

Aim of lesson

To consider James' teaching about controlling the tongue.

Bible background

James 3. Note also the references in the workbook.

Outline of lesson

Scattered and persecuted believers

Having spent the past few weeks seeing how the early church began to grow, develop and sort out problems that arose, this lesson and the next are going to look at the letter that James wrote to some groups of Christians. The author, James, may have been one of the twelve (the brother of John) who is killed by Herod (Acts 12:1-2) or the half brother of the Lord Jesus. The question of authorship is not an important part of the lesson. It is appropriate to consider the letter at this stage as the letter is addressed to a Jewish church which is scattered because of the persecution which flared up after the death of Stephen, see Acts 8:1. You may like to use this verse and James 1:1-2 to introduce the letter of James.

Four pictures

Ask the class to look out for the illustrations in the workbook as you read together James 3:1-12. Have them tell you where each illustration is taken from and what lesson James is making. Show how in each case there is disaster if the person does not take control, and that the same applies to the tongue.

A poisoned tongue

Point out verse 8 reminding the class of the deadly poison which needs taming and removing from the tongue. Have the class hunt for the 'poison' in the first tongue in the workbook. There are ten words or phrases to find in the word search: boasting, gossip, broken promises, take God's name in vain, lies, anger, quarrelling, curse, swearing and grumbling. The words can be written forward or backward, horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

You may want to ask the class for examples to make sure they understand what each means. Use the verses below the tongue to promote positive discussion. Lead the class to think how each 'poison' can destroy other people or the person using it.

Have the class write on the second tongue good things which the tongue can produce: some are suggested in the references and it is worth spending a little time looking at James' teaching about prayer, James 5:16-18, and at the description of the 'wisdom from above', James 3:17-18. You may like to have the class think of examples to show what 'peace loving, submissive and considerate' etc. mean.

Digging deeper

More about tongues

This exercise gets the students to think how Peter, David and Paul used their tongues for good and bad.

Relevance to our lives

You could ask the class to keep a tight rein on their tongue during the week to control any 'poison' that might otherwise come out. Discuss next week any situations where they, and you, found it hard to keep that control.

Prayer

You may like to use this opportunity to encourage the class to build praise into their prayers. This does not come naturally – it needs learning. It is helpful to start by thinking of what we can thank God for, both for what he has done and for what he is like.

Other suggestions for activities

- The class could make a large poster using magazine and newspaper cuttings, illustrating the good and bad things that can come from the tongue.
- To encourage the class to praise rather than criticise or slander, you could have each member of the class write their name at the top of a sheet of paper and pass it to the person on their right, and so on round the class. Each person should write what they think is the best quality of the person whose name heads the sheet. It is an encouraging sheet for each member to take home and keep.