

Sunday Bible Study Lesson: James 2:14-26
June 7, 2020

This section of James' letter is pivotal. In the Christian community, there were people who had a verbal faith that consisted of words **without** actions. James asks two rhetorical questions so that he can address that problem. What two questions does he ask in **verse 14**?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

In the following verses, James provides evidence that the answer to #2 is **NO**!
In **verse 15**, what do the fellow believers need? _____
In **verse 16**, what did the believers **say** to those in need? _____
What did they **do** for those in need? _____

In James' example, believers had an opportunity to demonstrate their love by meeting the most basic human needs of others. What question does the apostle John ask in **1 John 3:17**? _____

How does that verse show that John is in agreement with James? _____

Read **James 2:18**. What is the argument someone makes in this verse? _____

James will not accept this way of thinking. He proceeds to give us **three examples** that demonstrate that faith and works cannot be separated.

Read verse 19 and complete this sentence: You believe that _____.

So, the **first example** is the person who has intellectual faith. He uses the Jewish confession called the *Shema* from **Deuteronomy 6:4**: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God! The Lord is one!" This person believes that God is one, but his "head knowledge" has not penetrated his heart or made its way to his hands and feet. James states that those with intellectual faith alone have that in common with the demons. James' point is that the demons are convinced of the power and reality of the one God. Note that **Deuteronomy 6:5** says, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." The demons' belief in the power and reality of the one God does not lead them to love, submission, and obedience.

Thus, faith alone is inadequate. **Read James 2:20** and complete this sentence: “Do you want to be shown that faith without works is _____?”

James’ **second and third examples** involve two people of faith in the Old Testament who are polar opposites: Abraham and Rahab. Abraham, a leader with power and respect, was the father of all believers (**Genesis 12:1-3**). Rahab was a Gentile prostitute with little power and a bad reputation. In Chuck Swindoll’s *Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James*, he states; “James casts a broad net that captures every one of us reading his words--every Christian finds him or herself somewhere between Abraham and Rahab” (59). His message about faith and works applies to us all.

Read verses 21-24 and summarize what James says about Abraham.

(The passage of Abraham’s obedience in faith found in **Genesis 22:1-18** is a study all on its own, and you might want to read it to refresh your mind about the details.)

We know that Abraham is a man of faith because even when God’s commands made absolutely no sense to him, he acted in **obedience**. “**By faith**, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son” (**Hebrews 11:17**).

As we read the account of his sacrificing Isaac, we know that God provides a substitute offering. Abraham did not know that ahead of time. **Hebrews 11:19** says that while Abraham was offering Isaac, he “considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead.” Even so, obedience would have been hard. Thus, **Abraham serves as an example of a man of faith who acted on that faith**. He is “justified by works and not by faith only” (**James 2:24**).

Next, we turn to Rahab. Please read the account of her faith in **Joshua 2:1-24** and the result in **Joshua 6:22-25**. Rahab was not an Israelite, so the covenant God made to Abraham’s descendants did not apply to her. Originally, she believed in the gods of the city of Jericho, but there came a point in time when she switched allegiances from the false gods of Jericho to the one true God. Because Rahab was such a familiar heroine in the first century, James does not elaborate on the account. He assumes the readers will understand the relevance of his reference to her. When Rahab hid the spies, she demonstrated her faith by her works. Later, she tells the spies that she had heard how the Lord God had led his people out of Egypt and had dried up the Red Sea. Her

statement of faith is found in **Joshua 2:11**, "...the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." **Hebrews 11** is called "The Hall of Faith." As noted earlier, the writer uses Abraham's faith as an example to us (**Hebrews 11:17-19**), and in **Hebrews 11: 31**, Rahab's faith serves as another example. What does that verse say about her?

God had a plan for Rahab's life. After she and her family escaped from the destruction of Jericho, Rahab married into one of the leading families of Israel. In order to show that the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ, Matthew began his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus. In **Matthew 1:1**, Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham. Read **Matthew 1:5** and complete this phrase, "to Salmon was born Boaz by _____." That's right! Jesus was a descendent of Rahab! She is one of the four women included in the genealogy of Jesus.

In what ways are Abraham and Rahab different? _____

What can I learn from these two people of faith? _____

Application

Prayer and self-examination:

Heavenly Father, I have put my faith in you, and I want to be not only a **hearer** of your word, but also a **doer** of your word. Give me an awareness of the needs in my community, and show me how I can put my faith into action. Give me a heart that is open and sensitive, and help me to seize opportunities to share your love with others. Give me your wisdom as I discern how best to serve you and to use the time and resources you have given me. In Jesus name, and in the power of the Holy Spirit I pray, Amen.

❖ List some things you could do this week to put your faith into action.

❖ Choose one of those things **to do** this week.