

WAY OF LIFE
COMMENTARY
SERIES



GENERAL EPISTLES
DAVID W. CLOUD

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Way of Life Commentary Series
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Bible Commentaries

The *Way of Life Bible Commentary Series* is designed in a unique format to be used as verse-by-verse commentaries, as teaching courses, and for expository preaching.

(The *Highlights in Acts, Corinthians, Daniel, the Four Gospels, the General Epistles, Hebrews, Job, the Minor Prophets, the Pastoral Epistles, Proverbs, Psalms, Revelation, and Romans*, which are part of the *Advanced Bible Studies Series*, are abbreviated book studies and are not intended to be verse-by-verse commentaries.)

Way of Life Bible Commentary Series: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets, Romans, Corinthians, Pastoral Epistles, Hebrews, General Epistles, Revelation

Bible Courses Available on Video

A growing number of the courses are available in video taught by Brother Cloud. These are available at the Way of Life web site, some for sale, some free.

- Biblical Separation
- Building a New Testament Church
- Dressing for the Lord
- The Emerging Church Is Coming
- Keeping the Kids
- Knowing God's Will in These Perilous Times
- The New Age Tower of Babel
- The Preacher's Preaching (Expository Bible Preaching)
- The Satanic Attack on Sacred Music
- Southern Gospel Music
- Sowing and Reaping: A Course on Evangelism
- Steps to a Stronger Church in the 20th Century
- The Transformational Power of Contemporary Praise Music

In What Order Should the Courses Be Studied?

We recommend studying the courses in the following order:

Introduction to Bible Geography. An understanding of Bible geography is foundational to effectual Bible study, and this fully-illustrated introduction is geared for beginning students and older ones. The course consists of a PowerPoint presentation and a PDF. The PowerPoint includes videos and photos that aren't in the PDF and is intended especially for classroom use. The abbreviated PDF edition is for students to use in classrooms and for private study and easy reference.

Understanding the Bible for Yourself. This is foundational because it teaches how to have an effectual daily Bible study routine, the principles of Bible interpretation, and methods of Bible study.

Old Testament History and Geography. This gives an overview of the Old Testament and how that it forms the foundation for the

New Testament. The 2014 edition of this course is enlarged and improved.

Highlights in the Four Gospels and ***Highlights in Acts***. These two courses give the basic history of the New Testament.

Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms. This is a course on Bible geography, Bible culture, Bible history, and Bible archaeology, which has a two-fold objective: to present apologetic evidence for the Bible and to give the historical and cultural background to enable the student to better understand the setting of Bible history. *Bible Times & Ancient Kingdoms* covers the fascinating historical world of the Bible from Genesis to the New Testament. It is a package consisting of a book and a series of 26 PowerPoint presentations. 26 PowerPoint presentations packed with 5,600 high quality color photos, drawings, historic recreations, and video clips.

Highlights in Romans. This is the preeminent Epistle in the New Testament, and it is necessary for a good understanding of the gospel, holiness, Christian living, and Bible prophecy.

Understanding Bible Prophecy. Since a large part of the Bible consists of prophecy, this course is foundational.

Toward the top of the list we would also include *The Satanic Attack on Sacred Music*, *A History of the Churches*, *The Discipling Church*, *Bible Separation*, *The Bible Version Issue*, *The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements*, *Highlights in Daniel*, *Highlights in Corinthians*, *Highlights in the General Epistles*, *The Hand of God in World History*, *Jews in Fighter Jets: Israel Past, Present, and Future*, *New Evangelicalism*, *The Pastoral Epistles*, *Sowing and Reaping*, *An Unshakeable Faith*, and *Woman and Her Service to the Lord*.

The Review Questions

Most of these courses include review questions. They are designed to draw the student's attention to the most important points of the lessons and to help him remember these points after the course is finished.

If you take the courses by self-study, don't skip over the review questions. Find someone who will test you by presenting a selection of the review questions to you. This is a very important part of the learning process.

For the classroom setting, the teacher can use our review questions (and/or his own, of course, if he sees fit) to create sectional and final tests at the appropriate learning level.

Sample

The Bible as the Infallible Word of God

It is impossible to study the Bible properly and exactly apart from confidence that it is the divinely-inspired Word of God. This matter must be settled.

The effectual Bible student must pore over the pages of Scripture looking at every word, every detail, believing that nothing in the Scripture is there by accident. He must be confident that Scripture was purified seven times by an omniscient God (Ps. 12:6), that every word of God is perfect (Ps. 19:7), sure (Ps. 19:7), right (Ps. 19:8), eternal (“enduring for ever,” Ps. 19:9), true (Ps. 19:9).

There is a fierce, widespread attack upon the divine inspiration of Scripture today. How can we know for sure that the Bible is the infallible Word of God?

It proves to be so by a great many evidences, but it is enough for me to consider what Jesus Christ and His apostles believed. I am 100% sure that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. With Peter I can say, “We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (Joh. 6:69). Christ’s testimony settles everything for me. I will not follow any man who disputes Jesus’ teaching in any point.

So what did Jesus teach about Scripture?

After His resurrection, He gave a Bible study to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus near Jerusalem, and it is summarized as follows:

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lu. 24:27).

Christ taught that the entire Old Testament is a unified book that points to Him as the main theme. That means that it is a supernatural book, divinely planned by God, divinely superintended in its writing and canonization.

A little later that same day, Jesus made the following statement about the Scripture to His disciples:

“And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures ...” (Lu. 24:44-45).

Jesus taught that the key to a right understanding of Scripture is to receive it as a divinely inspired book, a divinely unified book, a supernatural book containing predictive prophecy that prepared the way for Christ.

That’s enough for me. A book planned and delivered by an infallible God is an infallible book.

Consider two more of Christ’s statements about the Scripture:

“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Mt. 5:18).

Here Jesus taught us to respect the authority of the Scripture in its words, even in its very letters. Jots and tittles are small parts of Hebrew letters. He taught that the Scripture is preserved and cannot possibly be corrupted.

“If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken” (Joh. 10:35).

Here Jesus taught that the Scripture is the Word of God and cannot be broken, meaning it is absolutely authoritative in all its parts and details. He made this point by quoting from a relatively obscure statement in Psalm 82:6. He taught that the whole Scripture is the Word of God and cannot be broken. All of it is true; all of it will be fulfilled.

Christ taught His apostles the same thing.

Consider Paul’s doctrine of Scripture:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect,

thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Words could not be clearer as to the full divine inspiration of Scripture. It is a product of God, so much so that it is as if He breathed it out, which is what the Greek says literally. It is a perfect Book that has the power to bring perfection.

Consider Peter’s doctrine of Scripture:

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:19-21).

The Scripture is not the product of man’s will or man’s own thinking. It is a product of God’s Spirit. He planned the Scripture, chose the prophets, and delivered to them the words of Scripture.

That settles the matter for me and that has settled the matter for millions of believers through the centuries, and those who trust Scripture as the infallible Word of God have never been disappointed.

“In the studies which we here commence we approach the Bible as being in its totality the Word of God; and in all our studying of it, therefore, we are seeking to learn, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the mind and the truth and the will of God” (J. Sidlow Baxter).

This is the greatest book on earth,
Unparalleled it stands;
Its author God, its truth Divine,
Inspired in every word and line,
Tho' writ by human hands.

This is the living rock of truth
Which all assaults defies.
O'er every stormy blast of time
It towers with majesty sublime;
It lives, and never dies.

This is the volume of the Cross;
Its saving truth is sure;
Its doctrine pure, its history true,
Its Gospel old, yet ever new,
Shall evermore endure.

- J. Sidlow Baxtor

For more on this, see *The Bible's Proof*, available as a free eBook from www.wayoflife.org, and *Give Attendance to Doctrine*, one of the Way of Life *Advanced Bible Studies Series* courses See also the expository studies of 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and 2 Peter 1:19-21 in the *Way of Life Commentary Series* on "The Pastoral Epistles" and "The General Epistles."

The Right Bible

Excerpt from "The Right Bible"

The *Way of Life Commentary Series* is based on the King James Bible and its underlying Greek and Hebrew texts. The King James Bible is explained and illuminated but not criticized. We are teachers, not textual critics. We have observed that modern textual criticism has corrupted the authority of God's Word. Modern textual criticism replaces a clear "thus saith the Lord" with "this manuscript says, that text says, that version says." We reject this. We believe the text was settled in the Reformation era when the Scripture was brought out of the age of handwriting into the age of printing and was translated into the major languages of the world and carried to the ends of the earth. We are convinced that "the better manuscripts" are those that were used by the Reformation editors and translators. For us the text is settled, and our job is to teach it and preach it. We don't try to reinvent the wheel.

The above paragraph is taken from "The Right Bible." Please see the entire report at <https://www.wayoflife.org/right-bible/>
The report will be beneficial to your Bible study.

Introduction to the General Epistles

1. The General Epistles are composed of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, and Jude. They are called the General Epistles because they are not addressed to a particular church or group of churches.
2. They have been called the “Hebrew Christian Epistles” but actually only two of them are addressed to Jewish believers. These are James and 1 Peter.
3. They are also called “Catholic Epistles” in the sense that they are of universal application.
4. In the ancient New Testament Greek manuscripts, the General Epistles are commonly grouped together and in ancient versions they are placed between the book of Acts and the book of Revelation. For example, in the Waldensian Romaunt New Testament the order of books was as follows: The Four Gospels, Paul’s Epistles (Romans to Hebrews), Acts, the General Epistles (James to Jude), and Revelation. We have examined two of the seven extant Waldensian New Testaments, the one at the Cambridge University Library and the one at Trinity College, Dublin.

James

Introduction to James

1. The author of the epistle

The Greek is *Iakobos*, which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Jaaqob*, who was the father of the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 49). The English equivalent is Jacob, James, or Jake.

James was the half-brother of Jesus (Mr. 6:3). See Ac. 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Ga. 2:9, 12. The apostle James, brother of John, son of Zebedee, who is mentioned throughout the four Gospels, was put to death in Acts 12:1-2 and could not have been the author of this epistle. Two other James are mentioned in the New Testament, but they are not prominent men and are not mentioned in Acts or the Epistles. These are James the son of Alphaeus (Mr. 3:18) and James the father of Judas (not Iscariot) (Lu. 6:16). Mary had other children. Jesus was her “firstborn” (Lu. 2:7). But Jesus’ half-brothers did not believe in Jesus as the Christ during His earthly ministry (Joh. 7:5). The family even tried to restrain Jesus at one point (Mr. 3:21, 31). Jude was also one of Jesus’ half-brothers and a full brother to James (Jude 1; Mr. 6:3). Their conversion apparently came at the time of Jesus’ resurrection appearances. Christ appeared personally to James (1 Co. 15:7). By the time the believers gathered in the upper room to await the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ brothers were with them (Ac. 1:13-14).

James was a leader in the church at Jerusalem (Ac. 12:17; 15:13; Ga. 2:1, 9, 10, 12; 21:18). It appears that James was highly respected in the church and was considered the senior pastor-elder. In the council in Acts 15, after the others had spoken, James assumed a position like that of a moderator or senior elder. He summarized what had been said, showed that it was in accordance with Scripture, and then gave his opinion as to what should be done. The other elders and apostles agreed and the matter was thus settled (Ac. 15:13-22).

According to Josephus, James was martyred in AD 62. He was brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin by Ananus (Ananias) the high

priest at Jerusalem, condemned as a breaker of the law of Moses, and stoned to death.

We give no credence to the description of James by Hegesippus of the second century (died about AD 180), which is quoted by many commentators from the writings of Eusebius. Writing more than a century after the death of James, Hegesippus' description was far-fetched and tainted by his heretical asceticism. He wrote: "James drank neither wine nor strong drink, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head; he never anointed himself with oil; and never used a bath. He never wore woollen, but only fine linen garments. He was in the habit of entering into the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, asking for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became hard like a camel's knees in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God" (Hegesippus). It should be obvious that an informed Christian Jew like James would not have been a vegetarian. Even before his conversion to faith in Christ, James would have partaken of the Passover lamb at the very least. After his conversion, James would have had no reason to abstain from meat. He also would not have taken a Nazarite vow to let his hair grow long and to avoid the fruit of the vine. And certainly he would not have abstained from bathing! These are the types of things that the heretical ascetics associated with the "church fathers" practiced. Hegesippus believed in "apostolic succession" and was the first to embark on the ridiculous custom of tracing a list of "popes" from "St. Peter" to his time.

2. The canonicity of the epistle

John Gill gives the following summary:

"Eusebius (c. 265-340) indeed says, that it had been accounted spurious by some, and that not many of the ancient writers had made mention of it: but he himself says, that it was publicly read in most churches; and certain it is, that some very early writers have respect unto it [*Ecclesiastical History*, l. 3. c. 25]. Irenaeus manifestly refers to it [2nd century, *Against Heresies*, l. 5. c. 1], and so does Tertullian [3rd century, *Adversus Judaeos*, c. 2]; and it is expressly mentioned by Origen among the canonical books of Scripture [3rd century, *Homil. 7. in Josuam*, fol. 156. E]. The objections against it are of no

weight, which are taken from the seeming disagreement between the Apostle Paul, and the writer of this epistle, concerning the doctrine of justification; and from his calling the law the perfect law of liberty, and insisting so much on the doctrine of works; all which will be seen to be agreeable to the other parts of Scripture, and easily reconciled with them; nor is there anything in it unworthy of an apostle.”

3. The date and recipients of the epistle

It is addressed “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (Jas. 1:1). This refers to Jewish believers in Christ who were scattered because of persecution (Ac. 8:1).

The epistle has a strong Jewish flavor, fitting for the early period in church history when the center of Christianity was still at Jerusalem where James was a leader.

James is possibly the first of the New Testament epistles. It appears to have been written before Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch to establish Gentile churches and before Paul’s epistles.

For many years the churches were composed almost entirely of converted Jews and Gentile Jewish proselytes. The mother church at Jerusalem was a Jewish church. The 3,000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:41), and the multitudes that were added to the Jerusalem church later, were Jews (Ac. 5:14; 6:7). James is the only New Testament epistle that uses the Greek word *sunagoge* (synagogue) (Jas. 2:2).

Estimated Timeline of the Book of Acts

- 33 - Pentecost (Acts 2)
- 35 - Saul’s Conversion (Acts 8-9)
- 41 - Cornelius’s Conversion (Acts 10)
- 44 - Martyrdom of James, John’s brother (Acts 11)
- 45 - Paul and Barnabas sent out on first missionary journey (Acts 13-14)
- 51 - Jerusalem conference on justification by grace alone (Acts 15)
- 53 - Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16-18)

- 58 - Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18-21)
- 60 - Paul's arrest and incarceration in Caesarea Maritima (Acts 22-26)
- 62 - Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 27-28)

4. The theme of the epistle

The main theme of James' epistle is to bring individual believers and the churches into spiritual maturity. The word "perfect" appears six times (Jas. 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 3:2). It means mature, complete. The word is defined in James 1:4, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." We see the same thing in 2 Timothy 3:17, "That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." James is concerned that those who profess Christ go on into spiritual maturity, and the epistle contains many lessons on how this can be accomplished.

The epistle was written because of the low spiritual condition of the Jewish churches of that day. There was unholiness, worldliness, respect of persons, bragging, self-seeking, cursing, fainting under persecution. James is calling God's people to spiritual growth and maturity, to holiness and separation. He is writing to prepare them for the imminent return of Christ.

The following major teachings of the epistle are designed to fulfill the overall theme of bringing the brethren to maturity:

The character of God. James wants the believers to turn their attention to God, to be mindful of Him in their daily lives, to know His character, to draw nigh to Him, to submit to Him, to humble themselves before Him, to be God's friend like Abraham. The epistle is absolutely permeated with teaching about God. We are taught that God and the Lord Jesus Christ are two and yet one, referring to the Trinity (Jas. 1:1); God "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not" (Jas. 1:5); God requires unwavering faith (Jas. 1:6-7); God has promised a crown of life to them that love him (Jas. 1:12); God cannot be tempted with evil and does not tempt men with evil (Jas. 1:13); God is the author of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17); God is the Father (Jas. 1:17, 27; 3:9); God is the Father of lights (Jas. 1:17); with God is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jas. 1:17); God begets believers by His Word (Jas. 1:18); God sees and is

concerned with what men do (Jas. 1:27); God is the judge of every man (Jas. 2:12); there is one God (Jas. 2:19); Abraham was God's friend, which teaches us that God will have men as His friends through redemption (Jas. 2:23); God imparts the fruit of righteousness (Jas. 3:170-18); God is at enmity with the world (Jas. 4:4); God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble (Jas. 4:6); God draws nigh to those who draw nigh to Him (Jas. 4:8); God will lift up those who humble themselves before Him (Jas. 4:10); God is the one lawgiver (Jas. 4:12); God is the one who is able to save and to destroy (Jas. 4:12); God is in control of man's affairs (Jas. 4:15); God is the Lord of Sabaoth who will judge sinners (Jas. 5:4); God is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (Jas. 5:11); God hears and answers the prayer of faith (Jas. 5:15-18).

True faith is evidenced by good works (Jas. 2:14-26). Faith, so-called, that doesn't produce works is not saving faith. This theme is repeated multiple times in James. In chapter one we learn that those who merely hear the Word of God and do not obey it, and those who seem to be religious but do not live accordingly, are deceived (Jas. 1:22, 26-27). On the authority of this teaching we can say that multitudes of professing Christians today are deceived. This theme is seen in chapter 3 where James says the man who has true wisdom will "shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (Jas. 3:13). This theme is seen in the reminders that the believer has a law to live by. We are saved by grace without the law but we are saved to keep the law--not the law of Moses, but the new law in Christ. James calls this law the "*law of liberty*" (Jas. 1:25; 2:12) and the "*royal law*" (Jas. 2:8). We will look at the meaning of these terms later in the studies, but the point here is that there is a law for the Christian to follow. We are not saved to sit; we are saved to serve. We are not saved to live as we please; we are saved to please the Saviour.

Patience in trials. The words "patience" and "patient" appear seven times (Jas. 1:3, 4; 5:7, 8, 10, 11). The epistle begins and ends with the exhortation to be patient in suffering (Jas. 1:2-3; 5:10-11).

Living by faith. James mentions keeping faith in trials (Jas. 1:2-3), seeking wisdom by faith (Jas. 1:5-6), true faith producing works (Jas. 2:14-26), and the prayer of faith for the sick (Jas. 5:15).

The importance and power of the Word of God. James mentions the “word of truth” (Jas. 1:18), the “engrafted word” (Jas. 1:21), being “doers of the word” (Jas. 1:22), and the Word as the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25). James thrice refers to “the Scripture” (Jas. 2:8, 23; 4:5).

Separation from the world. James teaches the strictest principle of separation, which is to keep oneself unspotted from the world (Jas. 1:27). He gives a long, sharp exhortation against being a friend of the world (Jas. 4:4-10).

Brotherly love. James quotes Christ’s commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself and calls it the “royal law” (Jas. 2:8). He applies this law to many situations: visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction (Jas. 1:27), treating a poor brother with the same respect as a rich brother (Jas. 2:1-5), assisting the needy (Jas. 2:15-16), not speaking evil one of another (Jas. 4:11), not grudging against one another (Jas. 5:9), confessing faults one to another (Jas. 5:16), and converting a brother from error (Jas. 5:19-20).

Effectual prayer. James teaches about prayer, which is one of the most important instruments of Christian growth and victory. He teaches about seeking wisdom by prayer (Jas. 1:5), failing to obtain from God because of lack of prayer (Jas. 4:2), asking for the right things by prayer (Jas. 4:3), praying in affliction (Jas. 5:13), praying in faith (Jas. 5:14), praying effectually by fervency (Jas. 5:16). James gives the example of Elijah’s mighty prayer that brought a three-year drought and then brought the rains again as an encouragement and to teach the power of prayer (Jas. 5:17-18).

The imminent return of Christ (Jas. 5:7-9). James teaches that Christ is standing before the door (Jas. 5:9). He teaches that this doctrine should change how the believer lives in this present world. It should produce patience in trials (Jas. 1:8) and good relationships among the brethren (Jas. 1:9). James reminds his readers of crowns (Jas. 1:12), Christ’s kingdom (Jas. 2:5), Christ’s judgment (Jas. 1:12-13; 3:1), all of which pertain to Christ’s return. He warns of the coming day of the Lord (Jas. 5:1-3).

The ministry of the body. James addresses the “brethren” 15 times. He doesn’t address brethren as individuals, but as members of a

family. The plural pronouns “ye” and “you” appear 60 times. James teaches that believers are not to live their Christian lives alone; they are to live their lives as members of an assembly. The church is mentioned specifically in Jas. 5:14. The brethren are instructed to love one another (Jas. 2:8), to provide for one another (Jas. 2:15-16), to sow peace among one another (Jas. 3:17-18), to not speak evil of one another (Jas. 4:11), to not grudge against one another (Jas. 5:9), to confess their faults one to another and to pray for one another (Jas. 5:16), and to watch over one another (Jas. 5:19-20).

5. The interpretation of the epistle

As we have seen, the book of James was written to Jewish believers in the early days of the church age. It was written during that transitional period before the Jews had learned the meaning of the church as the body of Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles. This does not mean, though, that James is only for Jewish believers.

The General Epistles cannot be separated from the Pauline Epistles. All of the New Testament Epistles are equally inspired and authoritative and all are necessary “*that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Peter, though he was the apostle to the Jews (Ga. 2:7-8), exalted Paul’s writings and called them Scripture (2 Pe. 3:1-2, 15-16).

This refutes the error of Messianic Judaism which intermingles law with grace. Paul taught that the believer is not under the law of Moses (Ga. 3:24-25). He taught that the law “written and engraven in stones” was a ministration of condemnation and death that is done away in Christ (2 Co. 3:7-11).

This also refutes the error of hyper-dispensationalism that says the General Epistles are dispensationally different from Paul’s Epistles. While James does not say everything that Paul said, everything that James says is written by divine inspiration and is profitable for all believers. What James or Peter wrote does not contradict what Paul wrote. They preached the same gospel. See Acts 15 where they all agreed that salvation is by the grace of God alone through faith in Christ alone. James was the moderator of that meeting (Ac.

15:13-22). (See “Study the Bible Dispensationally” at www.way-of-life.org.)

6. Some characteristics of the epistle

The epistle of James is kind but plain spoken in its reproof and exhortation. James’ doctrine is practical. It gets down to where God’s people live their daily lives. The term “my beloved brethren” appears twice (Jas. 1:16; 2:5). But James pulls no punches. His reproof is direct. He warns about doublemindedness (Jas. 1:8), hearing the word but not doing it (Jas. 1:23), seeming to be religious but bridling not the tongue (Jas. 1:26), being respecters of persons (Jas. 2:1-3, 9), speaking blessing and cursing out of the same mouth (Jas. 3:10), bitter envying and strife (Jas. 3:14), asking amiss to consume it on one’s lusts (Jas. 4:3), spiritual adultery by being a friend of the world (Jas. 4:4), speaking evil one of another (Jas. 4:11), boasting of tomorrow (Jas. 4:13), keeping back the hire of laborers (Jas. 5:3-4), living in wanton pleasure (Jas. 5:5), grudging against one another (Jas. 5:9). James calls his hearers “vain” (Jas. 2:20), “adulterers and adulteresses” (Jas. 4:4), “sinners” and “doubleminded” (Jas. 4:8), boasters (Jas. 4:16). Every preacher should be forthright like James, yet it is frightful to think about how very few pastors are this forthright.

James presents a dogmatic Christianity with firm leadership. In James, we don’t see believers sitting around sharing various opinions which are considered to be of equal weight. James teaches that there is one body of doctrinal truth that was delivered in the days of the apostles and it is the absolute standard for the entire church age. Compare Jude 3. Contrast the “emerging church” today, which is flexible, tolerant, and non-dogmatic. Consider a description of the emerging church: “WE DON’T BELIEVE ANY ONE THEOLOGY GETS IT ABSOLUTELY RIGHT. ... NO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY CAN BE FINAL. ... It turns its chastened epistemology against itself, saying, “This is what I believe, but I could be wrong. What do you think? Let’s talk” (“Five Streams of Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today*, February 2007). Brian McLaren says the emerging church “doesn’t claim too much; it admits it walks with a limp” (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 171). He says, “To be a Christian in a generously orthodox way is not to claim to have the

truth captured, stuffed, and mounted on the wall” (p. 293). The emerging church wants to “tolerate differences and treat people with opposing views with great dignity” (Spencer Burke, The-OOZE.com). James corrects this great error.

James’ epistle is filled with metaphors and similes. In this he is more like an Old Testament prophet and like Christ. It is a Hebrew style rather than a Greek style. This makes James’ teaching dynamic, energetic, vivid. He likens one who wavers in faith to “a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (Jas. 1:6). He likens the rich to “the flower of the grass” (Jas. 1:10-11). He likens the individual who hears the word and does not obey it to “a man beholding his natural face in a glass” (Jas. 1:23-24). He likens the governing of the tongue to a bit in a horse’s mouth and to a rudder on a ship (Jas. 3:2-4). He likens the tongue to a destructive fire (Jas. 3:6). He likens the control of the tongue to the taming of wild beasts (Jas. 3:7). He likens good and evil speech coming from the same mouth to a fountain sending forth sweet and bitter water and salt and fresh water, and to a fig tree bearing olives (Jas. 3:10-11).

James uses vivid narrative to illustrate his points. He describes the rich man with his gold ring and goodly apparel (Jas. 2:2). He describes the boaster saying, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain” (Jas. 4:13). He describes rich men weeping and howling because of the judgment (Jas. 5:1-6). He describes the farmer waiting for the precious fruit of the earth (Jas. 5:7). He describes the patience of Job (Jas. 5:11) and the prayers of Elijah (Jas. 5:17-18).

James is filled with unique words and phrases that aren’t found anywhere else in the Scripture, such as “doubleminded” (Jas. 1:8; 4:8), “Father of lights” (Jas. 1:17), “superfluity of naughtiness” (Jas. 1:21), “engrafted word” (Jas. 1:21), “crown of life” (Jas. 1:12), “pure religion” (Jas. 1:27), “royal law” (Jas. 2:8), “law of liberty” (Jas. 2:12), “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:26), “the tongue is a fire” (Jas. 3:6), “the wisdom that is from above” (Jas. 3:17), “the friendship of the world” (Jas. 4:4), “resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7), “draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (Jas. 4:8), “what is your life? It is even a vapor” (Jas. 4:14), “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is

sin” (Jas. 4:17), “the end of the Lord” (Jas. 5:11), “the prayer of faith” (Jas. 5:15), “effectual fervent prayer” (Jas. 1:16).

7. The need for the epistle today

Though James was written to Jewish believers in the early days of the church age, it is needed today as never before. We can understand its importance when we consider the condition of churches in our day.

Persecution and affliction is widespread among Christians in these last days. There is affliction from living in a wicked world and being opposed by the devil. There is persecution from unbelievers in general, from Cultists, from Muslims, from Hindus, from Communists, from homosexual activists, from atheists, from evolutionists. James addresses this matter in its theme of patience in trials.

Spiritual immaturity is rampant among professing Christians today. There are multitudes who profess Christ but remain babes in their knowledge of the Scripture and in spiritual maturity. They are like those to whom James addressed his epistle. They doubt God during trials; they are not strong in God’s Word; they have carnal divisions and strife; they love the world; they pray only to satisfy their lusts. James addresses the issue of immaturity with the theme of going on to spiritual perfection.

“Easy Believism”* is rampant today. Multitudes claim to be saved when there is nothing in their lives to show it. Multitudes are on the church rolls as members, but they rarely if ever darken the doors of the assembly. James addresses this with its theme that true faith is evidenced by good works. (* I prefer to call this error “quick prayerism.” This is the evangelistic methodology that is quick to get people to “receive Christ” or “pray a sinner’s prayer” after a shallow presentation of the gospel, and quick to pronounce them saved and to give them “assurance of salvation” even when there is no evidence that they have been born again.)

Biblical ignorance and shallowness is widespread among professing Christians today. Even in the staunchest Bible-believing churches the average church member typically lacks a strong knowledge of the Scripture and does not have an effectual, consistent daily Bible study habit. The average Christian knows more about sports and

video games and pop songs and romance novels and American idols and Hollywood movies and other vanities than he knows about the Bible. James addresses this by emphasizing the power and necessity of God's Word (Jas. 1:21-25).

Worldliness is widespread among professing Christians today. Christians rock out like the world and dress indecently like the world and have the same love of professional sports and other vanities as the world and are addicted to Hollywood like the world and have the same non-judgmental philosophy of toleration of sin and error as the world. James addresses this by emphasizing that worldliness is a great sin (Jas. 4:4-10).

The "judge not" philosophy is widespread today, and it is corrected by James' clarity and dogmatism and authoritative stance.

Unwholesome speech is rampant among professing Christians in our day. *Christianity Today* has reported on the way that many evangelicals use curse words. Many Contemporary Christian musicians use such words. Mark Driscoll of Seattle was called the "cussing pastor" in the book *Blue Like Jazz*. Many Christians even use the Lord's name in vain ("Well, Lordy, can you believe that"; "Oh, God, would you look at that"; "My God, I can't believe that"; "Jesus, that's amazing"; "Lord, have mercy, isn't that something!"). James addresses this by emphasizing the necessity of taming the tongue (Jas. 3:1-12).

Christians today are caught up too much in the business of this present life, in making money and seeking comfort and being enraptured by entertainment, and we need rather to lift up our eyes and to get into the spiritual battle in a more earnest way and be fruitful for Christ and thus be ready for His return. We need to live as pilgrims in a foreign land. James addresses this by emphasizing the imminent return of Christ (Jas. 5:8-9).

8. References to the Old Testament in the epistle

There are four direct quotations from the Old Testament:

James 2:8 -- Leviticus 19:18

James 2:11 -- Exodus 20:13-14

James 2:23 -- Genesis 15:6; Isaiah 41:8

James 4:6 -- Proverbs 3:34

There are at least 54 other references to the Old Testament, which is one for every two verses. The mind of James was saturated with the Jewish Scriptures so completely that his belief and utterances are rooted in them. "His references are traceable to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Zechariah; and there may be references to other O.T. books" (Scroggie).

9. An outline of the epistle

There are several ways to outline the book. Following are two examples:

In *The Annotated Bible*, Arno Gaebelein outlined the book according to the theme of Patience. I. Exhortations to patience in suffering God's will (Jas. 1:1-18). II. Exhortation to patience in doing God's will (Jas. 1:19 - 4:17). III. Exhortation to patience in awaiting God's will (Jas. 5:1-20).

In *Explore the Book*, J. Sidlow Baxter outlined the book according to the theme of Proofs of Faith. I. Endurance of temptation (Jas. 1). II. Impartial benevolence (Jas. 2). III. Control of the Tongue (Jas. 3). IV. Godliness in all things (Jas. 4-5).

We have decided not to try to arrange the book's teaching into a formal outline but rather to consider each individual exhortation separately. I believe that by this method we will be less likely to force the text into a preconceived meaning.

I. Introduction (Jas. 1:1)

II. Miscellaneous Exhortations (Jas. 1:2 - 5:20)

- Be patient in trials (Jas. 1:2-11)
- Be strong in temptation (Jas. 1:12-18)
- Be doers of the Word (Jas. 1:19-27)
- Do not have respect of persons (Jas. 2:1-13)
- Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:14-26)
- The power of the tongue (Jas. 3:1-12)

- The wisdom from above vs. the wisdom from below (Jas. 3:13-18)
- Spiritual adultery is reproved and revival commended (Jas. 4:1-10)
- Evil speaking is reproved (Jas. 4:11-12)
- Boasting is reproved (Jas. 4:13-17)
- The rich are warned (Jas. 5:1-6)
- The brethren are encouraged (Jas. 5:7-11)
- Swearing is reproved (Jas. 5:12)
- The sick and afflicted are instructed (Jas. 5:13-18)
- Effectual prayer is described (Jas. 5:16-18)
- The conversion of sinners is commended (Jas. 5:19-20)

10. Some statements about the epistle

“It might be described as the Christian book of Proverbs. It is strikingly fresh and vivid; the writer is rich in illustrations which are always appropriate and impressive. A vein of poetry pervades it, so that it may almost be considered as a prose poem” (Dr. Gloag, quoted from W. Graham Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*).

“It is well known that Martin Luther had problems with this book. He called it a ‘right strawy epistle.’ But it is only ‘strawy’ to the degree it is ‘stickly.’ There are enough needles in this haystack to prick the conscience of every dull, defeated, and degenerated Christian in the world. Here is a ‘right stirring epistle’ designed to exhort and encourage, to challenge and convict, to rebuke and revive, to describe practical holiness and drive believers toward the goal of a faith that works. James is severely ethical and refreshingly practical” (J. Ronald Blue, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

“Due to its practical nature, this epistle has been compared to the Book of Proverbs as well as to the Sermon on the Mount. James argues that justification by faith is demonstrated by works; it must be poured into the test tube of works (ch. 1–2), of words (ch. 3), of worldliness (ch. 4), and of a warning to the rich (ch. 5)” (J. Vernon McGee).

“In some ways, the Letter of James is the most authoritarian in the NT. That is, James issues instructions more profusely than any of the other writers. In the short space of 108 verses, there are fifty-four commands (imperative forms)” (*Believer’s Bible Commentary*).

Sample

James' Opening Statement

1. James called himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jas. 1:1).

This speaks of Christ's Deity.

- If Jesus were not God, it would be idolatrous for James to say that he was a servant of God and also of Jesus Christ. Anytime God and Jesus Christ are included together like this, the Bible is telling us that they are equal. No mere man could be spoken of in direct connection with God. Four times in Isaiah the Bible says there is no God beside the Creator Jehovah God (Isa. 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21). Exodus 34:14 says, "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

- Jesus claimed to be God (Joh. 10:30-33).

- Jesus accepted worship as God. Six times in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus accepted worship (Mt. 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9). Thomas worshipped Christ and called Him God (Joh. 20:28). Unlike the elect angels and the apostles who refused to accept worship (Ac. 14:11-15; Re. 19:10), not once did Jesus refuse it. The Bible teaches that it is idolatry and wickedness to worship anyone or anything other than the one true and living God (Ex. 20:3-5; 34:14; Isa. 42:8; Mt. 4:10). Therefore, the fact that Jesus accepted worship is indisputable evidence that he is Almighty God.

- Jesus is called God many times in the Epistles. See Philippians 2:5-6; Colossians 1:15-17; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8-9; 1 John 5:18. (For more on this see "Who Says Jesus is God?" at the Way of Life web site.)

This speaks of the Trinity.

- Though James doesn't specifically use the term "Son" for Jesus, He uses the term "Father" for God (Jas. 1:17, 27; 3:9). We know by comparing Scripture with Scripture that the "mystery" of Jesus being described as equal to God is explained by the Trinity. God is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit.

James calls himself a servant of God.

- The believer has many different relationships with God by means of his redemption in Christ. He is an adopted son (Ga. 3:26), a part of the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:24-27), a member of Christ's body (Eph. 5:31), a friend of Christ (Joh. 15:15), a joint heir with Christ (Ro. 8:17), a priest (1 Pe. 2:5), and a king (Re. 1:6; 5:10). But though the believer has such an exalted standing in Christ, he is still called God's servant, and the servant master relationship will exist throughout eternity (Re. 22:3).

- Man was made to serve God. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ec. 12:13). Sin separated sinners from God and made it impossible for them to serve God acceptably in holiness. All men have broken God's laws and their very righteousnesses are as filthy rags before a thrice holy God (Isa. 64:6). The redemption of Christ restores the sinner to a right relationship with God whereby he can serve God acceptably.

- Being the servant of God through Jesus Christ is the Christian life in a nutshell. Paul often described himself as a servant of Christ (Ro. 1:1; Php. 1:1). So did Peter (2 Pe. 1:1) and Jude (Jude 1). This is the basic meaning of the term "disciple." It refers to one who submits to a master. The term "disciple" is used many times in the New Testament to describe the believer, and Christ said that a true disciple continues in His Word (Joh. 8:31). No one has the right to claim to be a Christian if he is not a servant of Christ.

- Note that James does not mention his natural relationship as the half-brother of Jesus. Paul said that natural relationships will be done away in Christ (2 Co. 5:15-17). This shows the gross error of Rome's doctrine of Mary. Though she is the mother of Jesus, that special relationship is not eternal. Jesus gave her away to John when He was on the cross (Joh. 19:26-27). Never in the New Testament Epistles is Mary referred to as Jesus' mother, and certainly not as the Mother of God or the Queen of Heaven or the Ever-Virgin or the Immaculate. Even in His incarnation, Jesus downplayed his relationship with Mary and exalted the spiritual relationship above the physical (Mt. 12:46-50).

2. James addressed the epistle “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.”

We have seen in the introductory studies that these were Jewish believers in Jesus as Christ. They were scattered because of persecution. See Acts 8:1; 11:19. James continues to feel a pastoral sympathy for them and obligation toward them and he urges them to walk worthy of the Name that they profess. “The Christian communities would be founded in the Jewish quarters in most large cities; but it must have been years before they ceased to be ‘Jews’ and were entirely separated from the synagogues, with a definite and complete organisation of their own. It is to such as these that he is writing; not perhaps to a definitely organised and mixed Christian Church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, but rather to those synagogues which, like that at Berea, had embraced Christianity” (E.C.S. Gibson, quoted by J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*).

We see that there were no “lost tribes” in James’ day. The doctrine of the lost tribes and the idea that Britain is one of the lost tribes (also called British Israelism) is heresy. Though the 12 tribes of Israel have been scattered to the ends of the earth and individual Jews today are typically unable to trace their heritage, God has not lost track of the tribes, and in the Great Tribulation the 12 tribes of Israel still exist (Revelation 7:4-8). “We must also remember that a similar Jewish-Christian remnant will be in existence once more in Palestine during the coming great tribulation; it is the godly remnant, which we have pointed out many times in the prophetic Books and in the Psalms. Then the Gospel of the Kingdom will again be preached, and as it was in the Jewish beginning of the age, signs and miracles will follow. The Epistle of James will then have a special meaning for the remnant” (Arno Gaebelein).

Miscellaneous Exhortations (James 1:2 - 5:20)

James’ preaching was direct and forceful. It was also gracious; he calls his readers “*my brethren*” 15 times and “*my beloved brethren*” three times (Jas. 1:16, 19; 2:5).

Be Patient in Trials (James 1:2-11)

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.”

1. The nature and extent of trials (Jas. 1:2)

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”

The word “*temptation*” is the Greek *peirasmos*, and it is used in two ways in the New Testament. *First, it refers to being tempted with evil* (Jas. 1:13-15; Mt. 26:41). In this sense it was used of Christ’s temptations at the hand of the devil (Lu. 4:13). *Second, it refers to trials and sufferings in general* (“ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” 1 Pe. 1:6; “the fiery trial,” 1 Pe. 4:12). This is the meaning in James 1:2-8. James is referring to troubles and sufferings that are not brought upon ourselves by sin. Contrast 1 Peter 2:20; 4:15-16.

James is saying that there *will be* trials. It is God’s will to allow His people to be subject to troubles in this present life. To every child of God, Scripture is saying, “Don’t be surprised by trouble; don’t be confused; don’t be angry at God; don’t be swayed; don’t faint under the trial; don’t be turned aside.”

James says that we “**fall into**” trials. This refers to the fact that trials come unexpectedly in the Christian life. It is like I am walking along and suddenly fall into a hole, but God is in control of these things.

There are “**divers temptations.**” The word “divers” refers to diversity, different kinds. There are many kinds of trials in the Christian life. There is persecution, sickness, poverty, bereavement, slander, false accusations, etc. Faithfulness in trials is a major theme of the New Testament. See Mt. 5:10-12; 16:24; Joh. 15:19-21; 16:33; Ac. 14:22; 1 Th. 3:3-4; 2 Ti. 3:12; Heb. 10:32-39; 1 Pe. 2:20-21; 4:12-16; 5:9-10.

2. The purpose of trials (Jas. 1:3-4)

“Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

Suffering is a trying of the faith (Jas. 1:3).

- Faith is purified by suffering as gold is purified by the fire. Compare 1 Peter 1:7.
- The trying of faith is a chief reason why the believer has troubles. It is a chief reason why we have to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises. It is a chief reason why the believer is subjected to all sorts of difficulties and troubles and lacks and frustrating circumstances in this present life. It is a chief reason why prayer is not always answered immediately.

Suffering produces spiritual growth (Jas. 1:3-4).

- Suffering first produces “**patience**,” which is a foundational and necessary part of Christian living (Ro. 5:3; 12:12; Heb. 12:1). Patience is mentioned seven times in James' epistle. In 2 Thessalonians 1:4 we see that “patience and faith” are one. If you have faith then you have patience in trials, and if you have patience it is because you have faith.
- Patience must be allowed to do her perfect work (“**let patience have her perfect work**”). We can resist God's work by refusing to accept the trials that He has designed. It is also possible to let the

trial have *some* benefit but not the full benefit that God intends. By fretting against our circumstances, we are resisting the God who has said that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Ro. 8:28). Israel did this in the wilderness when they were thirsty (Ex. 17:1-2), when they lusted for Egypt’s food (Nu. 11:4-6, 10, 31-34), and when they were afraid of the giants (Nu. 14:1-2, 26-27).

- Patience in trials produces spiritual maturity (“***that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing,***” Jas. 1:4). Bible words must be defined by their context, and James defines “perfect” as “entire, wanting nothing.” In 2 Timothy 3:17, “perfect” is to be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” In Colossians 4:12 “perfect” is to be “complete in all the will of God.” In Hebrews 13:21 “perfect” is doing every good work according to God’s will. In 1 Peter 5:10, “perfect” is to be established, strengthened, and settled.

- Compare Romans 5:3-5. Here, too, we see that tribulation is intended to produce spiritual growth. *First, the tribulation produces patience.* As the believer surrenders to God in the trial he has patience to endure it and to wait on God to accomplish His pleasure. This is in contrast to the unbeliever, who has no help in trials, who has no divine wisdom about trials, and who can only call upon his own resources. We see an example of tribulation producing patience in Paul’s experience in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul was afflicted with some sort of physical ailment, and he prayed three times for God to remove it. God replied that it was His will for Paul to bear this trouble, so Paul exercised patience and rejoiced in that situation. Observe that Paul’s patience and faith came through God’s Word, which is also the believer’s source of patience and faith today. *Second, the patience results in experience.* The believer who has experience in trials is better able to face them. He can call on past experiences for wisdom and encouragement. He is also able to encourage others. See 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. *Third, the experience results in hope,* which is confidence in God’s Word. Hope looks to the future. It looks beyond the present trial to the fulfillment of God’s promises. Observe that “***hope maketh not ashamed.***” Unlike the unbe-

liever and his false hopes, the believer will never be ashamed of his faith in God's Word. All of the promises of God are true. Paul said they are yea and amen in Christ (2 Co. 1:20). *Fourth, this process results in **the love of God being shed abroad in the heart.*** The more we trust God, the more we love Him and the more His love works in us and toward others. This is produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Other reasons for suffering from other passages of Scripture.

- We suffer *because we live in a cursed world* (Ro. 8:22-23). Everything we do in this world is tainted by the curse that came because of man's fall (Ge. 3:16-19).
- We suffer *so we can help others* (2 Co. 1:3-7). Through suffering we learn lessons that we can use to encourage others who are going through similar trials.
- We suffer *so we will not trust in ourselves* (2 Co. 1:8-9). Through sufferings, God takes away self-confidence and helps us keep our eyes on Him.
- We suffer *to keep us humble* (2 Co. 12:7-10). Charles Spurgeon said that one of his greatest spiritual battles was with pride; it is a part of the old flesh. When Paul prayed three times for God to remove the trouble that he described in 2 Corinthians 12, God replied that it was necessary to keep him humble.
- We suffer *because of persecution* (2 Ti. 3:12). We live in the enemy's territory, and since the devil and his people hate God and Christ we can be sure that they hate those who represent God in this present world. We begin to learn this as soon as we are converted. I remember how that when I was a new Christian my former best friend told me to leave his house and not to come back unless I stopped talking about Jesus and left my Bible at home.
- We suffer *to correct sin and to mature us in Christ* (Heb. 12:5-13). This passage teaches the following lessons: God is a good Father and he corrects his children. Discipline is not pleasant (Heb. 12:11), and we are tempted to despise discipline (Heb. 12:5), to faint (Heb. 12:5), to stop serving (Heb. 12:12), to stop praying (Heb. 12:12), and to turn away (Heb. 12:13). God's chas-