

## Church Bible School (GBS) + Internet-Bible-School (IBS)

# EPISTLE OF JAMES

(Lesson 10) -

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

[www.nnk-berlin.de](http://www.nnk-berlin.de)

E-Mail: [pastor@matutis.de](mailto:pastor@matutis.de)

### Concerning the studying

I recommend you to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one or two pages of the material every day, which implies to also look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

If you would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminary**, you need to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

### GENERAL INFORMATION

The **letter of James is a practical instruction** for Christian life and a very practical book. It actually refers to the first Christians, because it was originally written for them. But it also applies to our current age. It deals with the actual proof of Christian faith in daily life.

In general the letter of James is considered **one of the earliest books** of the New Testament. This was probably written between 20 to 30 years after Jesus' death. It was addressing the Jewish Christians in the diaspora ( Jam. 1,1 and Act. 2,5-12 and 8,1 ).

Even though the text starts like a letter (1,1) it is actually not a letter. It is also not systematically arranged. It is not about an explanation or defense of a doctrine, but rather exhortation to practical application of the gospel (emphasis on the sermon on the Mount). The single chapters are only loosely connected with each other. The foundation of the content is the firm faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, the coming righteous Judge (Jam. 2,1; 5,7-11 ). **Faith itself is a grace gift of God**; it lives by the hearing of the word and conviction of its truth by the living flame of love in the bottom of the heart of our soul. Faith makes a man to be a servant of God to do the works of love on behalf of the poor (Jam. 1,19-27; 2,1-13 ).

The important relation between faith and works is contained in detail in Jam. 2,14-26. Whereas Paul says in Rom. 3,28 that a man is justified by faith, independent of the „works of the law“, James emphasizes that **»a man is also justified by his works and not by faith alone«** ( Jam. 2,24 ). Even though this seems to be a contradiction at first sight, James is not opposing the doctrine of Paul. They rather complement each other by looking at salvation from only one point of view. Paulus speaks of the **»works of the law«**, but James is talking about deeds of charity, without which faith in God is in vain according to Paul's teachings (Gal. 5,6 ).

**James highlights the „characteristics“ of living faith.** He points out practical results that clearly reveal the ones who come to Christ for forgiveness with all their sins to receive the highest salvation. In our bible study we will deal with the typical features of a truly redeemed person, that only God can provide or work in a man. To give a short preview James mentions some main features of faith, that are available for encouragement and empowerment for a Christian. A Christian by heart should show the following attitudes:

- Appear patient, peaceful and joyful in the midst of trials and challenges,
- victoriously resist temptations and attacks

- stay watchful of his words and actions everywhere and at all times,
- to use his precious time and the God-given possessions generously and helpfully
- never cease to long and seek God's pure truth,
- doer of good deeds by the refreshing power of the Holy Spirit.

In the letter of James we find the typical **character of a church person** who has to deal with every day life. As responsible **church leader** (at the Jerusalem church) he truly knows the problems within the church. He is warning his readers of self-deception by revealing all wrong conditions of the natural heart. He rebukes

wrong attitude in general and shallowness of the saints. In his letter we also find specific exhortation to patient endurance in tribulations and prayer. We find more of his serious warnings concerning arguments about doctrines, concerning doubtful philosophies that are not only from God, and the defilement by the world in general. In the closing part he promotes the „**Anointing of the Aick**“ as a very important ministry of the elders (church leaders) at the church (Jam. 5,14f ; Mark. 6,13).

**James was a strong and well-known personality in the primitive Christian community**, who had something to say. As the biological brother of Jesus he had a very intimate relationship to Jesus. His thoughts are originally depicted in this letter in short sentences which are yet full of sense and wisdom. The author obviously does not care too much about the correct description of thought patterns, but rather the sincere observation and observation of the divine will. This letter reflects a typical counseling and pastoral character. The main theme is rather practical than forceful. If someone would search for hints of religion and enthusiastic symptoms will be disappointed with the letter of James. In his letter the name Jesus appears only two times. But it offers something even better: a deep and practical insight into the application of Jesus' words (especially the sermon on the Mount) with regards to the daily life of the believers.

The author is writing to the (Jewish) Christians who were attacked and scattered. There are no collections of Jewish, lawful, Rabbinic rules and regulations. The content is depicted in the casual form of a letter in Jam.1,2-11. Still a strong connection to tradition can be sensed. In addition there is no analysis of Paul or his doctrines. Neither Paul nor another apostle is mentioned. This spiritual letter is a rightful part of the New Testament just like, for example, the First Epistle of Peter and the Gospel of Matthew as a message to the Jews. Therefore it belongs to the seven „catholic letters“ of the New Testament - such as the Epistle of Jude, and of John.

**It is called „catholic“** - because it was addressing the public and the whole church and not only a single group of people.

#### Other matters of the letter of James.

- It contains many exhorting parts and several timeless proverbs (Jam.1,5 and Pro. 2,3-6 ).
- It lacks a common letter ending.
- The letter counts 108 Verses; 54 of them are imperative (= command, exhortation, warning).
- James is especially addressing all who do not know the deep experience of faith that the first Christians had.

The letter of James was written at the end of an Apostolic era full of blessings. The fruitful time of awakening and its dynamic were already past and gone. Christianity had become a common tradition of shallow customs so that the power of faith was no longer able to gain a foothold. The glowing fire of the Holy Spirit was not burning as fresh as in the beginning. James courageously intervened against those drawbacks and fatigue. That was concerning the following matters:

- The tension between rich and poor in the church ( Jam. 2,1-13; 5,1-6 ),
- the misunderstanding of Paul's doctrine of justification ( Jam. 2,14-26 ),
- ambitions and arguments instead of peaceful unity ( Jam. 3,1-4, 9 ),
- impatience and doubts concerning the Parousia ( = the expected return of Jesus Christ ) ( Jam. 5,7-11 ) and
- how to deal with sinners and with sins and its consequences ( Jam. 5,13-20 ).

#### The letter of James is predominantly an exhortational text.

The churches are called to a life of a true Christian. The main topic of the letter is the „perfection“, whereas faith (primarily in thought and word) and deed (as a secondary result of action) are directly connected with

each other (Gal. 2,14-26 ). Therefore there are many active words of comfort and exhortation. Accordingly reasonable attitudes in diverse life situations such as pain, sorrow and sickness are displayed.

### **The letter of James is very close to the gospel of Matthew**

His role model is the sermon of the Mount of Jesus. A few comparisons:

Jam 1,5-8	and	Mat 7,7
Jam 1,17	and	Mat 7,11
Jam 1,22f	and	Mat 7,24-26
Jam 2,5	and	Mat 5,3f
Jam 5,2	and	Mat 6,19
Jam 5,9	and	Mat 7,1f
Jam 5,12	and	Mat 5,34-37.

The **Gospel of Matthew** was especially addressing the Jews. Both, Matthew and James, exhort the church of Jerusalem to the necessity of free observation of the wise commands (will) of God, pointing to the meaning of charitable deeds. For them it meant the only true fulfillment of divine faith that must result in a certain lifestyle.

### **TIME and PLACE of the composition of the letter**

The letter was written by James, the biological brother of Jesus Christ between AD 40 and 49. He was the leader of the Jerusalem church at that time. Therewith his letter must be one of the oldest texts of the New Testament. It is addressing the Jewish Christians who lived in Jerusalem and Judea. Of course it also addressed the Jewish Christians who were scattered among the Gentiles. James is encouraging the believers to live a practical and consequent life of faith, that proves in times of tribulations (Jam. 1,1-18 ). Furthermore he exhorts us to be active doers of the word of God and not only be passive hearers (Jam. 1,19-27 ). He warns of exaggerated estimation of certain persons (Jam. 2,1-13 ). The spontaneous sale of possession by the first church, based on the persecution of the Jews and the move of the church to Pella many Christians became poor (Act. 6,2 ). The first church was soon forced to appoint deacons in order to feed the poor. The newly converted probably stood out because they had their own houses and wealth. After the Apostolic Council the brothers asked apostle Paul to also provide the poor in Jerusalem and not to forget about their needs. The social need in Jerusalem's church must have been very serious (Rom.15,26 / Gal. 2,10). Therefore it is obvious why James emphasizes the helpful works of charity. Truly living faith always shows in actions. A simple mouth confession concerning faith, prayer and deeds cannot save anyone (Jam. 2,14-26 ).The first request and statement does not oppose the doctrine of Romans that says that a man is not justified by works of the law but by faith alone. The main command of God is clearly a twofold command to love „God“ and your „neighbour“ (Mat. 5,43 / Mark. 12,12,31,33/ Luk.10,27 / Gal. 2,14 ). Not only love God without His creation, and not only love your neighbour without his creator. The letter of James deals with the spiritual dangers of worldly riches and touches the content of other New Testament texts such as Luke, the pastoral letters and the revelation of John. James also warns us of the sin within the tongue (Jam. 3,1-12 ), to beware of ambitious arguments, passionate lust, idle friendship and the troubles of this world that express enmity with God (Jam. 3,13-5,6 ). His encouragements are supposed to promote the perseverance and prayer life of the believers. With this James closes his letter (Jam. 5,7-20 ).

### **AUTHOR**

The letter itself claims „James“ as the author. As we already mentioned the **Apostolic era** was almost over. The time of fruitful awakening of blooming churches also almost over. A paralyzing state of usualness had started and the churches were threatened to slacken. The author and his topic belong to the post-Apostolic time. Eventhough he cannot be counted among the first Apostolic generation it is strongly influenced by its tradition.

The **author of this letter** is obviously James, the »servant of God and Jesus Christ , the Lord« ( Jam. 1,1 ). Therefore it cannot be the Apostle James, the son of Zebedee, or the other Apostle James, the son of Alphaeus (Mat.10,2,3 / Mark. 3,17 / Acts 1,13 ) since this letter of James is lacking the otherwise common **title of the Apostle**.

**For your information: In the new Testament there are 5 people named James:**

- 1.- James, son of Zebedee in Mark. 1,19; 3,17 / Act. 12,2
- 2.- James, son of Alphaeus in Mk. 3,18
- 3.- James, the brother of Jesus in Mk. 6,3; 1.Cor. 15,7 / Gal. 1,19; 2,9.12 / Acts 12,17; 15,13; 21,18 / Jud 1.
- 4.- James the little one in Mk. 15,40
- 5.- James, the father of the apostle Jude in Lk. 6,16 / Acts 1,13.

The third, who is assumed to be the author of **the Epistle of James** is mentioned in Galatians 1,19 "the brother of the Lord". This brother James became an acknowledged leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15). The **Council of Jerusalem** played an important role for James as an overseer of the assembly and it was

him who proposed the resolution (Act. 15,13-21).

James represented the traditional Jewish Christian stream who wanted to stay faithful to the law ( Gal. 2,12 ). According to that information and ancient Christian history James, son of Zebedee cannot be the author because he died the death of a martyr in AD 44, but it was rather the brother of Jesus who converted after Easter (compare Mk. 3,20f; 31-35 / Joh. 7,5 ) to the faith in Jesus as the Messiah (1. Cor. 15,7 ). The latter already had a very important position in Jerusalem before the time of the Apostolic Council (Gal 1,19; 2,9 / Act. 15 ) whose position was not respected by all leaders of the Ancient Christian community (behold the indirect mention about differences in Gal. 2,11-14.).

**James, the brother of Jesus** ( Gal. 1,19 ) After Mark. 6,3 and Matth. 13, 55 he was the oldest brother of Jesus. After James there were three other brothers born: Joseph, Simon and Judas and at least two more sisters, so that Mary and Jesus had at least six children. This is still doubtful and there are several different opinions about this in Christian circles where facts were generally twisted and changed so often that even the best experts were not able to solve this matter. The catholic church for example claims that Jesus was Mary's first and only son and she remained a virgin since she was chosen among all maids to conceive the Lord of Lords. According to that Joseph being a widower must have had children from his first marriage. In other texts it says that Joseph, the father of Jesus had 5 sons – Joel, Joses, Samuel, Simeon and Jacob or James. When Jesus was born Joseph must have been over 70 years old and James as the oldest brother was only 15 years old. Joseph and Mary supposedly adopted foster children and they grew up with Jesus as siblings.

In such a big and holy family James must have grown up in protected devoutness. **The father Joseph was strictly following the law**. Unfortunately the bible does not tell us much about Joseph, the man whom God chose to be the right man for the virgin Mary. The family firmly believed that the announced Messiah would come soon. That the expected Saviour would come in the form of his brother never dawned to James.

The brothers did not watch the development of Jesus with approval. **James seemed to be the leader of the opposition in the family**. When Jesus became the head of the family after the death of his father and decided to move the family from Nazareth to Capernaum, James soon lead them back to Nazareth (Mat. 4,13 and Joh. 2,12 ).

And even worse some time later the family had to believe that **Jesus truly lost His mind** so that they tried to bring Him back by force (Mark. 3,21). But they probably changed their mind again because the spirit of the zealots of Galilee came over them. John reports of it (Joh. 7,2ff ).

Shortly before the feast of tabernacles Jesus' brothers said to Him: „You should no longer stay here in Galilee“, and: „Go to Judea so that your disciples may also see what mighty things you can do there. Whoever wants to make known what he is doing will not do it in secret. If you want to do such unusual things, then show it to the world!“. This is what His own brothers said because they did not truly believe in Him. They were not sure of Him, even though they had the best conditions for it. But the limited human thinking is barely capable to capture the wondrous works of God, especially if that person has not received the grace gift of the Holy Spirit.

It was James who stood **near the cross** with mother Mary ( Matth. 27,56 ). According to 1. Cor. 15,7 the Risen Christ appeared to Him. He is also mentioned before the apostles, therefore he himself was not an apostle. A tradition reports that he received the faith after the appearance of the resurrected Jesus. After that he followed the disciples and became a respectable leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts. 12,17 ). Paul mentioned that he visited him three years after his conversion (Gal. 1,19 ). 1. Cor. 9, 5 mentions that James

was married.

**Perhaps James converted or returned to faith in Jesus when he saw Him after the resurrection.** Paul mentions this event when he reports about Jesus' eye witnesses in 1. Corinthians 15. The encounter with Jesus the Risen one, turned a man who wanted to dominate his family into a voluntary „slave“ of Jesus Christ.

The next time we hear about James is in a room where he prayed with the disciples after the Ascension to heaven of the Lord. He is not mentioned by name but Luke reports in Act.1,13ff **that also the famous brothers of the Lord** were there. **Since the day of Pentecost James belonged to the church of**

**Jerusalem.** There he experienced three years of continuous growth and the first persecutions after the stoning of Stephen. When the second wave of persecution came over the church after Peter was arrested, James was an influential church leader. When Peter left the city he told the believers: „Bring report to James and the brothers!“ (Act. 12,17)

In Gal. 2,1-9 Paul writes about his journey to Jerusalem. Paul came to Jerusalem in order to inform the **respectable leaders** about his doctrine, because he wanted to make sure they were on one accord without depending upon another. Three names are mentioned in a row, in a certain order. **The prestige** of James at that time was even higher than that of the apostles Peter and John.

**James was the leader of the mother churches at Jerusalem** and was highly esteemed in Christianity that was primarily influenced by Jewish Christians. According to Gal. 2,12 James influence even in Antioch was so mighty that Peter was totally intimidated and there had to be a call for an Apostolic Council.

James was respected and honored in the church. He was a pillar in the first church. The biological relation to the Lord granted him much acknowledgement. James did not press for a role as a leader himself. But still for **almost 30 years** he was the acknowledged leader of the church at Jerusalem and his authority reached far beyond Jerusalem. During Paul's last journey to Jerusalem Paul gave him and the elders the offerings of the Gentile Christian churches (Act. 21,18). James gave Paul instructions to go to the temple and offer the vow of a Nazirite (Numb.6,14-15, Act. 21,18-27, especially vers 23). This lead to the imprisonment of Paul.

**James turned about 64 years old.** From his childhood on he lived with the family of the holy Lord, but only converted at the age of 32 after the resurrection of his Brother. The second half of his life he served his Brother whom he no longer called his brother but his Lord with much devotion. At the same time he still loved his own people even though his brother had rejected them as blasphemers, and he also loved the Christians who were no Jews. However, James adhered the Jewish law all the days of his life. He was a man who stood the test of that time.

The letter was written about **15 years after the resurrection** of the Lord (between AD 45-49) and is therefore a little controversial. James wrote for example: (Jam. 2,24) **Now you see that a man is justified by his works and not by faith alone.** It seems like this contradicts Rom. 3,28 ; 4,2-3. James uses the same Old Testament scripture but draws a different conclusion (Jam. 2,21+22). He states that faith is made perfect in works. To him faith has to become visible in daily life. James also calls the Christian proclamations „the perfect law of freedom“ (Jam. 1,25), that delivers a man from his yoke of servanthood (Gal. 5,1 / Act. 15,10) and plants a new being within us (Jam. 1,21+18). Therefore the letter of James is totally in alignment with Paul's and only states that faith without subsequent works is in vain. Because even a Gentile does what he considers right and acts according to what he believes in.

We also have to consider that **for the Jews who lived in Palestine** the ritual law was not abolished, while it was without meaning to the other believers of the different countries and nations. For the land of Canaan, however, it represented the eternal law. The „law“ always refers primarily to a country and not so much to people.

**James was not an evangelist** in this sense. He consciously addressed people who were already in Christ. He is not so much about saving lost souls, but rather tries to encourage believers to follow Jesus through works of charity and doing what Jesus did. Therefore he does not contradict Paul's doctrine.

James uses his letter to intervene in the current discussion about „**faith and deed**“ that was started by the works of Paul. Many Christians were confused. Even Peter mentions it in his letter (2. Petr. 3,15-16).

Based on this background the letter of James must be regarded in this relation. James wants to bring clarity and prevent that the proclamation of the gospel becomes onesided. This letter highlights the social meaning of the law.

The martyrdom of James around AD 62 is witnessed by Josephus ( Ant. 20,200f ) and reported by the church history author Hegesipp (Euseb. H.E. 2,23,4-19 ).

He called himself James, the »brother of the Lord«. This refers to James who is mentioned in Mark. 6,3 James, »the younger« and also in Mark. 15,40 referring to the younger brother of Jesus. After the

resurrection of Jesus he belonged to the rulers of the church in Jerusalem (Act. 1,14 / 1. Cor. 15,7 / Gal. 1,19 ; 2,9 / Act. 12,17; 15,13; 21,18 / Jud. 1). After Peter left ( Act. 12,17 ) James, the faithful and respectable Jewish Christian became the leader of the church ( Act. 21,17f ). He suffered the death of a martyr in the year of AD62. If James, the „brother of the Lord“ truly wrote this letter he must have written it till AD 62 at the latest.

The letter of James was accepted into the Catholic Canon quite late; that meant that he was found worthy to be included in the holy texts of the NT. Perhaps it took so much time, because James did not belong to the appointed apostles of Jesus and because he was Jesus biological brother who did not believe in Him at first. Paul, just like James, was not called by the carnal Jesus. Both callings happened after the resurrection of Jesus.

Another reason for the hesitation could also have been this: Even though James testified that he was the brother of the Lord, he does not give any indication that he had a personal relationship with Jesus. He only mentions the name of Jesus twice. The letter does not refer to the proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth, even not when it deals with synoptic tradition (Jam. 5,12 ) or where for other reasons there would have been an occasion to do so. In Jam. 5,10f. He refers to Job as an example for suffering, but not to Jesus who also suffered terrible things (1. Petr. 2,21-25 ). In addition it does not mention the incident at Antioch, even though Jam. 2,14-26 would offer an occasion. The author of this letter calls himself a Christian teacher in Jam. 3,1 but does not claim the authority of being one of the three „pillars“ ( Gal. 2,9 and 2,12 ).

But James was a strong pillar for the first church ( Gal. 2,9 ), even though the western churches did not accept this in the beginning. It was because of internal tensions in ancient Christianity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. James was highly respected ( Jam.1,1 ) and took Peter's leader position after a very short time, and remained the leader of the Jerusalem church after that. Peter did not take it to heart. First of all because he was persecuted by the Jews and secondly because the holy spirit had appointed him to do other things than to lead the church in Jerusalem. Peter had the „key function“ because he was supposed to unlock the gospel to the Samaritans and the Gentiles. In the Apostolic Council ( Act.15 ) they also discussed these matters and Peter was the one who introduced the final decision (Act. 15,7-12 ). Paul calls James a pillar of the church ( Gal. 2, 9 ).

## More theological ASPECTS of the Epistle of James.

With the same sharp tone as the prophets Amos and Micah of the OT James confronts the social attitude among Christians. Besides the public behaviour and attitude of believers in their regular meetings (Jam. 2,1-13 ) he also puts emphasis on their deeds in their private every day life.

James is the social ethic and social theologian of the NT. He reasons his practical theology by using the features of God Himself. God is the loving, merciful „Father of light“, His eternal and unchangeable goodness (Jam.1,17 ). God Father is the giver of all good gifts, never of evil things. This also applies to the „wisdom from above“ for all true things are by the spirit of God alone (Jam. 3,13-18 ). The goodness of the gifts applies to the goodness of the giver. His goodness is good, a good of God. One of God's gifts is wisdom that helps to carry the right attitude and discernment at all times (Jam. 3,13-18 ). Therefore the right Christianity excludes every evil motivation ( Jam. 3,13-18; 4,4 ).

**Since God chose the poor** (Jam. 2,5 ) the despise of the poor and needy is a strong contradiction to the acts of God ( Jam.2,6 ). The „**royal law**“ of charity ( Lev. 9,18 ) denies the despise of the poor ( Jam. 2,8f ). James' motivation for social action ( Jam.1,22 ) is based on the scriptures and role models of the bible such as **Abraham** ( in Jam. 2,21-23 ), **Rahab** ( in Jam. 2,25 ), **Job** ( in Jam. 5,11 ), **Elijah** (in Jam. 5,17f. ) and **the prophets** ( in Jam. 5,10 ).

Mainly because of the **likeness of men to God** we should never curse, judge, condemn, deny, etc. our neighbour while praising God at the other hand ( Jam. 3,9-11 ). For James every Christian act is generally unto God ( Jam.1,27 ).

Maybe you have heard that **Martin Luther** did not like this Epistle. To him the request for deeds and works in connection with the gospel was contradictory. But Luther is not decisive for our faith. The holy spirit only wants to show us that „**faith comes with a price**“ or that there is no neutral faith or cheap grace. **The letter of James is especially famous** for its instruction of the "**Anointing of the Sick**" ( Jam. 5,13 ). This letter enhances the social importance of the law.

## **CONTENT**

Even though the beginning of the letter is written in a classical style of a letter it should rather be compared with and exhorting collection of proverbs, characterized by the form of a sermon. The whole style of the message is like a request. The main request is faith manifested in good deeds.

Further exhortations are among others:

- to control the tongue,
- avoid arguments and discussions,
- deny arrogance,
- call for prayer.

## **RECIPIENTS**

The letter mainly addressed the **Jewish Christians!** Especially because James wrote to **Jewish Christians** he mentions the **twelve tribes of Israel in the diaspora**. This could refer to the Jewish Christian churches in Palestine and other countries, or the term »**the twelve tribes**« could be a **metaphor** for the whole Christianity which was scattered as in the diaspora (»scattering« Jam.1,1).The influence of Jewish thinking and language is evident in this letter.

### **„The twelve tribes in the diaspora“:**

This can refer to many things such as:

- the Jews in their entirety, or
- the Jewish Christians, or
- the Christians in their entirety as the true Israel.

That the recipients „**are the twelve tribes in the diaspora**“ tells us that the coming of the Lord had introduced the Last Days, so that James believed in the restoration of the twelve tribes according to the promise of the Old Testament and tradition.

The **recipients** are called the twelve tribes in the diaspora ( Jam. 1,1 ) genannt. Therefore it must refer to the whole church in general and not only to Jewish Christians ( in the diaspora). Christians are, spiritually seen, as foreigners in this world (Phil. 3,20 / Hebr. 13,14; 11,13 ).

### **To the „twelve tribes in the diaspora“: What does it mean?**

Those are the **twelve tribes of Israel in the diaspora**. At that time only the tribe of Judah and Benjamin lived in Israel. It refers to the „Jews“ but not all the people of Israel.

The **country** was divided among the descendants of Solomon. **Rehabeam** became king of Judea (Southern

area) and Jerobeam king of Israel (Northern area). From that point on faithful Israelites from the Northern tribes came into the area of Judah and Benjamin ( 2. Chr. 11,16 ) and dwelled there. Some of them kept the **identity of their own tribes** until the days of Jesus, Pentecost, so to say the desctruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). In the report of the newborn Jesus the old prophetess Hannah from the tribe of Asser was a witness ( Luk. 2,36 ). **Paul was a Jew in the diaspora** from the tribe of Benjamin who lived in Tarsus ( Rom. 11,1 / Phil. 3,5 ).

Since the majority of the Northern tribes was in Assyrian captivity, the descendants of the Persian captives were scattered throughout the Persian Empire during the time of Esther and king Ahasuerus ( Xerxes I; 486/85- 465 b.C.). Those were Jews that were deported to Media (722/21- 705 b.C.) (2. Kin. 17,6;18,11 ).

The people who returned from the Babylonian captivity originated from the different tribes of Israel. This happened in a time of persecution 606, 598 and 587 b.C.(Esra. 2:2,70; 6,17; 8,25 / Neh. 7,72 ). The **ten Northern tribes** were not destroyed or lost. Paul also mentions the twelve tribes before king Agrippa, a people who worship God day and night ( Act 26,7 ). But they were not yet in the diaspora at that time. At the time of the book of Acts Jews from every nation lived in Jerusalem (Act. 2,5-11 ). They had returned from Babylonian captivity or were Proselytes who had converted to Judaism.

Only because of the persecution that started after Stephen was stoned when the church of Jerusalem moved to Pella and Jerusalem was going down (AD 70) the scattering of the people of God truly started (Act. 8,1;11,19 ). They were **Jewish Christians** who fled from Jerusalem to foreign cities due to persecution. In many areas they established new Christian churches. When Paul came to Rome they had already established churches.

Peter addresses his letter to „the foreigners in the diaspora“ (1. Petr. 1,1 ). Peter proclaimed the gospel to the Jews. Daniel (12,7-9 ) speaks of the **end of the diaspora** in the Last Days, the end of time. Then, on the day of the Lord (Rev. 1,10 ), the day of wrath and the righteous judgment of God 12.000 unmarried men of all Jewish tribes would be sealed (Rev. 7,4-8; 14,4 ). And the tribes that are not sealed, Dan and Ephraim, would still obtain an inheritance in the millenium (Ez. 48,1-5 ). The Jewish style and spirit of the letter confirm that it does not mention any Gentile sins or customs.

**James was often called the apostle of the Jews** which implies that he wrote to the Jews in this function.

## **COMPOSITION**

The letter was written in Jerusalem, but not after AD 62, the year when James died. Since this letter emphasizes „**deeds**“ this letter could be a reaction upon the wrong understanding of Paul's letters. This means that the letter of James was written between AD 55 and 60. Most interpreters even assume that the letter was written between AD 44 and 49 or even earlier.

**The following evidence supports this assumption:**

The **Jewish foundation** of Christianity that is evident in this letter points to the fact that the author himself was a former Jew – he is still influenced by it. We only find a few aspects of New Testament Theology that we know from Paul. Since **there are no disputes mentioned**, which was usual for the time of the Apostolic Council, this is another indication. The Gentile Christian part of the church plays no major role in this letter and Jewish Christianity does not yet assume a negative attitude towards Gentile Christianity. The letter was also written before false teachers sneaked into the church as in Colosse, and it does not deal with false understanding of the resurrection of the Lord as in Corinth. There was also no doubt concerning the delayed Second Coming of the Lord. For these reasons there was no occasion for **warnings and comfort** as in the letters to the Thessalonians or the Hebrews.

These and other facts imply that the letter of James was written before the Council of Jerusalem between AD44 and 50 and should therefore be regarded as the earliest text of the New Testament.

The **Epistle of James** is different in style from all other letters of the New Testament.

Actually it is not really a letter but rather some kind of **sermon** or circular letter. It is rather a teaching text,

similar to the Old Testament texts of the prophets or comparable with the book of Proverbs.

It is remarkable that James only mentions the name of Jesus twice(Jam.1,1 + 2,1 ).

**However, James mentions more of Jesus' words** than all other letters of the NT together. In his letters there are numerous references to the famous sermon of the Mount and other teachings of Jesus.

James is not dealing much with right teaching or true insight, but rather the right lifestyle and faith in action. James challenges the reader to live out the faith in Jesus. It was surely not easy to be a Christian in

Jerusalem. The Jews hated the Christians because they believed in an executed criminal who claimed to be the Messiah. Many Christians were persecuted at that time and killed in a brutal way. Rome ruled with an iron fist. The whole country was cooking and a war was at hand (AD 70) which Jesus had already foretold.

### **PURPOSE AND GOAL**

James knew what his people had to endure and what was still ahead of them. Nevertheless he remained a realist. Therefore he encourages his readers to perseverance. Actually there was no certain reason for this letter. There were no false teachings, no wrong opinions about the resurrection of Jesus and no murmuring because the Second Coming of Christ had not yet taken place. Therefore there was no need for words of warnings or comfort. James was attacking a lack of honesty and diligence in the daily life of a Christian. He generally rebukes devout appearance of faithfulness without corresponding works.

The **basic intention of the Epistle of James** is the confirmation that true and living faith results in active, good deeds – and not that a man receives salvation alone, but rather to prove that their faith has truly set them free. To speak about good deeds or works and the importance to live in obedience to Christ is not the same as to preach „salvation by works“. „**For by grace you were blessed – by faith and not of yourselves: It is the gift of God and not of works so that no one could boast.**“ (Eph.2,8,9)

This letter was also written to correct and convict Christians whose lifestyle did not testify of their faith. Perhaps there were many believers who claimed that Christ is the Lord of their lives and that they firmly believed in Him, but they did not confess their faith by deeds of love / charity. James wanted to rebuke all who believed that it is enough to just inherit by faith and live an easy life without effort.

### **MISCELLANEOUS (special features)**

**The letter of James takes on a unique position among the letters of the NT according to its style and content.** It strongly reminds us of the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which the author seems to know well. James often refers to these texts and a multitude of other books of the OT. Furthermore he reflects the sermon of the Mount like no other author of the New Testament, so that the letter is often called „**the second sermon of the Mount**“ (compare Ch. 1,2 with Matth. 5,12 / 1,4 with Matth. 5, 48 / 1, 5 with Matth. 7, 7 etc.). On the other hand the letter is **evidently poor with regard** to Christian and spiritual basics.

### **Main / key verses:**

- „Be ye doers of the word and not hearers alone, lest you deceive yourselves.“ ( Jam. 1,22 )
- „Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world .“ ( Jam. 1,27 )
- Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone ( Jam .2,17 )
- Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (Jam. 4,17 )
- The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. ( Jam .5,16b )

### **CONTENT AND ARRANGEMENT**

It is very hard to extract a certain purpose from this letter. James speaks out of the fulness of his heart. Therefore it is rather an exhortation than a well-structured teaching epistle. We can divide the letter as follows:

Introduction: Greeting	Ch. 1,1
<b>1. Faith proves in tribulations</b>	Ch. 1,2-18
When patience is needed...	Ch. 1,2-4
When divine wisdom is needed...	Ch. 1 5-8
In wealth and poverty ...	Ch. 1,9-12
In all kinds of temptations....	Ch. 1,13-18
<b>2. Faith proves in works.</b>	Ch. 1,19-2, 26
Not hearers alone but doers of the word ...	Ch. 1,19-27
Not acknowledging the physical but fulfill God's commands...	Ch. 2,1-13
Not dead but living faith...	Ch. 2,14-26
<b>3. Faith proves in speech.</b>	Ch. 3,1-18
Warning of speaking evil....	Ch. 3,1-12
Exhortation to honesty and warning of false wisdom...	Ch. 3,13-18
<b>4. Faith proves in every day life.</b>	Ch. 4,1-5,11
Warning of arguments...	Ch. 4,1-3
Warning of worldliness...	Ch. 4, 4-10
Warning of judgement and defamation...	Ch. 4,11-12
Warning of complacency...	Ch. 4,13-17
Warning of the deception of riches...	Ch. 5,1-6
Exhortation to endure until the Second Coming of Christ...	Ch. 5,7-11
Conclusion: final exhortation	Ch. 5,12-20

## **Key word: works**

Key verse: „**Faith without works is dead**“ ( Jam. 2, 26 ).

## **Detailed interpretation**

**James** presumes that everybody of the first church knows him. He is addressing the „post apostolic“ church, especially the Jewish Christians. He addresses the „twelve tribes of Israel“. His letter is totally different than all other letters of the New Testament. It is like a draft of a sermon and an interpretation of the sermon of the Mount, whereas it speaks primarily about the right way of living and the practical execution of faith.

James knows like no other that it is not easy to be a Christian and **especially in Jerusalem**. This has not changed up to today. The first Christians even had to hide because they feared the Jews who persecuted them. They were persecuted until long after Pentecost (Act. 21,18-37 ). In Act. 21 we see that the Christians of Jerusalem had a rough way to go and had to make many compromises until the end.

The **Jews hated the Christians** even when they still confessed the temple and Moses. Only the fact, that they believed in Jesus of Nazareth from Galilee, an executed criminal who claimed to be the Messiah was enough to cause their bitter hate. Many of the Christians were relentlessly persecuted and violently killed. Rome ruled by an iron fist at the same time.

The **country was cooking and full of tension** and faced a great war that was at hand AD 70, which would destroy Jerusalem and its temple.

James knew what kind of shame and pain his people had to endure and had a clue what was still ahead of them. Being a realist with a sound common mind, he still encouraged his readers to endure and persevere.

**Jam. 1,1:** The twelve tribes in the diaspora are a **metaphor** for the people of God in a foreign land. An existence in the midst of a non-Christian environment. The metaphor of this division also describes the situation of the scattered people of God before the final gathering. Perhaps this letter addressed Jews in exile who lived outside of Israel and the Roman Empire, like for example Babylon, Peria and India, etc. We know that in the South of India, in Chochin, there was a synagogue established during the reign of Solomon. Thomas followed the footprints of this church. In addition there were also Jews and Proselytes living in Ethiopia and in other areas. The queen of Saba was acquainted with Judaism since she met with Solomon, and we also heard of the „Chamberlain“ who converted to the Christian faith ( Act. 8,26-39 ).

**Jam. 1,2-18: Faith is tested in tribulations.** The apostle is referring to the persecuted and threatened, poor Christians among the Jews and in Palestine. He encourages, comforts and strengthens them. James intention is targeting practical deeds and relates to the gospel of Matthew. The most important thing for Him is that which empowers a Christian believer. He also opposes indirectly the Pharisees and scribes who only followed the law theoretically but never practically applied it in their daily life.

He gets to the matter of the issue right away: every tribulation is a test of faith that has to be passed in everyday-life and throughout our life in general. The „tests“ that have to be realized are not the persecution per se but rather the conscious experience of our own human weaknesses ( Jam. 1,15 ). The active overcoming of acknowledged weaknesses plus honest effort and good will to pass the test of faith, result in righteous living – step by step (Jam. 1,2-4 ).

James explains what we are supposed to do when we do not know what to do, or we have option to do something: We should never doubt and ask God for wisdom and he will freely give it to us (Jam. 1,5-8,17). At the same time we should also acknowledge God's values in all areas (Jam. 9-11 ).

**Jam. 1,12-15** highlights that the origin of such „tests“ is not in God but rather in the substance of humanity. This refers to a Gentile opinion about the features of God (for example the teachings of the antique Greek philosopher Platon)

**Biblical examples for temptations:** Abraham with Isaac (Gen. 22,1 ff ), Job, Jesus' temptation (Mat. 4,1-11 ), the Lord's prayer (Mat. 6,13). God allows temptations and trials to see how far our faith has grown and matured. Basically we are engaged in growing tribulations as our devotion to God grows. For Abraham, for example, the tests grew harder bit by bit until Gen. 22.

**Temptation is not a sin**, only if you surrender to it (view Jesus' temptation Mat. 4,1-11.). It becomes corrupt when temptation becomes sin ( Jam. 1,15 ). Other than that we can only rejoice over the manifold tests, because as tests of life on the school planet earth is an important part of our maturing process (1. Cor. 10,13 ).

There is something else we have to understand: while here on earth every one would get the same test, every believer has to face an individual task. God surely does not want us to fail but rather that we would grow, become stronger and survive. God never overchallenges us, because He knows exactly how much we are able to bear and what not. Paul said: *“God is faithful and tests you according to your strength, so that in the end you win and were able to bear it”*. This is a convincing sign of God's eternal mercy.

Most of the people would of course be happy if they would not have to endure hard times. James suggests the opposite. He states that we should welcome necessary trials and tribulations and acknowledge them as carriers of healing and salvation, because it tests and strengthens our perseverance. This way every believer can find out about himself what he is really able to bear.

It is important to point out that James does not say that a believer should be happy about the tribulations, but rather be happy in it (as he goes through it).

## **What is temptation?**

**Temptation** means as much as test or challenge. A temptation whose purpose is that the threatened person becomes stronger, wiser, more experienced, more mature and pure. In the test of faith we need much wisdom (Jam. 1,5-8 ). Jesus tells us to be smart but without flaw. **A main obstacle** to accomplish the right strength and wisdom in the midst of temptation are mostly our lazy excuses that originate from the condition of our soul that is still to much consmed with the weak lusts of our flesh instead of the power of the spirit. But this was and is not the will of God.

From God's point of view temptations are tests that he allows in order to fight for our soul, to purge the precious spirit within us. In all those evil and threatening temptations God wants only the best for us. From the human point of view this is usually hard to understand. If someone is tempted this happens by the evil

lust that dwells in his flesh. The tempted person is supposed to leave his right way that connects him with God.

The father of all temptation is always the devil (Jam. 4,7 ). The opponent of God always tries to misuse us by our emotional lust of the flesh. Our inner, spiritual lust for true life is not sinful in itself for it is a gift from God. This was given us for blessing, in order to lust for the Lord.

Our natural, innermost lust for live becomes sinful the moment it is torn away from God to fleshly desires that do not illuminate us in His living light, and do not allow the spirit of God to live in us and guide us. That way we start to be disobedient and proud, eager to walk our own way. In this very moment when our soul is weak and we give in to our lusts and desires, the devil snatches us as if he just waited for the chance to take us down to the pit (Eph. 6,12 ).

Temptation is always a **test**. For example: when the queen of Saba came, it is said that she came to tempt the wisdom of Solomon. And it says of God „He tempted Abraham by telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen 22, 1 ). When the Israelites entered the promised land, God did not chase away all people who dwelled there, but left them there in order to tempt Israel in battle(Judges 2, 22; 3,1,4 ).

The many years of experience that the Israelites made during their time in the wilderness were tough tests to prepare them to become the true people of Israel (Deut 4,34; 7, 19 ). Test are always for practice. James points out that in their tribulations they would have to endure **many things** if they decided to life the life of a true and faithful Christian.

**Temptation** – this does usually not attack the whole person. It rather targets a weak or wounded area in his life. Facing our weakness we will have to take a stand and say „Yes“ or „No“.

Temptations often appear with many different faces and the tempter often changes his clothes in order to surprise us. But it is always the same one who causes us to be tempted. It is one of his treacherous tactics to visit us unexpectedly and do his corrupt works which we have to face in the form of an attack without preparation.

James teaches us that we should not give in to temptation as soon as we have realized it. James admits that a Christian has to go through crisis, even crisis of faith throughout his life. However, not every suffering has to be developed into a faith crisis.

**He suggests that when we are tempted** we should not try to find out why this is happening. To ask why, what for, who and how – we should put them aside. Because often the answer is at hand and we just have to acknowledge that this is one of our weaknesses.

When we stumble over our own feet an Achilles' heel is often exposed – a weak area is brought into the light of our awareness. But often – too often – we do not receive an answer as to why and what for. Sometimes our life seems to be a riddle and hard to understand or unfair. We feel like we are thrown into the water and all we can do is swim or go down. We are bewildered and have no idea how we got in the water or who pushed us. We must swim or drown.

James simply writes in the second verse: ***Count it all joy when your faith is tested in many ways...*** in this case „**my grace is sufficient for you**...applies (2.Cor.12,9 /1. Cor. 15,10 ).

**When a believer is tempted** he should ask God for wisdom right away to find out how he should react. Jesus said be wise and harmless ( Mat.10,16). For I send you as sheep among the wolves. This is the saving truth of wisdom. If someone does not know how to react upon temptation or what to do, he should turn to God right away and ask Him for the wisdom he needs. He does not have to walk in the counsel of the godless who will be even more of a problem than a help. **Most temptations** that James speaks about result from the oppression of the rich (Jam. 4,1 ) and disadvantages in life in general.

### **Jam. 1,3: ...and know that faith, when tried, works patience.**

When God allows us to be tempted it is His goal to expose us to growth of faith and not the destruction of our faith. Temptations are of course part of our Christian life, just like prayer and reading our bible. James says: be prepared! Be always aware of it!

Jesus taught his disciples to pray: **“And do not lead us into temptation** , which means that God should guide us in a way that we will not fall into temptations ( Mat. 6,13 ).Under this aspect James gives a surprising counsel to all persecuted Jewish Christians who live scattered among the Gentiles. **“My dear brothers, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations.”** The believers were supposed to learn how to face trials with joy and not consider it punishment, a curse or a misfortune. They should rather consider it something that leads to joy, a joy that will be full.

Thus the Gentiles in the time of persecution were always amazed that the martyrs were not bitter and harsh, but that they would rather disregard their pain and praised God when they died. A martyr once answered the question why he still smiled even though the flames were already burning: **“I rejoice for I have seen the glory of the Lord!”**. It is a very spiritual feature that does not only enable a believer to suffer, but rather even to rejoice in it and overcome it. Whosoever overcomes the present trials the right way will receive new strength to face even worse battles with even more strength.

**A passed test** empowers us for the future high calling into the kingdom of God. By the way we react to our experiences we will either be able to deal with the assignment that God has for us or not.

The word „**spotless**“ originates from sacrifice rituals. Animals that were sacrificed unto God or were sufficient for the priest's service were called flawless/spotless. Before God they were perfect, without flaw, totally perfect.

The word „**spotless**“ means that the animal or the person has no lack, mistake or flaw that would disqualify them for a certain purpose. Weaknesses or imperfections will be shaken off with every test that we pass. Consequent steadfastness enables a person to overcome old sinful habits and shake off old mistakes and exchange them for new virtues in order to become suitable for the ministry of God and the selfless ministry for our neighbour.

The author James primarily wants to show his readers how they can attain the necessary spiritual maturity.

**Two words** describe the purpose of God very clearly: **perfect and spotless**. These terms express the perfection and full development of Christian maturity. Christians can face tribulations with joy because ever attack we overcome will release more patience by the power of faith, which will turn us into a mature Christian who lacks nothing.

### **The word „patience“ does not refer to passivity.**

By **the numerous tests we slowly learn how to wait and endure with patience** and we find out if our faith is true or not and if it is great and solid or rather small and shaking. By the many tests and attacks – or rather God's loving chastisement and care – we will become more determined and diligent in our faith.

**Patience** in this correlation means endurance, perseverance, steadfastness, determination – even under the most difficult circumstances, under a heavy burden, under physical and mental suffering or other set backs we will still be able to remain faithful to God and stay in His love. We would then take on the position he gives us with joy. Typically the natural, worldly person would lose his temper and patience when he faces tribulations (Hebr. 12,11).

**Patience provides** us with the ability to bear something peacefully and to turn it into something glorious for the Lord. Through patience the believers consciously follow a higher purpose that they determined to accomplish with a longing heart (Eph. 5, 27 / 1.Cor. 15, 23 – 28 ).

#### **Jam. 1,5: If some of you lack wisdom...**

Wisdom refers to divine wisdom and not empty knowledge of the world, philosophy or literature. The latter knowledge, no matter how beautiful it may sound or how smart and perfect it might be formulated, is darkness because of the fall of men (Rom. 1,21 / Eph. 4,18). Shallow knowledge will lead people on the wrong way (Rom. 1, 22/ 1. Cor. 1,19,27 / 1. Cor. 2,14). Every knowledge of the world can only be considered a proud and separated-from-God kind of thinking. Beautifully wrapped mental trash. Especially because it denies the substantial spiritual foundation of the truth of life, which is the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ.

The mind of the Christian was transformed by the revelation of Jesus' sacrificial death. The meaningful crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and the deliberate acknowledgement thereof delivers a man from his sin by grace, and he will also be redeemed from all wrong and evil patterns of thought and belief (1. Cor. 1,30). Only because God came down in the form of the man Jesus we have a different understanding and a new perspective of life. Especially in order to lead a life rooted in love we need His wisdom to lead a life that pleases God. James says that we can just ask God:Let him ask God! (comp. Mat. 7,7).

**The request for divine wisdom is to ask for the spirit of God.** The only true wisdom is one of the wonderful effects of the holy spirit (Eph. 1,17). Jesus gave the plea for the holy spirit a special promise (Luk. 11,13). The external gifts God also gives to those who do not ask (Mat. 5,45). But His spirit, which means God Himself in His holiness and with His salvation He will not just share it. His most precious spirit will not simply be poured out. **The inner, spiritual gifts** God will not push on anyone. We have to ask for them according to our free will. **And God gives freely** to all who seek, knock and ask. He will give without reproach. Before that James already explains to the readers how to endure temptation and how to find wisdom (Jam. 1,2-5). In order to receive God's wisdom in such a situation the believer has to turn to God immediately with an upright heart and determination in his spirit.

**To such people God cheerfully gives His wisdom,** to all who ask Him from the heart. God cheerfully gives, even when people misuse or abuse His gifts (comp. Sirach 20,14-16; 41,22). **Sirach** is an apocryphal text of the Old Testament. God loves to give and gives with mercy. God is a "friend of gifts" (Greek poet Philemon). He loves to give gifts to the people because this is His perfect creative, giving and maintaining character.

**Jam. 1,6-7: Let him ask by faith and not doubt in his heart.** This tells us that God can and wants to give, provided we do not doubt Him. Every doubt questions God and blocks the streams of His love that flow toward us (Gen.3,4,5). The one who prays should ask by faith and doubt not.

**Doubters are ambivalent people**, whose requests are not answered (Mark. 11,24). We should trust because even the slightest doubt in God's care will strengthen the power of the enemy in our life. James explains: **Someone who doubts is like the sea** – going up and down. Doubters have no solid ground under their feet and are tossed by the wind or other powers of nature. He is always torn to and fro – one moment he trusts God and then he is full of doubts, insecurities and unbelief which close the doors for God and His gifts (Mat. 13,58; 16,4).

**Jam.1,8 : A doubter is unsteady in all his ways** not only when it comes to faith. Doubts express more than just distrusting God. It is a foundational problem of personality. A doubter is a person who is ambivalent and torn in pieces within himself – **A being with two souls**. Sometimes his soul is connected with the spirit of God and sometimes his soul is connected with the world and the body. This staggering being is sometimes open for the holy spirit from above and sometimes for other spirits from below. This inner fight will

only come to an end when the soul found its rest in the holy spirit.

In the worst case a doubter is someone who is dependent in all his ways and all areas of his life, undetermined, insecure and inconstant. But if someone trusts in God he will walk the right way and his walk will be steady. Someone who trusts in God will not be satisfied with false assurance or wrong help. He is rather free and happy because of God. He confidently holds on to God's words and His promises.

For a **Christian wisdom is not** in philosophical speculations or intellectual knowledge, but it is a God-revealed deep wisdom of life. It is such wisdom that is given within the parameter of divine truth of creation, a righteous lifestyle, right behaviour and a good attitude, just like God has planned it for the best of all individuals. The conscious awareness of God's wisdom is subsequently applied in every day life by word and deed.

**Jam. 1,9-11:** No one should boast before God. God also loves, and especially loves the poor and weak. Christian faith increases the value of people, especially those who suffer, are homeless or are very poor. James teaches to respect the poor because God respects them and to give them more confidence. In the church there should not be any differences between social classes or other groups. For God all people are equally precious (1. Cor. 6,20). God is love and as the Father He loves all the children He created.

It even happened in the early church that **even slaves** became the spiritual leaders of a church. Slaves preached while their lords were just members of the church. This is also the reason why **church garments** (cassock,etc) were introduced. The **poor brother** was not supposed to preach in his poor gowns. This soon became a practical tradition. The church robes we still see today is nothing **but the common Roman clothes** of that time.

**Reflection on riches:** It is ok to be rich, but not to love riches ( Mat. 19,16-24 / Mark.10,17-31 / Luk. 18,18-30 ). Riches cannot save (Pro. 11,4-6,28;16,16). It is the blessing and the grace of God that truly makes us rich and wealthy (Deut. 28,12). Then you will have everything you truly need for your life. However, our true riches are not in and not of this world, because the earthly riches will fall apart and are not eternal. Sometimes after a few years, sometimes after decades or even centuries but this is still nothing compared to the eternity of the heavenly kingdom.

Therefore James even speaks of the **dangers of riches**. The danger is especially that rich people often have a wrong perception of wealth and security (Rev. 3,16,17). They feel safe because they seem to have enough means for longterm provision. They can buy whatever they want. They deceive themselves and think that they have greater authority and can pay whatever price to get themselves out of trouble. Faith in Christ therefore teaches rich people a new awareness that they have to deny and humble themselves. James encourages the rich people not to trust in material things they can use to buy all things. They should rather be aware that they of themselves cannot help themselves and admit their shortcomings. They should not be proud but humbly trust in God who alone is able to give us more than even our life. James also wants to beware us of a wrong estimation of our own social position.

If someone is poor and not highly esteemed he should not lose heart or courage but rather be glad that he counts for God if he would present himself with thanksgiving and humility. A rich man, on the opposite, should be aware that his earthly possessions are vain compared to God's sovereignty. Our true value is not in material riches. Our value cannot be measured in our social status or the brilliance of abilities in arts or music, etc. Christ declared us precious. As children of a glorious and powerful creative God we are priceless beings. When we identify ourselves more and more with Jesus we will be free of envy of people who appear to have more than we do. When we identify ourselves more and more with Jesus we will be free of pride of the things we have.

We are allowed to enjoy who we are and what we have, but to compare ourselves with others if they have more or less than we have is sin and does not only destroy our relationships but also poison our heart. Christ declared our lives precious, no matter if we are rich or poor, no matter if we are alone or married, no matter what our life circumstances may be.

**Jam. 1,13-18: In all temptations:** verses 12 to 15 describe the „**origin of temptation**“. When our faith is weak there is a danger that we might blame God for it. He could have prevented it, is what we think in our twisted mind. The Israelites always blamed God that He lead them out of Egypt. Temptation always comes from the inside of a person (1. Cor. 10,13). God allows His enemy satan, to tempt men (read Jer.11,20 / 2. Chron. 32,31) in order to reveal the depths of his heart (Gen. 22,1 / Ex.16,4 / Deut. 8,2;13,4). These tests usually happen on the outside, caused by outer circumstances: touching the body or the material things of a

person ( Job 1,8-12 / Mat. 4,1 / 1. Cor. 7,5 / 1. Thes. 3,5 / Rev. 2,10 ). Of course most of the tests result from our own desires, weaknesses, addictions and wishes, because it is about the personal life experiences and the maturity of every individual's soul.

James emphasizes that no one is helplessly delivered to his temptations without protection. The grace of God is provided for him and also the endless power of God, the fulness of God with His armor of the Holy Spirit. It just has to be practically applied in order to resist every temptation (Eph. 5,8 / 1. Thess. 5,5 / 1. Petr. 5,9 / Jam. 4,7 / Hebr. 12,4 ).

**Jam. 1,19-20: before we act we have to listen** – and hearing should be followed by actions (Jam.1,22-25). Only false prophets will go without an assignment of God and speak words on their own behalf ( Jer. 14,14,15; 23,21 ). The word of God has to be proclaimed in order for someone to believe and accept faith in Jesus. Faith comes by hearing, the powerful rhema – the God-inspired word (Rom.10,6-19 ). The holy word of God has to be understood on the inside and then it can be practically applied in word and deed. God does nothing without proclamation. And therefore He wants nothing done that he did not assign us to do or ask for (Amos 3,3,6-8 ).

This letter has no intention to evangelize but rather addresses experienced Christians, people who already know the will of God. He cares about the right application of God's word, the change in our heart and our life. Three times James says "**If someone is a hearer only he deceives Himself.**"

James teaches that **our daily life should be service for God** and gives many practical examples: to control our **tongue**, to care for the **needy** and not to give heed to **human standards** of society, etc. (Jam. 1,19-20 ). In old Rabbinic texts it reads: "**There are four kinds of students.** Some hear quickly and forget quickly: Win and loss compensate each other. Others are slow to hear and slow to forget: Their gain outweighs their loss. The third are quick to hear and slow to forget: those are wise. The fourth are slow to hear and quick to forget: this is the worst kind." ( Also read Pro 10,19;13,3 ) We find similar thoughts in many texts of the Antique. Zeno for example said: "**We have two ears and only one mouth so that we would listen more and speak less!**"

**James also advises to be slow to wrath.** We can get agitated because of so many crazy things in this world. But we can accomplish so much more when we do not rage with anger or even better, not get angry. James describes this **denial** of evil and uncleanness with the word „**take off**“- as a taking off of dirty clothes. The same way believers should free themselves of all evil things. They should take off, reject and deny all things that **keep them from** hearing the truth of God's word. Especially to let go of all things that make us „deaf“ and closes our ears. The colorful variety of sin makes our ear turn deaf towards God and quenches the spirit within him.

James assumes that our knowledge of the truth is fed from two sources. **From the external and the internal voice.** If a man is wise **he will listen to both voices**, prove them and then follow the divine voice.

**Jam .1,22: Be ye doers** of the word and not hearers only, lest you deceive yourself. It is not enough to just **accept** the word, we should also answer by obedience of love. The word of God cannot only be accepted with our mind and thoughts, we also have to welcome the Holy Spirit with according deeds. By every selfless act of love the tender spark of the Holy Spirit will grow stronger, so that we grow precept upon precept in our power and ability to love. The divine spark of love can be fed by our love deeds and turn into a burning flame. A true Christian has to become a "**doer of the word**" and remain faithful. If someone is not a doer of the word he deceives himself, betrays himself. Faith and the word of God should not be empty knowledge. Thought, word, deed and results are a unity such as order, direction, way and goal or fire, water, earth and air. In order to make this clear, James uses the image of a „**mirror**“.

**A mirror helps to perceive things** that we cannot see without help, in order to find if there is something out of order. Or we look in the mirror to find out if we have to clean us up. An idle, proud person often wants to insist on their opinion and will not take correction from anybody. He will only check his reflection quickly and goes back to his daily routine. James explains that a quick, superficial **self-reflection** is in vain. The word of God expects us to reflect it humbly, diligently, continuously and honestly. Then we will know ourselves and recognize our dark spots, masks and flaws. When we confess those things and deny them we will be

redeemed of all things that were exposed without becoming depressed in order to overcome by the grace and power of God.

**Jam 1,25: The law of freedom.** Jesus is the end of the strict law and perfectly fulfilled it, but the moral requirements still apply. There is a law of order of life and living together that Christians should be aware of. It is the way of living that God has purposed for us, especially those who freely agree with the will of God. The divine law is so perfect that it cannot be changed for the better in any way. It is the ancient law of love, light and life. And whoever obeys the law of Christ, executes the true and holy purpose of our being on earth.

**Jam. 1,26: ...shows us what destroys our service** – and vers 27 tells us what belongs to it. It explains again what was meant by the deeds (behaviour and attitude) of a Christian. Speech belongs to our daily obligations. Idle words are discussed in detail: whoever serves God should open his mouth without consideration. Such a person will not speak idle, vain words. He will rather speak thoughtful, encouraging and true words that are determined by skilfull self-discipline (more in Jam. 3,1-12 ). The right thing would be to „**speak as the spirit gives us utterance**“. The fleshly speech and gossip is usually a door for the enemy of our life, arguments, discussions, misunderstanding and tension. As soon as you start to murmur and rebel in even in the small things the river of blessing and God's love stop to flow ( Act. 6,1 ) This is what also happened in the blooming church in Jerusalem. Therefore James tackles idle words like complaints, gossip and rebellion (Jam. 3,1-12 ), because it causes damage to the kingdom of God and the purposes of Jesus.

#### **Jam. 1,27: What is a pure and undefiled service?**

The Greek word for „**service**“ appears four times in the NT, two times in the letter of James (and then in Col. 2,18 / Act. 26,5 ). It tells us that God is not interested in religious rituals of a service, but is more interested in our lifestyle. One part, on the outside is „**to visit widows and orphans**“. The second, on the inside is our inner condition, which should be to „**keep ourselves undefiled of this world**“. A true believer will know who he truly is and care for those in need.

„**Widows and orphans**“ needed special help and legal protection (Mat. 25,45; 18,5 ). **It is ok to work in this world**, but not to defile ourselves or identify ourselves with it. In the OT Israel was told again and again not to become defiled by the idols of the nations around them. This meant they were not supposed to conform to the glittering world and its images (Lev. 19,31/ Jer. 2,7 / Ez. 5,11 ) and not to be controlled by the hostile powers. To live according to worldly counsel and standard or to live according to the regulations and customs

of this world is not for a believer who is connected to God (read Psalm 1 ). James judges what also the prophets judged in the Old Testament (compare Zach. 7,6-10/ Micah. 6,6-8 ). They required the opposite, that they would prove their loyalty to God by loving their neighbour as themselves and encouraged them to live a pure and holy life inspite of the permanent trials and temptations of this world.

James asked the believers to make a difference to the world. The worldly spirit demands us to „**conform**“ to the present standard of the world. This reveals the spirit of the Antichrist ( 2.Thess. 2,3-12 / Rev. 13 ), the spirit of the harlot ( Rev. 17 ) who wants to make Christians equal with the world.

To be „**undefiled**“ - expresses the opposite of immorality (1.Tim. 6,14 / 1. Petr. 1,19 / 2. Petr. 3,14 ). Furthermore, to be undefiled is a sign of an upright and humble attitude in agreement with the word of God. (Jam.1,19-27 ). **The essence of Christian devoutness starts in the execution of the word of God** (Jam.1,22-25 ), especially the selfless deed of charity.

#### **In the letter of James there is no main tough development.**

The **2<sup>nd</sup> verse** already shows us where James is going with this letter. His intention is to encourage the reader to establish his faith in daily life.

**Jame's instructions become more direct and concrete throughout the letter.** He is obviously discontent with the social imbalance among the brethren. He condemns the preference of single church members over others. All have to learn to accept one another – no matter what the social status may be or where they come from. A church of faith belongs to the body of Christ which must be united. This is what James fights for.

**Jam. 2,1-13: Since God is not a respecter of persons** his children should not make a difference with each other. He is actually opposing the attitude of the Pharisees that was adopted into Christianity since they all came from Judaism and more or less adhered the ritual laws.

The service they celebrated was according to the „**services at the synagogues**“. Therefore a relapse into the old, fleshly, traditional habits is understandable. James especially criticises those who treat rich people in a privileged way. A poor man was nothing among the Jews. They regarded the poor as cursed and therefore did not respect them. Even our dear Jesus had to experience such discriminating despise and offense (see Luk. 7,44 ). Here we find the continuation of the fight between light and dark that Jesus lead with the Pharisees (comp. Luk. 6,24 / Mat. 19,23 / Luk.14,8 )

**Jam. 2,12-13 tells us that only mercy counts in the judgment of God** (comp. Pro. 21,23 / Mat. 6,14,15 ). In these 13 verses James stays consequent in his topic. He challenges the Christians to meet every man without prejudice and with an open heart.

**Christians should live free from condemnation of any kind.** The Greek word for person is „mask“, like an actor for example. It is not so much about the individual but rather about the description of a certain type who plays a characteristic role. James challenges the Christians to meet every person with uprightness and without prejudice. **A prejudice is not a judgment.** It is rather a dangerous assumption without taking the effort to look behind the mask of the person in order to find out what is going on in that person. If someone meets others with prejudice is limited in his thinking and actions, criticises before the time and puts them in a box that he established long before he meets the actual person.

Out of a broad variety of all kinds of prejudices and boxes James chose the **treatment of the poor and the rich**. In the church of Jesus there is no first or second class. There are also no appointed chairs or seats of honor that have to be kept free. We are all the same before God. A shepherd and his flock. There is no respect of persons since it only reflects the worldly side which is passing by.

**Jam. 2,1-4** speaks of an **injustice** between the rich and the poor in the service or the church gathering. To make such a difference is a wrong attitude before God. In Jam. 2,5 this statement is theologically supported. Jam. 2,6 warns us of the foolish argument that those are life experiences. In Jam. 2,8-11 this severe **misconduct** as a violation against the foundational command of charity and relentlessness (Mark. 12,28-34 / Mat. 5,43f. / Luk. 6,27f. / Gal. 5,14 / Rom. 13,8-10 ) and the command of loving your neighbor ( Joh. 13,34 / 1. Joh. 2,7f.; 3,11-18 / 2. Joh. 5 ).

**Jam. 2,2:** „If there come into your **assembly**...“ , - here the original word is „synagogue“: It is the only text in the NT where the Christian gathering is called so. This is another indication that James is addressing the Jews who had become Christians and had adopted the „**synagogue system**“. The instructions for the Anointing of the Sick also indicate it by the terminology (Jam. 5,14 ), the „**elders of the church**“.

**In his letter James confronts problems within the church.** The love of the first church had grown cold. In Corinth Christians were going to court (Jam. 2,6 / 1. Cor. 6,1 ). They probably had to do so, since there were no other jurisdictions and therefore Christianity was mocked. At this point James refers to the message, when He said: ... **they will bring you to court and whip you in their synagogues..**“ (read Mat. 10,17-19; 23,34 / Mark.13,9 / Luk. 12,11; 21,12 ).

**Jam. 2, 5: Now James turns things upside down** by saying: *Did God not choose the poor in this world to make them rich by faith and make them heirs of the kingdom that He promised to those who love Him?*

Since Christ God is with **the poor**, the weak, despised and neglected (Luk. 4,18-19 / Is. 61,1-2 ). This appears to be partial, since He also accepted humble rich people, even though they were few. The term **person** meant something different than before. It was not so much the individual but more referred to the characteristics of the person. The term “**respect of person**” means to show partiality. Even in the Old Testament a judge was not allowed to show partiality (Lev. 19,15 / Deut .1,17 / Ps. 82, 2 ).

James said : **faith and respect** of person do not go together because our role model is God and He is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2,11; 3,22,23 / Eph. 6,9 / Col. 3, 25 ). To disrespect the poor is a violation of God's law of love – one of the most important commands ( Mat. 22,36-40 ) and therefore a violation of the whole law. The love of the Father makes no distinction. Even though we are all different and have different

assignments in the church we are all the same before God: One is your Master – Jesus, but you are all brethren (Mat. 23, 8 ). We are all children of the only true and holy God. So of course we should not be a respecter of persons because God plays no favorites either (Rom. 2,11 / Eph. 6,9 / Col. 3,25 ).

**God chose the poor** (1. Cor. 1,26-31 ). Of course poverty is not a requirement or a reason to get saved. James is just interpreting the Sermon of the Mount and going deeper into it ( Mat. 5,3 ). The kingdom of God is only promised to those who truly love God with all their heart. Those who keep His commands are those who love Him, and not those who only confess with their mouth. But rather the quiet ones who do the will of their Father out of their love for Him ( Mat. 7,21 / 1. Joh. 2,17; 3,24; 4,21; 5,3 ).

James said: „**Do not disgrace the poor**“. God always chooses the little ones out of the part of creation who was rebellious and proud, just like He did it with Israel (Deut. 7,7 ). James has nothing positive to say about the celebrities and powerful, famous ones. In the opposite he criticises them in the following verses. In Jesus words he says: **It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven** ( Mat. 19,23 ) and the „poor“ were chosen from God. What is a custom in the daily routine of the worldly society must not be the standard of the church of Jesus. If someone just looks at the outside appearance and discriminates people by putting them in a box, judging or even condemning them, sins against them and against God at the same time. With the living faith in Jesus Christ it is possible to overcome all social, national and other differences without neglecting the God-given individual personality of the person (comp. Col. 3,11 / Gal. 3,28 ).

**We must keep in mind:** In the new kingdom of God, all things that are important to us on this earth and that separate us from each other, **are no longer important then**. In the new divine world all that counts are Jesus Christ and His endless love, nothing more and nothing less. As a faithful church we should get a taste of it in this world. If our future with God determines our present, differences no longer count. The kingdom of God is already here in every one who received Jesus in his heart.

**Jam. 2,14-17: deeds belong to our faith and our justification.**

Faith without action is a shallow and dead faith, according to James. This faith cannot save us. We receive the holy grace of God for free and undeserved, without works and by faith alone – this is true (Eph. 2,8,9 ) - but to reach the kingdom, the destiny of our divine calling we need deeds: love put in action (comp. Joh. 15,1-5 / Mat. 13,3-23 ).

**Jam. 2,14-26: faith and action / works.** You cannot truly believe without expressing your love in your deeds. Living faith always produces good works.

James explains the theology of Paul, especially dealing with the proclamations that were resulting from misunderstanding his teachings. The holy spirit wants to prevent **extremes and partiality**. Especially for this reason God blessed us with the letter of James ( 2. Petr. 1,20-21 / 2. Tim. 3,14-16 / 1. Tim. 5,18 / 2. Petr. 3,15-16 ). In the Jewish Christianity around Jerusalem faith seemed to have become a shallow consideration. They only insisted on faith itself and that faith alone would be sufficient for salvation. Nobody wanted to hear anything about deeds and works. The true fruits of faith remained meaningless and therefore had no influence upon their lifestyle. Therefore James challenged them to let faith result in deeds of love in order to produce some fruits of faith. He wants to point out that faith in Jesus Christ is a living, creative faith and does not only consist of listening to sermons, reading the bible or pray. According to the **theology of Paul** as we can read in his Epistle to the Romans and Galatians, a man is justified before God by faith alone and not depending on his works based on Jewish regulations that were revealed through Moses (Rom. 4,27 ):

Also James refers to the story of Abraham in order to support his statements. But he does not only use Gen. 15,6, but also Gen. 22,9, where Abraham was even obedient to offer up his beloved son Isaac. This proves that Abraham's faith was walking hand in hand with works of faith ( Jam. 2,22 ).

The topic **faith and works** especially address the wealthy rich people and their responsibility. Someone whom God blessed with many goods should be prepared to support the needy anytime because that is why he has received material possessions and was positioned to help the poor. Helpfulness alone cannot deserve salvation because it was an act of grace which cannot be deserved. But we can serve Jesus and make Him proud of us (Mat. 25,34-46 ). James states that he can tell if faith is real when he sees the according works in the life of the believer (Jam. 2,19-20 ) and not just theory. James says: „You claim to be a believer, then prove by your works that you truly believe.“ This is a challenge for the hypocrites to tempt them to prove that their faith is alive.

**Jam. 2,19:** A typical monotheistic confession of God - „**There is one God**“ is the most fundamental faith confession of Israel (Deut 6,4). And Moses added: „You shall love the Lord, thy God, with all your heart all your might and all your soul.“ **This is intense action. Also the demons acknowledge God** (Mark.1,24,34), but they decided to disobey God and therefore feared the wrath of God. Those spirits have to believe in God because they cannot deny their inner voice. The **demons** believe ( Jam. 2,18,19 ) and also know that there is only one god. They ever recognized Jesus as the „son of God“ and the „holy one of God“ and called Him by those titles ( Mat. 8,29 / Luk. 4,34 ). But their knowledge was in vain because they did not really fear God, otherwise their fear would become reverence and they would serve Him instead of trying to harm Him. Therefore James considers faith in God without works totally meaningless.

**James is opposing the Judaistic way of thinking.** The thinking of a Jew even up to today is very narrow to assume that their religion is the only true religion of all ( Matt. 5,17 / Rom. 2,17 ). Being a very small majority among all nations they truly believe that God prefers them. God does not prefer anybody, especially not the proud and arrogant.

Christianity emphasized that **all men are born** sinners, unbelievers, fallen and rebellious to God, which also includes the Jews who think they are better than others ( Rom. 3,23 ). We were born into this earth, a creation that is in bondage because once we chose to turn away from God, together with one third of the angels. Therefore we fell into darkness and are also born into darkness. How much more do we need the helping grace of God to escape this death and darkness we deliberately chose! Therefor James explains that **even demons believe in God somehow**, but they do not obey the will of God and what He tells them, so that they cannot escape their demonic nature even if they wanted to.

This puts the Pharisees on the same level as demons (Joh. 8,44 / Rev. 2,9; 3,9) because they rejected Jesus and therewith the grace of God (Joh. 8,39-42 / 1. Petr. 2,22). Also their works were dead, because they were not based on faith which justifies us before God and gives us life (Jam. 2,21,22). This is how Paul judged the dead works of the Jews and James judged the faith that only takes place in the mind, confessions of faith that were only based on traditions of the Old Testament. This way Paul and James use contradictory ways of explaining this – but in the end they are saying the same thing (Rom. 2,6-11;13,27-29).

**Jam. 2,21-23: Abraham was justified by his works** (also Rahab. Jam, 2,25). By his faith and obedience to God Abraham was even willing to offer up his son Isaac (Gen. 22). But then he heard the voice of God (Gen. 22:16-18) because he had passed the test of his love (Hebr. 11,17-19) and received the full blessing (Gen. 21,12).

The reason for Abrahams justification **by his faith alone** is expressed in the incident (Gen.15,5,6) when Abraham was supposed to number the stars. There he received the promise. Abraham **believed** already but was not able to express his faith yet. His faith had not yet been revealed in according actions. When he received that promise he was not even circumcised (Rom. 4,11-12 / Gen. 17,4-11) and his faith had not become evident yet.

Paul based his doctrine of „**justification by faith**“ on Gen.15 ( comp. Rom. 4,12 ). James, however, based his doctrine on Gen.22 and therefore the deeds of the circumcised and tested Abraham. Abrahams faith had matured and was made perfect. This is what **Peter** and **James** preached when they proclaimed the „**gospel of circumcision**“ to the circumcised (Gal. 2,7-8 / 2. Petr. 1,10,11).

**Christians lived under the law of freedom** and they will also be judged according to that law. In contrast to the Pharisees and the orthodox Jews whose life was determined by external pressure consisting of regulations and laws, the life of a Christian is supposed to be determined by the inner desire to give love freely without fear of punishment.

**Justification is an act of God** when He declares the believing sinner righteous because of the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This is not a continuous thing but an act that only had to be done once, by the goodness, grace and love of God. It is nothing that a sinner could ever do himself. It is an holy act of God on behalf of the powerless sinner, required that he freely acknowledges Jesus Christ, trusts Him and receives Him in his life. The redemptive salvation itself is for free. It is an undeserved gift of grace. It is an amazing and eternal incident that happened once and for all. But the practical realization and application of salvation must be effected with our help and effort.

Only after Abraham was obedient to offer up his son Isaac (Jak.2,23) he was called a „**friend of God**“ and the promise of Gen.15,6 becomes true. In the same way this also applies for the harlot Rahab ( Jam. 2,25 ), who was justified by her works when she hid the messengers and saved their lives ( Hebr. 11,31 ) because she believed in God ( Jos. 2,1-11 ) and followed the instructions (to put a red ribbon in her window).

**Jam. 2,23: „Abraham believed God...“.** ( Gen. 15,6 ;18,17 ). Even before Abraham did what was pleasing in God's sight his faith was counted righteousness. Paul and James are in agreement with each other. The **faith of Abraham** was not a blind, dead consideration that it is true. He also did something when he showed his willingness to offer his son to God. If Abraham or Rahab ( Jam. 2,23-25 ) James emphasizes the external conditions of both. Their faith was not just somethin on the inside, an invisible pretense or empty

words, but was rather reflected on the outside in courageous, good deeds. They put their faith in action and therefore passed the test of their faith ( Hebr. 11,31 because of their faith... ).

**Jakm 2,2 : „by faith alone...“.** The words „by faith alone“ are in the original text and not in Rom. 3,28, but only in Jam. 2,24. This is decisive regarding his opponents who separate faith and works in Jam. 2,18 and believe that faith alone is enough. But actually Jam. 2,24 and Rom. 3,28 do not contradict each other. Rom. 3,28 lacks the word „alone“.

The Jewish teachers (Rabbis) always insisted that a matter has to be confirmed by **two or three witnesses** and / or texts that prove the statement. James assumes the same attitude. He mentions Rahab and Abraham (Jam. 2,25 / Jos. 2,1; 6,17 / Hebr. 11,31 ). God even used her family line for the birth of His son Jesus ( Mat. 1,5 ). Therefore she was justified by her works.

**Rahab heard the word** and knew that her city was cursed ( Jos. 2,11 ). Rahab answered with her mind and her emotions, but she also answered with active determination: She did something important. She risked her own life in order to save Jewish spies. She even dared to tell that dangerous but good news to the members of her family.

Many bible interpretors act like James drops out of the NT. But this is not the case. Jesus also represents the same opinion (comp. Mat 7,21ff.; 12,50; 21,28ff. ), and also Paul ( Rom. 2,13 / Gal. 5,6 / 2. Tim. 3,17 / Tit. 3,8) and John ( 1. Joh. 2,17 / 1. Joh. 3,18 ).

The letter of James is a warning to all who think grace if cheap. James argues very carefully. The saving faith is more than just a consideration, it is rather a practical faith or an obedient faith. The divine salvation, and the grace of the Lord cannot be deserved (Jam. 2,14 ). **Abraham was justified** when he place Isaac on the altar. This reveals the measure of faith Abraham had. Faith is only true, real and perfect when it produces fruits of work (1. Thess. 4,1ff. and Jam. 2,14ff. ).

James likes to use phrases like: „**And the scripture was fulfilled, which said....**“ ( Jam. 2,23 ). We often find this phrase in the New Testament (NT) (comp. Joh. 7,38,42 / Rom. 4,3,9,17 / Rom. 10,11 / Gal. 4,30 / 1. Tim. 5,18 / Jam. 4,5 ). It is always presumed that the „scripture“ is represented in its entirety and without contradictions, and that the canon of the Old Testament was already perfectly fulfilled through Jesus. Therefore we read this as a fulfilled prophecy of the OT in the New Covenant – received and understood. Therfore the apostles also refered to the scripture of the Old Testament.

If someone does not love his neighbour ( Jam. 2,15-16 ), then even all his good wishes are in vain, like the traditional Jewish farewell "go in peace" (comp. Judg. 18,6 / 1. Sam. 1,17 / 2. Sam. 15,9 / Mak. 5,34 / Lk. 7,50 ). Spiritual works (deeds) are the evidence and not the motivation of true faith.

Paul usually centered the meaning of faith. But James wants to see evidence of our faith. To him good deeds are the result of living faith. Faith and works complement each other – just like body and spirit.

**Jam. 2,26: A body without spirit is dead.** This is a clear comparison. The dead cannot work or do anything (comp. Ecc. 9,5,10; 12,7; Ps. 104,29; 115,17; 146,4 / Dan. 12,13 / Luk. 23,46 / 1. Cor. 15,18 ). Also Paul states „work out your own salvation with fear and trembling“ ( Phil. 2,12 ).

**Jam. 3,1-12: Responsibility of reasonable speech!**

James continues to go against the Christians who were influenced by the attitudes of the Pharisees. In order to do that he addresses their zeal to teach. There were probably no occupied teachers yet, as it was a custom in the synagogues. According to the structure of the synagogue the church leader allowed many

brothers to teach in the gatherings. But many of them had just converted and were not yet mature enough to become a teacher (comp. Rom. 2,17-24 /1. Tim. 6,3-7 / 2. Tim. 2,16-18 / Tit. 3,9 -11 / Tit. 1,10-12 ).

**Jam. 3,1: „Not many of you should become teachers...**“ The whole chapter 3 deals with those who want to be a teacher because of that position to stand in the front and instruct others. He is addressing all who are ambitious to occupy an important position in church (also read Mat. 23,8 / Act. 13,1 / 1. Cor. 12,28 ). They should all be aware what kind of responsibility they will take on automatically.

The whole chapter (Jam. 3 ) seems to be written with regard to those who think they should teach in the church. They must be aware how God will hold them responsible because God will give a stricter judgment

to those who teach in His church. James is especially addressing those who want to teach others in spiritual things (comp. Jam. 3,13 / Tit. 1,10-12 ). But when he speaks about controlling the tongue he is talking to those who gossip and James is not necessarily referring to teachers only.

**Jam. 3,1,2: Not many of you should become teachers.** This means that there must have been many who were pressing towards a position in the church in order to be privileged and give commands to others. It is usually a very good and important ministry, but a person has to fulfill certain requirements in order to meet the expectations of God for a teacher. It is a very responsible position (Mat. 12,36,37 / Luk. 1,48 ). Such a ministry can only be done with great humility. .

**Immaturity, pride and idleness** are totally out of place for this position. If someone wants to be an effective teacher he has to have knowledge, experience and must be rooted in the word of God and in faith. A “**freshman**” who just received the faith and just started to believe should not teach. In the best case the holy spirit Himself appoints the ministers of a church ( Eph. 4,11 ). It is another issue that many Christians should be teachers already but are still so immature that they need milk instead of solid nourishment. Many are still not able to discern wrong from right ( Heb. 5,12-14 ). The ministry of evangelists, shepherds and teachers are very important gifts of grace by our Lord Jesus Christ for His chosen church ( Eph. 4,11 ).

**The characteristics of a mature person:** He should be in a good spiritual condition and his life should be alright with God. He should be full of the Holy Spirit and have a positive spirit. He should be able to eat meat (Hebr. 5,12-14 ) and be a father in Christ. He must especially be very self-disciplined (Gal. 5,22 ). All of those things result in wise speech that encourages the weak and weary, etc ( Col. 4,16 / Eph. 4,29 ).

**Jam. 3,1-18: Faith shows in our speech.** Control your tongue – this is James' request. Again James argues by practical life experience (Jam. 3,3-12). He addresses a typical issue – **selfcontrol** that proves in our ability to control our tongue. He also shows what a man was actually created for – to praise God ( Jam. 3,9 ). The contrast of blessing and curse is often used in the Old Testament (Gen. 12,3; 27,29 / Numb 23,11; 24,9 / Joh. 8,34 ). To enhance his argument James uses the **image of the snake** because snakes carry their poison under their tongue.

**Jam.3,14-16:** God never agrees with plans motivated by **envy, revenge, pride or immorality**. James calls such evil attitudes earthly, sensual and devilish because it does not suit the behaviour of a person who is redeemed (comp. 1. Joh. 5,19 / Eph. 2,2 ).

The letter of James calls out the **speech of a believer** as an indication for the maturity of the believer. It requires that a believer is not only supposed to control his tongue ( Jam. 3,1-12 ) but also that they should always guard their mind and thoughts (Jam. 3,13-17 ), because the spoken word stands in direct connection with the thoughts of a man.

**The gift of conscious speech** distinguishes us from the animals. Human beings can think, plan, decide and also put our thoughts, plans and decisions in words – all of that underlines our spiritual superiority and unites our self-consciousness and our free will. We know how to deal with words and give answers and we also carry a certain responsibility for our words and actions. The Christians James was addressing obviously had serious problems with their **tongue**. A believer who cannot tame his tongue will sooner or later be unreliable (Jam.1,26 ). The power of speech is one of the greatest spiritual powers that God has given us. The genius ability to think words, formulate them and speak is a powerful ability to influence others and accomplish great tasks. We often assume this wonderful ability a routine and take it for granted. But a tongue which is not tamed by the holy spirit will destroy every spiritual ministry.

**There is no other sin that a man falls into so quickly like the sin of the tongue.**

And there is also no other sin that has such serious consequences (Mat. 12,36,37 ). James makes it clear

that the spiritual maturity must line up with the taming of the tongue. Therefore he **earnestly warns:** „**Control your tongue!**“ He emphasizes that the way a believer speaks is an important measure of the spiritual development. Therefore James dedicates a major part of this letter to rebuke unbridled and noxious speech. Negative speech destroys so many things, more than we can imagine. You cannot think negative and live positive or the other way around.

**Jam. 3,17–18: Wisdom from above** is sincere, peaceful, gentle, filled with mercies and good fruits. It makes no difference, is not partial or superficial. **True wisdom** is the positive contrast to the warnings in Jam. 4,1-6 against assertiveness and covetousness. True wisdom is revealed in its merciful works ( Jam. 1,22-25; 2,14-26 ). Insightful wisdom avoids behaviour that is connected to discussions, wrath or

provocation. Truly wise people will not let disagreement or arguments destroy the unity of Christ.

**Jam. 4,1-12: James warns of strife and worldliness.**

**In Jam. 4,1-6 he warns of discord.** James speaks of an **inner battle** (Rom. 7,23 /1. Petr. 2,11) that is raging within us. Some kind of **inner brokenness**. But it also refers to the many disagreements among the believers in the world. If someone only strives for visible, material things and rather seeks perishable things is equal to the world and not a bit better than them. James calls it „**friendship with the world**“ and therefore this is „**enmity with God**“.

James asks: **Does a well produce sweet and bitter water from the same source.** Can a figtree bear olives or can a vine produce figs? They cannot, neither can a salty well give sweet water. At first James uses the image of the well – a well cannot give sweet water and salt water at the same time. But we always produce mixed fruit. A well could also give two kinds of water if it would be connected to two sources. The fact that we produce two kinds of fruits shows that we are connected to two sources: the spirit of God and the spirit of this world. Therefore we must ask the Lord: “**Empty my heart!**” We must not doubt and move back and forth, but we should rather grow stronger in our steadfast fellowship with Christ ( Joh. 7,38 / Col. 2, 7 / Hebr. 13,9 ).

Then James uses the image of the **figtree and the vine**. Because of their seeds plants always remain faithful to their kind, we Christians are often not able to do so, especially with our words. It reminds us that Jesus said in the sermon of the Mount: **A good tree brings forth good fruits** ( Mat. 7,16 ).

**Jam. 4,4-6: The term „adulterers“** refers to the **Jews** who broke the covenant of God and therefore became enemies of God (comp. Jer. 31,32 ). The spirit of the world is and remains an enemy of God. The world hates the believers (read Joh. 15,18 ). The world and God are like water and fire. Sometimes we try to conform to this world in order to a friend to this world or have friends in this world to have an easy life or even to become rich.

**Jam. 4,7-9: Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil... Draw nigh to God.... Cleanse your hands and purify your hearts...** This is a wave of good instructions that rolls over the reader. Those are precious guides unto sanctification (Hebr.12,14 ).

The word „**submit**“ originates from the military language and means „to be under“ or „obey“. It is like a magnet with a positive and a negative pole. To „**resist**“ means to stand firm with God and oppose satan, then he will flee from you. But instead „**draw near**“ to God so that He can draw near to you. If someone runs to God He will meet him half way. But if someone wants to draw near to God he has to purify himself: „**cleanse**“ your hands – you sinners, and „**purify**“ your hearts – you double-minded! Both verbs, to **cleanse** and **purify**, refer to the **ceremonial cleaning** of Judaistic tradition. These instructions surely reached the Jewish Christians because it referred to their Judaistic knowledge.

The **necessity of cleansing** becomes clear by the term that James uses to address the reader - “**you sinners and double-minded**”. But what does this mean: “**Clean your hands you sinners!**”? Why would they clean their hands? This is just a metaphor because God, our Father who is always ready to receive us as His children is a pure and holy God. We cannot go into His presence with filthy sin and uncleanness. Unclean refers to the spiritual mix of the Almighty God and other god images, cults or religions (Ex. 20,4,5 ).

**God is the holiest of all**, that means that God is very different than we could ever imagine. God is more

omnipresent, concrete, real and closer than we could ever imagine. He is the source and the light Himself. In the best case we are His shadows. God is perfectly good, wise, true and pure. He is power, strength, might, love, authority and glory. The bible uses this impressive and mighty image of God to express just a glimpse of Who God is: "From His face the earth and the heaven fled away" (Rev. 20,11). If a man can only get a slight idea how holy God is, he is on the right way of faith – as expression of a pure gift of grace. „The fear of God (reverence) is the beginning of all wisdom“ ( Pro.9,10).

**The short statement: „Purify your hearts!“ includes a whole package of contents:** ...that you have to give up for God: all negative memories, painful hurts and all experienced and suppressed traumata, strongholds, soul ties, bitterness, disappointment and wrath. We have to be determined to leave all of that behind in order to be free to belong to God and only be available to His will and His service.

James consciously points to the group of the „**double-minded**“. They are the so-called religious „border crossers“, who juggle too many balls at the same time“, „serve two lords“ or „are caught in the middle“. This refers to all who have not yet forsaken all of their former attitudes and behaviours. To be double-minded means that on one hand a person cares for the gospel, but there are two souls that dwell in the bosom: the love for Jesus and the love for the world. James states that this has to change. Our hearts have to be purified and set apart for God.

**Jam. 4,7-10: Submit to God with thanksgiving!** This is a clear requirement in order to lead a victorious, holy and peaceful life. Only then we can oppose the devil and resist him without fear and chase him away. If someone turns to God, our source of life, he automatically turns away from satan, the enemy of life ( Mat. 4,1-11 / 1. Petr. 5,9 ). All exhortations of James are: not to sin, to cleanse ourselves or to tame our tongue – the climax of all is to resist the enemy of God, satan, and not do his will but follow only God. This is also what the prophets declared in the OT. It is always the same good and true message ( comp. Zach. 1,3 / Ps. 145,18 / siehe Ps. 18,21/ Is. 1,16 / 1. Joh. 3,3 / Joel. 2,12 / Is. 57,15 / Is. 66,2 / Ps. 51,19 / 1. Petr. 5,6 ). Especially that message of James to the twelve tribes of Israel in the diaspora is supposed to bring the remnant of Israel back to the Lord.

#### **Jam. 4,10: "If you humble yourself before the Lord, He will exalt you."**

For two reasons this humility is very important:

1. On one hand a humble character is open for the will of God. Humility is prepared to obey the Lord who will instruct him everywhere and at all times. The humble and obedient person rejoices in trust and hope in God at the same time (Rev.13,10 / 14,12 ).
2. On the other hand God wants to meet us right where we are, in the situation or condition we are currently in: on earth – way below. This being below makes it easy for us to be humble. But if someone is aiming to go high, he will miss God because of his idle pride.

**James wants to see faith applied in daily life in order to prove that faith is real.** But he still has to add some concrete, very serious exhortations in order to rebuke the „**twelve tribes**“. God did not want us to become all the same like soldiers in a uniform – in the opposite His creation is so manifold and unique. He does not want to form a unit religion. He wanted twelve tribes, who are all different in character but yet a unity of variety. This individual variety of the tribes was supposed to oppose the enemy together and if necessary to fight together. James also uses this repeated request to submit to God our Lord and Creator, to point out that we can either be the friend of God and an enemy of the world, or a friend of the world and an enemy of God, like in Jam. 3,11. He provokes them by saying Does a well give two kinds of water from only one source? Or: Can a figtree bear olives, can a vine produce figs?

James says that **the life and work of a Christian in general** and especially that of a teacher has to be determined by meekness. **Meekness** is not a popular word. This gentle, pure tenderness is not available to a person according to his raw nature. In the rough world of materialism we need a lot of elbows at our workplace, in society, politics or even daily life. In the opposite Jesus quietly and gently builds his church, in secret, the kingdom of heaven on the inside of every believer's heart.

While the ambitious people still build and toil in a deceptive world while everything is falling apart, His work has endured all the centuries and persecutions up to today. The true and only One has a different work

attitude. The Holy One will not rush, force or abuse nothing and nobody. Jesus has the longest wind and the longest arm. His merciful goodness and grace, His patient longsuffering and meekness are incomprehensible, unique and without end.

He is very gentle and careful when it comes to the winning and guiding of the souls of His children. He is never pushy but very persistent when He tries to reach an individual who is far away from Him. He wants the people to freely accept Him, like we also freely accepted our enemy into the dark. **Every force kills the development of a soul** and violates His law of free will. He quietly went around the Samaritan village that neglected and rejected Him (Lk. 9,51 - 57). Later the same Samaritans received the gospel from a sick Christian refugees. It is the same Luke who reports that in Acts 8,3 – 8. Paul said: God's weakness is stronger than the strength of man (1. Cor. 1, 25 ). This way Jesus shows us in the bible **what meekness**

**really means**. This is how OT prophecy announced Him ( Zach. 9, 9 ). He also confesses it Himself ( Mt. 11, 29 ). He expects the same meekness from His disciples. In addition He gives them a great promise in Mat. 5,5. And even today the Lord who is exalted on the right hand of God loves gentle meekness. He said: **"Behold, I am knocking on the door."** ( Rev. 3,20 ). This is how He offers His endless peace to His beloved, a peace that no one can attain another way. He stands and knocks and waits. Not that He does not have the power or authority. He freely chooses not to use it. This is only possible with Jesus and all who live under His guidance and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Also the so-called human principle of non-violence is not the same thing as divine peace. Because also with this well-intended principle people eventually want to **enforce** their own ways and ideas, just another way than before, a way that is more gentle. But the **meekness of Jesus** cannot originate from our own strength. He Himself has to come into our life by His word and His spirit. He has to be the highest authority of our life in order to guide our path without restrictions.

Therefore James explains that **wisdom** is a feature of a person with moral insight who is also able to deal with practical things in life. It is much more than just spiritual awareness and intellect. **Wisdom will be measured by the real works of daily life**. It is not about learning wisdom and knowledge in lectures or to learn for idle joy or your own purposes. It is to attain knowledge to apply it in a way that helps us to worship the Lord with our deeds more and more. This is how James explains the walk by faith. Someone who is truly wise is therefore a **humble person** who lives in meekness without envy, strife or bitterness.

**Jam. 4,12: Concerning judgment:** Judgment is a privilege of God alone ( Jam. 1,12; 2,4 / Mat. 7,1 / Rom. 2,1 / Ps. 5,11; 9,1 ). If someone still judges his neighbour he assumes the powerful position of God. A human judge knows nothing of God's grace and mercies.

**Besides disputes and a tendency to judge others,** the readers of this letter seemed to have also a tendency to **boast**. The apostle shows how such remarks would look like. He criticises their negative attitude and adds the practical suggestion how to avoid such perishable behaviour. And again we encounter a very contemporary image, that the readers were well acquainted with. It was an image that allowed them to reflect themselves.

The **Jews merchants of the Antique**. Therefore they often had opportunities to prove their trading skills. At that time many cities were built and the founders often made generous offers to the Jews who travelled a lot in order to get them settle down and multiply and trade in the new city. Wherever the Jews went the trade was blooming and brought good income. The image that James uses displays someone who looks at a map and says: *"There is a new city and this city seems to offer good opportunities to make some money. I will go there and prosper. I will stay there for one year and then return as a rich man!"* James states that nobody has the right to make plans like that, because we do not even know what the next day will bring. Of course we can have dreams and plans and determinations, but the future is always in God's hand because He alone is the one who guides our life.

James criticises ( Jam. 4,13 ) the motivation, someone who **relies on himself when he makes a plan**. James uses the typical image of a Jewish business man **who calculates without God**. Of course a very bad habit that was common among the Christians who came from a Jewish background. James rebukes them: **„You don't even know what tomorrow brings.“** Because the plans of a man are always unsure and **temporary**. We are never Lord over the things to come. Neither time nor life nor even our body belongs to ourselves. All is a gift and loan from the hand of God. And thus James gives them more questions: "For what is your life?" And the answer is: „It is nothing but **vapor** that appeareth for a little time and then vanishes away". It is only a certain kind of **„in between“**, a temporary intermezzo.

Let us not forget that James is speaking to **Christians**. They are supposed to be without envy and strife but honest. A Christian is not supposed to judge his brother. In the letter James mentions „**envy**“, which was originally called „**idle eagerness**“. The term for such eagerness applies if someone experiences something great or receives wisdom from above ... and uses it to cause others to be envious and jealous. To enjoy the appearance to be something very special or holy. There has to be no evil motivation. But it is not pleasing to God if we try to provoke others with our attitude. We could also call it „competition“. Also the word for „**strife**“ that James uses is not necessarily a word of negative meaning. It refers to assertiveness and ambitions motivated by pride, as soon as you are prepared to accomplish a goal by all means.

Perhaps the teachers were also exposed to such ambitions. The temptation of arrogance. Assertiveness was an old traditional sin of the Pharisees and later of the Jewish rabbis. Such a thing can also be seen in the church of Corinth (1. Cor. 1,12; 3,5; 6,22 ). **When jealousy and strife enter in, all kinds of evil things and destruction are at hand**, such as „judgment“. Wisdom from below will not provide humility for the person who owns it, but rather provokes shallow conceit. Wisdom is actually a term of spirituality that only applies when it is saturated with divine truth. All others are only worldly knowledge that is not meek but rather challenging. Superficial knowledge does not provoke humility or care, but pride and covetousness. Worldly knowledge or expert knowledge do not deliver us but rather make us more self-centred than we were before. But this destroys the foundation of every fellowship – great or small – in the church or in the world. Some great works were started by Christians until some evil attitudes separated and destroyed them.

**Envoy and competition** are always clear indicators that wisdom is not from above, from the spiritual hights of God, but rather earthly, sensual, satanic and perishable in the sense of natural. Therefore envy, strife and rivalry will lead to chaos and confusion and produce only evil things. A truly wise person does **not rely on recognition, hand claps or success**. Even if all of those things were denied to him, he would still be loving, caring and generous.

**In the text of Jam. 4,11-5,20 James gives concrete instructions as a church leader.** This is the part he especially dedicates to the Jewish Christians, the twelve tribes of Israel. **This is a comprehensive piece of pastoral theology including practical instructions concerning the application of faith.**

**Do not defame one another!** He tells us how we can reach spiritual maturity: „Do not judge one another, do not gossip! Do not tell lies about someone! Do not judge!“ (also read Proverbs 17,9) Like a sting the eagerness to criticise is in our flesh. It must be overcome by the power of God.

**Only God, the eternal and only one, has the privilege to judge someone.**

He is the creative giver of the law and the priestly judge and counselor or a person. If someone humiliates others in order to lift himself up, he is very far away from his true home – the kingdom of God. If someone appoints himself to be a judge, in whatever form, is playing God and therefore denies Him and His laws. All of that belongs to the „old“ issues or original sin, which was the fall of man, the fall into the spiritual depths of the valley of death (comp. Mat. 10,28 / Is. 33,22 ). This is a deep wound that only our Saviour Jesus can heal. His divine law of life tells us that we should love God, our neighbours and even our enemy, and not to condemn anyone (comp. Lev. 19,18 / 1. Cor. 4,4,5 / Luk. 6,37 ). To judge is an act that degrades and condemns a person that is actually a divine creature. This sinful condemnation against the people in our surrounding, no matter if direct or indirect, conscious or subconscious, it is against our holy God of creation.

**Jam. 4,13-17: A word for the merchants.** The Jews were diligent and talented merchants, also when they became Christians. James repeats what those merchants often said or decided by themselves: **“Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city and stay there for a year, trade and prosper.”** Those are idle plans.

God has no problem if we make our plans, but basically those people have not understood the divine mystery concerning the next day. With their carnal mind they assume the path of their life. They do not even know if the next day belongs to them since our life is perishable. James says: „**You are like vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.**“ ( Ps. 39,5-7 / 102,4 / Eccl. 6,12 / Pro. 27,1 ). Instead you should rather be wise and humble and speak like this: **„If the Lord wills and we live we will do this or that.“** Paul likes to say, being aware of his dependency: **„If it is God’s will, I shall...“** ( Act.18,21 / 1. Cor. 4,19 / Heb. 6,3 / comp. also Joh. 4,34 ).

**A word to the rich:** „Now listen you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted and moths have eaten your clothes... Look, the wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty (comp. Deut. 24,14,15). You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men who were not opposing you.“ The prophets had similar charges against the people of Israel in the OT, but this is a prophetic word of James.

**The problem is not wealth or riches**, but rather if someone loses his heart to it. If someone is trying to get rich by all means he will necessarily fall into many temptations and lustful desires. The love of money is the root of all evil – mammon (1. Tim. 6,9,10). In the Last Days with regard to the true kingdom of Israel the rich will suffer because nothing will be left for them. On the day of judgment there will be nothing left of them but mourning, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**James calls to patience:** “Be patient then, brothers” (Jam. 5,7,8) until the Lord's coming.

The coming of the Lord Jesus is a main motive for patience (1. Cor. 15,23 / Jam. 1,2-4,12 / 1. Thes. 3,13 / 1. Petr. 4,7; 5,10). A comparison with a farmer ( Jam. 5,7 ) reminds us of Mark 4,26-29. In the life of a Christian patience and waiting on God is the ABC of faith (Zach. 9,9 / 2. Petr. 3,9).

**Jam. 5,9: Don't grumble against each other!** ... or you will be judged. To grumble means to exalt oneself above another – a form of judgment that we are not authorised to do. Two examples: **the prophets and Job** (Jam. 5,7,8 / Job 1,21,22). We are challenged to „**be patient**“ until the Lord returns from heaven. It is about the patient „**suffering**“, and faithful „**endurance**“ until God Himself will finish it. All who want to live a God-fearing life will have to suffer persecution ( 2. Tim. 3,12 ) that almost all prophets had to go through ( Mat. 5,12 ). Stephen called out: „which prophet did your ancestors not persecute?“ ( Acts 7,52 ). Inspite of all that they patiently endured (comp. 1. Pet. 1,10-12).

**„Endurance“** - according to the gospel of circumcision the Jews would have to wait till the end to be saved ( Mat. 10,22; 24,13 / Luk. 21,19 / Rev. 13,10; 14,12 ).

**Jam. 5,12: Do not swear!** James means: „Do not determine yet! Make no empty promises (Mat. 5,3 34,37).

**Jam. 5,13-16: prayer for the sick!** There is a certain attitude that believers should have especially dealing with the pain and suffering of the neighbour. All who suffer, let it be because of other people or worldly circumstanced, they all can turn to God our Father with trust and expectation (Act. 16,25) or claim certain ministries of the church.

Especially the ministry of the so-called **elders**, the mature in faith. Brethren in faith who are open and care for others will rejoice with the happy and cry with the sad (Rom. 12,15).

**Prayer for the sick belonged to a usual church ministry.** The power of the holy spirit was already at work (read Hebr. 6,5 / and. Mark. 6,13 ).

**The sick were supposed to call the elders of their church.** They were supposed to visit them at home, and pray with them in the presence of the sick person. Call on the One to whom nothing is impossible. They were also supposed to anoint them with oil. Oil was an acknowledged remedy of the Antiquity, applied on believers it also represented the symbolical power of the holy spirit. The sick person was supposed to speak a confession of faith that expressed a closer walk with God in the future. Of course he was also supposed to firmly believe that the Lord is healing him in his sickness and lift him up. **In case that the sick person sinned**, based on his confession of faith and the determination to repent his sins will be forgiven him (Mat. 9,1-8). **The sick was obligated**, in case he sinned, to confess his sins publicly (1. Joh. 1,9). James closes the matter with one more instruction ( Jam. 5,16 ) : “...**pray for each other** so you can be healed.“ (Job 42,10).

**James uses „Elijah“ to prove the effectiveness of prayer.** The prayer of a „righteous“, or rather „**tried**“ person avails much. Before Elijah was able to pray with authority he had to be „tried“ (1. Kin. 17,18,42-45 / Luk. 4,25 ).

A „righteous“ man according to James is someone who „believes and acts“ ( Jam. 2,24 ) where faith and actions go hand in hand. He wants to explain that only the prayer of those who live pleasing in the sight of God can pray with authority and receive an answer ( 1. Joh. 3,22 ). In this manner only a person who prays according to the will of God will be heard ( 1. Joh. 5,14 / Joh. 1,4,14 / Mark. 11,24 / Rom. 8,26-28 ).

**Jam. 4,13-17: Warning of false complacency:** The „perishable man“ is the big topic of wisdom literature per se ( for example Ps. 39,6-7;12;102,4 ).

The **closing sentence** of chapter 4 warns the reader: “Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and does not do it, sins.” Jam. 4,17 probably refers to all kinds of behaviours that he previously mentioned in his letter.

**The letter is full of exhortations** to right attitude and a righteous lifestyle on earth.

Now if anyone hears these practical instructions and does not admit his mistakes and turn away from them sins. That person sins even more than a person who does not do good because he does not know better. In order to grow in heart and soul, a believer has to put into action what he has heard and accepted as the truth.

- He is supposed to trust and rely in God's word patiently in times of trials and tribulations.
- He has to be merciful to his brothers and sisters and not allow prejudices to guide his path. He must rather believe in the goodness of God and let that be the standard of behaviour towards other people.
- He must be able to bridle his tongue and guard his thoughts and his mind.
- He must be of a sound mind, balanced, reasonable, thoughtful and act with wisdom.
- He must draw near to God, the holy Father, eternal law-giver and sovereign judge with honest repentance and humility.
- He should also draw close with continuous motivation to trust Him and learn how to think, speak and act right.
- He must be exactly how God created him individually.
- He must be prepared to do what God expects from him and places in his heart.
- He should speak in a manner that is pleasant and acceptable unto God.
- He should have the mind and attitude that God expects.

**Jam. 5,1-6 : The warning to the rich.** The misery that the blind, rich people have to face are the perspective of inevitable judgment ( Jam. 5,7-9 / Mat. 6,19 / Is. 5,8-10 / Amos. 2,6-7; 8,4-8 ). James speaks in the manner of the prophets in the OT ( Micah. 3 / Is. 58,1-9 ). A great, long announced judgment was already at hand: the occupation and the fall of Jerusalem by the Romans AD 70.

James continues his wake up call ( Jam. 5 ) to the overly **confident merchants**. It refers not only to merchants who had a successful business and made a lot of income, but also those who were considered rich because of the possessions they stored up. James exposes such wealth as perishable vanity.

The door to God, the door to His heavenly kingdom leads through the narrow gate of sharing with each other in fellowship. The door is Jesus and not to store up precious treasures. Remember that the first church communities shared all their goods and possessions with each other ( Act. 4,36; 2,42,46 ).

**When James exposes the rich he is aiming at two things.** First of all he wants to show **the vanity** of all earthly, only appearing to be precious treasures. Secondly he wants to point out the **detestable character** that those people who stored up treasures for themselves usually had. He wants to keep the readers from putting their hope and desires in the perishable and sensual things of this earth.

When James says: „**Now listen, you rich people**: weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you ( Jam. 5,1 ) he wants to shock the reader to make him listen and realize that the rich people have nothing we could envy them for. Poor people do not have to feel inferior to them. Also the reader is supposed to apply this new insight in his attitude towards the poor. In the New Testament the rich people are usually on the side of the „**enemy**“ ( Mat. 23,14 / Luk. 16,14,19 ). To James it was clear that most of the rich people usually opposed Christ, and many of them would not be so rich if they had not been careless and selfish in

their way to prosperity (Luk. 12,16-21; 18,24 / Mat. 19,24 and also 1. Tim. 6,9 ).

In **Jam. 5,4** ther is a record of all the wrong things they did. They did not pay their workers correctly or held their wages back. This is a strong violation of the **law of charity**, disregarding the divine law (Lev. 19,13 / Deutos. 24,14 / Jer. 22,13 ) and therefore brought a curse upon themselves.

**Jam. 5,2-3: Therefore their possessions will not make them happy in the end.** James probably refers to their **food storages** that the greedy rich people stored up for themselves, keeping it from the needy who often had nothing to eat (Ps. 41, 2 / Pro. 19,17 ). These people just waited for the next famine in order to sell their stored up foods at a very high price. James prophesies: "All of that will perish or others will come and profit from it." James makes it plain that all the substance earthly riches are made of will sooner or later pass away. Riches are, just as everything else of the material creation, subject to the law of perishability. The

verses Jam. 5,2-3 are sharp criticsm of the wasteful lifestyle of rich egoistics and at the same time a reasonable warning to them. It does not condemn prosperity itself but rather the greed of the owners who walk crooked paths and the means they use in order to gain wealth.

**Jam. 5,7-11: Exhortation to patience:** „Be patient then, brothers, until the coming of the Lord...“

Out of the assurance that the Lord returns soon results in a demand of a certain attitude. **Job** is not only a role model for his heroic patience but much more as a warranty and example for the positive turn-around of his destiny and a new start, where all he had lost was restored to him twice – everything that the devil took from him in the beginning (Job 42,10 ). This is a good example of the goodness of God, showing that the truth always wins and that not only fairy tales have a happy ending. In the first three chapters of the Book of Job we are confronted with **his misery**. He lost his prosperity, his health and his family, except his wife who still adds to his sorrows and suggests to Job to deny God and kill himself. In the chapters 4 to 31 we read details about **Job's defense** and how he debates with his 3 friends and how he answers their false accusations.

Chapter 38 to 42 tell us of **Job's deliverance**: At first God humiliates Job and then He honors him and even gives him twice as much as he had before. When we explore the **experiences of Job** it is good to remeber that **Job did not know what happened behind the curtains between God and satan** like we know. God's spirit left Job without a clue why this happened to him in order to make perfect this test of faith. His friends are seriously blaming him to be a sinner and a hypocrite instead of showing compassion and encouraging him. „you must have violated God's law, otherwise God would never bring such misery upon you.“ Job did not agree with them and declared his innocence. His friends were wrong. In the end God rebuked the friends because they lied about Job and defamed him (Job 42,7) . **Job endured**. Satan was bold to claim that Job would **rebel** against God and deny Him, but this did not happen. It is true that Job questioned **the will of God** at a certain point of his suffering, but he never gave up his faith in the Lord (comp. Job 13,15 ). Job was so sure of God's divine perfection that he continued to reason with God, even though he did not understand what God was doing. This is evidence of true patience.

**Job was righteous through and through and still had to suffer.** God did not find a fault in him, and even satan could not find anything even though he tried. Job's friends were also not able to prove their accusations. The story of Job teaches us the understanding that God sometimes sees a different perspective of the sufferings we go through and not the punishment of sins. Job's experience prepared the way for Jesus, the perfect Son of God, who did not die for His own sins but for the sins of this world and had to endure terrible pain and suffering.

**One of the effects of suffering is the grooming of our character.**

James wanted to encourage us to become especially patient in times of suffering. Job is a motivating prototype for the victorious overcoming of difficulties, pain, loss and all aspects of our negative past. Paul also mentions that the suffering of this time here on earth are nothing compared the coming glory of eternity (Rom. 5,2 ). In eternity every soul will be grateful for the pain it suffered and was allowed to bear them with humble patience.

**The Christian hope is the expectation of the eschatological gifts of salvation:** To remind you –

Eschatology is the theological doctrine of the hope of perfection of every individual and the whole creation. Earlier it was called the doctrine of the „last things“ and subsequently „the doctrine of the beginning of a new world“.

**Some examples for hopeful expectations that we have:**

- The resurrection of the body ( Rom. 8,18-23 / 1.Thes. 4,13 );
- The inheritance of the saints (comp. Eph. 1,18 / Hebr. 6,11 / 1. Petr. 1,3 );
- Eternal life ( Tit. 1,2 / 1. Cor. 15,19 );
- Eternal glory ( Rom. 5,2 / 2. Cor. 3,7-12 / Eph. 1,18 / Col. 1,27 / Tit. 2,13 );
- To see God ( 1. Joh. 3,2 ) ... etc.

James encourages his brothers not to complain provoke judgment because Jesus, the omnipresent judge is at hand ( Jam. 5,9 ). Facing the joyful hope of a soon return of Christ all saints should put aside the little disputes James refers to in **Chapter 4**. Just like many small children in a class expect the coming of their favorite teacher, God's children should also be excited and look out for the coming of their beloved Father

Jesus. During the long time of the waiting process we need a quite and peaceful attitude towards each other and a harmonious fellowship in order to hold fast to our faith, love and faithfulness.

James strengthens the readers: „**Be patient!**“ This was his openign slogan and suggestion in the beginning of the letter ( 1, 1-5 ) and also his last counsel when he closes the letter. Because of God's loving patience and because of the law of free will God does not take away all unrighteousness and evil from this world until Jesus returns as it was promised. We as believers should wait patiently, faithfully and hopefully. Three times James reminds us of the coming of the Lord ( Jam. 5,7,8,9 ). In order to express the term patience he uses two different words, the word „longsuffering“ and „endurance“. In Jam. 5,11 he literally says: „to stay under“ and expresses a longlasting endurance under high pressure.

„Patience“ also means „to stand firm“ especially when we would prefer to run away. James gives us three encouraging examples to display „patient persistence“ to answer our important questions concerning the threats we have to face.

He mentions the farmer ( Jam. 5,7-9 ). There is no harvest over night, except some tares. Nobody can reign over the weather, also not a farmer – no matter how attentive he may watch the weather to find out all its secrets. This is how country lores were established in order to predict the weather. There is the image of rain, the „early rain“ that prepares the earth and soaks it. Again there is the image of the „latter rain“. A farmer had to wait many weeks until his seed would bear fruits. Besides Job, James also mentions „the prophets“ as role models of patience ( Jam. 5,10 ). A Jewish Christian church was able to immediately understand James' mention of the OT prophets. In the sermon of the Mount, Jesus also used the prophets as an example for the victory over persecution ( Matth. 5,10-12 ). Many prophets had to endure extreme temptations and suffering, not only by the hand of the enemy – but even more so by the hand of the believers. Those rebellious people proved by their actions that they were led astray from the truth and followed a wrong belief.

**Jam. 5,12: Do not swear!** The content can be compared to Mat. 5,34-37 but in Jam. 5,12 it does not only refer to the authority of Jesus. To swear could be translated by „determination“.

James uses the words of Jesus' sermon on the Mount ( Mat .5,34 ). He draws parallels to the customary practice of vows in Judaism. It cannot be understood as cursing and swearing in today's colloquial language, it rather refers to swearing on something or promise sth.

In Judaism there was a difference between a binding vow and a non-binding vow. This nonsense can be explained this way: every vow that contained the pronounced name of God was a binding vor. Every vow that did not mention the name of God directly was non- binding.

In their superficial and naive imagination they thought that as soon as God was mentioned in an agreement He became an active partner of a covenant. But if His name was not mentioned, God was not a part of it. The subsequent consequence was that people learned „to become masters of elusive vows“. Swearing became a matter of ability and Tricks. People tried to come up with new vows all the time that could be broken. Therefore the proclamation of a vow had become a show and many vows were made. This practice provoked lies, deception and betrayal.

In a place where it is common to be honest and truthful there is no need of vows..

In the case that we cannot trust a person it makes sense to make him vow. But according to the NT understanding every word that comes out of our mouth is spoken in the presence of God. From this point of view every word we say should be true. In addition the New Testament suggests that upright disciples of

Jesus should be such honorable people that no one would find it necessary to ask for a vow. Believers who are persistent and patient do not have to vow, neither by heaven nor by earth, in order to put more emphasis on their words or in order confirm the truth or reliability of their words.

Yes should be Yes and No should be No ( Mat. 5, 37 ). The **future coming** of our Lord and Judge, who stands at the door to our heart, is enough reason for us to be honest and reliable.

**Let us now take a look at the conclusion of the letter.** The final part in the end is a counseling part. James really wanted the brothers to change their thinking and renew their minds (read Jam. 5,19,20 ). He wants his letter to be as effective as can be, and help all who are confused to return to the right way of living.

The danger to lose the right way of faith and truth is always present in the valley of death. Therefore he calls the believers to become „**watchmen**“ (Ez. 3,17-21; 33,1-13 / Is. 21,6,8,11 ).

**Jam. 5,13: Is any one of you in trouble, let him pray. Is anyone happy, let him sing psalms..!**

These were the characteristic features and main topics of the early church in the beginning of Christianity. **The early churches were known as singing churches.** This means that the Christians were always ready and cheerfull of heart to sing loud songs of praise. The apostle Paul always encouraged them to do so in his letters, such as in Eph. 5,19 (also read Col. 3,16 / Rom.15,9 ). Prayer and praising God were the main parts of a service at that time.

**In the end** James speaks about **prayer**. Of course this is the most powerful and precious thing, that the brothers and sisters of faith can do for each other: to fervently pray for one another.

**Prayer is a very important act of charity.** This is the fastest line to the One who can do all things, no matter how complexe the current problem may be or how impossible a solution may seem. .

**For corporate prayer** a believer has to ask God for insight into the needs of others. He is supposed to help others with their problems. Everybody who is motivated to pray should learn everything that is necessary in order to understand the needs of his neighbour so that he can meet them.

**The church of Jesus has a „healing ministry“.** The emphasis is on „calling the elders“, the authorised leaders and overseers of the church. The believers are supposed to ask the elders to call on the name of the Lord Jesus on their behalf ( Act. 19,13 / Joh. 2,7 ), so that the healing stream of Jesus becomes manifested (Luk. 10,17 / Mark. 9,30 / Act. 3,6,16; 4,7,10; 9,34). After that the sick person is supposed to confess his sins and receive the anointing of oil and prayer ( Jam. 5,16-18 ). This is referring to reconciliation and forgiveness in the church. The healing ministry must be based on a prayer of pure faith. And it should always be a conscious act of sincere faith.

According to Rom. 6, 23 sickness is a **consequence of sin** and a messenger of death. But Jesus clearly denied the partial conclusion that therefore everybody who was sick had sinned ( Joh. 9,2 ff ).

**Sickness may be a result of sin, but it does not have to be.**

By the death of Jesus all of our sins were forgiven(also read Is. 53,4 / Ecc. 3,11 / Rev. 21,4 ). We still live in a time of “not seeing” and yet “believing” ( Joh. 20, 29 / 1. Petr. 1, 8 ).

The church, or the assembly of Jesus, truly cared for the sick in the beginning. The gift of healing had always been an important part of their ministry. James puts it like this: ... **is there anyone sick** – this means that also in a life of a Christian there might still be sickness. Unfortunately the understanding of being sick among many Christians is based on false doctrine, and they believe that sickness itself is an attack, even though this might only be the result.

The origin of the „**Anointing of the Sick**“ can be found in the Old Testament in Lev. 14,10-31; 2,4; where it describes the anointing with oil and the release of sin. This tradition can also be found in Jam. 5,13-16. The believer is supposed to pray for more strength to endure and also for deliverance of his suffering. By the **anointing** the person is supposed to be prepared to take part in the divine power and glory of healing. The **anointing** with oil and the prayer is supposed to lift up the sick, and strengthen him with power so that he will be able to bear the burden and pain of the disease and even receives perfect healing immediately or soon.

The **person who did the anointing** in the OT was always a priest or a prophet, someone who was assigned by God. In the NT the elders, church leaders or pastors are called to anoint the sick. It was always a blessed and spiritual ministry for the sick. This is a ministry appointed by God and in close co-work with God.

**The anointing of the Sick** by a priest, prophet, pastor or an elder ushers the sick person into a new position with God. In the sense of the bible, the anointing does not provoke physical healing, but rather brings healing for the soul. Many, but of course not all sicknesses, are psychosomatic. This means that the things that invisible hurt the soul infects the physical body.

**The first church had the positive reputation of a healing and helping church.** It continued the example of the traditional Jewish customs. Sick Jews are known to prefer to see a rabbi and receive the **anointing of oil**, instead of visiting a doctor. The **anointing with oil**“ was executed with olive oil. **Olive oil** was used for

many things: preparation of many dishes, oil for lamps, medicine and lotion. Besides that oil was also used for the anointing of a priest or for the appointment of a king. Oil was an image of joy, comfort and spiritual nourishment. In addition oil in the bible is a metaphor of the proximity of God and a sign for the Holy Spirit.

**The prayer for the sick** was a common practice in the ancient church. Earlier sin was regarded the cause of sickness and was treated with the breaking of spells and hexes. A determined **repentance of sin** and the rejection of sinful attitudes are suggested to the sick and also expected (Jam. 5,15). Before you **can confess your sin** you would have to understand and acknowledge them first. „**Confession of sin**“ is a fruit of self-recognition and admission of the thing, by calling it by name and to confess it to himself, God and the minister. Only after the sin was exposed and forgiven was granted the person would be anointed with oil and prayed for. This was the effective help that should be provided for the sick in the church.

**Many sicknesses of Christians originate from unforgiveness.** In the „Lord's Prayer“ Jesus teaches us: and forgive us ours trespasses, as we forgive the ones who trespassed against us. This is a plea to be able to forgive, by the power of God, everyone who hurt us. That we would truly forgive them and also forget what they have done to us and pray from the bottom of our heart that God will also not count their sin, not now and not on the day of judgment. For if we do not forgive God does also not forgive us. The way we judge others is the way we will be judged.

**Therefore many believers are sick because of a reason.** Let us remember the an den Schalksknecht ( Matth. 18,27-35 ). **An evil servant** – he is a deceptive servant ( Matth. 18,32 ). Many Christians suffer **under those evil servants** because of their own unforgiveness, and not being willing to forgive their debtors.

There are many diseases and suffering among the people of God only because the believers cannot correctly understand the „**body of the Lord**“ in the form of the church and therefore do not know how to fit in or how to behave (1. Cor. 11,26-32 ). In the body of Christ there is perfect order. **To call the elders of the church** is an act of faith and obedience. The elders do not have to have a special faith or special divine authorities. This is not a requirement. But they must willingly submit by faith to God's instructions how to deal with sicknesses.

The word „**sick**“ does not only refer to either internal or external physical disorders. It rather refers to a much more complex „**weakness**“. In the gospels it usually describes physical sickness, but in the Book of Acts and the Epistles of the Apostles this word usually refers to a „weak faith“ or a „guilty conscience“ such as in Act. 20,35 / Rom.6,19 and in Hebr.12,3.

James does not speak about people who are sick in bed or in hospital, but rather those who **grew tired in spirit and moral throughout the test**. And this spiritual growing weary in faith, being weak in morals should be a reason to call on the elders of the church for support. At least they were assigned as overseers of the church to comfort the weary and carry the weak (1. Thess. 5, 14 ). Thus, according to the words of James, those elders were supposed to pray for the weary and strengthen them by the anointing with oil.

**Anointing with oil clearly represents a ritual act.** It is supposed to strengthen the weak and a sign of respect, such as the anointing of Jesus in Bethany (Luk. 7,38). James wanted to make clear: the elders are supposed to pour oil on the head of the helplessly weak and tired person and pray for them so they would be quickened, encouraged and established. This way the fallen, discouraged and sad would be comforted and the practice of prayer of faith that the elders would speak over the sick person. It would pull them out of their

discouragement and spiritual weakness and the Lord would deliver them all from their spiritual need and restore them.

**„Let him call the elders..!“** James did not just send the elders to the nken hin.

The **initiative** must come from the free will of the weak and sick. **God does not force anybody!** If someone chooses to be sick, God will not enforce his healing!

There is actually a direct relation between our will and our sickness. If for several reasons someone does not want to recover, will probably not recover quickly. Since this is usually anchored in the depths of the soul, the sick person often does not know that. Therefore this is a call for sincere self-recognition / reflection and to appeal to the **will** of that person.

That this **restoration is** primarily a **spiritual** and not a physical restoration. This becomes evident in the statement of James: **“And if he has sinned he shall be forgiven!”** To care and pray for each other in the church, among the brethren, is the best way to face **discouragement** and weakness among the Christians.

James gave clear instructions to the believers how to accomplish practical healing and spiritual maturity. This is his last call ( Jam. 5,19-20 ). The people who have lost sight of the right way are actually the ones **who are sick in the church of Jesus.** They basically ran away and then got lost, which lead them into hopeless confusion. This word, that also describes planet earth suggests the image of wandering stars ( Jud.13 ) as opposed to fix stars.

**James encourages the steadfast ones to bring back** the believers who are no longer coming to church, so to say: the sick believers. They were supposed to help them to get back on track. This is not referring to evangelization but rather a **repatraition** of former church members. It is about „**revival**“ and not about salvation. It is important that the weak in faith have to be treated like an injured and „**lost sheep**“ that has been brought back to the flock ( Mat.1 0,6; 15,24; 18,11 / Luk. 15,4,24 ). The lost sheep will be saved from the misery and his sins will be forgiven and covered, so that he can be restored in order to grow and mature ( 1. Pet .4,8 / Ez. 3,16-21; 33,1-9 ). To look after the lost as a good deed of „love in action“ is a living expression of charity and an active effort to our healing.

#### **In the early church there was extraordinary devotion for the sick.**

The church father Irenes wrote in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> decade, that the sick are still being healed by **the laying on of hands** and therewith were restored to health. Tertullian, who lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the third decade, claimed that even Emperor Alexander Severus was healed by the anointing and hands of the Christian Torpaktion, who was invited to stay in the palace of the Emperor as a guest, because of the Emperor's gratefulness.

**James reminds us in Jam. 5,13: If anyone among you suffers, let him pray. Is anyone cheerful, let him sing psalms.** Those were the dominating guidelines of the early church and the beginning of Christianity. The church was a happy singing church. The first Christians were always prepared to sing a song of praise. The apostle also strengthened them to do so in Eph. 5,19; in Col. 3,16 and in Rom.15,9. Prayer, praising 'God and singing were the essence of the first services in church.

**„If anyone suffers“**... James just throws this out there. He is trying to say, if someone is going through some things, he should pray first. The one who suffers is supposed to help himself and pray for himself before he asks someone else for prayer. Is anyone of good courage, let him sing psalms and let him praise God. We all know that the Gentile world without faith in God is a very sad, tired and fearful world. Cheerful Christians and their lively songs of praise that come from a cheerful heart are supposed to build a contrast to the sadness of the world.

**James explains what a suffering Christian should do or not do.** We all know by experience, that the typical person, when he suffers, **would probably God and the world.** He doubts, complains, cries and murmurs until he cries out in the end: "Now it's enough, I don't believe in anything anymore!". Even though we feel with such a person and understand their pain and suffering, it has to be pointed out that someone who speaks such offensive words, never really believed but was rather stuck in total darkness. Suffering often pushes us further into the direction we chose: either even closer to God, or even further away from him. But not only the people of the bible would let that circumstance take them closer to God. Let us remember **Jacob** at Jabbok ( Gen. 32, 23 – 32 ) and **Moses** and his pain because of the sin of his people ( Ex. 32 – 34 ), David ( Ps. 51,130 ) or **Daniel's** suffering because of the guilt and oppression of his people ( Dan. 9,1 -19 ).

Even when our Lord Jesus Christ suffered it only intensified His relationship with the Father and enhanced

his obedience even more. If the pain and suffering can take us closer to God by His grace and prayer, then pain and suffering are actually doing a good service for us. Then the pain satan wanted to use to tempt us, accomplished what God wanted us to do. As a caring Father he would prefer not to see us suffer. würde Er uns zwar viel lieber nicht leiden sehen. But this is related to His love for us and His knowledge that we are weak and tempted. He Himself in His wisdom limited us to this perishable body which is weak, because of the fall of men by arrogance, so that they would become humble and aware of their dependency to God. This way we can acknowledge God as our mighty creator, God and Father again and also learn to love Him. Therefore pain serves God as a minister who can only touch our physical body here on earth, that can help to save our souls in the spirit, so that our life on earth would not be in vain. Therefore: do not be discourage and : **Pray without ceasing!**

**James mentions prayer seven times** in this chapter. **The mature Christian prays without ceasing no matter what his circumstances may be.** No matter if he feels powerless and spiritually and physically weak, he prays as a holy attitude to his divine Father, Jesus. Prayer refers to the dimensions of the physical, psychological, social, economical and finally also mental lack. .

The „**prayer for the sick**“ in the church is an important part of the fulfillment of the law of Chriss (Gal. 6,2 ). Basically: **Christians get sick just like every other person**, because sickness belongs to the typical things we have to deal with in this perishable world. **Sickness in the life of a Christians** can mean so many things – a test, trials, tribulations or a means of chastisement of God for repentance... etc, or jsut an expression of the natural essence of human beings who live in a hostile environment. **Healing** and restoration of the sick to their former health is a sign of grace that Jesus Christ brought to us. The gift of healing the sick is not given to the Christian as a mechanism or a sensation, but rather for the loving and helping ministry to preach the Gospel.

#### **Sick church members are supposed to call the church leaders, the elders!**

No healing can be eternal since we are facing mortality. Also the people who were healed by Jesus or were brought back to life just like Lazarus, still had to die sooner or later. The place where there will no longer be sickness is the new world of God, where all the enemies will be cound for a long time (1000 years of peace here on earth. And yet we can, may and should pray for full recovery of physical, psychologicl and social pain, because next to rare complete healings, also partial healing can be an unimaginable blessing for the weak and weary (Mat. 21,22 / Joh. 15, 7 / Rev. 21,4 ).

James takes **Elijah** as a role model. **Jam. 5,17: Elia was a man just like us;** and prayed that it should not rain, and it did not rain on earth for three years and six months. And again he prayed... This prophet was well aquainted with the Jewish readers. „**Elijah was a weak man just like us....**“ He was a human being with the same human being with the same emotions.

He was a man who had to go through the same things like all of us. Elijah also knew all the weaknesses of the human nature but he also knew the mighty power of His God and the power of prayer. Therefore he earnestly and fervently prayed, wherefore the rain was held back for a certain time until he prayed again and the rain started to pour down again (1. Kin. 17,1; 18, 41 – 46 ).

**Conclusion:** James speaks about the continuous **test and trials of our faith** and about the flawless and blameless attitude of the believers among each other. The church was facing hard times: the occupation of Jerusalem, the escape to Pela, the persecution and the diaspora ... etc. (Acts. 7,54-8,3; 4,1-23; 5,17-21 ). Furthermore there were other internal problems within the first church (Acts 6,2-6 ) and also theological disputes about the Gentile mission of Paul (Gal. 2,7 / Act.15 ) and the supposed „delay“ of the return of Jesus (comp. 2. Petr. 3,4 ). James praised that believer blessed, who is able to endure under such conditions and complimented every believer who is able to overcome such threats that endanger our precious faith.

He encourages all who refuse to bow down and successfully overcome the threats and attacks such as oppression, persecution, defamation of the faith or the obvious temptation of evil such as lying and stealing (comp. 2. Petr. 1,10,11 / Rev. 13,8,15 ). The following test of our faith in our many life experiences determines our reward (see 1. Cor. 3,8,14,15 ). But it is not supposed to happen on behalf of the reward but for the love of the Father. The readers of this letter are supposed to acknowledge that all their tests will result in purification of their soul. The believer is only supposed to endure with patience (Jam. 1,4 ). **We receive eternal life by grace and love**, but subsequently the faith must be proven by willingness to sacrifice. The crown

of victory is promised to those who love God, honor and respect, acknowledge and love their Father. Those are the ones who obediently follow his commands ( Ex 20,6 / 1. Joh. 5,3 ) and who resist temptation so that evil must flee from them... etc.

**According to James faith has to be put into action.** The reading and hearing – the spiritual consummation of the heavenly bread of life – is not enough for our spiritual salvation. Therefore we should also apply our faith in thought, words and deeds (comp Mat. 7,24,26 / Rom. 2,13 ). Our righteous deeds on the inside and outside work out our salvation (Phil. 2,12 / 1. Joh. 3,7 / Mat. 7,21 / also read 1. Sam. 15,22,23 ). The implanted word of God must be rooted with love in the heart of the Christian soul and systematic progressive fruits.

Every man should be diligent and willing to hear, but very careful to speak and slow to wrath. We should avoid quick answers and also an encouraging word should be well tempered (comp. Eccl. 5,1,2 / Pro. 10,19 - Mat. 5,22 / Eccl. 7,9 / Pro. 17,27 / Eph. 4,26 / Pro.15,1 ).

James is trying to explain to his readers what makes a reasonable service for God. He taught that the actual essence of Christianity logically does not depend upon external things but rather primarily on the things that come from the inside. This refers especially to the „tongue“. **The successful control of a quick tongue results from watchful self-discipline that enables us to temper our attitude and be of a sound mind.** This positive result can only be traced back to the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5,22 ). All things that come out of our mouth before we think about it causes the defilement of the spirit and exposes what the heart is full of.

All the beautiful things on the outside are in vain, if there is lack of spiritual wealth on the inside. God sees our heart alone ( 1. Sam. 16,7 ). The disciplined adherence to religious traditions as for example the hours of prayer, the order of the synagogues, etc, are only rituals in order to learn good habits facing the laziness of our nature. But rituals, however, will always be external things and can never substitute what is in our heart. At the time of the Jewish Christians, according to the „gospel of circumcision“, traditions such as food regulations were in to be adhered, just like Peter did ( Act. 10,14 ). However, James does not mention neither circumcision, nor food regulations, nor temple order. He also does not mention Moses or the law. But he speaks about Job, Elijah and the prophets.

**A true service** would be to take care of the poor, the weak and the sick, the widows and orphans. A simple but continuous and blessed ministry for the poor and the weak (comp. Rom. 12,15,16 / Job 29,12 ). In all our deeds it was also important to remain „spotless“ from this world (comp. 2. Cor. 6,14-7,1 / Lev. 26,12 / Jer. 31,9 ). It was also James who asked the Apostle Paul at the Apostolic Council (Acts.15 ) to remember the poor in Judea who are in need of help ( Gal. 2,1-10 ).

**The term „poor“** probably originated from Is. 61,1 and referred to the churches of Jerusalem and Judea who were considered poor according to their lifestyle and circumstances (Acts. 1-5 ). Paul also refers to those questions in Rom. 15,25-31 / 1. Cor. 16,1-4 / 2. Cor. 8-9 and Gal. 2,10 and mentions practical, administrative issues that are directly connected to the offering for the „poor“. The real need and defamation of the church of Christ in Judea and Jerusalem must have been severe so that such an effort was made on behalf of them. But this also held a spiritual dimension. The rich, that James is addressing in his letter, are a hidden reflection of the Gentile Christians who lived outside of Judea and were often very wealthy. Only remember some representatives such as Lydia or the rich jailer Philemon and others.

**Jam. 5,19-20: Love the brothers who have gone astray:** If a sinner finds his way back to church by the help of a loving brother, he saved him with the help of God from the worst lot of spiritual death.

Brotherly love, forgiveness, and charity will lead the lost back to the loving arms of the Father under the protective wings of the Almighty Lord ( Mat. 18,15,21-22 / 1. Thes. 5,14 ). If someone sacrifices time and effort to bring back those who lost their way will receive the reward of this precious ministry, at the latest on the day of God's judgment that we all have to face in the end (comp. 1. Petr. 4,8 / Dan. 12,3 / Ez. 3,19; 33,9 ). And this closes the letterref.

## **Test questions**

1. Who and what is the author of the Epistle of Jamess?
2. What is the Epistle of James?
3. To whom is it adressed?
4. What is the letter about?
5. What are the main themes of the letter?
6. What is a reasonable service according to the author?
7. What kind of suggestions, instructions does the author give to the believers?
8. How and where does faith become evident?
9. Why should we not swear?
10. What belongs to the prayer for the sick? What do we have to observe?
11. Why are Christians still sick?
12. Why should no one aspire to teach in a church too soon?
13. Why does James mention Job as an example?
14. What does this letter mean to Christianity and the New Testament?

**Please send the answers** to [pastor@matutis.de](mailto:pastor@matutis.de)

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