

FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDIES
(Reading the Bible together)



SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE
(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)

Ruth and James

Introduction and Lesson 1

[31 JUL - 6 AUG 2011]

There are two books in the Bible called by women's names – Esther and Ruth. Because Esther was a beautiful Jewish queen who saved her people from death it is easy to understand why her story is written in the Bible. But Ruth was not from God's chosen people, and she was a poor widow. Why did God cause her story to be written for us? When we read the list of Jesus' ancestors in Matthew 1, we find Ruth's name in v.5. She is one of only four women mentioned in this list.

In Ruth's story we see God's grace in saving someone who was completely unworthy of His kindness. We learn how, even before the coming of the Lord Jesus and the time when the message of the gospel would be given to the Gentiles, God in His mercy saved this woman who was not an Israelite. Not only did He save Ruth, but he also gave her the great privilege of being an ancestor of Jesus.

Ruth lived in the time of the Judges. While in the book of Judges we read the history of the nation: in the book of Ruth we read about only one family. Even although most of God's people who lived during this time were weak in faith and did not walk in God's ways, in the book of Ruth we learn about a family who obeyed God and were faithful to Him.

What is it like at this present time where you live? Do most people believe in the Lord Jesus and honour God in their lives? If this is so, thank God and ask Him to keep you all walking in His ways. But, even if the people around you have gone far from God, you can be different from them. In the book of Ruth we read about a family who followed God's ways faithfully when most people worshipped idols. God will help you to be like that family. Rom.12:2 tells us that we are not to be like the world around us, but are to be changed by the renewing of our minds. As we read God's Word, the Holy Spirit changes and renews our thinking. In our thoughts and our actions we will be different from the people around us. Do you follow the way of life of the people who live around you? Or are you allowing the Holy Spirit to change your heart, your mind and your thinking?

Questions for lesson 1

Memory verse: Romans 12:2

Day 1 Read the **Introduction and Lesson 1**

1. Why is it surprising that Ruth's story is written in the Bible?

2. (a) Just as the Moabites were despised by the Israelites, are there any ethnic groups in our country who are looked down on by others? Do you think God accepts these people as He accepted Ruth? Read Acts 10:34-35.

(b) Do you count believers from those races as brothers and sisters?

3. How can our thinking be renewed?

Day 2 Ruth 1:1-2

4. (a) Where was Elimelech's home?

(b) Give the names of his family.

5. Why did they go to Moab?

6. Do you think their going to Moab was right? (Read Deut.23:3-6).

Day 3 Ruth 1:3-7

7. Give the names of the 2 Moabite wives.

8. (a) Although Elimelech and Naomi found food in Moab, what things happened to the family there?

(b) Look at your answer for question 6. Is there a lesson for us here?

9. (a) What news did Naomi hear from Judah?

(b) Therefore, what did she do?

Day 4 Ruth 1:8-10

10. What did Naomi pray for her daughters-in-law?

11. What did she tell them to do?

12. (a) These women were not related in the flesh. What good things do we see in their relationship?

(b) What can we learn from them?

Day 5 Ruth 1:11-14

13. In v.11-13, what is Naomi saying Orpah and Ruth will lack if they go with her?

14. (a) What did Orpah do?

(b) What did Ruth do?

15. (a) What reason did Naomi give for the bitterness in her life?

(b) Can you tell of a time when you thought that God's hand was against you?

(c) Read Rom.8:28-29. Do you believe this?

Day 6 Ruth 1:14-18

16. What had Orpah chosen?

17. What things did Ruth choose to leave?

18. If I am a disciple of Jesus, I will love Him more than what things? Lk.14:26

Day 7 Ruth 1:19-22

19. "Naomi" means "Pleasant". What new name did Naomi choose for herself, and why?

20. (a) Did God bring Naomi back empty? (v.21)

(b) What did she have?

21. (a) Is there anything bitter in your life today?

(b) Do the sorrows and difficulties in your life cause you to come near to God or to go away from Him?

Lesson 2

[7 AUG - 13 AUG 2011]

Ruth 1:1-22 The Family in a Far Country

An Israelite family in Moab - 1:1-5

Because of the famine, Elimelech and his family decided to go to Moab where they could get food. It seems that they made a mistake in leaving their country. If they had trusted God, would He not have given them what they

needed in the country He had given to His people? We need to pray about our decisions, and trust God to guide us. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us not to rely on our own wisdom and understanding, but to trust God with all our hearts. He promises to guide us. We can trust Him for our families as well as ourselves. Material things will not bring the greatest blessings to our families. The important thing is to obey God and walk with Him. What will you choose - to turn to the world to satisfy your needs, or to walk in God's ways and trust Him?

The decision to return to Bethlehem - 1:6-18

After her husband and sons had died, Naomi decided to return to her own people. As she began her journey, both her daughters-in-law went with her. Although they were different in tribe, custom, age and religion, these three women truly loved one another. Orpah and Ruth had cared for their husbands and Naomi (v.8). Now they did not want to be separated from her. Naomi desired what was best for them; she wanted them to find joy in the homes of new husbands (v.9). In times of sorrow, we can be a great help and strength to other people. Let us think not only of our own blood relatives, but encourage any around us who are sorrowing, and do what we can to help them.

Orpah chose to return to her people and her gods. Ruth chose, not only to go with Naomi, but also to become one of God's people, and to worship Him. She had learnt about the true God from her husband and Naomi and she now believed in Him. Even if it would not be possible for her to marry again, even although she must leave her people and her customs, she decided to go with Naomi and to worship her God. When Jesus said, "In order to be My disciple, you must hate your father, mother, etc.", He meant that we must love Him more than anyone or anything else. When we choose to follow Him, like Ruth we may need to leave our home and our family. Even if that is not necessary, we must love the Lord Jesus more than anyone else.

Arrival in Bethlehem - 1:19-22

When the two women arrived in Bethlehem, everyone was amazed because Naomi had changed so much. Naomi told the women of the town, "God has made my life very bitter. He has afflicted me. Now my life is empty." Although she had not turned away from God, because of the sorrow in her life, it seemed to her that He had abandoned her. She had no hope for the future and she thought her life was empty. Have you ever felt like that? Does life seem very bitter to you? We all may feel like this sometimes. But God does not change and He does not leave us (Heb.13:5-6). Although Naomi did not now have a husband and sons, she had Ruth, and as we read the second chapter of

this book, we will see how God cared for Naomi by means of Ruth. When life seems bitter, we should not concentrate on our loss and our sorrow. We should look to God and thank Him for what He will give us. "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." (Ps.30:5)

Questions for lesson 2

Memory verse: Proverbs 3:5-6

Day 1 Read the notes for Lesson 2

1. (a) According to Prov.3:5-6, to know God's leading, what must we do?

(b) What do you think it means to "in all your ways acknowledge Him"?

2. Can you think of someone near you who needs comfort and help today? What can you do to help that person?

3. What should we do when life seems bitter?

Day 2 Ruth 2:1-3 Leviticus 19:9-10

4. What do we learn in these verses about Boaz?

5. How did God give food to the poor?

6. (a) Do you think that it was only by chance (v.3) that Ruth came to Boaz's

field?

- (b) Can you remember some "chance happening" in your life that you know was God's will for you?

Day 3 Ruth 2:4-9

7. (a) What things do you learn about Boaz's character in these verses?

- (b) What advice does the New Testament give to those who rule over workers? Col.4:1 and Eph.6:9

8. What do you learn about Ruth? (v.7)

9. What commands does God give to workers? Col.3:23 and Eph.6:7

Day 4 Ruth 2:10-13

10. What good things had Boaz heard about Ruth?

11. (a) Why does a chick hide under its mother's wings?

(b) Well then, what does v.12 tell us that Ruth had found from God?

12. (a) Who would reward Ruth for all that she had done?

(b) What comforting thing can we learn from this?

Day 5 Ruth 2:14-16

13. What things did Boaz do for Ruth?

14. From chapter 2, what ways have you seen that God used to give Ruth the food she needed that day?

15. How will God give you your food today?

Day 6 Ruth 2:17-19

16. (a) How long did Ruth work in the fields?

(b) Did she go home after that?

17. What did she give to Naomi? (See v.14)
18. (a) Perhaps Naomi was not able to work. How did God give her the food she needed?
- (b) Is there anyone (especially in your family) who needs your help in order that they get their food?

Day 7 Ruth 2:19-23 Leviticus 25:25

19. What 2 things did Naomi tell Ruth about Boaz?
20. From the verse in Leviticus, explain what God commanded a redeemer to do.
21. What did Boaz do so that Ruth and Naomi had food for a long time?

Lesson 3

[14 AUG - 20 AUG 2011]

Ruth 2:1-23 Food for the Family

Ruth in the fields - 2:1-16

In Lev.19:9-10, we see one of God's ways of giving food to the poor. At harvest time, those who had land were to leave some grain and fruit for the poor people to come and harvest for themselves. God did not command the

rich to give money to the poor: He did not tell the poor to beg. To get their food, the poor had to work. From the beginning, it has always been God's will that people work. He taught Adam that he must work for his food (Gen.3:19). Until He was about 30 years old, Jesus worked as a carpenter. Paul worked making tents (Acts 18:3). The book of Proverbs has much to say about lazy people - e.g. 6:9-11, 10:4. Read what Paul wrote in 2 Thess.3:6-12. Some people will not work with their hands because they are proud. Jesus and Paul are our examples: from them we learn that it is good to work with our hands. Some people do not work because they are lazy. Such an attitude should not be found amongst believers.

God's other method for giving people what they need is through the family. Some are children, or weak or old and cannot work. God's plan is that their family support them. It seems that Naomi was not able to work, but Ruth brought food for her. Because Naomi's husband was his relative, Boaz gave special place for Ruth to glean in his fields. Read 1 Tim.5:8. Believers have the responsibility to support the people in their families. The person who is in need and cannot work, should first ask for help from his relatives. The church helps those who are truly in need (1 Tim.5:16).

God's two main methods of giving us our food are through our work and through our family. If we are not willing to work, and if we do not help the people in our own family, we may lack what we need.

Although it seemed to be by chance that Ruth came to Boaz's field, God was guiding her to the one who could help her. Prov.16:9 says, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." It was also God's plan that Ruth and Naomi came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. In all the circumstances of our lives, God is fulfilling His plan for us.

One of the things that Boaz knew about Ruth even before he met her was her faith in God. He knew that she had taken refuge under the wings of the God of Israel (v.12). Just as a chick hides under the wings of the hen and is safe from harm, so Ruth was protected by God. Read Ps.91:1-4. Have you found refuge under God's wings?

Ruth returns home - 2:17-23

After working hard all day, Ruth returned to Naomi. When she heard that Ruth had worked in Boaz's field Naomi told her that he was a close relative who was able to redeem them. Redemption was another of God's methods of providing the poor with what they needed. If a man became poor and sold his land, his relative had the right to buy back (redeem) the land for him.

Because Boaz was a relative, he could buy the land which Naomi's husband had sold when he went to Moab.

Questions for lesson 3

Memory verse: 1 Timothy 5:8

Day 1 Read the notes for Lesson 3

1. (a) What are God's 2 main methods of giving us what we need?

(b) What answer would you give to a person who says, "It's degrading for me to work with my hands"?

2. Which of the following sentences is true?

(a) If I am in need, a rich person must help me.

(b) If God has given me health and strength, He wants me to work to get what I need.

(c) If I am poor, the people in my church must help me.

(d) I must help anyone in my family who asks me.

(e) God cares about the poor.

Day 2 Ruth 3:1-6 Deuteronomy 25:5-6

3. What did Naomi want for Ruth?

4. So that a dead man's name be carried on, what command did God give to his close relative?

5. What did Naomi hope Boaz would do?

Day 3 Ruth 3:7-13

6. What did Ruth remind Boaz of? (v.9)

7. For what things did Boaz praise Ruth?

8. (a) Why did Boaz not immediately agree to marry Ruth?

(b) What did he promise Ruth?

Day 4 Ruth 3:14-18

9. What action of Boaz's showed his love for her?

10. What advice did Naomi give to Ruth?

11. Ps.37:7 says, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him." Is this God's word to you today? Is there something for which you must wait patiently?

Day 5 Ruth 4:1-12

12. What was the close relative willing to do?

13. What was he not willing to do?

14. What 2 things did Boaz make known before the witnesses?
(a) v.9 (b) v.10

Day 6 Ruth 4:13-17

15. (a) What did the women say to Naomi in praise of Ruth?

(b) Compare this with what Naomi said in 1:21. What can sorrow do to us?

16. Who cared for the baby?

17. From where does a woman get the ability to have a child?

Day 7 Ruth 4:18-22 Matthew 1:1-16

18. (a) Who was Obed's grandson?

(b) Why is he famous?

19. Who is the most important person born from Ruth and Boaz's family?

20. What main lesson have you learned from the book of Ruth?

Lesson 4

[21 AUG - 27 AUG 2011]

Ruth 3:1 - 4:22 Rest for the Family

Ruth at the threshing floor - 3:1-15

As Naomi's husband's relative, Boaz not only had the right to buy their land back, but he also had the right to marry Ruth so that her husband's name be carried on. When Naomi sent Ruth to the threshing floor, her goal was to remind Boaz of this. When he woke and found Ruth at his feet, he immediately understood what she was asking him to do. He was surprised and pleased at her coming because he had thought Ruth would want to marry a man younger than he. He knew that she was a woman of good character (3:11), but he could not yet promise to marry her. Because there was a closer relative who had the right to buy the land and marry Ruth, he had to give first choice to him.

Ruth waits - 3:16-18

Although Boaz spoke words of encouragement and gave her a gift of grain, Ruth still did not know what would happen. Naomi said, "Wait until you find out what happens." Do you find it difficult to wait? We want God to answer

our prayers immediately, but He often tells us to wait. If we're not willing to wait we cannot know His plan and His will.

Boaz at the town gate - 4:1-12

In front of ten witnesses, Boaz asked the close relative if he wanted to redeem the land that had belonged to Naomi's husband. While the relative was willing for this, when he heard that it was also necessary for him to marry Ruth, he changed his mind. In that time, a contract was made legal, not by signing a signature, but by one person taking off his shoe and giving it to the other. So the close relative took off his shoe to show that he was giving his rights to Boaz.

Boaz and Ruth's marriage and family - 4:13-22

Although this book is named for Ruth, it is also Naomi's story. In these verses we see how God changed her sorrow and bitterness into joy and blessing. In times of sorrow we must not give up hope. Although there may be times when we say with David, "I sink in the miry depths where there is no foothold" (see Ps.69:1-2), we can say in faith, "Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up." (Ps.71:20)

When we were studying Lesson 1, we said that Elimelech and his family were mistaken in going to Moab. We have seen, however, that the result was that God saved Ruth. We make many mistakes and when we are wrong, we must repent and confess our sin. But we must not lose hope as God can do good things even by means of our mistakes.

When we study some of the stories in the Old Testament, we find people whose lives remind us of ourselves and of the Lord Jesus. Ruth's story teaches us things about ourselves, and Boaz is an example (a type) of Jesus Christ. Before we knew the Lord Jesus, just like Ruth we were outside of God's people, poor, undeserving and without hope (Eph.2:12). Just as Boaz loved Ruth, redeemed her and gave her his wealth, so the Lord Jesus loves us, redeemed us by His blood and gives us spiritual riches - forgiveness, eternal life and hope. Read 1 Pet.1:18-19. Now, we who were far away have been brought into God's people through the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph.2:13).

Introduction to James

In the New Testament we read about two important people called James. One was a disciple of the Lord Jesus, the brother of the apostle John. In Acts 12:2 we read about his death, therefore he was not able to be the writer of this

Epistle. After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had other children and one of these is called James (Matt.13:55). He is the writer of this Epistle.

James is known as a great man of prayer. Because he spent so much time kneeling in prayer, it is said his knees became hard like a camel's. The teaching he gives in his epistle is very practical.

Questions for lesson 4

Memory verse: Psalm 71:20

Day 1 Read the notes for Lesson 4

1. What promise is given in Ps.71:20?

2. (a) In what ways are we like Ruth?

(b) In what ways is Boaz like the Lord Jesus?

3. What have you learnt about the man who wrote the Epistle of James?

Day 2 James 1:1

4. What things do you learn about James from these verses?

(a) John 7:1-5

(b) 1 Cor.15:5-7

(c) Gal.1:19 and 2:9

5. (a) Even although James was Jesus' brother, what does he say about himself in 1:1?

(b) What lessons can you learn from James' life?

6. To whom did James write his epistle?

Day 3 James 1:2-4

7. What did James tell his readers to do when trials came to them?

8. In what ways can trials benefit us?

9. (a) What trials do you have in your life today?

(b) What is James' command to you?

Day 4 James 1:5-8

10. What do you learn in v.5 about God?

11. (a) Which person will not receive what he asks for?
- (b) Why?
- (c) Therefore, what must we do when we pray?
12. (a) For what do you need wisdom today?
- (b) For what other special thing are you asking God?
- (c) Are you a double-minded, unstable person in your praying?

Day 5 James 1:9-11

13. In what way is a rich person like a wild flower?
14. What ought the poor Christian to do?

15. What high position do you have because you are a Christian? Rom.8:16-17

Day 6 James 1:12-15

16. (a) Who is the blessed person?

(b) Why?

(c) To whom does God give a reward?

17. What do you learn in v.13 about God?

18. (a) What is the first step towards falling into sin?

(b) What must we do when this happens? Gen.4:7

Day 7 James 1:16-18

19. What do we learn in these verses about God?

20. Can you think of some of the good and perfect gifts God has given us?

21. (a) According to v.18, how are we born again?

(b) What do you think this means?

Lesson 5

[28 AUG - 3 SEP 2011]

James 1:1-18 Standing in times of Testing

Until Jesus was crucified, His brothers did not believe in Him. But after He rose from the dead, He showed Himself to James. James believed, and later became a leader of the church in Jerusalem, along with Peter and John. Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles. But because most of the people in the church in Jerusalem were Jews, James' ministry was to his own people. He wrote this letter to Jewish Christians who were living in different places. While he wrote to Jews, that does not mean that it was written only for them. God included it in the books of the Bible so that we too can learn from it.

In his epistle, James often reminds his readers of things written in the Old Testament. In his teaching we also find many of the things the Lord Jesus taught. This was probably the first of the New Testament books to be written.

Different sorts of testing - 1:2-4 and 12-15

There are two kinds of testing that come to us. When God tests us, it is in order that we become strong. We read about this sort of testing in v.2-4. In these verses, the "test" is called a "trial". Perhaps you have trials and difficulties in your life today. James tells us that when this happens, we are to be full of joy. How can this be possible? James is not saying, "Trials cause us to be happy", but "Knowing that God is working in us through our trials so that our faith becomes complete, we can be happy". God's purpose in our trials is for our benefit - that we become mature Christians (v.3-4). If we stand firm in times of trial, we will receive the prize from God (v.12).

In v.13 we read about the second sort of testing. James says that God does not tempt anyone; this means that He does not tempt us to sin. That sort of temptation comes from Satan. His goal is to cause us to fall. When his temptation comes to us, our evil desires pull us and deceive us. If we resist those desires, we do not sin. (To be tempted is not sin: Jesus was tempted but did not sin.) However, if we follow our evil desires, we sin, and the final end of sin is death. There is nothing outside of us that forces us to sin. When temptation comes, it is our responsibility to overcome it.

Praying for wisdom - 1:5-8

When trials come to us, we need the wisdom which only God can give us. God wants us to ask for this wisdom, and He wants to give it to us. But if we doubt when we pray, we will not receive anything from the Lord.

Poverty and riches - 1:9-11

Many of the believers in the early church were poor in material things. James told these people that, because they were rich in Christ, they could be proud in their high position. Rich believers, however, must remember that their place in this world is temporary, and before the Lord they are in a low position.

God's good gifts - 1:16-18

In these verses, James calls God "the Father of lights". In saying this he reminds us that God is the Creator of the sun, moon and stars. While they have shadows which move and change, God is unchanging. Every good gift and every blessing come from our unchanging God. Of all the gifts He gives us, the greatest is our birth into His family (v.18). James says we are born through the word of truth. In order that we know the truth, we must hear God's Word. Having heard the message of the gospel from the Bible, we believe and become God's children. God gives us birth through His Word, the Bible. We can, however, see another meaning in these words of James. Jesus Christ is the Living Word, and it is through Him that we are born into God's family.

Questions for lesson 5

Memory verse: James 1:2-3

Day 1 Read the notes for Lesson 5

1. What is the difference between God's testing and Satan's tempting?

2. What new thing have you learnt from the notes?

3. What does the name "the Father of lights" teach us about God?

Day 2 James 1:19-21

4. (a) What 3 commands do we read in v.19?

(b) Which of these is hard for you to obey?

5. What does James say about man's anger?

6. (a) What do we learn in these verses about the word?

(b) What command does James give us about the word?

Day 3 James 1:22-24

7. Who is the person who deceives himself?

8. To whom does James compare the person who listens to the word but does not do what it says?

9. Give an example from your life when you have listened to God's Word and then obeyed it.

Day 4 James 1:25

10. (a) What 3 things are we to do as we read God's Word?

(b) What are we not to do?

11. (a) What is the result if we do these things?

(b) Have you done these things and found this result in your life?

12. What do we learn in this verse about God's Word?

Day 5 James 1:26-27

13. Who is the person who deceives himself?

14. What 3 things will a true worshipper of God do?

15. Think carefully about these things. What is God teaching you?

Day 6 James 2:1-4

16. What is James' command in v.1?

17. (a) What sort of discrimination does he oppose in these verses?

(b) What other sorts of discrimination are there in our country in our time?

18. Do all the visitors who come to your church get welcomed equally? Do you need to change your customs?

Day 7 James 2:5-7

19. Why is it wrong to discriminate against the poor?

20. What were the rich unbelievers doing?

21. Look at your answer for question 17(b). What is God's attitude towards those who are discriminated against? Is there any kind of discrimination in your heart?

Lesson 6

[4 SEP – 10 SEP 2011]

James 1:19 - 2:7 God's Word Changes our Life

Hearing and doing the Word - 1:19-27

When Jesus was teaching, he spoke about two men who built houses. The wise man built his house on rock and it stood firm when the wind and floods came. Because the foolish man built his house on sand, it fell in the floods. Jesus said, "The man who hears My words but does not do them is like that foolish man. The one who hears My words and puts them into practice is like the wise man" (Matt.7:24-27). To build our lives on a strong foundation, reading or hearing the Bible is not enough. If we only hear the Word, it will judge us and not profit us at all. In 1:25 James tells us that we must look carefully at God's Word, then we must continue in it, and we must do what it tells us. Do you read the Bible carefully, or do you read in a hurry? Are you obeying it? Is God's Word changing your life? Or are you like the man who looks at himself in a mirror and then forgets what he looks like?

James tells us about some of the changes there will be in our lives when we receive God's Word as we should. Read 1:19-21. Are you obeying these commands? When we put God's Word into practice, we will learn to control our tongues (v.26). Our worship will not just be something we do on Sunday,

but we will be people who glorify God by caring for those in trouble, and by living pure lives (v.27).

Favouritism - 2:1-7

Romans 2:11 says, "God does not show favouritism." We, however, are often like the people to whom James wrote; we give honour to those whose outward appearance pleases us. James says that favouritism is sin (2:9). In your church, do all receive equal honour? Do you thank those who prepare food for visitors and clean the church? Or do you praise only the choir and preachers? Do you invite the women to participate in your ministry and in your feasts? Or are only the men invited? Do you receive all the people from other races who come to your church? James reminds us that the people we despise and insult are honoured before God (v.5-6). In the world, the rich, the educated, the powerful and the beautiful are given praise and honour. In the church this ought not to be so. We ought to be like Christ who received all who came to Him (Jn.6:37). He said, "Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" Lk.13:30.

Questions for lesson 6

Memory verse: James 1:27

Day 1 Read the notes for Lesson 6

1. Write 2 or 3 lessons you have learnt from God's Word this week which you want to put into practice.
2. The memory verse tells us we should look after orphans and widows. What other people around you need your care?
3. Can you give an example from Jesus' life which shows He did not show favouritism?

Day 2 James 2:8-11

4. (a) What does v.9 tell us about the person who shows favouritism?

(b) What is the royal law which we must keep so that we don't discriminate against people?

5. How many of God's laws do we need to break to be a law-breaker?

6. Which of the following people have you not loved as yourself? The poor, the opposite sex, people from other races, the uneducated, children? What attitude or actions is God asking you to change?

Day 3 James 2:12-13

7. What will happen if we are not merciful?

8. When James tells us about being merciful, what example is he thinking about? Look again at 2:1-4.

9. (a) By which law will we be judged? (v.12)

(b) For what will we be judged? 2 Cor.5:10

Day 4 James 2:14-17

10. What does James say in the following verses about faith that does not have actions?
 - (a) v.14
 - (b) v.16
 - (c) v.17
11. Do our good actions save us? See Eph.2:8-9
12. What main thing is James teaching us in these verses?

Day 5 James 2:18-19

13. How can we show our faith?
14.
 - (a) What do the demons believe?
 - (b) Does their belief save them?
15. From these verses, explain the difference between the faith that saves and the faith that does not save.

Day 6 James 2:20-24

16. How did Abraham show his faith?

17. Read v.22 carefully. What 2 things do you learn about Abraham's faith?

18. Can you give an example of something you did this week which showed your faith?

Day 7 James 2:25-26

19. What does James say about faith that has no deeds?

20. (a) Why was Rahab considered righteous?

(b) Read Heb.11:31. What was the foundation of her actions?

21. Read 1:26-27 again. By what 3 sorts of actions do we show that we have real faith?

James 2:8-26 Faith and Deeds**The royal law - 2:8-13**

When we fulfill our Heavenly King's law, "Love your neighbour as yourself", we will not only show kindness to the rich, but also to the poor. Jesus taught us about this in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk.10:25-37). Just as the Samaritan helped a man who was poor, despised and of a different race, so we ought to show love to all. If we don't, we sin and break God's law. James tells us that we will be judged by the law that gives freedom (v.12). The Law of Moses brought bondage. But now, we who have believed in Christ have received God's Spirit and He frees us to obey God. Having received God's mercy, we are able to be merciful to others.

Living faith and dead faith - 2:14-26

Some people find these verses difficult to understand because it seems that James is teaching the opposite of what Paul says in his letters. Paul tells us that we are saved by our faith and not by our works. But when we look carefully at what James writes, we see that he is not speaking about true, saving faith. In v.14 he writes about a man who says, "I have faith." Most people say that they believe in God: many even say, "I believe in Jesus Christ." But even the demons know and believe that God exists and that Jesus is His Son. That sort of faith doesn't save anyone. It is not enough to believe in our minds, or to say with our mouths, "I believe". True faith will show itself in our actions. If we have truly believed, we will live according to God's will. We will do what we can to help others (v.15-16). Like Abraham, we will obey God, even when it is difficult (v.21-22). Like Rahab we will do what we can to support what God's people are doing (v.25). Our works and good deeds do not save us. Nevertheless, real, living faith is faith that works.

James does not oppose Paul's teaching. Both say, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (James 2:23 and Gal.3:6). In addition, James tells us that after Abraham believed, he showed his faith by obeying God's command to offer his son as a sacrifice. Likewise, after we believe, we must reveal our faith by our obedience. Jesus teaches us that unless we do God's will, we will not be saved. It is not enough to say "Lord, Lord" with our mouths, or even to do miracles in His name (Matt.7:21-23). Obedience must follow if our faith is true.

Day 3 James 3:3-6

7. In what way is the tongue like a horse's bit or the rudder of a ship?

8. In what way is the tongue like a fire?

9. Can you give an example of how a few words grew into something big?

Day 4 James 3:7-8

10. (a) What can man tame?

(b) What can man not tame?

11. What other things do we learn about the tongue in v.8?

12. Are you able to control your tongue, or does it control you? What sort of words do you want to remove from your speech today?

Day 5 James 3:9-12

13. What does James say come out of the same mouth?

14. In v.9, when James says "we" he means that he too does this. Do you also do this? If so, what do you need to do?

15. Write one of the examples that James gives from nature. What is he teaching us from these examples?

Day 6 James 3:13-16

16. (a) What things will a truly wise person do?

(b) Do you want to be wise? Is your life like this?

17. (a) Where do bitter envy and selfish ambition come from?

(b) What is the result if we have envy and selfish ambition in our lives?

18. Examine your heart to see if there is envy and selfish ambition there.

Day 7 James 3:17-18

19. What sort of person is the truly wise man?

20. Try to explain the meaning of all the words you have written in your answer for question 19.

21. Which of these qualities is not found in your life?

Lesson 8

[18 SEP - 24 SEP 2011]

James 3:1-18 Speech and Wisdom

Taming the tongue - 3:1-12

Although a teacher is usually given honour from men, James warns us that he may not receive honour from God. Bible teachers will be judged more strictly than other people (v.1). Anyone who teaches God's Word must obey what it says. For example, the teacher who says, "James tells us that we must not show favouritism", must himself put away discrimination from his life. Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Lk.12:48).

James knows that for all of us, and especially for teachers, the hardest thing is to control our tongues. A bit, although small, controls the whole horse, and likewise a ship is guided by a small rudder. In the same way, although the tongue is a very small part of our bodies, it has great power. If we could control our tongues, we could rule ourselves completely. Just as a small fire can grow and destroy a forest, so a few words can cause much harm (v.6).

We ourselves are unable to control our tongues. But when we allow God to control them, our words can be used for good. Fire can destroy, but it can also be used for cooking and other good purposes. In the same way, our tongues

can speak words of encouragement, of hope and of praise to God. The Lord Jesus said, "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him" (Matt.12:34-35). If our hearts are right, our words will be good. Do you want to have good words come out of your mouth? Put away all evil from your heart. Then ask God to help you control your tongue. Try today to speak words of encouragement and hope to someone.

Two kinds of wisdom - 3:13-18

James tells us about two kinds of wisdom - that which comes from heaven, and that which is worldly. Although there is much knowledge in our world today, few people have the true wisdom that comes from God. Even in our churches, bitter jealousy, selfish ambition and pride are found among our leaders. Such people cannot lead the church with God's wisdom. James tells us that true wisdom is found in the lives of those who are without hypocrisy, who love peace, who think about others and are merciful to them, and who live pure lives. In chapter 2 we learnt that if we have real faith, we will show it by our actions. Now James tells us that if we are truly wise, we will show that wisdom, not by our words, but by our way of living. Knowledge and wisdom are not the same. Many educated people who have much knowledge do not have God's wisdom. Likewise, uneducated people can be full of the wisdom mentioned in v.17. What is your goal? To obtain much learning in order to have a lot of knowledge? This is all in vain unless you seek the qualities in v.17. Remember, earthly wisdom which leads to pride, envy and selfish ambition is from the devil, not from God (v.15).

Questions for lesson 8

Memory verse: Psalm 141:3

Day 1 Read the notes for Lesson 8

1. What are three things we can do to help us control our tongues?

2. What is the difference between knowledge and true wisdom?

3. If we have God's wisdom, by what means is it revealed, by words or by deeds?

Day 2 James 4:1-2

4. What prevents us from living at peace with one another?

5. (a) What sins were found amongst the people to whom James wrote?

(b) Are any of these found in your church?

6. What is one reason why we do not get what we want?

Day 3 James 4:3

7. What can prevent us from getting answers to our prayers?

8. What wrong motive does James tell us about?

9. Can you think of things that are necessary in order that we receive answers to our prayers? Try to find verses which support your answer.

Day 4 James 4:4-6

10. What happens to the person who chooses to become a friend of the world?

11. (a) What do we learn about the proud?

(b) What do we learn about the humble?

12. (a) Give examples of the things a proud person does.

(b) Give examples of the things a humble person does.

Day 5 James 4:7-10

13. What will happen if we do the following things:

(a) Resist the devil?

(b) Come near to God?

(c) Humble ourselves before God?

14. Explain what it means to do these 3 things:

(a) Resist the devil.

(b) Come near to God.

(c) Humble ourselves before God.

15. What must we do if there is sin in our lives?

Day 6 James 4:11-12

16. What command is given here?

17. Who is the only One who can judge the actions of each one of us?

18. (a) What is the meaning of the word "slander"?

(b) Do you need to remove this sin from your life?

Day 7 James 4:13-17

19. What must we remember when we make plans for the future?

20. What is our life?

21. (a) Is it a sin if we do nothing? (v.17)

(b) What good thing is God telling you to do?

Lesson 9

[25 SEP - 1 OCT 2011]

James 4:1-17 Submitting to God

Friends of the world - 4:1-6

Amongst the believers there were quarrels, coveting, fighting and hating. When these things are found in our churches, we do not receive what we want, we have no peace, and God is not honoured. James tells us that the source of our problems is our own sinful, selfish desires - v.1. When we pray, if our desire is our own pleasure, we do not receive from God.

In these times, we sometimes hear preachers say, "God wants you to be rich. Tell Him what you want and He will give it to you." But James says, "If you ask for your own pleasure, you will not receive."

More than this, he calls those who want the things of the world "adulterers" (v.4). A believer who turns from God to worldly things is just like a woman who leaves her husband for another man. Just as a husband is jealous when his wife goes to another man, so God's Spirit is jealous when we turn from God to worldly things (v.5). Are you asking God for worldly things for yourself? Do not become a friend of the world.

What is the root of our selfish and worldly desires? James tells us in v.6 that it is our pride. God opposes those who are proud. When we humble ourselves before the Lord, He gives us grace for whatever happens in our lives. Joy is not found in receiving wealth and worldly things. When God gives us His grace, we have all that we need.

Resisting the devil - 4:7-8

What does it mean to resist the devil? Since he is God's enemy, his main aim is to oppose God's will and to prevent people from obeying God. He works in our minds to tempt us to sin. We see this in the story of Adam and Eve (Gen.3), and in Jesus' temptation (Matt.4). When we submit ourselves to God (James 4:7), and come near to Him (v.8), He will help us to resist the devil. When Jesus was tempted, He did these things, and He also used God's Word as a sword. The main way Satan opposes us is when he tempts us to sin. We resist him when we submit ourselves to God and refuse to listen to Satan. When Jesus resisted Satan's temptations with God's Word, Satan fled from Him (Matt.4:11). Likewise, the devil will flee from us when we resist him in this way.

We read in the New Testament that when the followers of Jesus cast out evil spirits they rebuked them in Jesus' name. This is not what James is teaching us about in 4:7 when he tells us to resist the devil. Casting out evil spirits and resisting Satan are not the same thing. To shout, "In Jesus' name," is not the way we resist the devil.

Are you afraid of Satan? The Bible tells us that he cannot touch us because the One born of God (Jesus) protects us (1 Jn.5:18). Jesus is greater than Satan (1 Jn.4:4), and He was revealed to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn.3:8). Think carefully about these verses. Jesus did not teach us to rebuke the devil, but to pray asking God to deliver us from him (Matt.6:13). We of ourselves have no power over him. If we rebuke him by our words, it will be useless unless we resist him when he tempts us. We must focus our thoughts on God; not on the devil. When God comes near to us, and when we obey Him, Satan cannot harm us.

Various commands - 4:8-12

So that we can have close fellowship with God, James gives us various commands. We must humble ourselves before Him, sorrow for the sins we have done, and examine and purify the motives of our hearts. When we come near to God with this attitude, He will come near to us. To live at peace with other Christians, we must guard our mouths when we speak about them. We often sin when we speak about our brothers and sisters.

Boasting about tomorrow - 4:13-17

God is the only One who knows and controls what will happen in the future. Therefore we should not boast about what we plan to do. Our hope for tomorrow should be in God; not in what we will do.

The last verse in chapter 4 teaches us an important lesson about sin. We sin, not only when we do those things that God forbids, but also when we don't do the good things that we ought to do. The parable of the good Samaritan is an example of this (Lk.10:30-35). Because the priest and the Levite did not do good for the man who had been beaten, they sinned. When God reminds us to do good to a needy person, we sin if we do nothing.

Questions for lesson 9

Memory verse: James 4:7-8(a)

Day 1 Read the notes for Lesson 9

1. What does James call those who want the things of the world?

2. (a) What is the main way Satan opposes us?

 (b) What new thing have you learnt about resisting the devil?

3. What attitude must we have when we come near to God?

Day 2 James 5:1-6

4. What were the faults of these rich people?

(a) v.3	(b) v.4
(c) v.5	(d) v.6

5. What will happen to the possessions of rich people?

6. Read Matt.6:19-21. What advice did Jesus give us?

Day 3 James 5:7-9

7. Because the Lord's coming is near, what 3 things does James tell us to do?

8. In what way do you think a farmer is a good example of patience?

9. About what sorts of things do Christians grumble against each other?

Day 4 James 5:10-12

10. In what way are the prophets and Job examples to us?

11. Do you know the story of Job? What did the Lord finally bring about?
(v.11)

12. Read Matt.5:33-37. Why do Jesus and James say, "Do not swear"?

Day 5 James 5:13-16

13. What are we to do:
- (a) when we are in trouble?
 - (b) when we are happy?
 - (c) when we are sick?
 - (d) when we have sinned against other people?
14. What does James teach us about prayer?

Day 6 James 5:17-20

15. (a) What sort of man was Elijah?
- (b) What were the results of his prayers?
16. (a) What should we try to do if a Christian brother or sister wanders from the truth?
- (b) Do you know someone who has wandered from the truth?
16. What will the benefit be if you turn him back?

Day 7 Read the notes for Lesson 10

18. What wrong attitude can we have concerning our money and possessions?

19. Read Heb.11:35-39

(a) Did these people receive what God had promised?

(b) Was this because they did not have faith?

(c) What can you learn from this?

20. What is one practical lesson you have learned from the Epistle of James?

Lesson 10

[2 OCT - 8 OCT 2011]

James 5:1-20 Words of Warning and Encouragement

Warning to the rich - 5:1-6

Rich people who have lived in luxury and have not paid the wages of their workers will have to answer to God. On the day of judgment their wealth will not save them. When we read these verses, it is easy to say, "I am not rich; I have not sinned like this." But even if we do not have any wealth, we too can have the wrong attitude concerning our money and possessions. Instead of helping those in need, we can spend all of our money for our own comfort and pleasure (v.5). If we say, "This money and these possessions are mine; therefore I can use them as I want", we are mistaken. Everything we have belongs to God. In our desire to get more for ourselves, if we cheat others we are like the rich people James warned (v.4).

Patience in suffering - 5:7-12

Although there were those who persecuted them, James told his readers to be patient. One day the Lord will come. We may have trials and difficulties in our lives, but we are sure that our Lord, the true Judge, will return. When James spoke about patience, he did not tell us about something new. God's people have suffered in past ages and are examples to us. The prophets were patient in their suffering, and although many troubles came to Job, he kept on trusting God. We cannot always understand why suffering comes to us, but in our suffering we can learn more of God's compassion and mercy (v.11).

What does James mean in v.12 when he speaks about swearing by heaven or by earth? To prove that they are speaking the truth, people often swear an oath by God's name. But James and the Lord Jesus teach us that we should not swear by anything. If we always speak the truth, people will believe our words. Oaths are not necessary. Do people believe what you say? If they don't believe you, why is this so? Is it because your words are not always true? James says, "Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No' no, or you will be condemned." (v.12)

The prayer of faith - 5:13-19

We are to come near to God in prayer in all circumstances of our lives. God hears and answers our prayers. These verses suggest two questions that we need to answer:

1. Does God promise to heal any sick person if the elders of his church anoint him with oil and pray for him in faith? (v.14-15) God does not always heal all our sicknesses. 2 Cor.12:7-9 gives us an example of this. He does heal in answer to the prayer of faith, but we cannot command Him to do this. In Hebrews chapter 11 we read the stories of people who did great things by faith. But towards the end of the chapter we are told of some who suffered without being saved from their troubles. v.39 says, "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised." If a person is not healed in answer to prayer, the reason may not be a lack of faith. Sometimes it is not God's will to heal us.
2. Is sickness the result of sin? (v.15-16) Illness may come because of our sin, but many illnesses are not connected to sin. Jesus told His disciples that the man's being born blind was not because of his or his parents' sin (Jn.9:2-3). Nevertheless, if we have sin in our lives which we have not confessed, it can spoil our health. This sin also prevents our prayers from being answered. That's why James tells us to confess our sins to each

another. First of all, we must confess our sins to God. But if our sin has been against other people, we must also confess the sin to them.

James tells us that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Do you really believe this? How much do you pray? God hears and answers the prayers of ordinary people like Elijah and you and me. Are you using this great power of prayer?

As James finishes his letter, he reminds us to watch out for the spiritual state of our Christian brothers and sisters. We must bring back those who are wandering from God's ways. What a great thing it is if we can save a fallen brother or sister from death!

Memory Verses for Ruth and James

1. Romans 12:2
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.
2. Proverbs 3:5-6
Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.
3. 1 Timothy 5:8
If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
4. Psalm 71:20
Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.
5. James 1:2-3
Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.
6. James 1:27
Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.
7. James 2:26
As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.
8. Psalm 141:3
Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.
9. James 4:7-8(a)
Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.

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