

James

Chapter 1

Verse 1 The letter begins with a typical salutation acknowledging the written and the reader. So, who wrote it and to whom is it written? What do your Bible notes say about James? And what do they say about the Diaspora?

In verses 2-8 it speaks of faith and wisdom. Can you relate to what is written? Do you see trials as a joy? When has your faith ever been really tested? And how did you do on that test? Here we see that wisdom is a gift. Remember that young King Solomon asked God for wisdom and was granted it. What wisdom have you gained through studying the Bible? For James wisdom comes through faith and not doubting.

In verses 9-11 we read a version of what Jesus taught about the first being last and the last being first. Though Jesus seems to speak to both the rich and the poor with a warning and an encouragement respectively, here it seems to be written to the believer who is lowly. What do you make of the last line about a busy life and withering away? Do you know people like that?

In verses 12-16 James returns to the idea of testing or trials and temptations. Here it starts with what we know we are blessed when we have overcome the temptations. It may not feel like it while we are going through it, but afterwards and looking back we can feel the blessing that we have passed the test. When have you felt so blessed? He also affirms that God cannot tempt us, though God can lead us into temptation, that's why we pray God not do that in the Lord's prayer. You may remember after Jesus' baptism that it was the Holy Spirit who led him into the wilderness to be tempted. What are you being tempted by and how might we pray and help one another through it?

In verses 17-18 we read about generous acts of giving and gifts of God – specifically the gift of birth (or life). For what gifts do you thank God today, and what generous gifts might we share with others in thanksgiving for what we have received.

Verses 19-27 get us into one of the themes of this letter – doing good works. We are to listen to the word. I wonder if James thought there would be some who would react negatively or angrily to his letter? I like the concept of being doers of the word in verse 22. This takes us beyond just sitting in the pew and hearing the sermon but going and doing something with what we hear. How are you putting your faith into action? In what ways might you describe yourself as a doer of the word? In verse 26 he returns to the idea of not speaking or bridling their tongues and watching what they say. I wonder if he might be speaking to the Jews who were speaking against Jesus and the believers. What might he be saying to those today who preach against other believers with whom they disagree? How does verse 27 describe religion for you?