



Introduction to the Book of James

Life According to Jim

Life not going the way you planned? Have you stalled out in your life or your faith and you don't know where to turn for help? Try "Life According to Jim", where you learn to live life on purpose and for the greatest purpose!

The book of James is one of the easiest books of the New Testament to read. It has straight forward and easy to understand language but it is also this type of language that poses the greatest challenge for the reader: *There is no mistaking what James is declaring – A Christian is to live out his faith.*

The core passage that sums up the book of James is found in the first chapter. It declares that every Christian is to have a living and active faith even in times of great difficulty. Memorize this scripture and let it change the way you look at your faith.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.
Do what it says. – **James 1:22**

This booklet is meant to give you a brief introduction to the book of James and is meant to be a companion guide to the first sermon of this series. As we study through the book of James together, reflect on the great importance of being a doer of the Word in a world that needs to see the authenticity of Christ-centered followers.

Authorship of James

James is considered to be an epistle. An epistle is a letter that was written from one individual(s) to a church or a group of believers. The author of this letter is recorded as James, who identifies himself as "a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). There are four men in the New Testament who have the name James.

- **James, son of Zebedee and brother of John** - A fisherman called by Christ (Mt. 4:17-22) who was an apostle. Together with John, they were nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" because of their impulsive natures (cf. Mk 3:17). He was killed by Herod in 44 A.D. (Ac 12:1-2).

- **James, father of Judas the apostle** – An obscure Biblical character. One of the few references to him is in Luke 6:16.
- **James, son of Alphaeus** - Another one of the apostles (Mt 10:3), which we know very little about. He may be "James the younger," whose mother, Mary, was among the women at Jesus' crucifixion and tomb (Mt 27:56; Lk 24:10).
- **James, the brother of our Lord** - A half-brother of our Lord (Mt 13:55), who did not believe in his brother at first (Jn 7:5). He became a disciple following the resurrection (1 Co 15:7; Ac 1:14) and gained influence in the church at Jerusalem (Ga 2:9). James also played an important role in the conference at Jerusalem (Ac 15:13-33).

"James, the Lord's brother" (Ga. 1:19) is most likely the author of this epistle. Tradition describes James as a man of prayer, which may explain the emphasis on prayer in his letter. It was said that he prayed so much, his knees were as hard as those on a camel. He was martyred in 62 A.D., either by being cast down from the temple, or beaten to death with clubs. It is reported that as he died, he prayed as did Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

- **What is the importance of the background about the author of this letter?**

Recipients of the book of James

The book of James is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1). This naturally leads us to think of Jews (Ac 26:6-7) living outside the land of Palestine. Since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, many Jews were scattered throughout different nations (Ac 2:5-11). While Jews, the epistle makes it clear that they were also brethren in the Lord helping us understand that they were Jewish Christians. James calls them "brethren" 19 times.

It appears many of these Jewish Christians were poor and oppressed. Being Jews, they would often be rejected by the Gentiles. As Jewish Christians, they would also be rejected by many of their own countrymen. The letter indicates that most were poor, and some were being oppressed by the rich (2:6-7). Because it was not addressed to a single church or individual, it

has been categorized a universal epistle along with 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude.

- **Why is it important to note that James wrote to Jewish Christians?**
- **Is the book of James relevant for Christians today even though it was written to Jewish Christians? Why or why not?**

Time and Place of the Writing of James

With no mention of the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts 15 (A.D. 49), and the use of the word "synagogue" (assembly, 2:2), A.D. 48-50 is the date commonly given for this book. This would possibly make it the first book of the New Testament written. If James, the Lord's brother, is the author, then he probably wrote it in Jerusalem.

Purpose of the book of James

The book of James deals with a variety of themes but James primarily focuses upon practical aspects of the Christian life. Some of the themes that the reader encounters are as follows:

- Handling trials and temptations
- Practicing pure religion
- Te relationship between faith and works
- The proper use of the tongue
- Seeking true wisdom
- Living for God instead of living for the world.
- Importance of humility
- Necessity of Patience
- Necessity of prayer.

Each one of these themes are absolutely crucial to the growth and development of the Christian. The main purpose of James could easily be defined as:

Teaching Each Christian is to live out his faith

In the book of James we hear the call to be doers of the Word which can be seen as living faith accompanied by works. In 108 verses, there are 54 imperatives (commands), prompting some scholars to call James "*the Amos of the New Testament.*"

- Read through the book of James in one setting and write down some of the major themes that you observe. Discuss with a small group why these themes stood out to you.

Outline of James

- I. Introduction & Greeting (1:1)
- II. Relying on God's Steady Hand in Unsteady Times (1:2-27)
 - a. The Truth about the Trials and Tests (v. 2-4)
 - b. Wisdom, Faith, and Doubt (v. 5-8)
 - c. The Truth about Trials and Temptation (v. 12-18)
 - d. Authentic Christianity – Being Intent about Faith in an Intention-less World (v. 19-27)
- III. Authentic Living for Christ: The Story of Love, Faith, and Fruit
 - a. Warning Against Favoritism and Judgment that Follows (v. 1-13)
 - b. Faith and Fruit (*Works*) – Are they part of the same equation? (v. 14-26)
- IV. Our Pursuit and Our Walk Matters to God
 - a. The Tongue: A Weapon of War or Peace (v. 1-12)
 - b. The Pursuit of Wisdom: The Journey of Peace, Purity, and Mercy (v. 13-18)
- V. Choices, Choices: Is this Life about Me or God?
 - a. The Poison of Pride – God's Antidote for Us (v. 1-10)
 - b. Judgment: Who Me? (v. 11-12)
 - c. The Purpose of Life: Living for the Moment or Living for God (v. 13-17)
- VI. Duties of a Christian
 - a. Spending our Treasures Wisely (v. 1-6)
 - b. The Prize of Patience (v. 7-12)
 - c. Interceding for One Another (v. 13-18)
 - d. I am My Brother's Keeper (v. 19-20)

- What does this outline show us about the priorities of James in this letter?
- How would you outline the book of James? Why?

James: A Practical Commentary of the Sermon on the Mount

One interesting observation we can make about the book of James can be seen in its relationship to the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount was given by Jesus to Christians as basic marching orders on how to follow in His footsteps and live out your Christian faith. James could best be summed up as a practical commentary on the Sermon on the Mount as seen in the following table.

Sermon on the Mount	Book of James	Sermon on the Mount	Book of James
5:10-12	1:2	5:22	3:6
5:48	1:4	7:15-20	3:10-12
7:7-12	1:5	5:9	3:17-18
5:3	1:9	6:24	4:4
7:14	1:12	5:3-5	4:10
5:22	1:20	7:1-5	4:11-12
7:21-27	1:22	6:19-20	5:2-3
5:3	2:5	5:12	5:10
5:7, 6:14-15	2:13	5:10	5:11
7:21-23	2:14-16	5:33-37	5:12

- What are some of the parallels that you see in this chart?
- Why is this important to recognize?

Your Personal Reflections from Each Chapter

There are five chapters found in the book of James. One of the main challenges through the course of this series is to read through the book of James once per day for the next 30 days. As you read through the book of James write down some of your reflections from each chapter.

Chapter One

Main Themes: _____

Favorite Verses: _____

Questions I Have Regarding this Chapter: _____

Chapter Two

Main Themes: _____

Favorite Verses: _____

Questions I Have Regarding this Chapter: _____

Chapter Three

Main Themes: _____

Favorite Verses: _____

Questions I Have Regarding this Chapter: _____

Chapter Four

Main Themes: _____

Favorite Verses: _____

Questions I Have Regarding this Chapter: _____

Chapter Five

Main Themes: _____

Favorite Verses: _____

Questions I Have Regarding this Chapter: _____

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