



Summary of James

Introduction

James was the brother of Jesus, designated as an apostle in Scripture, and a prominent leader in the early Jerusalem church, although he preferred to call himself a servant of Jesus Christ. He was martyred in Jerusalem in AD62, being stoned on the orders of the high priest Ananus.

He wrote to a group of predominately Jewish Christians, who were scattered around parts of the Roman Empire, were mainly poor and were being oppressed and persecuted.

The letter was written probably in the early to mid 40's AD, marking it as the earliest of the NT writings.

The letter does not follow the typical style of other NT epistles but is more of like that of the OT wisdom literature. In it James focuses his readership on the need for practical application of their faith and to that of patient endurance. He warns the rich not to oppress the poor and calls for genuine equality between believers.

Chapter One

James commences his letter by identifying himself and announcing that he is a servant of Jesus as the Christ, but makes no mention of being his brother as he fully submits to the lordship of Christ. He alludes to his readership as having a distinctive Jewish heritage or association at least.

After the inscription and salutation (v.1) believers are instructed as to how they should conduct themselves when under the Cross of Christ. Several graces and duties are recommended; and those who endure in their trials and afflictions, as James here directs, are pronounced blessed, being assured of a glorious reward (vv.2-12).

Those sins which bring sufferings, and the weakness and faults of men are chargeable to them. They are by no means to be imputed to God, who cannot be the author of sin, but is the author of all good (vv.13-18).

All aggressive passion, rash anger, and vile affections, need to be suppressed. The Word of God should become a believer's main focus in life; with what they hear

and know of it being put into continuous practise, otherwise their faith will prove but a vain thing. A believer's faith is revealed in the practicality of their lifestyle choices and actions (vv.19-27).

Chapter Two

James opens this chapter with an account of how believers are drawn into showing partiality towards the social status of others, and thus giving preference to the wealthy and influential, while paying little heed to those of lower esteem. Therefore, James states they are guilty of judging their brothers and sisters who were created their equal and should be treated as such.

James speaks of the perfection of God's law as shown in Scripture, which now includes the teachings of Christ, and he admonishes his readership to obey the full law with regard to their own growth and love for neighbour. He teaches that believers must speak and act in accordance with the law of freedom and with a view to the coming judgment.

James turns his attention to the correlation between faith and works. He does not say that salvation is by works but by faith. However, true faith will be demonstrated by the associated deeds that naturally accompany that faith.

In his argument on faith, James draws on two historical accounts from the OT: Abraham and Rahab, very different people, drawn from different ends of the social spectrum, but both who had faith in the promises and power of God, with their subsequent actions reflecting that faith.

Chapter Three

Firstly James establishes that nobody is perfect and that all believers make mistakes. Those who are called to be teachers will be judged more severely for the mistakes they make, especially those who take on the role without being called to it by God.

James provides examples of how small things can produce extreme results and then likens the tongue to a small but powerful organ that can be such a danger if it is not kept under control and then used wisely.

The tongue makes great boasts; it also is used to praise God, curse men and corrupt human hearts. This, James says, is unacceptable for a follower of Jesus. James also calls the tongue a restless evil that cannot be tamed in the way man has managed to tame wild animals.

James challenges his readership to show the fruit of their supposed wisdom, but then states it is actually wisdom to do evil or fulfil selfish ambition. Such wisdom is not from God but earthly and of the devil. Such wisdom can only lead to dissension and division.

James calls on them to ask God for his wisdom as that will bring peace, harmony and produces good fruit, a harvest of righteousness for God.

Chapter Four

The previous chapter spoke of the envy and contention in church that becomes a springboard for strife and discontentment. Here, James turns his attention to the

lusts of worldly power, pleasure and friendships, which carry the divisions in church to a shameful height.

James commences this chapter by addressing some quite distasteful aspects of human behaviour that was witnessed in the early church and is still apparently in evidence today. There are so many people who wish to use church as a place to build their own empire, or to impose their own stamp of authority in order to fulfil their own selfish ambitions, or just a place where they can manipulate well-intentioned people, and they do so in the basest, worldly manner, instead of submitting themselves to God and following his ways and his will.

James then shifts his focus on to wealthy businessmen who go about their work without due regard to what God's will is for them. Their attitude is one of presumption and even arrogance. James is not speaking out against business or wealth creation, but the godless attitude of some of those engaged in such businesses, and their cavalier approach to life.

Chapter Five

As James draws his letter to a close he denounces the judgments of God upon those wealthy landowners who oppress and enslave the poor, showing them how great their sin and folly are in the sight of God, and how grievous the punishments will be unless they mend their ways and repent (vv.1-6).

All of the faithful are called to patient forbearance under their trials and sufferings (vv.7-11). The sin of making false oaths is cautioned against in v.12.

Disciples of Christ are directed as to how they should act, both under affliction and in prosperity (v.13), whilst prayer for the sick, and their anointing with oil by the elders of the church, are prescribed in vv.14-15.

Christians are directed to acknowledge their faults to one another, to pray for each other, and the efficacy of prayer is proven (vv.16-18).

Finally, it is recommended that believers should do all that they can in bringing those that stray from the ways of truth back into the Kingdom of God.

Epilogue

James continued to faithfully serve his Lord in the Jerusalem church for about 20 years after writing this letter. He was a prominent figure in his day, as can be seen both from other NT Scriptures and historic documents from his day.

He was a thorn in the flesh to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem until AD62 when there was a hiatus in Roman rule due to the death of the governor Porcius Festus. The high priest Ananus took the opportunity of having James and other church leaders arrested on bogus charges of contravening the Law of Moses and had them all stoned to death. Ananus was subsequently removed from the high priesthood on the arrival of the new governor Luceius Albinus.

James was a faithful servant of God as both a Jew and then as a Christian. He has left a legacy for all believers in Christ to be thankful for. Surely he had prophesied his own reward: <<***Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him***>> (James 1:12).