

James

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Letter of Saint James using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to the Catholic Epistles* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||}that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||}and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all th tioning,¹⁵that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God's g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

A Thing to Harpagmos (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi **(1)** Some, like “something sel

Prepare

Read the Introduction to James, paying particular attention to the *Themes and Characteristics* of the book. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of James to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of James, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on James as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:5.** To what does *wisdom* refer? To whom is it given?
2. **1:8.** Who is the “double-minded” person? How does such a person relate to God? What effect does double-mindedness have on prayer?
3. **1:13.** What difference is there between a testing from God and a temptation? If God does not tempt us to sin, what does draw us into sin?
4. **1:19–25.** What activity characterizes the two types of hearing that James mentions here?

For application

1. **1:2–4.** What does it mean for faith to be *tested*? How might suffering produce steadfastness? What is the worst suffering you have ever experienced, and what was your response to it?
2. **1:5–8.** If you ask for wisdom, how long do you think it might take for that prayer to be answered? According to the note on 1:5, for what are you really asking? Why do you think someone might not want the wisdom that God offers or be only half-hearted in asking for it? By contrast, why do you think God would be eager to answer that prayer?
3. **1:19–20.** How do you handle yourself during disagreements and quarrels? How quickly do you get angry, and how do you manage your speech and actions when you do? How can you use a disagreement so as to “work the righteousness of God”?
4. **1:22–27.** If, as Paul says in Rom 10:17, faith comes by hearing, how is faith strengthened by action? Why would James say (in v. 26) that an unbridled tongue deceives the heart and renders religion vain?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **Word Study: Assembly (2:2).** To what can the Greek word *synagōgē* refer here? To what does it refer in the Greek OT? Where were synagogues built? For what were they used?
2. **2:8.** What is the “royal law”? To what does the precept of Lev 19:18 refer, and what is its significance in the Torah? What other allusions does James make to Lev 19 in his letter?
3. **2:18.** What is the teaching style called “diatribe”? What assumption can we *not* make from James’ use of the diatribe technique?
4. **Topical Essay: Faith and Works.** How does what James presents to readers of the Bible differ from what Paul says on the subject of faith, works, and justification? How might we account for those differences? What do many scholars believe James is trying to refute when he insists on the necessity of works in the Christian life?

For application

1. **2:1–7.** How do you behave when the opportunity arises to meet someone famous or wealthy? What association do you have with the poor? Of the two, whose company do you prefer? According to Scripture, what advantages do the poor have that the rich lack?
2. **2:12–13.** How would you describe the “law of liberty” (v. 12)? How would you reconcile the paradoxes in these verses—that is, of *liberty* as related to *law*, of *judgment* as related to *liberty*, and of *merciless* judgment under that law? To whose mercy does v. 13 refer as setting the standard of judgment?
3. **2:14–18.** To illustrate the necessity of putting faith to work, James mentions an opportunity for service that confronts a person unbidden. What similar situations have you faced in the last year? How did you address the need you observed? Granted that no one can meet the needs of everyone who comes along, how do you decide which ones you can—and will—meet?
4. **2:19–23.** James distinguishes between dead faith and active faith. Which was Abraham’s? How might Abraham’s example apply to difficult decisions you face? For example, how much do you trust God for your family’s welfare?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1.** For what do Christian educators bear great responsibility? Why are they at greater risk than most people? What should restrain them from uttering careless words?
2. **3:6.** Of what is the tongue a microcosm? What does James mean by the “cycle of nature”?
3. **3:9.** What contradicts our use of the tongue in worship? What does our cursing do to our relationship with the Father?
4. **3:13–18.** What is the subject of these verses? What is the state of the teacher who claims to be wise but is ruled by jealousy and selfish ambition? What does true wisdom do? How is it manifested?

For application

1. **3:1–5.** When have you taught or given advice that you thought was good but that resulted in something unfortunate? What responsibility did you take for the consequences of what you said? What responsibility *should* you have taken?
2. **3:8–10.** Examine what you say as it affects those closest to you. On the one hand, how often do you criticize, call names, express anger or irritability, or joke at their expense? On the other hand, how often do you praise, compliment, or express approval of and delight in your family members? Which of the two patterns predominates?
3. **3:13–16.** What is the difference between wisdom and shrewdness or cunning? Which description would you apply to someone who uses others to get ahead, advertises his own abilities, flatters, is insincere, or tells stories about others’ stupidity? What effect on relationships does such behavior have?
4. **3:17–18.** Now ask the same questions about the sort of wisdom James describes in these verses. Whom do you know who acts this way? How might you learn to act this way?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:4.** What is the literal meaning behind the translation “unfaithful creatures”? For what do the Prophets use this epithet? For what does James use it? How does friendship with the world contrast with Abraham’s friendship with God?
2. **4:5.** Where is this saying found in the OT? According to the RSV translation, of what is God intolerant? What would an alternative translation be, and what meaning would it give the saying?
3. **4:8.** By inviting them to “Draw near to God”, what is James calling his readers to do? Why does he tell them to cleanse their hands?
4. **4:11.** In what two kinds of speech are believers forbidden to engage? What is the difference between them? Why is such behavior injurious? To what OT passage does James probably allude?

For application

1. **4:3.** Since prayer goes unanswered when we ask wrongly, what is the right way to ask for something? How appropriate is it for you to ask God for something specific, such as for a job? How can you ask “rightly” for something that satisfies a need of your own?
2. **4:4.** Refer to the note for this verse. How might friendship with the world show itself in your own life? What impact has it had on your relationship with God as you experience that relationship now (for example, on your prayer life)?
3. **4:7.** How seriously do you take the existence of the devil? How would you recognize the devil’s influence in your life? How do you resist the devil?
4. **4:17.** Look up paragraph 1853 in the *Catechism* on sins of omission. What are some of your own failures—especially consistent or habitual failures—to do what you should do? Have you repented of these failures? If your failure has caused trouble for someone else, have you tried to repair the damage?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **5:3.** To what does the expression “last days” refer? What can the world expect at the end of the last days? What were the rich doing for themselves before the last days?

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2. **5:7.** To what does the expression “the coming of the Lord” refer here? Of what might the image of the Judge “standing at the doors” (5:9) be an echo? What is the background for James’ reference to the early and late rains?
3. **5:14.** What could oil be used for in Jewish antiquity? How did the Council of Trent interpret this verse of James? What is the purpose of this anointing? Where in the Gospels do we find a hint of the institution of this sacrament?
4. **Word Study: Elders (5:14).** What are some of the meanings of the word “elder” in Jewish tradition? What did the word mean in first-century Judaism? How is this usage carried over into Christian tradition?

For application

1. **5:1–6.** How have you used your personal resources—such as money, influence, talent, or time—for the benefit of others? How might you seek God’s wisdom to learn how you should use your resources?
2. **5:12.** How well would your friends say you keep the promises you make? How reliable are you in fulfilling your commitments? Since reliability or faithfulness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Gal 5:22), how might you improve in this respect?
3. **5:13–16.** How willingly do you ask others to pray for you when you are ill? How willing are you to request the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick in case of serious illness? How regularly do you use the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
4. **5:19–20.** Have you ever wandered away from the practice of the faith? If so, what did friends or relatives do to call you back to it? If you know of anyone who has strayed, what have you done to help bring him back?