresses issues that every believer can struggle with.

These issues include impatience, failure to control the tongue, fighting with others, coveting what others have, and materialism, among others. Any honest person must admit that we all can struggle with such issues.

Just as did those Jewish Christians in the first century AD, we continue to face problems within our personal lives and in our local churches.

Studying the book of James should lead us to examine our own hearts and should encourage us toward spiritual maturity. An overriding problem among believers then and now, indeed in every generation, is the failure to mature spiritually.

There is a difference between age and maturity. People certainly can (and many do) grow old without growing up. Spiritual immaturity causes many problems for people, for families, and for churches.

Just as a baby needs physical nourishment to grow into a child and then a mature adult, we need the spiritual nourishment of God's Word to grow toward spiritual maturity (*1Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:11-14; 1Peter 2:2*).

As Paul reminds Timothy (and us) (*1Tim 4:7-8*), "*exercise/discipline yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life that is to come.*" Maturity leads to an eternal perspective.

The study of James offers plenty of potential growth and understanding for anyone, whether a new Bible student or a mature biblical scholar. It will offer us opportunities for many thoughtful discussions in our journey to better know God and grow in maturity as is His desire and plan for us.

James 1

Greeting to the Twelve Tribes

¹ James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Profiting from Trials

² My brethren, count it all joy when you face various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ And let perseverance have *its* perfect result, that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, without doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not expect that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ *for he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

The Perspective of Rich and Poor

⁹ The brother of humble circumstances should glory in his high position, ¹⁰ but the one who is rich should glory in being humbled, because he shall pass away like a wildflower. ¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its flower falls, and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man also will fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Loving God Under Trials

¹² Blessed *is* the man who perseveres despite temptation; because when he has been stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own evil desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be, as it were, the firstfruits among His creatures.

Qualities Needed in Trials

¹⁹ So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Doers—Not Hearers Only

²¹ Therefore put aside all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and in humility receive the word planted in you, which is able to save your souls.

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only as those who deceive themselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his face in a mirror, ²⁴ and after seeing himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives liberty, and continues *to do this*, and is not a forgetful hearer but an effective doer - this one will be blessed in what he does.

²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious [*i.e. if anyone thinks that his outward behavior demonstrates worship of God*], and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* worthless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Memory Verse for the Week

¹ Timothy 4:7-8 - *Exercise and discipline yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life that is to come.*