

Investigating the Word of God

James



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An Introduction to James

The epistle of James is one of the most practical, hard-hitting books of the Bible. To James, religion was a daily life to be lived in submission to Divine revelation. His book has been referred to as “the gospel of common sense.”

Some, though, have always held the book of James to be suspect. It was slow to be recognized as a part of the New Testament, mostly, it seems, because of an apparent contradiction to the writings of the apostle Paul over the relationship of faith and works. Also, it may have been slow to receive acceptance because it was an early book written to Jewish Christians, a fact that may have not pleased some Gentile churches.

The Author of the Book

There are four men named “James in the New Testament.

- The father of the apostle Judas, not Iscariot [Thaddeus] (Luke 6:16). He was not a prominent figure. His life seemed too obscure for him to be considered the author of this epistle.
- The son of Zebedee, the brother of John (Matt. 4:21). He was one of the apostles. He was killed by Herod at an early date because he was a Christian [44 A.D.] (Acts 12:1-2).
- The son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3). He too was one of the apostles. We know very little about him because he was obscure in New Testament history.
- The brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55). In reality, he was a “half-brother” since Joseph was not really Jesus’ father (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). He was the brother of Jude (Jude 1).

During the life of Jesus, James, his half-brother, was not a believer (John 7:5, 10) but he witnessed the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). He no longer was an unbeliever. He awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14).

He became a prominent member, possibly an elder, in the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9; Acts 21:8). He was visited by the apostle Paul in 35 or 36 A.D. after Paul had spent three years in Damascus and Arabia (Acts 9:26; Gal. 1:18-19). After his imprisonment the apostle Peter made sure James was informed of his release (Acts 12:17). He figured prominently in the Jerusalem meeting over whether or not the practice of circumcision should be bound on the Gentiles who were obeying the gospel (Acts 15:13-21; Gal. 2:1-10). Some Jews presented themselves as being sent by him (Gal. 2:12). He was present, with the elders, upon Paul’s return to Jerusalem with the offering from the Gentiles for needy saints (Acts 21:18-25).

He was put to death because he was a Christian in either 62 or 63 A.D. The Jewish historian Josephus said he was martyred during a Jewish insurrection in the interval between the death of Festus, Roman Procurator of Judea, and the arrival of the new governor, Albinus, by stoning. Eusebius, an early church historian, said that those who conspired against the apostle Paul turned on James after Paul, under Roman custody, went to Rome. When James refused to renounce Christ before the priests and elders of the Jews he was taken to the temple and thrown off. He lived a short while after the impact so they beat him to death.

Those to Whom the Book Was Written

The book is addressed to the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (1:1). That lets us know that Jewish Christians were most likely the intended readers.

The Jews came from many places to Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11). Many were converted (Acts 2:41, 47). As these were scattered and went back home, they had need for instruction and guidance.

Jewish Christians were also scattered abroad by the persecution that arose following the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19). Driven out of Jerusalem and Palestine, they lost jobs, homes and most of their possessions. Separated from family and friends they had to make a new start among hostile people in unfamiliar places. They were hated by both Jews and Romans. They were hated by the Jews for it seemed to them that in becoming Christians they had deserted the faith of their fathers. The Romans hated them because they were loyal to a King other than Caesar.

The Time and Place of Writing

Almost all historians believe the epistle of James was written early in the first century, possibly as early as 45 A.D. (45 to 48), making it the first New Testament book written. It had to have been written prior to 62-63 A.D., the date of James’ death. It was written before the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.).

It is not really known where this book was written. The best possibility is the city of Jerusalem. The Bible always places James in Jerusalem after his conversion. The use in the book of the phrase, “early and latter rain” (5:7), speaks of the rainy season common to Palestine.

Why This Book Was Written

This book was written to meet the needs of Jewish Christians who were scattered over the world (1:1). It was written to:

- Admonish them to take the proper attitude toward trials and tribulations (1:2-18).
- Encourage them to properly receive the word of God (1:19-27).
- Forbid them to show partiality to others (2:1-13).
- Demonstrate that faith without works will not save them (2:14-26).
- Warn against the sins of the tongue (3:1-12).
- Set forth the nature of true and false wisdom (3:13-18).
- Rebuke them for quarrelsomeness, worldliness and pride (4:1-10).
- Instruct them to be considerate toward their brethren (4:11-12).
- Scold them for their attitude and conduct in their business life (4:13 - 5:6).
- Encourage them to patient endurance of the ills of life (5: 7-12).
- Tell them what to do in times of affliction (5:13-18).
- Show the importance of restoring an erring brother (5:19-20).

- Robert G. Gromacki, *NT Survey*

In a general way, the book was written to get Christians to live their professed faith by obeying the word of God and doing good works (1:22; 2:14-16); to practice pure and undefiled religion (1:27); and to become perfect in Christ (1:4; 3:2).

An Outline of James

I. Salutation (1:1)

II. The Superiority of Christ to Angels (1:2-18)

- A. Trials from without (2-12).
 - 1. A proper attitude toward them (2-4).
 - 2. Prayer amidst trials (5-8).
 - 3. Some common types of trials (9-11).
 - 4. The reward of faithful endurance (12).
- B. Trials from within (13-18).
 - 1. The true source of temptations to evil (13-14).
 - 2. The result of yielding to temptation (15-16).
 - 3. A true view of the goodness of God (17-18).

III. Living One's Faith in Relation to the Word of God (1:19-27)

- A. Reacting to the word (19-20).
- B. Receiving the word (21).
- C. Obeying the word (22-27).
 - 1. Not mere hearers but doers also (22-25).
 - 2. Specific examples of hearing the word (16-27).

IV. Living One's Faith in Relation to His Fellowman (2:1-13)

- A. Partiality is condemned (1-4).
- B. Reasons why partiality is condemned (5-11).
 - 1. It is inconsistent with God's attitude toward the poor (5-6a).
 - 2. The conduct of the rich (6b-7).
 - 3. It is a violation of the "royal law" (8-11).
- C. An appeal (12-13).

V. Living One's Faith: A Study of Faith and Works (2:14-26)

- A. The uselessness of "dead faith" (14-20).
- B. True faith always demonstrates itself through works (21-25).
 - 1. The case of Abraham (21-24)
 - 2. The case of Rahab (25).
- C. The necessary union of faith and works (26).

VI. Living One's Faith in Relation to His Tongue (3:1-18)

- A. The danger of failing in the use of the tongue (1-2).
- B. The necessity of controlling this member of our bodies (3-6).
- C. The general inability of people to control the tongue (7-8).
- D. The inconsistency of an uncontrolled tongue (9-12).
- E. True wisdom as the key to controlling the tongue (13-18).
 - 1. The marks of a wise man (13).
 - 2. Earthly wisdom in control of the tongue (14-16).
 - 3. True wisdom in control of the tongue (17-18).

VI. Living One's Faith in Relation to the World (4:1 - 5:12)

- A. Strife and faction as evidences of worldliness (4:1-6).
- B. The remedy for worldliness (4:7-12).
 - 1. Return to a right relationship with God (7-10).
 - 2. Change from the wrong treatment of others (11-12).
- C. Worldliness in the realm of business (4:13 - 5:11).
 - 1. The salesman who leaves God out of his plans (4:13-17).
 - 2. The wealthy landowner who oppresses men (5:1-11).
- D. Worldliness and the use of the tongue (5:12).

VI. Living One's Faith in Prayer and Compassion (5:13-20)

- A. The place of prayer in the life of the Christian (13-18).
- B. Compassion for the erring (19-20).

James Chapter One

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 27

“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

Key People

James

Key Words

Trials
Patience
Double-minded
Unstable
Lowly
Exaltation
Humiliation
Endures
Temptation
Enticed
Conceived
Variation
Meekness
Implanted
Liberty
Religious
Bridle
Visit
Orphans
Widows

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. Who wrote this book? How does he describe himself in verse one?
2. To whom was the book addressed?
3. What can one count all joy?
4. What produces patience?
5. According to verse four, what is the perfect work of patience?
6. What should one who lacks wisdom do?
7. To what is a doubter compared?
8. Will the doubter receive anything from the Lord? Why?
9. In what is the lowly brother to glory? In what is the rich to glory?
10. According to verses 10 and 11, what will happen to the rich man?
11. According to verse 12, what man is blessed?
12. What will the one who endures temptation receive when he is approved?
13. Whom does God tempt?
14. According to verse 14, when is a person tempted?
15. What does desire bring forth when it has conceived? What does sin bring forth when it is full grown?
16. Who is the source of every good and perfect gift?
17. According to verse 19, what should be one’s attitude toward the word of God?
18. What should a person receive with meekness? Why?
19. What, according to verse 22, is the duty of one who hears the word?
20. If one is not a “doer” of the word, who is he like? (v. 23)
21. How is the law of Christ described in verse 25?
22. According to verse 25, who is blessed?
23. If one claims to be religious, what must he do? What if he fails to do that?
24. For one to practice “pure and undefiled religion,” whom must he “visit?”
25. For one to practice “pure and undefiled religion,” what must he keep?

Discussion Question

How does a person keep “unspotted from the world?”

James Chapter Two

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 24
“You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

Key People

Abraham

Isaac

Rahab

Key Words

Partiality

Heirs

Dishonored

Blaspheme

Noble

Royal

Transgressors

Works

Demons

Tremble

Perfect

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. With what is “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” not to be held?
2. According to verse five, what has God chosen the poor of this world to be?
3. How can one fulfill the “royal law?”
4. What do you do if you show partiality?
5. What is said in verse 10 of one who keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point?
6. Can faith without works save a person?
7. What is faith if it does not have works? (vv. 17 and 20)
8. According to verse 18, how is faith shown?
9. According to verse 19, who believe in Jesus?
10. When was Abraham “justified by works?”
11. According to verse 22, by what is faith made perfect?
12. What was Abraham called? (v. 23)
13. According to verse 24, by what is man justified? By what is he not justified?
14. What did Rahab do to be justified by faith?
15. What is the body without the spirit? What is faith without works?

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. You should give a rich man a good place of honor and the poor man a less honorable place in your assemblies. |
| T | F | 2. If you show partiality you are convicted by the law as a transgressor. |
| T | F | 3. One should speak and so do as one who will be judged by the perfect law of Moses. |
| T | F | 4. If you see a brother or sister in need of food, clothes and shelter, you must tell them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled.” |
| T | F | 5. The demons believe and tremble. |

Discussion Question

How would you answer a person who told you that all you have to do to be saved is believe in Jesus?

James Chapter Three

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 13

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.”

Key Words

Stricter

Stumble

Member

Iniquity

Tame

Unruly

Kindle

Similitude

Meekness

Wisdom

Sensual

Demonic

Envy

Self-seeking

Confusion

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. What will teachers receive?
2. According to verse two, what do all people do?
3. Though our tongue is a little member, of what does it boast?
4. According to verse six, what is the tongue?
5. Can anyone tame the tongue?
6. According to verse eight, what fills the tongue?
7. Should blessing and cursing proceed from the same mouth?
8. According to verse 13, how can a person demonstrate he is wise and understanding?
9. What are present where envy and self-seeking exist?
10. According to verse 17, of what is “the wisdom that is from above” made?

True - False

- T F 1. James wants many people to become teachers.
- T F 2. We may put bits in horses' ears so that they will obey us.
- T F 3. Large ships are turned by very small rudders.
- T F 4. A little fire can kindle a great forest.
- T F 5. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body.
- T F 6. Anyone can tame the tongue.
- T F 7. A spring can send forth both fresh and bitter water at the same time.
- T F 8. We get olives from fig trees and figs from grapevines.
- T F 9. The wisdom that descends from above is sensual and demonic.
- T F 10. Those who make peace sow the fruit of righteousness in peace.

Discussion Question

List as many sins of the tongue as you can.

James Chapter Four

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 4

“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Key Words

Pleasure

Amiss

Enmity

Yearns

Jealousy

Proud

Humble

Cleanse

Purify

Lawgiver

Vapor

Boast

Arrogance

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. What causes wars and fights?
2. According to verse three, why does a person not receive what he asks of God?
3. What is the result of being a friend of the world?
4. Whom does God resist? To whom does He give grace?
5. To whom is a person to submit?
6. What happens when a person resists the devil?
7. What happens when a person draws near to God?
8. According to verse eight, what is a person to do with his heart?
9. What happens when a person humbles himself in the sight of the Lord?
10. Of whom is the Christian not to speak?
11. When one speaks evil of and judges a brother, of what is he really speaking evil and judging?
12. How many Lawgivers are there?
13. Do you know what will happen tomorrow?
14. According to verse 14, what is life?
15. According to verse 17, what is sin?

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. Friendship with the world makes one a friend of God. |
| T | F | 2. The Spirit who dwells in the Christian yearns jealously. |
| T | F | 3. God resists the humble. |
| T | F | 4. Sinners are to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts. |
| T | F | 5. The one who knows to do good but does not do it sins. |

Discussion Question

How does a person draw near to God?

James Chapter Five

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 16

“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

Key People

Job

Elijah

Key Words

Corrupted

Sabbath

Luxury

Slaughter

The early and latter rain

Grumble

Compassionate

Swear

Oath

Effective

Fervent

Avails

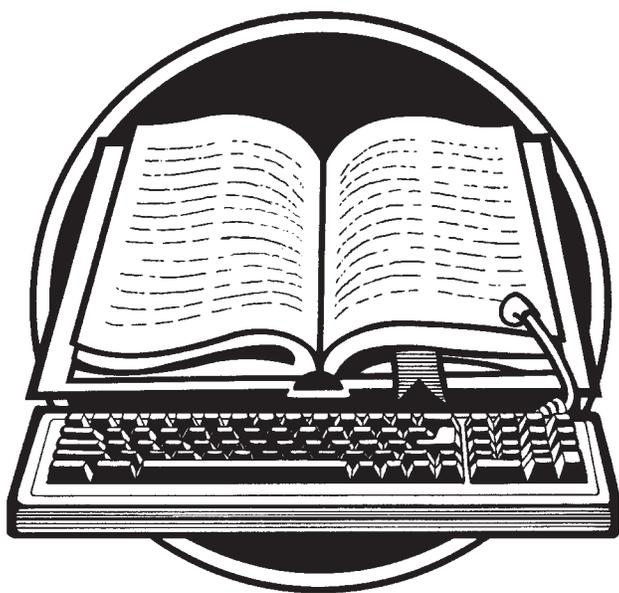
Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. Why were the rich told to weep and howl?
2. What had the rich done with the wages of the laborers who mowed their fields?
3. Whose ears had the cries of the reapers reached?
4. In what had the rich lived?
5. What, in verse seven, were the brethren encouraged to be?
6. According to verse nine, what are brethren not to do against one another?
7. Who are to be viewed as examples of suffering and patience?
8. According to verse 11, who are blessed?
9. What, according to verse 11, is the Lord?
10. By what were these brethren not to swear?
11. If one is suffering, what is he to do?
12. If one is cheerful, what is he to do?
13. If one is sick, what is he to do?
14. What are the elders of the church to do for a Christian who is sick?
15. What should Christians confess to one another?
16. What does the prayer of a righteous man avail?
17. How must the prayer of a righteous man be offered?
18. What kind of man was Elijah?
19. What did Elijah do?
20. What does a person do when he turns a Christian who has wandered from the truth back to God?

Discussion Question

What are some of the benefits and blessings a person receives when he prays to God?



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