

JAMES

Outlined Bible

Introduction: The book of James is one of the most practical and needed letters for believers in any generation. In this epistle, James deals very little with doctrinal issues; rather he focuses on the outworking of genuine faith. The letter appeals to Christians to live their lives consistent with their profession.

James offers particularly stinging rebukes against worldliness, religious pretense, and social injustice. These rebukes have led many to label James "the Amos" of the New Testament.

Name — The book is named for its author.

1. Several personalities named James appear in the New Testament record. (cf. Matthew 4:21; 10:3; Luke 6:16; and Mark 6:3)
2. By process of elimination, the only reasonable possibility is James, the brother of Jesus.
 - a. James, the father of Judas, and James, son of Alphaeus, have no link to the letter.
 - b. James, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, died in AD 44—almost certainly before this book was penned.
 - c. Origen and Eusebius, early church leaders, both attribute the letter to James the brother of Jesus.

Purpose — The letter was written to believers whose lives apparently did not match their profession of faith in Christ. James reminds them (and us) that genuine faith is seen in a transformed life.

I. Background of the book

A. James, the brother of Jesus.

1. During Jesus' earthly ministry, James was skeptical of Jesus' claims. (John 7:3-5)
2. However, Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection and James became a believer. (I Corinthians 15:7; cf. Acts 1:14)
3. James became a leader of the early Jerusalem church.
 - a. Upon his escape from prison, Peter sent word to James. (Acts 12:17)
 - b. He made the definitive address at the Jerusalem conference dealing with Gentile conversion. (Acts 15:31f)
 - c. Upon return from his third missionary journey, Paul reported to James. (Acts 21:18-25)
 - d. Paul referred to James as a "pillar" in the church. (Galatians 2:9)
 - e. Eusebius, a fourth-century church historian, tells us that James was nicknamed "the Righteous" and spent so much time in prayer that "his knees grew worn and hard like those of a camel."
4. Yet notice James' introduction to the letter — "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." (James 1:1)
 - a. James saw his spiritual relationship with Christ as far more important than the relationship they had in the flesh. (cf. Mark 3:31 -35)
 - b. It also testifies to James' sense of genuine humility.

B. The letter is addressed to Jewish Christians who were dispersed from Palestine because of persecution.

1. This dispersion had occurred as a result of attacks from unbelieving Jews. (Acts 8—ca. AD 33; Acts 12—ca. AD 41)
2. Yet the book was written before the controversy of whether to or how to receive Gentiles into the church. (ca. AD 48)
3. Therefore, James was likely written about AD 45 making it the earliest of the New Testament books.

II. The Main Message of the book.

- A. The main message of the book of James is the practice of true religion.
- B. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

III. Outline of the book.

- A. Address and greeting. (James 1:1)
- B. Trials and temptations. (James 1:2-18)
 - 1. The readers are admonished to consider trials as faith builders. (1:2-4)
 - 2. Ask for wisdom. (James 1:5-11)
 - 3. Preserver under trials. (James 1:12)
 - 4. Remember the source and nature of temptations. (James 1:13-16)
 - 5. Remember that God is the giver of all good and perfect gifts. (1:17-18)
- C. Instructions on listening and doing. (James 2:19-26)
- D. Favoritism is forbidden. (James 2:1-13)
- E. The true nature of faith and works. (James 2:14-26)
- F. Proper use of the tongue. (James 3:1-12)
- G. "Earthly" versus "heavenly" wisdom. (James 3:13-17)
- H. Submission to God. (James 4:1-12)
- I. Daily dependence on God. (James 4:13-17)
- J. Warnings about wealth. (James 5:1-6)
- K. Patience through suffering. (James 5:7-12)
- L. The power of prayer. (James 5:13-18)
- M. Restoring an erring brother. (James 5:19-20)

IV. Key themes of the book.

- A. Hearing and doing. (James 1:22-27)
 - 1. The command: (v. 22)
 - a. James warns against the pitfall of hearing what one should do, but not doing it.
 - b. The Greek word translated "hearer" is the root word from which we get the English word "auditor."
 - c. The truth of the gospel must be translated into concrete deeds and actions of faith.
 - 2. The illustration: (v.23-24)
 - a. James compares the person who "hears" but never "does" to one who sees his reflection in a mirror and does nothing about it.
 - b. Imagine seeing yourself in the mirror in your worst possible condition, and simply walking away!
 - c. James likens that foolishness to the one who sees his poor spiritual condition reflected in the truth of scripture and apathetically walks away.
 - 3. The application: (v. 25-27)
 - a. James first applies this truth to the tongue. (v. 26)
 - b. His next application deals with care for widows and orphans. (v. 27a)
 - c. His third application is for the "doer" to obey commands that would keep him/her from being polluted by the world.
- B. Faith and works. (James 2:14-26)
 - 1. James attacks the false doctrine that one can have a genuine faith that does not bear fruit evidenced in good works.
 - 2. He makes the following assertions:
 - a. Genuine faith helps others. (v. 15-16)
 - b. A living faith produces good works. (v. 17-18)
 - c. Faith is not merely an intellectual activity. (v. 19)

3. Then James shares historical examples of living, active, productive faith:
 - a. Abraham. (v. 21-23; cf. Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:17-19)
 - b. Rahab. (v. 25; cf. Joshua 2:1-24; Hebrews 11:31)
 4. For centuries, the Christian world has created a straw controversy over faith vs. works.
 - a. No such controversy is found in scripture.
 - b. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that they are inseparable.
 - c. We are saved "by grace through faith," (not grace alone; not faith alone). (Ephesians 2:8-9)
 - d. A living faith (i.e. — that is not dead) will always produce good works and deeds.
 - e. But no amount of good works will earn salvation.
- C. The use of the tongue. (James 3:3-12)
1. James introduces this subject by using three analogies for the tongue.
 - a. It is like a bit in a horse's mouth. (v. 3)
 - b. It is like the rudder of a ship. (v. 4)
 - c. It is like the spark that ignites a great forest fire. (v. 5b-6)
 2. In each of these similes/metaphors, James is emphasizing the constructive and destructive power in this tiny part of the human anatomy.
 3. He then specifically warns of the tongue's destructive inclinations, calling it:
 - a. An untamed beast. (v. 7-8a)
 - b. A restless evil. (v. 8)
 - c. Full of deadly poison. (v. 8)
 4. His final concern is over its inconsistent use.

notes that such inconsistency is foreign to God's handiwork. (v. 11-12) 141

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To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

“Whenever you face trials of many kinds you know they are for the testing of your faith. These trials develop perseverance so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. But if you lack wisdom, ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault. But you must believe He hears. His answer is what best for the Kingdom. If you do not believe He will answer, why pray? You are double-minded and unstable.”

Comment: It is not if, but when, you face trials for, they are the purpose of testing your faith. How one responds depicts the level of faith. Do they expect God to provide help when they do not seek to know and understand His word?

Desires and Temptations

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (James 1:12)

Comment: The test is when something one desires, wants, or would like, but not necessarily best for him, is placed before him. Does he yield or resist? With the constant resisting of sinful desire. The desire will probably cease to be a desire. It is the uncontrolled desire that allows one to be enticed and yield to sin.

“Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.” (James 1:16-18)

Listen

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do forgets. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:19-25)

Worship

“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion (religious worship (Thayer Greek Lexicon)) that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after (visit is the KJV) orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:26-27)

Comment: To “look after” is from Greek word *episképtesthai* meaning to look upon in order to help or to benefit (Thayer's); e.g., provide necessities. At the time the KJV was translated the word “visit” meant to go see someone to take care of their unmet necessities of life.

Favoritism

“As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism to the wealthy well-dressed and disregard poor and lowly. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? You have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you show favoritism, you sin.” (James 2:1-9)

Displaying Faith by Actions

“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds (actions doing good to others shows faith)? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it (faith) is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Abraham was considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together. A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” (James 2:12-24)

Tongue

“He who teach will be judged more strictly. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. We put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. A great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

“All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing - this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring or can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs or can a salt spring produce fresh water?” (Of course not.) (James 3:1-12)

“Show your humility by deeds done that comes from wisdom. Envy and selfish ambition in your hearts does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom from heaven is pure; peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness”. (James 3:13-18)

Desires

“Your uncontrolled desires cause fights and quarrels you want something but don't get it. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 4:1-3)

“Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone in Christ who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. He becomes adulterous since he broke his covenant with Christ and God.” (James 4:4)

Submit to God

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Purify your hearts, you double-minded. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:7-10)

Slander

“Do not slander or judge one another.” (James 4:11-12)

Brag and Boast

“You who say, "Today or tomorrow I will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.” (James 4:17)

Greed - You rich people,

- Your gold and silver are corroded and testify against you.

- The wages you failed to pay the workmen crying out against you.
- You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence you have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.
- You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. (James 5:1-6)

Patience

“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming as a farmer waits for the autumn and spring rains.”

Grumble

“Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged.”

Comment: The Israelites were constantly grumbling against God and suffered many heartaches. They did not receive their desires when they wanted them.

Oaths

“Above all, my brothers, do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your ‘Yes’ be yes, and your ‘No,’ no, or you will be condemned. (James 5:12)

Comment: If a person's life and actions cause his word not to be trusted, swearing accomplishes nothing even if by heaven or earth.)

Prayer and Praise

“Anyone in trouble? Pray.

Anyone happy? Sing songs of praise.

Anyone sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

Losing one's faith

“My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20)

Comment: Wandering from truth means one left God as he is Truth. Bringing him back to the truth of Christ allows him to be forgiven, thus back in fellowship with Christ and those in Christ.

Key Points from James

➤ One's attitude of listening, learning and praying will either glorify God or not.

Question - Who tempts man and why does God allow man to be tempted?