



For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

THE DAILY READING BIBLE

JAMES

THE ATONEMENT

GENESIS 12-35

60 daily readings with full Bible text

THE DAILY READING BIBLE

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- *some ideas to get you started in prayer.*

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THE DAILY READING BIBLE

Volume 5

JAMES

THE ATONEMENT

GENESIS 12-35

The Daily Reading Bible (Volume 5)

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INTRODUCTION

Readng our Bibles regularly is getting harder. That, at least, seems to be the common experience of many Christians. We could waste lots of ink speculating on the reasons for this: is it the frenetic pace of life these days? Is it spiritual laziness? Is it the impact of postmodernism on our culture and the lack of certainty when it comes to interpreting the written word?

But a better option than speculating on the reasons, we thought, was to provide a new resource for Christians to help them get back into a more regular habit of reflecting daily on God's Word. So back in June 2001, we decided to start including a section called 'Bible Brief' in our monthly magazine, *The Briefing* (see www.matthiasmedia.com for more information about *The Briefing*). The 'Bible Brief' provided 20 short readings each month—acknowledging that there will be days we miss or days when we want to do something a bit different—with questions, thoughts to ponder, and suggestions to get started in prayer.

Now, several years later, we have a good collection of 'Bible Briefs', and it's time to offer them to a wider audience in a format that will, we hope, be even more convenient and useful.

This fifth volume contains 60 readings, all designed to be done in 15–20 minutes. These short daily Bible readings are designed to help

you feed regularly from God's word. They won't cover every issue in each passage, nor even every passage from each Bible book. In other words, *they are no substitute for the in-depth study of the Scriptures* that you may undertake personally, in small groups or through listening to sermons.

With the kind permission of our friends at Crossway Bibles, we've been able to make this a complete package to take with you—we've included the English Standard Version Bible text with each daily study. So you can take this one book with you and have everything you need—on the train, on the bus, or to the park at lunchtime—wherever and whenever you can get 20 minutes to yourself.

How to use these readings

- *With a penitent heart*, the true prerequisite for all Bible reading. Open with prayer (perhaps using the prayer suggested at the beginning of each set of studies).
- *With 15–20 minutes* of peace and quiet. If you can take longer, and want to read and pray further—great! But we have designed the readings to be done in a fairly short space of time.
- *With an accurate modern translation*. We recommend and have included the new ESV translation. The writers of the studies refer to this translation. Contact us for further details about the ESV or visit www.matthiasmedia.com.au/ESV

- *With a pen.* Even if you only jot down brief ideas, writing focuses the mind.
- *As a guide and help, not a straitjacket.* Feel free to dig further into the passage, to notice and ponder things that the questions don't point to.
- *As a launch-pad for prayer.* Use the prayer ideas at the end of each reading as a starting point for your daily prayer. Many of the points that will arise from the readings will be things you can pray for yourself, and also for others (family, friends, neighbours, etc.). Why not compile a list of people you want to pray for (you can write them in the blank space below), and use the prayer ideas from each reading to pray for the next person on your list?

This fifth volume includes:

- studies on James (written by Neil Cavanagh with minor assistance from Tony Payne. Neil has been working in parish ministry in Western Australia, and is currently in general medical practice)
- studies on the atonement (written by the AFES ministry team at the University of Western Australia)
- studies on Genesis 12-35 (written by Bruce Morrison, Senior Minister of St John's Cathedral, Parramatta in Sydney).

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Please note: the main section of Scripture for each study is reproduced before the questions. Other Scripture references are reproduced as footnotes at the bottom of the page, or, where the passages are too long to be included as footnotes, in the appendix.

PEOPLE TO PRAY FOR:

JAMES

INTRODUCTION

The short letter of James has always been loved by Christians for its warm and practical exhortations about daily life. But we shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that James is somehow just a list of do's and don't's. The practical teaching of the letter is based on "the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (as 2:1 puts it), and on the new birth that comes through the word of truth (1:18). As well as studying James in the following readings, we'll also be pausing a couple of times to meditate on some proverbs that reflect the teaching of James.

You might like to use this prayer (or your own variation on it) before each of the next 20 studies:

Father of light,

Every good and perfect gift is from you. By your living word, you brought me to new birth, that I should be one of your holy people. Father, help me now to be not just a reader of your word, but a doer, through the glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

NB: Tick the box when you've completed each study ✓

READING 1

JAMES 1:1-4

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
Greetings.

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Judging by the opening verses of James, becoming a Christian can sound like joining a masochist society. Count various trials as "all joy"? What does he mean?

1. *What impact do outward trials have on our faith?*

2. *What two responses should we make?*

3. *Why should we make these responses?*

PONDER What is it about outward trials that makes them difficult? Why then are we supposed to rejoice? Is there anything wrong with feeling distressed about trials? Consider a difficult situation that you currently face; how does God's word here help you respond to it?

PRAYER IDEAS Praise God that he wants his children to keep growing to Christian maturity and completeness. Thank God that he even uses the trials of life to develop the necessary perseverance in us. Ask God to help you rejoice in that knowledge and to sustain you in faithfulness all the days of your life.

POINTER v. 2: the word "trials" is a translation of the Greek word *peirasmoi*, which has the double meaning of outward trials or inward temptation. The translation "trials" is preferred here.

READING 2

JAMES 1:4-8

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

When trials in our life distress, harass and confuse us, joy becomes a tall order. What are we to do? James tells us to ask God.

1. Read James 1:1-8. Now look more closely at verses 4-8. When we face trials of many kinds, what should we ask God for?

2. What right attitude is required and what is promised as a result?

3. What wrong attitude is identified and what are its consequences?

PONDER Why would facing a trial require wisdom and belief? What is the wisdom for and what is it that we must believe (v. 6)? What does it mean to be a "double-minded" Christian? Why, and in what way, is it destructive? Think about how this applies to trials you face in your own life. How will you respond?

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God that he wants you to be a complete Christian, not lacking in anything. For yourself and others, ask God for wisdom and faithfulness in the face of trials. Ask God to protect you from double-mindedness.

READING 3

JAMES 1:9-12

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Many people believe that financial security is very important for a safe and happy life

and so they pursue wealth. Even Christians will talk about their wealth as a blessing from God. But what are the true blessings of God and where are they to be found?

1. What is the high position of the poor and what attitude should they have toward it?
2. What is the low position of the rich and what attitude should they have toward it?
3. Read the passage again. What blessing is promised? Under what conditions is it received?

PONDER How is this passage related to the previous one? How can riches and poverty test believers spiritually? How might 'double-mindedness' be expressed in relation to money? How does money and the pursuit of wealth affect your faith, your Christian commitment, and how you feel about others?

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God that he is the Saviour of all people, the rich and the poor, and that our status before him is unaffected by wealth. Ask God for faithfulness in all your financial dealings. Ask God to protect you from a double-minded love of money and to keep you single-minded about Christ.

POINTERS One of the difficulties that many of us face when studying the letter of James is to understand the flow of ideas. At times he seems to jump from one topic to another without explanation. Verse 9 is one such place, and yet when we get to verse 12 we see that he is still on the topic of "trials", first raised in verse 2. We need a closer look to understand the connections.

v. 12: "crown of life" is the crown that consists of life—the joyful and everlasting gift of eternal life from the eternal King promised to his faithful servants.

READING 4

JAMES 1:12-18

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect

gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Sometimes the trials of life can get pretty ugly. They can make us feel like we're drowning and we become desperate for relief. That's when the easy way out looks easy indeed.