

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Introduction to James

James 1:1

Part 3

We have begun our examination of the book of James. We have been involved over the last several weeks in a general overview of the book and we will continue with that overview this weekend.

We have already discovered the theme of this epistle: TESTS OF LIVING FAITH. James wrote this book to provide for us a means to evaluate whether we are truly a Christian or not,. Whether we are a part of the Christian family or not. As we have seen, it is not enough simply to say that we are Christian. We must act like Christians if we are going to truly feel secure. We have concluded that the writer of this epistle was James the brother of Jesus. A forceful man, a highly spiritual man, an effective and respected leader in the Jerusalem church. And that it was probably written sometime before the Jerusalem counsel which is described in Acts 15. This would mean that this epistle was written sometime between 44-50 AD. This would make the Book of James the first NT epistle that was written.

Now we come to another question and that is, to whom was this epistle written? James is writing to Christian Jews living outside of Jerusalem. Let us look at **James 1:1** once more, **“James a bond servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ , to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.”**

Who exactly are the twelve tribes? This of course would be referring to Jews. The Jewish nation is referred to in the bible as “Israel,” “the people of God,” “the children of God,” “the nation of God” and of course the “twelve tribes” (Matt. 19:28, Acts 26:7, Rev. 7:4).

Though it is not clear in **V. 1** it is clear from the rest of the epistle that he is not speaking to Jews in general who are dispersed but Christian Jews in particular who are dispersed. In **V.2** he calls them **“brethren.”** And if there was any doubt, it is removed in **James 2:1** when he says, **“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.”** He is not talking to just any Jews who had been scattered but to Jewish Christians who had been scattered. How did Jewish Christians get scattered?

Forced expulsions of Jews by Gentiles was indirectly responsible. As we review the Old Testament history of Israel, one of its most remarkable characteristics is the long series of compulsory transplantations or dispersions undergone by this people.

The very first major expulsion of Jews from Palestine occurred in 722 BC when the northern 10 tribes of Israel were taken captive by Assyria. We read about this in **2 Kings 17:4-6**. These Jews never returned as an entity back to the land from which they were taken.

This fact is very interesting. We see repeated references to Israel as the “twelve tribes” in the New Testament. But the fact is that ten of these tribes were taken into captivity by Assyria long before the NT was written and that over the centuries their tribal identifications became blurred.

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If in the time of James you went to Mesopotamia, which is the area that these Jewish captives were taken to, and you asked the Jews living there to identify which tribe they belonged to, they most likely would not have been able to do it. Certainly today you have the same situation. If you were to go up to a Jew and ask him which of the twelve tribes they belong, they would not be able to tell you. But even though this is true, it still does not mean that God does not know who in fact belongs to the nation of Israel and even from which tribe they are descended.

The scattering of the Jewish nation or the “twelve tribes” was not a surprise to God. In fact he was responsible for it. The prophets of the OT had prophesied the scattering of this nation. They also prophesied the reconstitution of the nation of Israel.

Isaiah 11:12-13, “Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. (12) And He will lift up a standard for the nations, and will assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Jer. 3:18, “In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance.”

Jer. 50:4, “In those days and at that time,” declares the Lord, “the sons of Israel will come, both they and the sons of Judah as well; they will go along weeping as they go, and it will be the Lord their God they will seek.”

These ten tribes were taken captive and as a group never returned back to the land of Israel but they are not lost. God knows where they are. And God knows where the remaining other two tribes are.

The second major movement of Jews occurred in 586 BC when large numbers of Jews from the remaining two tribes of Judah and Benjamin were removed to Babylon from the southern kingdom. We read about this in **2 Kings 24:14-16** and **2 Kings 25**. Though large numbers were removed at this time from the southern part of Palestine, there were still a large number of Jews that still remained. But even this group of Jews were thinned dramatically by a voluntary exodus of Jews to Egypt after the Babylonians had taken control.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had appointed Gedaliah governor over Judah. Gedaliah, after assuming the office, told the people in **2 Kings 25:24** “**Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans; live in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will be well with you.**” So how did they respond? A certain group of Jews, 7 months after Gedaliah had been appointed assassinated him. As a result of this **2 Kings 25:26** tells us, “**Then all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the forces arose and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.**” This group of Jews grew into a very large community in Egypt. In fact the descendants of this group in 180 to 145 BC built a temple modeled after that at Jerusalem. Philo estimated the number of Jews in Egypt at that time to be about 1,000,000.

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The third mass exodus of Jews from Israel occurred in 63 BC when the Roman Pompeius conquered the Jews. When this happened he took many of them back to Rome with him as slaves. They were then kicked out of Rome in 19 AD which resulted in an even greater scattering.

Besides these more or less compulsory transplantations, the pursuit of commerce led many Jews to find a home in foreign lands. According to a man named Strabo, “It is hard to find a spot in the whole world which is not occupied and dominated by Jews.” Josephus said, “There is no city, no tribe, whether Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish custom have not taken root.”

The Jewish nation has been scattered, as a result of God’s judgment against them, all over the world. Their dispersion was not an accident, it was purposed by God and used by God.

This scattering was strategic. God used the dispersion of the twelve tribes, which was the result of their disobedience, as the primary means of expanding the church throughout the known world. When Paul went into cities, where did he go? He went into synagogues, and would present Jesus to these Jews, who had been dispersed, as their Messiah persuading them from their own scriptures. And after the Lord had blessed Paul with Jewish converts in a particular Gentile area, they together then would carry the message to the Gentiles. The dispersion created the soil in which Gentile evangelism could begin. Gentile evangelism spread through the known world of that day through the Jews of the dispersion.

Those Jewish Christians reached by Paul and Barnabas certainly would have made up part of the audience that James was trying to reach, along with others who may have been converted through the ministry of the church at Jerusalem when they came to visit during various festivals such as happened on the day of Pentecost when Jews from all over the world heard the gospel.

But the greatest bulk of them probably came from a totally different dispersion. Not from the dispersions of the OT but rather the NT.

The forced expulsion of Jewish Christians by fellow Jews was directly responsible. When the church was born in **Acts 2**, we see 3000 people added to the church on one day. By the time we get to **Acts 4** there are probably 20,000 men in the church perhaps 50,000 believers all together. When we arrive at **Acts 7** we have the martyrdom of Stephen. Following the death of Stephen, we have what is called the “great persecution” breaking out under the leadership of Saul who we have come to know as Paul. In **Acts 8** it tells us beginning in **V. 1** **“And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”** Jews were not only scattered at the hands of Gentiles as a result of God’s judgments on the Jews in the OT, but Jews were also scattered by the hands of other Jews.

When James is speaking to the twelve tribes of the dispersion, he is speaking to Christian Jews outside of Jerusalem and the area around Jerusalem, those who had been driven out of Israel centuries ago in various forced expulsions by the Gentiles and those who had recently been driven out by force by fellow Jews who hated Christ and the Christian message.

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Who was the leader of the Jerusalem Church? James the brother of Jesus was the leader of the church. He had seen a very large number of his congregation dispersed into a very hostile world because of the great persecution that had broken out in Jerusalem under the leadership of the apostle Paul. Even though at the time of this writing the persecution had ceased because of the conversion of Paul, the Christian Jews who had left were still scattered or dispersed and he is now writing to them and to other Christian Jews who were dispersed throughout the world.

James was concerned for them that their faith would be proven in the places to which they had fled. That their faith would prove itself to be vibrant and living.

James knows that salvation comes through elective grace. In **James 2:5**, “**Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?**” James knows that salvation brings imputed righteousness. In **James 2:23** it says, “**And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to Him as righteousness.”**” But he also knows that the sovereign act of God in bestowing divine grace will always be verified by a transformed life. And this is the message that James, the brother of Jesus, wants to deliver to the former members of his congregation who have been scattered to various other places.

And so as bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, he wants to share with them various tests that will help them to verify whether or not they are a part of God’s family.

The first test that we will encounter will be found in **James 1:2-12**. We can call this the RESPONSE TO TRIALS TEST. The key verse is **V. 12** “**Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.**” Are you going through difficulties? If you are, then you are even now being tested and your response to these tests or trials can give a good indication of whether or not you possess true genuine faith.

The second test we will encounter will be found in **James 1:13-16**. We can call this the RESPONSE TO FAILURE TEST. Those possessing true faith accept responsibility for moral failure. I see sin as the fruit of lust. My sin is not God’s fault, It is not my deprivation. It was not because of the way I was put together. Sin does not come down from God but rather it comes up from me. You show me a true believer and I will show you someone beating on his breast acknowledging his own sin.

The third test we will encounter will be found in **James 1:19-27**. We could call this the RESPONSE TO THE BIBLE TEST. **Verse 22** says, “**But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.**” The way you receive the Word of God is an indicator of whether or not you are genuine.

The fourth test we will encounter will be found in **James 2:1-13**. We could call this the PARTIALITY TEST. This test involves how we treat others.

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The fifth test we will encounter will be found in **James 2:14-26**. We could call this the THE WORKS TEST. Has our profession of faith made a difference in the way we are living?

The sixth test we will encounter will be found in **James 3:1-18**. We could call this THE TONGUE TEST. The way a person speaks cannot be discounted. In fact what we talk about and the way we talk is a great barometer of whether or not we possess living faith.

The seventh test we will encounter will be found in **James 4:1-12**. We could call this THE INDULGENCE TEST.

The eighth test we will encounter will be found in **James 4:13-17**. We could call this THE TEST OF PRESUMPTION.

The ninth test we will encounter will be found in **James 5:1-11**. We could call this THE RESPONSE TO INJUSTICE TEST.

The tenth test we will encounter will be found in **James 5:12**. We could call this THE TRUTHFULNESS TEST.

The eleventh test we will encounter will be found in **James 5:13-18**. We could call this THE TEST OF PRAYER.

CONCLUSION

These are the tests that James, the brother of Jesus, the leader of the church at Jerusalem, spelled out for the Jewish Christians of the dispersion.

Our hope once more is this, that when we as a church fellowship have the opportunity to stand before Jesus, that we will all be there. This is not only my work, this is the work of the entire church. It is your work. Not only making sure that you are there, but working hard to make sure that those you are in fellowship with that are professing believers will be there with you. So let us get about this work, and a great tool in accomplishing this work will be what we discover in this epistle.