

# **Read the Bible in a Year**

Week 47 – April 24-30

**Read on Your Own this Week:**

*Psalm 135-137*

*Luke 21-24*

**Readings in Class:**

Ezekiel 37-48

James 1-5

## **Introduction to James**

James is the first of what are sometimes referred to as the general or catholic epistles. Unlike Paul's letters, James, Peter, John, and Jude, appear to not be written to specific churches or people.

While there is some debate on the date of composition, many believe James is one of the earliest, if not the earliest New Testament book written, likely written before AD 50. It is distinctively Jewish in nature, which would imply that it was written before the Gentiles were predominant in the church.

The author of this letter is not James the disciple (brother of John). That James was killed around AD 43 (Acts 12:2). It is believed that the author is James the half-brother of Jesus who became one of the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem. James did not believe in Jesus during Jesus' ministry, but became a believer after the risen Jesus appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15:7).

## **A brief summary of James**

- Greetings (1:1)
- Trials and Temptations (1:2-18)
- Listening and Doing (1:19-27)
- Favoritism (2:1-13)
- Faith and Deeds (2:14-26)
- Taming the Tongue (3:1-12)
- Two kinds of Wisdom (3:13-18)
- Warning against Worldliness (4)
- Warning to the Rich (5:1-6)
- Patience in Suffering (5:7-12)
- The Prayer of Faith (5:13-20)

## **Practical Wisdom**

The book of James is a plea for practical Christian living. It is being written to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. These would be Christian Jews, most likely those who were scattered after the stoning of Stephen in Acts 8. Much like Jeremiah writing to the Jews taken into Babylon or many of Paul's letters, James is giving direction on how a Christian is to live among those who are not believers and may even be hostile to the Christian message and way of life.

## **Where is Jesus?**

James has often been ignored or derided because of its apparent lack of the Gospel. While there is very little mention of Jesus in the book, Jews especially would have noted the similarities of James to the book of Proverbs (wisdom). As we know, Jesus is wisdom incarnate. And James says in the first chapter that if anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask God. There are also parallels to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). The book is very much an extrapolation on Jesus' teachings.

## **Faith or Works?**

Many people try to pit Paul and James against each other. This is because Paul says that we are saved by grace, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 3:21-31) but James says that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). They think that Paul is saying we are saved by faith and that James is saying we are saved by works. But that is a misunderstanding. James is not saying that you are saved by works and not by faith. He is saying that if you have faith, it will be manifested in your works. If you say you have faith but continue living as a pagan, you are no better than the demons, who know God exists. This is similar to Paul's thought in Romans, especially chapter 6 (we died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?). Because we are saved, our lives should look different than the world around us.