

Introducing the New Testament

Worksheet for Week 6

James

Traditionally held to be written by James, the brother of Jesus, this “sort-of” letter is the least doctrinal and most practical of all the New Testament writings. Read the introduction to the book in your study bible and, if you have one, the entry on the book in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet. The outline in the daily readings is Raymond Brown’s.¹ If you work through the all the readings, you will have read the entire book. Before tackling the worksheet, you might want to read the entire letter in one sitting, using an easier translation like the New Living Translation.

A most practical faith

This book probably began as a sermon, a most practical sermon. It does seem to address specific problems in some particular setting. Still, it has little to say about Jesus, the cross, the resurrection, or so many of the other topics that dominate Paul’s letters. Instead, this is practical writing. It is very Jewish in its focus on the living out of our faith, on the day-to-day practice of living in a covenant relationship with God. Like Paul, James is redefining what it means to be the people. He writes to Israel, telling them that true faithfulness to the Law and to God are to be found in loving one’s neighbor, not in keeping to the traditional markers such as circumcision and keeping the Sabbath.

Over the centuries, some Christians have mistakenly diminished the importance of James, failing to remember that the “doing” of our faith is inseparably bound up with the “believing” of our faith and with the redeeming work of Jesus. Since the very beginning of God’s covenant with Abraham, the people of God have been called to be the light to the world, working for the renewal of all of God’s creation. This letter/sermon/essay speaks directly and powerfully to how we are to go about being God’s people and doing God’s work. We are called to “love our neighbor as ourselves” and James tells us much about what that really means.

Here are a few thoughts that might help you see the richness and vitality in this letter.

- James is very much grounded in Jewish wisdom literature. You might compare verses like 3:2 and 4:1 with the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is a compilation of the lived experience of the Israelites. Similarly, James teaches, in most practical words, his experience of living in covenant with God as “believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” (2:1)
- Note James’ contrasting of the two ways: wisdom and foolishness, the righteous and the wicked, the way of God v. the way of the world. This too is very similar to much of the Old Testament teaching about the way of God. These notions permeate the entire book, but see especially, 3:13-18.
- There are numerous parallels between James’ teachings and Jesus’ teachings as recorded in the synoptic gospels. Here are a few you might want to check out:
 - James 1:6 & Matthew 21:21
 - James 2:13 v. Matthew 5:7
 - James 5:12 v. Matthew 5:34-37
- In James 1:22, he contrasts “doers of the word” with those who are mere “hearers,” particularly in relationship to the poor and humble. James has many words of warning to the rich, as did Jesus. James has so much harsh criticism for the rich that perhaps he is responding to some specific problems with wealthy Christians in his community. Why do you think James and Jesus have such strong words for the rich?

¹ Brown, Raymond E. 1997. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday

Bible Readings for Week 6

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in this letter?

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| <p>Day 1 James 1 The role of trials and temptations; Words and deeds</p> | <p>Day 2 James 2 Partiality toward the rich; Keeping the whole Law; Faith and works</p> |
| <p>Day 3 James 3 Power of the tongue; Wisdom from above</p> | <p>Day 4 James 4 Desires as a cause of division; Judging one another as judging the Law; Further arrogant behavior</p> |
| <p>Day 5 James 5 Warning to the rich; Patience till the coming of the Lord; Behavior in the community</p> | <p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p> |