

New Testament Overview – J. Carl Laney

FACTS ON JAMES

Tests of a Living Faith

Author

The author of the epistle identifies himself as "James, bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Four men by the name of James are mentioned in the NT: James the father of Judas (not Iscariot), James the son of Zebedee, James the son of Alphaeus, and James the half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55, Gal. 1:19). The traditional view from Eusebius on is that the epistle was authored by James the _____ of Jesus. This James was an important leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17, 15:13-21, 21:8) and needed no further identification.

Readers

The letter is addressed to believing _____ scattered throughout the Roman Empire (1:1-2). Their scattering was probably the result of _____ which broke out in Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1, 12:1-23).

Date of Writing

The lack of reference to the Judaizing controversy addressed by the Jerusalem council seems to indicate a date prior to A.D. 49. If so, James was the _____ New Testament epistle.

Historical Setting

The letter indicates that the readers were suffering _____ and trials (1:2-4, 12, 2:6, 5:4). They were also lacking in fervor for _____ and the practical application of truth to Christian living.

Purpose

James insists that saving faith is a _____ faith, proving its genuineness by what it does. He writes to exhort his readers to live out the ethical implications of their faith.

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Theme

_____ of a living faith (1:3).

Outline “Faith tested by . . .”

FAITH TESTED BY ITS RESPONSE TO TRIAL 1:1-18

Introduction 1:1

The Attitude in Trials 2-4

The word for "trials" (peirasmos) is the same word for "temptations."
These are closely related concepts.

A trial is designed by God to prove the merit or value of the one tested.

A temptation is designed by Satan to solicit evil and lead to sin.

The context indicates that "trials" are in view here. What trials? Poverty (1:9, 2:5,15) and oppression (5:7).

Prayer for Wisdom 1:5-8

An Evaluation of Wealth 1:9-11

The comments about wealth arise out of James' discussion of trials. Some of the readers were poor (2:3), and this poverty was a cause of adversity.

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The exaltation of the poor 9

The humiliation of the rich 10-11

The Way of Temptation 1:12-18

Blessing of perseverance in trial 12

The source of temptation to sin 13-16

The divine source of all good 17-18

FAITH TESTED BY ITS RESPONSE TO THE WORD OF GOD 1:19-27

Receiving the Word 19-21

Applying the Word 22-25

FAITH TESTED BY ITS REACTION TO PARTIALITY 2:1-13

The Sin of Partiality 1-4

The Evil Consequences of Partiality 5-11

Partiality dishonors God's choice of the poor 5

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Partiality favors those who oppress believers 6-7

Partiality is a breach of the law of love 8-11

Summary Exhortation 12-13

FAITH TESTED BY ITS PRODUCTION OF GOOD WORKS 2:14-26

The Fallacy of Inactive Faith 14-18

The question of inactive faith 14

The illustration of an inactive faith 15-16

The conclusion 17

The relationship of faith and works 18

The Illustrations of an Active Faith 19-26

The faith of demons 19-20

The faith of Abraham 21-24

The faith of Rahab 25-26

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FAITH TESTED BY ITS PRODUCTION OF SELF-CONTROL 3:1-12

Responsibility of Teachers 1

The Test for Maturity 2

The power of the Tongue 3-5

The Evil Nature of the Tongue 6-8

The Hypocrisy of the Tongue 9-12

FAITH TESTED BY ITS APPROPRIATION OF TRUE WISDOM 3:13-18

The Demonstration of Wisdom 13

The Character of Earthly Wisdom 14-16

The Character of Heavenly Wisdom 17-18

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FAITH TESTED BY ITS REACTION TO WORLDLINESS 4:1-10

Manifestations of Worldliness 1-5

The Remedy for Worldliness 6-10 V. 8 is the key!

FAITH TESTED BY ITS AVOIDANCE OF SLANDER 4:11-12

The Exhortation: Stop what is going on! 11a

The Reasons: 11b-12

FAITH TESTED BY ITS AVOIDANCE OF PRESUMPTUOUS PLANNING 13-17

FAITH TESTED BY ITS REACTION TO INJUSTICE 5:1-11

The rich are condemned 1-3

Their conduct is described 4-6

The poor and oppressed are encouraged 7-11

FAITH TESTED BY ITS CONSISTENT HONESTY 5:12

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FAITH TESTED BY ITS RESORT TO PRAYER 13-18

The power of prayer 14-15

The prerequisite for prayer 16

The example of prayer 17-18 Elijah 1 Kings 17:1 ff.

Is James referring to physical sickness or spiritual distress? Many people have refused medical treatment on the basis of this text. Many of these have prayed faithfully for the sick and their prayers for healing have not been answered. Could it be that this passage has been misinterpreted? There is an alternative that should be considered.

The Key Words

v. 14 "Sick" (astheneo): From sthenoo ("strengthen") and the prefix a ("not"); meaning "weakness." Used of physical weakness 20 times in the NT, of spiritual weakness 14 times.

"Anointing" (aleipho): Not a sacred (chrío), but a profane anointing; to bestow honor (Lk. 7:38) and refresh (Lk. 7:46, Matt. 6:17).

v. 15 "Sick" (kamno): Used only here and in Heb. 12:3-4 where it speaks of "growing weary." It can carry the idea of physical illness, but the primary usage is to grow weary or fatigued.

v. 16 "Healed" (iaomai): Used elsewhere of healing the heart (Heb. 12:12-13), a spiritual healing.

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The Context

The problem with these readers is that they were at the point of emotional and spiritual exhaustion in their deep struggle with temptation (1:13-15) and sin (5:16). The reference to Elijah in verse 17 would add support to this view. He found himself spiritually weak and weary after his encounter with Jezebel (1 Kings 19:3-4).

The Exposition

Based on the definitions of the words and the context, it may be that James 5:14-18 does not teach that divine healing through anointing the sick by the church elders. Rather, the text appears to be saying that the elders have a ministry of bringing refreshment and encouragement to the spiritually weak and weary saints.

FAITH TESTED ITS CORRECTING THE ERRANT 5:19-20