

# James

## Putting Feet on Faith

### I. Setting

James is the 18th book of the New Testament and 15th among the Epistles, or letters. They are the primary doctrinal portions of the New Testament.

It is not that the Gospels and Acts do not contain doctrine, but that the purpose of the Epistles is to explain to churches and individuals how to apply the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus' earthly life models ministry. In every area of ministry, we must apply the example of Christ. He was filled with the Spirit, sought to honor God, put a high value on people, and lowered Himself as the servant of all.

Once He ascended to heaven, He poured His Spirit out on believers and the New Testament church was formed. Acts focuses on the birth, establishment, and furtherance of the work of God in the world, through the church.

The Epistles are written to the church, further explaining doctrine.

A. James is part of a section among the Epistles commonly known as "The Hebrew Christian Epistles" and includes Hebrew, James, 1&2 Peter; 1st, 2nd and 3rd John; and Jude.

1. Called "Hebrew Epistles" because of those to whom the letters were written.

a. James - "to the twelve tribes scattered abroad"

b. Peter - "to the pilgrims of the dispersion"

c. Hebrews - the title, "To the Hebrews" dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. Content makes it clear the letter was written to Jewish believers.

d. Although not all Epistles are so addressed

2. Date

a. James is considered to be one of the earliest of the New Testament books. Written perhaps as early as 49 -50 AD

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- i. He uses illustration to bring his teaching to light. It is difficult to forget his teaching on faith, works and the tongue because of his masterful use of illustration.
- b. James was a bondservant of Jesus Christ
  - i. Doulos - One who gives himself to the will of another
  - ii. James will speak of the need to submit to the will of God. He will speak from firsthand experience.
- c. What we can decipher from the Biblical narrative
  - i. Four men named James appear in the New Testament
  - ii. Two are so obscure that they could not have been the author
  - iii. Of the remaining two, James, the Apostle died early. He was the first of the Apostles to be martyred and the only (apart from Judas Iscariot) whose death is recorded in Scripture.
    - **Acts 12:1-2** “Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.”
  - iv. The remaining James was the half-brother of Christ
    - **Matthew 13:55** “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?”
  - v. It is the half-brother of Jesus who has traditionally been considered as the author of this book.
    - It was the view of the church leaders when compiling the New Testament canon.
    - It is consistent with the facts of the New Testament

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- d. James is referred to as the half-brother of Jesus because they had the same mother (Mary), but a different father. Jesus was conceived in Mary miraculously by the Spirit of God (**Matthew 1:20**). It is His virgin birth that allowed Him to be a sinless sacrifice for the sins of humanity.
  - i. James was not a believer until after the cross and resurrection (cf. **Mark 3:21, John 7:5**).
    - According to Paul, Jesus appeared to James personally (**1 Corinthians 9:5**).
  - ii. James was present in the upper room when the Spirit came on Pentecost (**Acts 2:1**).
  - iii. James was married (**1 Corinthians 9:5**).
  - iv. James is referred to by Paul as a pillar (Galatians 1:19), but was not one of the Twelve Apostles.
  - v. Josephus says that he was stoned in 62AD by orders from the Sadducees of the Sanhedrin.
    - Another tradition from the 2nd Century says he was pushed off the Temple wall.
  - vi. After the resurrection, James rapidly grew to become a leader in the early church.
    - The narrative of Acts strongly implies that James, not Peter or John, became the Pastoral leader of the church in Jerusalem.
    - He resided over the first church counsel (**Acts 15**).
    - He is the one to whom Paul reported when arriving in Jerusalem.

### 3. Recipients

- a. **James 1:1** “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad: Greetings.”

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- b. Scattered abroad - diaspora - the word has at least two Biblical meanings.
  - i. First, meaning Jews who were scattered during periods of exile:
    - 770 BC, Israel fell to Assyria and residence were taken captive to Assyria and 120 years later, Judah fell to Babylon and captives were spread throughout the Babylonian empire.
      - ❖ Of the masses that were taken, only 50,000 returned with Ezra in the first Zionist movement to rebuild the Temple and repopulate the land.
      - ❖ The remainder of the scattered Jews remained in foreign lands.
    - By the time of Christ, Jews were living throughout the Roman Empire.
      - ❖ Acts 2 records Jews were living in:  
Mesopotamia - a region covering modern day Iraq,  
Iran, Syria and Egypt  
Turkey  
Greece  
Rome
      - ❖ Acts 8 records Philip's encounter with a dignitary from North Africa, who was either a Jew or a proselyte. Either way, it is clear there was a Jewish element in Ethiopia.
    - Two reasons make it highly unlikely that James was written to Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

Reason one, James uses the term 'Brethren' seventeen times to describe his readers.

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- ❖ Brethren (Adelphos) - This is the most common term in the New Testament to describe a Christian, used 346 times.
  - ❖ Saint -This is the second most common term; used 219 times.
  - ❖ While it is true that the term can and is used in reference to someone who is not a Christian, James defines his use of the word in Chapter 2.
- c. Reason two, **James 2:1** “My brethren do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality, . . .’ To James a ‘brethren’ is one who “holds faith in the Lord Jesus Christ”
- ❖ The second reason is not theological, but practical. There is no reason why Jews would read a letter written by James. To them, he was either unknown or the brother of one whom they considered to be a cult leader.
- i. Second - Diaspora is used in the book of Acts to speak of believing Jews, or Christians who were scattered because of the rising hostility toward Christians.
- **Acts 8:4** “Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”
    - ❖ Scattered is the Greek ‘diaspora’ (See also **Acts 8:1 and 11:19**)
    - ❖ It is important to note that when they were scattered, they took the Gospel with them. This is how the Gospel spread beyond the borders of Israel.
    - ❖ The scattering became the seeds that birthed many churches fulfilling the promises found in the parable of the sower and the soils.

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- As they went, they took the Gospel with them. With this view in mind, James becomes a very pastoral letter.
  - ❖ It is his desire to equip the saints to be most effective in bringing the Gospel of Christ to the world around them.
- Paul's words to Titus express the heart of James letter.
  - ❖ **Titus 2:10** "That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

- Adorn means to put in order, to beautify

- Putting the lessons of James into practice will make us more effective in bringing the Gospel to our world.

#### 4. Message/Outline

The best way to outline the letter is to consider James, the pastor, writing to believers; addressing the very struggles they are facing. It is as though their personal issues are used as his outline for writing.

From the content of the book, we surmise that the recipients were facing trials, temptations, and internal conflicts with other believers. It also seems clear they were struggling with understanding their relationship between faith and works, as well as how to distinguish the wisdom of God from the wisdom of men.

a. **James 1:2** "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials." This is the first in a long list of imperatives found in James.

##### i. Imperative

- Absolute necessity or requirement of a command (dictionary.com)
- In Grammar, having the form that expresses command rather than statement or question (Webster)

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- b. James contains at least 54 imperatives or commands.
  - i. Clearly this book requires action. You cannot read James without taking away something to put into practice in your life. These actions are what enable believers to live effective lives for the Kingdom.
- c. These commands include help for the believer with trials, temptation, the Bible, other believers, our speech, the will of God, the future, those in the body of Christ who are hurting or have fallen and much, much more.
  - i. Chapter 1
    - 1:2 Count trials as joy
    - 1:4 Let patience work in our lives
    - 1:5 Ask God for wisdom
    - 1:6 Ask in faith
    - 1:7 Don't think doubt will get you anything from God
    - 1:9 Boast in our future exaltation
    - 1:13 Don't say God is tempting you
    - 1:16 Don't be deceived about God's goodness
    - 1:19 Be quick to hear and slow to speak
    - 1:21 Receive the Word of God
    - 1:22 Do the word of God
  - ii. Chapter 2
    - 2:1 Don't show partiality
    - 2:5 Listen to God's view of the poor
    - 2:12 Speak and act like one who will be facing judgment
    - 2:18 Show your faith
    - 2:24 See that justification is by a faith that works
  - iii. Chapter 3
    - 3:1 Not many should be teachers
    - 3:4 Look at ships to understand the tongue
    - 3:6 Look at forest fires to understand the tongue
    - 3:13 Show your good works by your conduct
    - 3:15 Do not boast

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### iv. Chapter 4

- 4:7 Submit to God
- 4:7 Resist the devil
- 4:8 Draw near to God
- 4:8-9 Turn from sin
- 4:10 Humble yourself
- 4:11 Do not speak evil of others
- 4:13 Surrender to the will of God

### v. Chapter 5

- 5:1 Weep for judgment is coming
- 5:4 Behold your life will testify against you
- 5:7 Patiently await Christ's return
- 5:7 See how farming illustrates waiting for Christ
- 5:8 Establish your hearts
- 5:9 Do not grumble
- 5:10 Look at the prophets as examples
- 5:11 Remain steadfast
- 5:12 Let your yes be yes and no be no
- 5:13 Pray
- 5:13 Sing
- 5:14 Call elders and pray
- 5:16 Confess sin to one another
- 5:19 Know the value of bringing a sinner back to Christ

(One more thought about the message before we look at the doctrines in the book.)

### d. **James 1:1** "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

James makes references to the Lord Jesus Christ. Although not a believer during the earthy ministry of Christ, James was no doubt a witness to much of the public ministry of Jesus. As a result, James alludes to the teachings of Christ more than any other New Testament letter.

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There are many parallels between James and the Sermon on the Mount.

James 1:5 – Ask	Matt 7:7 – Ask, seek knock
James 1:22 – Do the Word	Matt 7:24 – Wise builder
James 3:12 – Known by fruit	Matt 7:16 – Known by fruit
James 3:18 – Peace	Matt 5:9 – Peacemakers
James 3:18 – Friends with world	Matt 6:24 – 2 masters
James 4:11 – Judging others	Matt 7:1 – judging others
James 4:13 – Tomorrow	Matt 6:34 – tomorrow
James 5:2 – Riches rot	Matt 6:19 – Riches rot
James 5:10 – Prophets	Matt 5:12 – Prophets
James 5:12 – Yes/No	Matt 5:34 – Yes/No

## II. Doctrine in James

Martin Luther was used by God to accomplish great things for the kingdom of God. However his assessment of James as “Strawy Epistle” is not only completely inaccurate, but has led many to misunderstand and falsely interpret much of the letter.

James is not only an invaluable portion of the New Testament Canon, but is also filled with major doctrinal truths, including the doctrine of trials, sin, salvation, and the return of Christ. Any position that reduces the importance of James’ writing is a faulty one that will greatly reduce our understanding of what it means to walk out our faith.

James is a book of Applied Doctrines. As a pastor, his desire is to see the saints living out the doctrines, not just understanding them.

Let’s look at a few of the main doctrines found in James.

### A. The Doctrine of Trials

1. **James 1: 2-5** “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God. . .”
  - a. Trials are designed by God to mature the believer. Trials should bring us closer to God as we call upon Him for wisdom.

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### B. The Doctrine of Prayer

1. Historically, James was himself a man of prayer. According to Eusibius (4th century Historian) “He used to enter alone into the temple and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness of the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel’s because of his constant worship of God.”
  - a. Apparently he was affectionately known as “Old Camel Knees”
  - b. **James 1:5** “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God. . . .”
    - i. James gets to it quickly 1:5, returns to it 4:2-3 and ends with it 5:13-18. He tells us we should:
      - Ask
      - Ask in faith
      - Pray when suffering, cheerful, sick or sinning
      - Pray alone and with elders
      - Pray with requests, with worship, and with confession of sin
      - He uses the example of Elijah to teach us the need to pray the promises of God

### C. The Doctrine of Temptation

1. **James 1:12** “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”
  - a. Temptation – enticement
    - i. Temptation is similar to trials in that it creates great difficulty for the child of God.
    - ii. Temptation is different than trials in that temptations do not come from God.
  - b. Temptation must be endured
    - i. Endure - hypomeno - to remain under

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- Blessed is the one who remains faithful to the Lord even when faced with great temptation.
- ii. Those who endure are rewarded with the crown of life.
- iii. The same reward is given to those who suffer martyrdom for the faith.
  - **Revelation 2:10** “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
- c. How do we endure temptation?
  - i. James gives the practical details in James 4:7-10
    - **Submit to God**  
Submit means to be under orders. The first step, to successfully enduring temptation, is to put yourself under God; living with the new goal of pleasing God.
    - **Resist the Devil**  
Resist means standing opposed. Daniel determined to live differently than those in Babylon. While resolve is not enough, it is the beginning of great success.
    - **Draw near to God**  
Approach, to join with
    - **Cleanse your hands**  
Remove sin from your life. One of the most common failures for believers is to trip over a stumbling block they set up for themselves.
      - ❖ **Hosea 8:11** “Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin, they have become for him altars for sinning.”
      - ❖ **James 1:14-15** “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

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-Drawn away - to lure

A word used in hunting or fishing to draw prey into a trap

-Desire - speaks of our appetite for sinful things. The devil knows your tastes and will tempt you in those areas.

-Enticed - to trap

To catch with bait, like a fish on the hook

-Conceived - to take as a prisoner

Death - sin that promises life will always results in death

### D. The Doctrine of the Bible – Bibliology

How James loved the WORD! To him, it was the saving Word, **James 1:18, 21**; the perfect law of liberty, **James 1:25**; and the royal law, **James 2:8**.

1. James does not go into the reliability, truthfulness or inspiration of the Bible. To him those things were already assumed. James spends his time on the applied doctrine of the Word, or the need to put it into action.
  - a. **James 1:21** - Receive the Word
  - b. **James 1:22** - Do the Word
  - c. **James 5:10** - Use the Word as a guide through life.

### E. Doctrine of Salvation by Faith

James has received a lot of flak as though he were contradicting Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. Instead of thinking of his message as contradictory, we should see it as it was intended. James complements Paul's teachings.

James teaches, "A faith that works is a Faith that works." James is not alone in teaching that "faith without works is dead."

#### 1. JEREMIAH TAUGHT IT

- a. **Jeremiah 7:8** "Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit.

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### 2. JOHN THE BAPTIST TAUGHT IT

- a. **Matthew 3:7-8** “But when he saw many so the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’ Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance. . .”

### 3. PAUL TAUGHT IT

- a. **Galatians 5:6** “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love.”
- b. **Titus 1:16** “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny (Him), being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”
- c. **Ephesians 2:8-10** “For by grace are y saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

### 4. PETER TAUGHT IT

- a. **2 Peter 1:5** “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; . . .”

### 5. JOHN TAUGHT IT

- a. **1 John 2:4** “He who says, ‘I know Kim’, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

### 6. JESUS TAUGHT IT

- a. **Luke 13:3** “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”
- b. **Luke 13:5** “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

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- c. **Matthew 7:19-20** “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”
- d. **Matthew 7:21-23, 26-27, 21-23** “Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”  
**26-27** “And every one that hears these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

### 7. James wrote about works that revealed true faith

- a. **James 2:18** “I will show you my faith by my works.”
- b. **James 2:19** The demons show by their actions that although they believe in God, that does not save them; living lives opposed to God.
- c. **James 2:20** We are like them when we live for those things Jesus came to set us free.
- d. **James 2:21** Abraham proved his faith by his actions. His obedience to God proved his faith in God. His actions proved that God was his chief love.
- e. **James 2:25** Rahab would prove to be faithful by choosing to join with the believers.

### F. The Doctrine of the Tongue

The largest mammal on the planet is a blue whale, whose tongue can weigh upwards of 2.5 tons, which is approximately the size of an adult elephant. In contrast, the human tongue on average is about 4 inches long and weighs less than 4 ounces. The tongue is certainly not one of the strongest muscles in the human body, yet it is perhaps the one capable of the most destruction.

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1. We are warned not to become teachers because the judgment is stricter. That judgment includes:
  - a. Before God at the Bema.
  - b. Before men, daily
  - c. Before the Word, as the teacher spends a week dealing with what the church will hear for an hour.
    - i. How often I am cut to pieces all week by the Word, as I study.
    - ii. This allows us to present it with passion
2. James speaks of three things that lead to perfection
  - a. Trials
  - b. Faith perfected through works
  - c. The taming of the tongue
    - Learning to bridle the tongue is training for bridling the whole man.
    - Much like fasting trains the body.