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# THE BOOK OF JAMES

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Author's note:

This 2021 wintertime Bible study is intended to draw us nearer to God by studying this great epistle, "James."

Please use the book with Bible in hand. You will need it! In this book, we will ask pertinent questions to help us understand the book of James. Please be an active student by working diligently at this study and ready to answer the questions asked by the teacher.

May God bless you in your study of God's word!

- Jarrod Jacobs

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# Lesson I

## An Overview Of The Book Of James

**T**he book of James is estimated to have been written around 60-62 A.D. James has been called a book of practical applications of morality in Christ. Of course, as James writes, *“to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,”* he is teaching lessons we need to learn today.

### **The Author**

James is the first word in the book. We are not left wondering or guessing who wrote this book. At the same time, who is this man? There are two possibilities as to the author. One option is James, the son of Alphaeus, mentioned in Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15-16, and Acts 1:13. The second “James” who could have authored this book is James, the brother of Christ, mentioned in Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3, and Galatians 1:18-19. Some suggest that we might know the author by remembering that Jude said his brother was James (Jude 1). However, both of these James’s had brothers named Jude or Judas (Matt. 13:55; Lk. 6:15-16; Jude 1)! Therefore, one cannot pinpoint with 100% accuracy which James authored this book by looking at his family.

We can know for sure that the author cannot be James, the son of Zebedee, because he was killed by Herod long before the book was written (Acts 12:1-2). Most take the position that the Lord’s brother

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wrote this book. *If* this is the case, then the book of Jude was written by the Lord’s brother, too.

Regardless of the position one might take as to who authored James, we know this book is inspired by God and needed for our spiritual growth.

### **Jewish Overtones In This Letter**

This letter was written to Jewish Christians “*scattered abroad.*” It definitely has Jewish tones to it. For example, compare the statement in James 4:8 with Psalm 24:3-4. \_\_\_\_\_

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Further evidence of the Jewish overtones is seen when we observe the Old Testament characters mentioned in the book, which would have been well-known to the Jews. Name them. \_\_\_\_\_

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We also see that verses like James 2:8, which cites an Old Testament statement in teaching these Christians. James 2:8 is first found in what Old Testament book? \_\_\_\_\_

When we study the book of James, we will discover that James refers many times to the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Some have even referred to James as “Wisdom Literature” for the New Testament, or “New Testament Proverbs.” In this book, there are:

- At least ten allusions to the book of Proverbs. (For example, Proverbs 10:19, 14:17 was quoted in James 1:19.)
- Six allusions to the book of Job in James. (Example: Job 22:29 quoted in James 4:10, also 5:11.)
- Fifteen allusions to the book of Ecclesiastes. (Example: Ecclesiastes 5:2, 6 in James 3:5-6.)

For this reason, some suggest that this book is more like a prophet’s appeal to a nation rather than a personal letter (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. III, p. 1564).

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## **James' Teachings Parallel Christ's Teachings.**

In addition to the Old Testament references, this epistle echoes the teachings of Christ on several occasions. For example, compare:

- Matthew 5:48 and James 1:4 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matthew 7:7 and James 1:5 \_\_\_\_\_
- Mark 11:23 and James 1:6 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matthew 7:24, 26 and James 1:22 \_\_\_\_\_
- John 13:17 and James 1:25 \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 6:24-25 and James 5:1 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matthew 6:19-21 and James 5:2-3 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matthew 5:34-37 and James 5:12 \_\_\_\_\_

## **James Declares The Ways That Faith Works.<sup>1</sup>**

Though Martin Luther called this book “an epistle of straw” because of the emphasis on work or action, he did not see that in the “big picture,” this letter emphasizes faith. The passage around which this book revolves is James 2:14-26. This section argues two main things:

- Faith without works is dead (v. 17, 20, 26).
- Faith alone cannot save (v. 14, 24).

At the same time, we are shown how faith works in this book. In short, we learn through reading the epistle of James that faith:

- Endures Trials (1:2-4).
- Overcomes Temptations (1:13-15).
- Works By Love (1:27, 5:19-20). For this reason, love will never:
  - Be partial (2:1)
  - Speak evil of others (4:11-12)
  - Cheat others (5:1-5).
- Controls The Tongue (3:1-12).
- Chooses God's Wisdom Over The World's Wisdom (3:13-18).
- Turns Away from Lusts/Pleasures (4:1-3).

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<sup>1</sup> This section is based on a sermon preached by brother Bryan Gibson.

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- Draws Near To God (4:6-8).
  - Does Not Count On Tomorrow (4:13-17).
  - Prays To God (1:5-8, 5:13-18).

## Questions

1. Who is the possible author of James? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Who do you think wrote the book of James? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. To whom was James writing? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Name some of the allusions James makes to Old Testament Wisdom literature. \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. Name some of the allusions James makes to Christ's teaching.  
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6. Name some of the ways that faith works. \_\_\_\_\_  
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For extra study – Below is a short outline of the book of James compiled by bro. Phil Martin

## James

Patient in Testing (James 1)

- \* Trials - James 1:1–12
- \* Temptations - James 1:13–27

Practicing Truth (James 2)

- \* Faith and love - James 2:1–13
- \* Faith and works - James 2:14–26

Power of the Tongue (James 3)

- \* Exhortation - James 3:1–2
- \* Illustration - James 3:3–12
- \* Application - James 3:13–18

Peacemaker (James 4)

- \* Three wars - James 4:1–3
- \* Three enemies James 4:4–7
- \* Three admonitions - James 4:8–17

Prayerful (James 5)

- \* Economic trouble - James 5:1–9
- \* Physical trouble - James 5:10–16
- \* National trouble - James 5:17–18
- \* Church trouble - James 5:19–20