

Lesson 1: James and Jude

- **I. Introduction to the Book of James**
 - **A. James is my favorite book in the Bible -- and has been for as long as I can remember having a favorite book.**
 - 1. It has been called the "how-to book of the Christian life."
 - 2. It has been called the "Proverbs of the New Testament."
 - 3. "If the message of James is allowed to go out unmuffled, it will rattle the stained glass windows!"
 - 4. "James is one of the most contemporary books in the New Testament -- a book that could have been written yesterday."
 - 5. "Shirt-sleeve Christianity," "Gospel of Practicality," "Ethical Scrapbook"
 - 6. "the most practical and the most convicting book in the Bible"
 - 7. "without doubt, the least theological book in the New Testament" (I disagree!)
 - 8. Martin Luther called it an epistle of straw.
 - 9. "a literary masterpiece that is both picturesque and passionate, and combines the beauty of Greek with the stern intensity of Hebrew."
 - **B. The book of James has had a controversial history.**
 - 1. The book is controversial because of what it contains.
 - a. The prayer of faith shall save the sick. (5:15)
 - b. By works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (2:24)
 - 2. The book is controversial because of what it does not contain.
 - a. It is silent with regard to the cross and the resurrection of Christ.
 - b. It contains only two direct references to Christ (in 1:1 and 2:1), although there are eleven indirect uses of the word "Lord."
 - c. It is silent with regard to baptism and the Lord's supper.
 - d. It is called a letter and yet it lists no names of its recipients and it contains no personal information about its author beyond the first verse. It concludes without any final greetings.
 - 3. There are many misconceptions about the book of James.
 - a. It is a misconception that James is a shallow book compared, for example, with the deep writings of Paul.
 - 1. One of the people we will meet during our study is a Danish philosopher/theologian named Soren Kierkegaard. He has been called many things -- but never shallow! His favorite verse in the Bible was James 1:17, and he wrote an entire book around James 4:8.
 - 2. James has incredible depth, and if anyone says otherwise, I would just encourage them to jump in and see for themselves how deep it is.

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- b. It is a misconception that James lacks unity and coherence.
 - 1. One critic said that James is "the rambling effusion of some indeterminate scribbler without plan, purpose, or authority."
- c. It is a misconception that James' concept of Christianity is somehow peculiar and unorthodox.
- **II. History of the Book of James**
 - **A. The first mention of the book by name that we know of comes from the third century.**
 - 1. On this point, however, we should note that many ancient authors did not always cite their sources, and so it is possible that earlier writings made use of James without citing the book by name.
 - a. Many have noted possible allusions to James in other New Testament books as well as in non-Biblical writings of the first and second century.
 - b. The Shepherd of Hermas, for examples, dates from the early or middle second century, and includes sections that almost certainly depend from James. First Clement (AD 95) and the Epistle of Barnabas (between AD 70 and 132) also show some dependence on James.
 - 2. Clement's successor in Alexandria, Origen, is the first to refer to the letter of James by name.
 - **B. It was not until the end of the fourth century that it was acknowledged as Scripture by both Eastern and Western Christendom.**
 - 1. Eusebius (who died in AD 339) considered James as canonical, but he included it in a list of disputed books because, he said, he was aware of some who questioned its scriptural authority.
 - a. He probably had in mind the Syrian church in the East, where some rejected all of the general epistles.
 - b. The situation was similar in the West, where James' acceptance came about even more slowly. Jerome's influence led to its eventual acceptance.
 - 1. He included the epistle in his Latin translation, the Vulgate, and he cited it often in his writings.
 - 2. At about the same time Augustine weighed in in favor of James, and no more questions were raised about the letter until the Reformation.
 - 2. Thus, James eventually was recognized as canonical by all segments of early Christendom, although that recognition occurred slowly in some areas.
 - **C. Why was James so slow to gain acceptance?**
 - 1. It is important to note that James was not rejected so much as it was neglected, and there are a number of possible reasons for that neglect.
 - a. First, there was uncertainty about the apostolic origin of the book. There are many men named "James" in the New Testament, two of which were apostles.

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- b. Second, the letter betrays a strong Jewish orientation and was probably written to Jewish churches in Palestine or Syria. The early demise of the Jewish church in Palestine as a result of the Jewish revolts in AD 66-70 and 132-135 may have caused a serious slow-down in the circulation of the letter. In fact, Origen makes reference to the letter only after coming in contact with the church in Palestine.

- **D. It was at the time of the Reformation that doubts about James were once again expressed.**
 - 1. Martin Luther said that James "mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture," and characterized the letter as "an epistle of straw."
 - a. But Luther did not reject James as part of the canon (placing it at the end of his German translation of the New Testament along with Hebrews, Jude, and Revelation -- three other books he considered historically and doctrinally suspect), and he cites over half of the verses in his writings.
 - b. He wrote, "I cannot include [James] among the chief books, though I would not prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him."
 - c. Luther's view of James was not based on any evidence from ancient manuscripts but instead was a reaction to the use made of the book by Papists in defense of their doctrine of justification by works.
 - d. Luther's comments about James tell us much more about Luther than about James.
 - 2. Calvin did not follow Luther in this regard.
 - a. While saying that James "seems more sparing in proclaiming the grace of Christ than it behooved an Apostle to be," he also noted that "it is not surely required of all to handle the same arguments."
 - b. Calvin accepted the authority of the book, and he argued for a harmonization of James and Paul on the issue of justification.

- **E. How can we be sure today that James belongs in the Bible?**
 - 1. We can be absolutely certain that the book of James belongs in our Bibles because we can be absolutely certain that the Bible we have today is complete and has been given to us by the providence of God.
 - 2. There are no lost books of the Bible, and there are no books of the Bible that do not belong there.
 - 3. I believe that God guided the hands of those who preserved and collected his word, and that he remains concerned and involved in the preservation of his word.
 - 4. But I also believe that we as the Lord's church have a tremendous responsibility to make certain that the word of God is preserved and proclaimed, and to fight every attempt to dilute it or pervert it.
 - 5. And, finally, I believe that we are about to witness attacks against the Bible of the sort we have never seen and likely have never imagined.

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- 6. Already in Europe, preachers have been imprisoned for simply proclaiming in public that which God has to say about homosexuality. Anyone who doesn't think that could happen here has just not been paying attention.

- **III. Who Wrote James?**
 - **A. Why does it matter?**
 - 1. One reason it matters is that it is interesting.
 - 2. A second reason is that identifying the author will help us understand the book.
 - 3. A third reason is that confusion over authorship has likely played a major role in the slow acceptance of the book by some.

 - **B. The very first word of the letter gives us an important clue! "James"**
 - 1. James is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Jacob (meaning "supplanter" or "one who takes the place of"), just as Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua.
 - 2. Thus, James was named after Jacob, the great hero of faith from Hebrews 11 and from the Old Testament who trusted in God and who was repeatedly rewarded for his faithfulness to God.
 - 3. It is interesting to consider that the younger brother of Jesus was named supplanter! If (as we will now discuss) James the author of this book is James the brother of Christ, then it is this so-called supplanter who calls himself a servant of Christ in the very first verse!

 - **C. One thing we know about the author of James (other than his name) was that he was a preacher before he was a writer.**
 - 1. He addresses his readers as a preacher addresses his hearers: directly and pointedly.
 - a. Do not be deceived! (1:16)
 - b. Do you want to be shown? (2:20)
 - c. Know this. (1:19)
 - 2. He is capable of turning on those whose errors he wants to expose, and he calls attention with many a "behold" to things he does not want his readers to miss.
 - 3. His sentences are short, simple, and direct -- which tells us that the author was likely a speaker rather than a writer (such as Paul, for example).
 - 4. Imaginary objectors make their appearance and rhetorical questions keep the attention alive.
 - 5. Vivid illustrations abound -- horses, rudders, fires, billowing seas, withered flowers, mirrors, the rising sun, the scorching heat, shifting shadows, patient farmers -- and startling statements jolt the congregation awake -- Count it all joy when you are tried! Even the demons believe!

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- a. James uses more figures of speech, analogies, and imagery from nature than all of Paul's epistles.
- 6. Yet the warmth of the vital relationship between preacher and congregation is maintained throughout with the word "Brethren," which occurs 15 times in various forms.
- 7. We cannot help but ask if a spoken original lies behind the letter of James. It reads in some ways like sermon notes.
- 8. Whoever the author was, he has rightly been called the Amos of the New Covenant, but who was he?
- **D. There are perhaps as many as seven people in the New Testament named James, and perhaps as few as four.**
 - 1. Here are the seven possibly unique people named James:
 - a. James the brother of Jude in Jude 1.
 - b. James the father of Judas (not Iscariot) in Acts 1:13.
 - c. James the Younger in Mark 15:40.
 - d. James the son of Zebedee and Salome (Mary's sister) in Mark 3:17, Mark 15:40, Matthew 20:20, Matthew 27:55-56. (Martyred in Acts 12:2). (Jesus' cousin and an Apostle)
 - e. James the son of Alphaeus in Mark 3:18. (also an Apostle)
 - f. James the brother of Jesus in Matthew 13:55. (See also 1 Cor. 9:5, 15; 15:7; Gal. 1:15-2:12; Acts 15:13-21.)
 - g. James the author of James in James 1:1.
 - 2. Can we identify James the author of James with one of the other men named James in the New Testament?
 - a. It is almost certain that some of these verses are describing the same person.
 - 1. For example, if the author of Jude was a brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3), then we are left with 6 rather than 7 men named James.
 - 2. And if James the Younger is the same as James the son of Alphaeus, then we have 5 people named James.
 - 3. We will proceed under these common assumptions.
 - b. The use of the name in the letter with such authority and addressed to a wide audience suggests that the author was a well known figure in the early church. That observation leaves us with James the son of Zebedee and James the brother of Jesus as the only real choices. It also casts serious doubt on the idea that the author of James was another person named James who is nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament.
 - 1. James uses over 50 imperatives in the 108 verses of the letter, indicating that the author had authority and was able to command respect.

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- c. James the son of Zebedee died an early martyr's death in AD 44 (Acts 12:2), and that observation thus leaves James the brother of Jesus as the most likely author of James.
- d. Was James in fact a physical brother of Jesus, or more exactly a half-brother as a physical son of both Mary and Joseph? There are three views on that question.
 - 1. The Hieronymian View was popularized by Jerome and holds that James and the other so-called brothers of Jesus were in fact his cousins. This view identifies Mary of Clopas (a sister of Mary in John 19:25) with the mother of James in Mark 6:3.
 - a. This view is held by Catholics who believe that Mary remained a virgin even after the birth of Jesus.
 - b. Most damaging to this view is that the Greek word 'adelphos' always means 'brother' when a blood relationship is denoted in the New Testament.
 - 2. The Ephiphanian View holds that James was an older brother of Jesus born to Joseph by a wife before Mary.
 - 3. The Helvidian View holds that James was a younger brother of Jesus born to Mary and Joseph. This view is the most common outside of Catholic circles and is the best explanation of the evidence.
 - a. There is much evidence for this view. For example, recall the events when Jesus was 12 and left behind at the temple. Do those events make more sense if Jesus was the oldest child in the family or if Jesus was one of the younger children in the family? Wouldn't the older child be more likely to be left behind?
- 3. Is there any other evidence suggesting that James the brother of Jesus wrote this letter?
 - a. The Greek in the book of James is strikingly similar to that found in the brief speech by James in Acts 15:13-21 and in the letter sent by James in Acts 15:23-29.
 - 1. As you recall, Acts 15 recounts the visit by Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to deal with the issue of whether Gentile Christians are bound to the ritual requirements of the old law. James took a lead role in that meeting.
 - 2. In Acts 15:13, James begins his address by saying, "Listen, my beloved brethren." James 2:5 contains the identical phrase.
 - a. And we know that Luke took down a verbatim account of that speech because of the use of the name "Simeon" in Acts 15:14 in place of the name "Peter" used by Luke in verse 7.
 - 3. In Acts 15:17, James quotes from Amos 9:11-12 about the Gentiles, and both the thought and the words are found in James 2:7.

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- 4. The Greek word for "greeting" found in Acts 15:23 occurs nowhere else except for its use in James 1:1.
- b. The Jewish atmosphere of the letter is very apparent; it is full of the spirit and imagery of the Old Testament and Judaism. Also, the letter is addressed to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion. These facts support the choice of James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, as the author.
- c. The teachings of Jesus permeate this letter, which points to someone very close to him as the author.
- 4. Are there any potential objections to the view that James the Lord's brother wrote this epistle?
 - a. First, some say that it is inconceivable that James the Lord's brother would write this letter and yet nowhere make reference to that relationship or to the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus that almost certainly led to his conversion.
 - 1. But James may have felt that being the Lord's brother should carry no special status, particularly in view of his failure to believe in Jesus prior to that resurrection appearance.
 - 2. Also, his readers would certainly have known of that relationship, and James possibly felt no need to remind them.
 - 3. Paul, who also had a life changing vision of Christ, mentions it in only two of his many letters.
 - 4. And what if the letter contained repeated references to James' relation to Jesus? The critics would no doubt point to that as evidence the letter had been written by an impostor!
 - a. Later non-canonical works described James in very lofty terms -- "the Brother of God" and "the lord and bishop of the holy church."
 - b. Second Peter is considered non-canonical by some because the author describes himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ" and makes several autobiographical references. Thus, as is often the case, you just can't win with the critics -- they will find fault no matter which way you jump.
 - 5. On the other hand, who -- after the death of James the son of Zebedee -- could simply sign his letter 'James' and expect everyone to know who he was other than James the brother of Jesus?
 - b. A second possible objection is that James is written in idiomatic Hellenistic Greek and occasionally uses language from Greek philosophy and religion. Could such language be written by the son of a Galilean carpenter?
 - 1. Of the 570 Greek words in James, 73 do not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. Of those 73 words, 46 occur in the Greek Septuagint, with which the author of James was obviously familiar.
 - a. Interestingly, James' address in Acts 15:24 also contains a Greek word that appears nowhere else in the New Testament -- a vivid word ("subverting your souls") used to describe the disturbance that had been created in the minds of the Gentiles.

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- 2. But while the quality of the Greek in James is polished, its quality should not be exaggerated. The author does not use long words or elaborate grammatical structures. "The author of Hebrews, Luke, and Paul far surpass James in formal rhetoric."
- 3. Also, Greek was widely used in Palestine and many in that area were fluent.
 - a. Rendall: "It is time surely to discard the figment of Galilean illiteracy....Philodemus the philosopher, Meleager the epigrammatist and anthologist, Theodorus the rhetorician, and one may almost add Josephus the historian, were all of Galilee."
 - b. There is no reason to suppose that James could not speak Greek fluently. Even the issue of education is not convincing. Consider, for example, the uneducated cobbler John Bunyan who wrote Pilgrim's Progress.
- 4. Also, even though it is written in Greek, the book has a literary style with a distinct Hebrew coloring such as, for example, its frequent use of Hebrew parallelism. The book is full of heroes of Old Testament history: Abraham, Isaac, Rahab, Job, and Elijah. James alludes to all three parts of the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets, and the Wisdom Literature. In short, James is a thoroughly Jewish book even though it is written in Greek.
- c. A third possible objection is that the book of James ignores the ritual components of the old Law and focuses instead on its moral commandments. Is this consistent with the picture of James in Acts and the letters of Paul?
 - 1. James has a reputation as a strict Pharisaical ritualist and legalist -- but that false portrayal has no basis in Scripture. Instead, it came largely from the writings of the Ebionites, a legalistic group of Christians around during the first few centuries.
 - 2. Although Galatians 2:12 describes the opponents who challenged Paul as men who "came from James," we cannot say they were sent with his approval or as representing his position.
 - 3. James was concerned with maintaining the best possible relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and so Scripture shows him advocating the legitimacy of Jewish customs and traditions, but nowhere does it show him seeking to bind those customs on Gentiles. In fact, just the opposite is true. In Acts 15:13-21 he opposed an attempt to impose the Mosaic law on Gentile Christians.
 - 4. Also, an author's silence on a subject does not necessarily indicate a lack of concern for that subject. Perhaps the ritual law was not an issue for those to whom he was writing this letter.
- d. A fourth possible objection involves the relation between James and Paul. It is said by some that James is a response to misunderstandings about the teachings of Paul that could not have arisen until after James the Lord's brother was killed in AD 62.
 - 1. But there is no reason to believe that James was written in response to Paul.

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- a. In fact, some argue from internal evidence that Paul must have known about the book of James when he penned the book of Romans.
- 2. Further, Paul was likely misunderstood by some as soon as he opened his mouth, and so there is no reason to believe a response to such a misunderstanding could not have appeared before AD 62. (See Romans 3:5-8 and 2 Peter 3:16.)
- 5. Assuming then that James the brother of Christ is the author, what do we know about that James?
 - a. We know that James was likely the second oldest child in the family after Jesus since he is always listed first among the brothers of Jesus. (Matthew 13:55)
 - b. We know that James rejected the claims of Jesus during his earthly ministry. (Mark 3:21, Luke 8:19-21; John 7:5)
 - c. We know that rejection continued to the cross at which time Jesus gave charge of his mother to his cousin John rather than to his brother James. (John 19:26)
 - d. We know that Jesus appeared to James following his resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:1-7) (It is fascinating to imagine that scene!)
 - e. We know that James was present with the apostles in the upper room. (Acts 1:13-14)
 - f. We know from Acts and the Pauline epistles that James was a pillar in the early Jerusalem church. (Galatians 2:9)
 - g. We know that James may have become an Apostle, although the text is ambiguous on that issue. (Galatians 1:19)
 - h. We also know something about James' death from extra-Biblical sources.
 - 1. Eusebius gives us Hegesippus' eye-witness account of James' death.
 - a. After the death of the Roman governor Festus and before the arrival of Albinus his successor 3 months later, the Jewish high priest Ananus unleashed his anger against the church.
 - b. The Jews accused James of blasphemy and threw him from the pinnacle of the temple.
 - c. After surviving the fall, he was then stoned and finally beaten to death with a launderer's club.
 - d. You might recall that in 2002 there was a claim that James' ossuary had been found, bearing the inscription, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Maybe ... but that inscription today might read, "Bob, son of Bill, brother of Jim." All were very common names.
 - 2. This account of James' death is independently confirmed by Josephus, who gives us a date of AD 62.

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- 6. As an aside, the life of James is one of the best pieces of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - a. He rejected Christ up until the time of the cross, and yet shortly thereafter we find him praying with the disciples in the upper room. How is that complete turn-around to be explained? There is only one explanation, and it is the same explanation behind the complete turn-around of the apostle Paul. Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection.
- 7. The book of James shares some similarities with the Dead Sea Scrolls, which has created a lot of wild speculation trying to link James with the Essenes and the Qumran community.
- 8. Two books in the New Testament have the most in common with James -- Matthew and First Peter. (See the series of lessons about First Peter on the website.)
 - a. Although closest to Matthew, there is a strong connection between James and all of the so-called Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).
 - b. There are throughout James, constant hidden allusions to the sayings of Christ.
 - c. There is an especially strong link between James and the Sermon on the Mount.
 - 1. Rejoice in trials (Matthew 5:12 and James 1:2)
 - 2. Ask and it will be given (Matthew 7:7 and James 1:5)
 - 3. Be perfect (Matthew 5:48 and James 1:4)
 - 4. Prohibition against oaths (Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12)
 - 5. Against hoarding (Matthew 6:19 and James 5:2-3)
 - 6. Against anger (Matthew 5:22 and James 1:20)
 - 7. Against lip service (Matthew 7:21-23 and James 2:14-16)
 - 8. Against divided loyalty (Matthew 6:24 and James 4:4)
 - 9. Against slander (Matthew 5:22, 7:1-2 and James 4:11)
 - d. "Much of James reads like the gospel of Jesus rather than the gospel about Jesus."
 - 1. James is one of the many reason why I do not like red-letter Bibles. It seems likely that much of James should be painted red.
 - 2. It would seem to have been written by someone close to Jesus who often heard these teachings -- perhaps someone who worked next to him in a carpenter's shop!
 - 3. This book gives fresh expressions to truths that James had often heard from Jesus himself. It is a wonderful book -- especially in view of its author!
- **IV. Where and When was James Written?**
 - **A. Internal evidence suggests the letter was written in Israel.**

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- 1. James 5:7 mentions the autumn and spring rains, which fit only the Palestinian region.
- 2. James 1:11 mentions the scorching heat, and James 3:12 discusses figs and olives.

- **B. If James the Lord's brother wrote the letter, then it must be dated before James' death in AD 62.**

- **C. At the other end of the time scale, the book was almost certainly written after James became a pillar in the church in Jerusalem. When did that occur?**
 - 1. James' leadership most likely began after Peter was imprisoned and released. (Acts 12:17) This event occurred in the year that Herod Agrippa I died, which was AD 44.
 - 2. It was also around this time that the Jewish Christians were scattered to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch following the death of Stephen. (Recall from James 1:1 that the letter is addressed to the scattered tribes.)

- **D. A number of factors point to a date much earlier than AD 62, perhaps as early as AD 49.**
 - 1. The book contains no references to the admission of Gentiles into the church, a subject with which James would be much occupied later in his life.
 - 2. James 2:2 suggests these early Christians may have still been meeting in Synagogues, and in any event they were still using that term to describe their meetings.
 - 3. If the letter was composed before the council meeting of Acts 15 (as seems likely), then it would likely have been written before AD 49.
 - 4. Thus, the book was likely written between AD 44 and 49.

- **E. Others point to a later date.**
 - 1. They argue that the condition in the book is too settled for an early date. They argue that an earlier book would be more concerned with laying the foundations.
 - 2. They also argue that James likely follows Romans, which was written in AD 57.
 - 3. They argue for a date around AD 60, at which time Paul would have been in Rome awaiting his trial -- and 10 years before the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans.
 - 4. Despite these arguments, I favor the early view as being the best fit to the evidence.

- **F. Now that we know who wrote the book and when it was likely written, let's consider again its slow acceptance into the canon.**
 - 1. How does it come about that the letter was not widely known before the end of the second century if the author was the Lord's brother?

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- 2. In my opinion, James is most likely the earliest of the New Testament books, and that fact combined with the book's targeted audience help explain its slow acceptance.
 - a. It was written shortly after the dispersion so that those who were dispersed would have a written record of what James considered to be the most important ethical teachings of Christ.
 - b. It did not contain teachings about Jesus because its readers were very familiar with those facts and likely had personally witnessed many of them.
 - c. Its slow acceptance occurred because it was addressed to a narrow Jewish audience, and was not widely circulated among the Gentile congregations with which Paul worked.

- **V. Is James Relevant Today?**
 - **A. James belongs to the category of New Testament epistles called "general" or "catholic" (meaning "universal") because it is addressed to the church at large rather than to a specific congregation.**
 - **B. James was written to believers, primarily Jewish, who were mainly poor people caught in a situation of considerable social tension.**
 - 1. They were oppressed and taken advantage of by wealthy landlords, and they were hauled into court by rich people who scorned their Christian faith.
 - **C. But while the situation of the church in the world provides the background for the letter, James' real concern is with the world getting into the church.**
 - 1. He warns his readers that friendship with the world is enmity with God, and he tells them that a key ingredient of pure and undefiled religion is keeping oneself unstained from the world.
 - 2. James tells us that worldliness in the church had manifested itself in a number of ways:
 - a. Through a fawning deference to the rich and a callous indifference to the poor.
 - b. Through uncontrolled, critical speech.
 - c. Through earthly wisdom with its envy and selfish ambition.
 - d. Through arrogance.
 - e. Through double-mindedness, which destroys the effectiveness of prayer and prevents faith from becoming action.
 - 3. What could be more relevant today?