



**FAITH...WORKS. THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF JAMES.**

That we, in our own ability, cannot stand in the face of adversity. We could never find the strength to trust without faith because we don't have the capability to see above the trials we meet, to keep our eyes focused on the King while counting the situation we are currently experiencing as joy.

**FAITH...WORKS. THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF JAMES.**

We don't work to be saved; we work because we are saved. Without faith, without works, we too quickly become that man in the mirror staring at his face but then forgets the way he looks as soon as he turns away. But with faith, with works, we stay steadfast on this journey, progressively sanctified, knowing we'll be perfected once we reach the other side.

**FAITH...WORKS. THIS IS THE CRY OF JAMES.**

That faith apart from works can never be sustained, that in every day and in every way, we should see this truth proclaimed because it's faith that makes us doers of the Word, not just hearers. It's faith that keeps us humble, not proud. It's faith that directs our tongues to bless, not to curse. It's faith that causes us to show mercy, not judgment. It's faith that leads us to true religion, not its empty substitute. It's faith that's causing us to preach the good news to every tribe, tongue, and nation with every breath we breathe. It will be faith that causes us to worship our God for all eternity.

**THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF JAMES. FAITH...WORKS.**

## **WHO WROTE THE BOOK?**

While James did not specifically identify himself as to which “James” he was (James 1:1), the author is widely thought to be James the half-brother of Jesus. James was not a follower of Jesus during the Savior’s time on earth (Mark 3:21–35; John 7:5) but eventually became an apostle in the vein of Paul, as one who had seen and believed the Lord post-resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19). After witnessing the Lord’s resurrected body, James became one of the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Peter singled him out among the other Christians there following Peter’s miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:17). James made the deciding speech at the Jerusalem Council (15:13–22), and Paul called James one of the pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9).

## **WHERE ARE WE?**

As one of the chief leaders in the church at Jerusalem, James wrote from that city prior to the meeting of the Jerusalem Council, which Luke recorded in Acts 15. At that council, James, along with Peter and Paul, affirmed the decision to take the gospel message to the Gentiles. This council met in AD 49, meaning James likely wrote his letter in AD 45–48. Such a significant event as the Jerusalem Council warranted comment from James, as he was writing to a Jewish Christian audience. But James made no mention of Gentile Christians at all, making an early date for the letter most likely. In fact, it was likely the first New Testament book written.

## **WHY IS JAMES SO IMPORTANT?**

The book of James looks a bit like the Old Testament book of Proverbs dressed up in New Testament clothes. Its consistent focus on practical action in the life of faith is reminiscent of the Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, encouraging God’s people to *act* like God’s people. The pages of James are filled with direct commands to pursue a life of holiness. He makes no excuses for those who do not measure up. In the mind of this early church leader, Christians evidence their faith by walking in certain ways and not others. For James, a faith that does not produce real life change is a faith that is worthless (James 2:17).

## **WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?**

In the opening of his letter, James called himself a bond-servant of God, an appropriate name given the practical, servant-oriented emphasis of the book. Throughout the book, James contended that faith produces authentic deeds. In other words, if those who call themselves God’s people truly belong to Him, their lives will produce deeds or fruit. In language and themes that sound similar to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, James rails against the hypocritical believer who says one thing but does another.

For James, faith was no abstract proposition but had effects in the real world. James offered numerous practical examples to illustrate his point: faith endures in the midst of trials, calls on God for wisdom, bridles the tongue, sets aside wickedness, visits orphans and widows, and does not play favorites. He stressed that the life of faith is comprehensive, impacting every area of our lives and driving us to truly engage in the lives of other people in the world. While James recognized that even believers stumble (James 3:2), he also knew that faith should not coexist with people who roll their eyes at the less fortunate, ignore the plight of others, or curse those in their paths.

## HOW DO I APPLY THIS?

More than any other book in the New Testament, James places the spotlight on the necessity for believers to act in accordance with our faith. How well do your actions mirror the faith that you proclaim? This is a question that we all struggle to answer well. We would like to point to all the ways our faith and works overlap but too often see only gaps and crevices.

As you read the letter from James, focus on those areas that he mentioned: your actions during trials, your treatment of those less fortunate, the way you speak and relate to others, and the role that money plays in how you live your life. Allow James to encourage you to do good, according to the faith you proclaim.<sup>1</sup>

# JAMES

<b>Faith</b>	When stretched, it doesn't break.	When pressed, it doesn't fail.	When expressed, it doesn't explode.	When distressed, it doesn't panic.
<b>Deeds</b>	Authentic stability	Authentic love	Authentic control and humility	Authentic patience
	<u>Greeting</u>	<u>Partiality and prejudice</u>	<u>The tongue</u>	<u>Money matters</u>
	<u>Trials</u>	<u>Indifference and mere intellectualism</u>	<u>The heart</u>	<u>Sickness</u>
	<u>Temptation</u>	<u>Obedience and action</u>	<u>The will</u>	<u>Carnality and correction</u>
	<u>Response to Scripture</u>			
	CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTERS 3-4	CHAPTER 5
<b>Background</b>	The difficulties of life caused the scattered saints to drift spiritually, leading to all forms of problems—unbridled speech, wrong attitudes, doubt, strife, carnality, shallow faith.			
<b>Characteristics</b>	"The Proverbs of the New Testament," James contains many practical, straightforward exhortations. Emphasis is on importance of balancing right belief with right behavior. The book has many Old Testament word pictures and references.			
<b>Theme</b>	Real faith produces authentic deeds.			
<b>Key Verse</b>	2:17			
<b>Christ in James</b>	Jesus is the glorious Lord, who inspires true faith and authentic works (2:1, 14-26).			

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to James by Insight for Living found @ <https://www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-general-epistles/james>





James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.  
**James 1:1**

## Devotional

The book of James is addressed to Jewish Christians scattered abroad. The book makes no mention of any Gentile controversy, and thus was probably written before that controversy broke out and the Jewish church came to be divided between the faithful and the Judaizers. Also, James refers to the meeting of the church as “synagoguing” (James 2:2). In the light of these factors, most scholars believe that the book was written early, before AD 49, the time of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.

Who wrote it? There are three prominent men named James in the New Testament. One is James the brother of John, who was martyred around AD 43 (Acts 12). Since John wrote several books, perhaps his brother also wrote the book of James before his death, after the Jewish believers were scattered around AD 35 (Acts 8:1). If this James wrote the book, however, we might expect James 1:1 to read “James, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

Another of Jesus’ apostles was “James the son of Alphaeus.” Just because we know nothing about this man does not mean he could not have written this book. After all, what do we know about Jude? So perhaps this is the James who wrote the book of James, though again we might expect him to identify himself as an apostle.

Early church tradition ascribes the book to James the brother of Jesus. This James was very prominent in the New Testament church. He grew up with Jesus, was converted after Jesus’ resurrection, immediately began associating with the apostles, and became the presiding elder of the Jerusalem church. James’ position in the church makes it probable that he would have had occasion to write letters to the brethren. Scholars have compared James’ speech and letter of Acts 15:13–29 with the book of James and have come up with many similarities of language and phrasing.

There is no way to settle the issue for certain, but most scholars agree that James the Lord’s brother is most likely to have been the author of the book of James. The references to scattering and suffering, and the absence of the Gentile controversy, suggest a date around AD 44, during or right after the persecution of Acts 12.

## **CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)**

If you have the opportunity today, read over the entire book of James and note some of its major themes. What concerns does James address which relate to you? Commit to focusing on those sins which James focuses on, and to begin changing those areas of your life.<sup>2</sup>

# Open it

1. In which of the following ways do you communicate with people the most? (For example: mail, phone, text, email, Facebook) Why do you choose this form of communication?

# Read it

## **THE BOOK OF JAMES**

Spend some reading through this book as if it were a letter from an old friend. Don't worry at this point about understanding everything; just get a feel for the book. Record your initial thoughts and feelings below.

# Explore it

2. Who is the author of this letter?
3. How does he describe himself?
4. To whom is he writing this letter?

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-author-of-james/>

# Apply it

Many readers skip the opening verses of NT letters, treating them as unimportant formal details. But this is a mistake. For the letter introductions usually contain more than bare names. They also describe the writer and the recipients in ways that provide us with important clues about the nature and purposes of the letter that follows. The introduction of James is no exception.<sup>3</sup>

5. What do we learn about the writer and recipients of this letter in verse 1?

## WHO WAS JAMES?

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1: 1a) is the way he introduced himself. It was a popular name, a form of the great Old Testament name “Jacob.” There were several men who bore this name in New Testament history.

**James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John.** He was one of the most prominent to bear the name. He was a fisherman called by Christ to follow and become a disciple (Matthew 4: 17–22). He and his brother John were nicknamed by Christ “sons of thunder” because of their impulsiveness (Mark 3: 17; Luke 9: 51–56). James was the first of the disciples to give his life for Christ. He was killed by Herod in AD 44 (Acts 12: 1– 2).

**James, the son of Alphaeus.** He was another of the disciples (Matthew 10: 3; Acts 1: 13), but very little is known about him. Matthew (Levi) is also identified as “the son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2: 14), and some students conjecture that the two men might have been brothers. There is no indication that this James wrote the letter we are about to study.

**James, the father of Judas the disciple.** He is an even more obscure man (Luke 6: 16, where “brother” ought to be “father”). This Judas was called “the son of James” to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot.

**James, the brother of our Lord.** He seems to be the most likely candidate for author of this letter. He does not identify himself in this way; humbly, he calls himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” That Jesus had brothers and sisters is stated in Matthew 13: 55–56 and Mark 6: 3, and one of His brothers was named James. (By “brother,” of course, I mean half-brother. Joseph was not our Lord’s father since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit of God.)

James and the other brothers did not believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry (Mark 3: 31–35; John 7: 1–5). Yet we find our Lord’s brethren in the upper room praying with the disciples (Acts 1: 14). **What effected the change from unbelief to faith?** <sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Moo, D. J. *The letter of James. The Pillar New Testament commentary.* Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leicester, England: Eerdmans

<sup>4</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe. *Be Mature (James): Growing Up in Christ (The BE Series Commentary)* (pp. 19–21). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

Somewhere along the line God changed James' heart. Nobody knows when but we do know this: by the time that Jesus has been crucified, as the disciples are huddled together in the upper room praying after the event of the crucifixion, James and his brothers are found there crouched with them in prayer asking God for help and grace. And soon thereafter, after the days of Pentecost, James emerges not only as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, but as one of the key leaders in the life of the early Christian church. In fact, it would be James, perhaps more than any other single individual, who helped keep the early Church together in the days when there was so much controversy being hurled against the apostle Paul for his teaching about the Gentiles and their role in this young Jewish Christianity.

6. James had the blessing of being the half-brother of Jesus, yet he wouldn't believe that his brother was the Messiah until after the resurrection. What does this say about James? What does this probably tell us about Jesus as He was growing up?
  
7. James had been an eyewitness to the popularity of Jesus and yet he did not believe in all the hype surrounding his brother. Why are we so quick to dismiss the growing accolades and popularity of someone we know well?
  
8. What can make sharing the gospel within your family more difficult than with acquaintances? Are there any inherent benefits within family relationships that allow for the spreading of the gospel with those closest to us?

### “A SERVANT OF GOD”

Regarding the description of a bondservant, **Hiebert** comments that...

He prefers to speak only of his status as a Christian man. When after His resurrection Jesus appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:7), and James became convinced of His true nature as the Messiah, the spiritual identity of the One whom he had previously regarded as his physical brother became so important to him that the physical relations receded into the background. While others in the church might have referred to him as "the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19), he preferred to speak of himself as a "servant" rather than the "brother" of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> D Edmond Hiebert – Commentary on the Book of James. Moody

9. The above quote speaks volumes as to the impact the resurrection had on James and how he viewed his brother. How have the resurrection and the claims of Christ changed your view of Christ and the world?

**Servant (gr. *doulos*)** speaks of submission to one's master. The *doulos* had no life of his own, no will of his own, no purpose of his own and no plan of his own. All was subject to his master. The bondservant's every thought, breath, and effort was subject to the will of his master. In sum, the picture of a **bondservant** is one who is absolutely surrendered and totally devoted to his master (cp. single-mindedness and purity of devotion in 2 Corinthians 11:3). What a picture of James' relation to his Lord! What an example and challenge for all believers of every age to emulate!

By using *doulos*, James is saying, "I am a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ. I am absolutely sold out to His will. I am willing to do whatever He tells me to do. I am willing to say whatever He tells me to say. I am willing to go wherever He leads me. I am a man who has made a choice. I am going to serve Him for all eternity."<sup>6</sup>

10. How does the understanding of being a servant of God change the way James viewed his life and obedience to the Word of God?

**Matthew Henry adds that...**

The highest honor of the greatest apostle, and most eminent ministers, is to be the servants of Jesus Christ; not the masters of the churches, but the servants of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

11. In our culture, we have been trained to believe that "we are king," and yet as Christ followers we learn very quickly that **there is only one King and we are not HIM**. How should this revelation change the way we live?

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.preceptaustin.org/james\\_11-2](http://www.preceptaustin.org/james_11-2)

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Commentary on the Whole Bible: James 1:1

12. What things or attitudes keep you from being a devoted servant of God? What areas of your life do you keep under your own lordship instead of His?

In summary, the servant (*doulos*)...

- Was owned by and totally possessed by his master.
- Existed for his master and no other reason.
- Had no personal rights.
- Was at the master's disposal "24/7."
- Had no will of his own but was completely subservient to the master.<sup>8</sup>

13. What characteristic of Christian servitude comes easiest to you? Which one is most difficult?

#### WHAT DOES GOD DO FOR HIS SERVANTS?

And, for our encouragement, let us remember:

**The Master is responsible for His slaves' needs** – feeding, housing, clothing, and all else is the slave-owner's concern. It is because we are God's servants (slaves) that our Lord says, "Therefore ... take no thought ...", for the ordinary needs of life. Paul's says in his letter to the Philippians, "My God shall supply all your need" (Philippians 4:19).

**The Master is responsible for His slaves' duties** – they will not choose their own task, or their own sphere. Whether ours is to be the more menial, or the more genial, work is in His plan, not ours. It is the Christian's wisdom to stand before Him as those in 2\_Samuel 15:15, "Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint," or as Gabriel in Luke 1:19, "I ... stand... and am sent ...."

**The Master is responsible for His slaves' supplies** – "Who goes to war any time at his own charges?" asks 1 Corinthians 9:7. The soldier has all his military equipment provided; and likewise, the slave is supplied with everything needful for the adequate discharge of all his duties. Whatever He tells us to do, we can do – "If ... God command thee ... thou shalt be able to ..." Exodus 18:23 – because all supplies are at our disposal. And as Paul records, in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.preceptaustin.org/james\\_11-2](http://www.preceptaustin.org/james_11-2)

14. How does knowing that we serve a loving and kind Master allow us to welcome our place of servitude with gladness and not bitterness?

15. How have you seen God care and provide for you as you have faithfully served Him?

#### **TO THE TWELVE TRIBES DISPERSED...**

His readers' life setting is equally pertinent to the content of the letter. He is writing to Christian Jews (the twelve tribes) who are scattered among the nations. The reference speaks of a literal diaspora, a scattering of these Christians mainly through persecution. Acts 8:1-3 gives the likely background. By addressing them as ones scattered among the nations, he is telling them at once: "I know you are persecuted; I know you face various trials; I know you are suffering." All that James will have to say to his readers is said with this knowledge of their life setting. All that he will have to say to his readers is applicable even in their life setting of suffering.

Imagine the implications, drawing from the actual phrases of Acts 8:13. Young Christians of Jewish upbringing had become the objects of "a great persecution" by the very ones who had been their leaders in Judaism. Stephen, a loved and respected leader of this Christian movement, had been stoned to death for his faith in Christ. The church "mourned deeply for him." Meanwhile, Saul was determined to destroy the church and so was "going from house to house" forcibly taking men and women to prison. With "all except the apostles" being driven from Jerusalem, James now writes from there to believers scattered among the nations. Certainly among James's readers are people experiencing confusion, fear, sorrow, injustice, loneliness, poverty, sickness, loss of home and family members and livelihood—in fact, "trials of many kinds," as he acknowledges right way in 1:2.<sup>9</sup>

16. It would have been easy for James to take it easy on these Christians because of the persecution that they were facing. Yet the letter is full of imperatives (commands to follow). Why is it so important that we remain obedient even when we are struggling with all sorts of troubles?

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Jas/Jamess-Greeting>

17. James uses the word “dispersion,” which was an agrarian term for spreading seed in a field. In what ways would the mass exodus of Christianity from Jerusalem lead to a greater gospel presence in the world?
18. In what ways has God spread you like seed in the field He has called you into? Looking at the headings of this letter, what things will hinder that seed from producing a plentiful harvest? What things enable the seed to grow?

Warren Wiersbe outlines five marks that James was encouraging Christians to exhibit. By living out these characteristics, the Christian would be enabled to be mature in his walk with God. These are the marks of the mature Christian:

- He is patient in testing (James 1)
- He practices the truth (James 2)
- He has power over his tongue (James 3)
- He is a peacemaker, not a troublemaker (James 4)
- He is prayerful in troubles (James 5)<sup>10</sup>

19. Why is it important that followers of Christ pursue maturity rather than just simply affirming a childlike faith? (See Hebrews 5:11–6:1.)

20. What are some areas of spiritual immaturity in your life as you begin this study? How can you begin to take some steps toward “growing up”?

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<sup>10</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe. *Be Mature (James): Growing Up in Christ (The BE Series Commentary)* (pp. 19–21). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.