

Profile of James

A half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55)

An unbeliever in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry (John 7:3-5)

Converted to Christ probably when Christ appeared to him
in His risen body (1 Corinthians 15:7)

A humble servant of Jesus Christ (James 1:1)

Referred to by Paul as "the Lord brother" (Galatians 1:19)
and a "pillar" in the Jerusalem church (2:9)

Leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13-22; 21:18-26)

Presided over the council meeting at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-22)

An apostle (Galatians 1:19)

Author of the Epistle of James (James 1:1)

Church historians report that his knees were hard like a camel's knees because of constant kneeling in prayer. He died as a martyr, stoned by order of Ananias, the high priest, c. A.D. 62 or 63.

James

“The Testing of a Living Faith: Faith That Works”

Key Verse: “the testing of your faith produces patience” (1:3)											
Faith and Trials (1:1-11)	Faith and Temptations (1:13-18)	Faith and the Word of God (1:19-27)	Faith and Prejudice (2:1-13)	Faith and Works (2:14-26)	Faith and the Tongue (3:1-12)	Faith and True Wisdom (3:13-18)	Faith and Worldliness (4:1-10)	Faith and Playing God (4:11-17)	Faith and Money (5:1-6)	Faith and Patience (5:7-12)	Faith and Prayer (5:13-20)
Patient when tested Chapter 1			Practice the truth Chapter 2		Power over the tongue Chapter 3		Peacemaker, not a troublemaker Chapter 4		Prayerful in troubles Chapter 5		

- Amos of the N.T.
- Proverbs of the N.T.
- 54 imperatives in 108 verses
- Earliest N.T. book
- Pictures the character and conduct of a mature believer
- Possible sermon abstracts preached by James in Jerusalem
- Authored by James, half-brother of Jesus, “old camel knees”

Introduction to James

I. Author

The author of this book identifies himself as “James, a bondservant or slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). He was probably the half-brother of Jesus and a leader of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15). Four men in the NT have this same name. The author of this letter could not have been the apostle James, who was the first apostle martyred (Acts 12:1-2; c. A.D. 44). The other two men named James had neither the stature nor the influence that the author of this letter has.

James was one of several brothers of Jesus and was possibly the oldest since his name appears first in the list in Matt. 13:55. At first he did not believe in Jesus and even challenged him (John 7:2-5). Later he became both a believer and very prominent in the church:

1. He was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7).
2. Paul called him a “pillar” of the church (Gal. 2:9).
3. Paul, on his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, saw James (Gal. 1:19).
4. Paul did the same on his last visit (Acts 21:18).
5. When Peter was rescued from prison, he told his friends to tell James (Acts 12:17).
6. James was a leader in the important council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13).
7. Jude could identify himself simply as “a brother of James” (Jude 1:1), because James was so well known.
8. He was martyred c. A.D. 62.

II. Date

Some date the letter in the early 60s. There are indications, however, that it was written before A.D. 50, perhaps in the mid-40s.

1. Its distinctively Jewish nature suggests that it was written when the church was still predominantly Jewish.
2. It reflects a very simple church order—the officers of the church are called “teachers” (3:1) and “elders” (5:14).
3. No reference is made to the Gentile controversies.
4. The Greek term *synagogue* (“synagogue” or “meeting”) is used to designate the meeting of believers (2:2).

If this early dating is correct, this letter is the earliest of all the N.T. writings—with the possible exception of Galatians.

III. Recipients

The recipients are identified in 1:1 as “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” While some hold that this expression refers to Christians in general, the term “twelve tribes” would more naturally apply to Jewish Christians. Furthermore, a Jewish audience is more likely given the obviously Jewish nature of the letter (e.g., the use of the Hebrew title for God, *kyrios sabaoth*, “Lord Almighty,” 5:4). That the recipients were Christians is clear from 2:1; 5:7-8. It has been plausibly suggested that these were believers from the early Jerusalem church who, after Stephen’s death, were scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch (Acts 8:1, 11:19). This would account for James’ references to trials and oppression, his intimate knowledge of the readers and the authoritative nature of the letter. As the leader of the Jerusalem church, James wrote as pastor to instruct and encourage his dispersed people in the face of their difficulties.

IV. Theme

The theme that ties this epistle together is practical, vital Christian faith, which manifests itself in the behavior of the “good works” of those who profess to have faith. Tests for a genuine and living faith are examined in a manner reminiscent of the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, especially the Book of Proverbs. The idea that James contradicts Paul’s view of justification by faith (2:14-16) is without foundation and fails to account for differing perspectives and purposes for the two writers. (See the chart: “Different By Design”) James 1:3 provides a good summary of the book.

Edmond Heibert says “tests of a living faith” is the unifying theme. James develops a series of tests to demonstrate the reality of that faith.

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| 1. | Faith tested by its response to trials. | 1:1-11 |
| 2. | Faith tested by its response to temptation. | 1:12-18 |
| 3. | Faith tested by its response to the Word of God. | 1:19-27 |
| 4. | Faith tested by its response to partiality. | 2:1-13 |
| 5. | Faith tested by its production of good works. | 2:14-26 |
| 6. | Faith tested by its production of self-control. | 3:1-18 |
| 7. | Faith tested by its reactions to worldliness. | 4:1–5:12 |

8. Faith tested by its resort to prayer. 5:13-18
9. Faith tested by its recovery of an erring brother. 5:19-20

Martin Luther called the Book of James “a right strawy epistle.” However, because of the oppressive Catholic content from which he was emerging, he failed to see the beautiful balance between faith and works that the book actually affirms.

V. Special Features

Though quite similar to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, James is not simply a gathering of loose and unrelated moral teachings. The book, written in an excellent Greek style, reads very much like a number of sermon summaries, all of which are related to the central theme of a genuine faith that works. There are at least 26 allusions to the words of Jesus. The book is well suited for public reading in worship and is remarkable in its parallels with the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; see chart, “The Parallels and Possible Allusions of James to the Sermon on the Mount”). James, being a “country boy” from Galilee, also has numerous references to “nature.” Called “the Amos of the New Testament,” James, in 108 verses, peppers his work with 54 imperatives to communicate the need for urgent action on the part of his audience.

VI. Areas that receive special attention in James

1. wisdom
2. riches
3. tongue
4. impartiality
5. good works
6. self-control

VII. Key Words

Brothers – 15 times
 Faith – 16 times
 Trials/temptation
 Perfect

Works – 10 times
 Believe – 3 times
 Perseverance

VIII. Various approaches to the style and structure of James (notoriously difficult to classify)

1. Greek diatribe – form used by popular moralist (see Donald Guthrie p. 165)
2. Parenesis form – (means to exhort, advice, counsel) – a loosely organized series of exhortations without any concern to develop a theme or line of thought in the entire writing (Harold Songer). Material characterized by ethical instruction and exhortation (“moral exhortations”).
- * 3. Sermon abstracts – which James preached at Jerusalem (Scroggie).
4. Homiletic/didactic discourses – (Shepherd) – eight discourses developing a principle or theme linked together by skillful use of work-links and thematic recapitulations.
- * 5. Sermon expansions of the sayings of Jesus – (Sermonic origin of some type is probable).
- * 6. A unifying theme of faith that is alive and tests that prove its reality – Hiebert (also Fry) “A saving faith is a living faith.”
7. Parenetic discourse with a concentric structure, e.g. a chiasmic structure.

A.	1:2-27	Testing, prayer, wisdom, maturity
B.	2:1-26	Warning to the rich
C.	3:1-18	Central message for community leaders
B ¹ .	4:1 – 5:6	Warning to the rich
A ¹ .	5:7-20	Testing, prayer and maturity
8. A literary or secondary letter with a double introduction that expresses a theology of suffering.
(Peter Davids) “A call for eschatological joy in the face of testing situations.”
9. A letter for public reading consisting of two installments – chapters 1 & 2, and 3, 4, & 5.

A Suggested Outline of James

(by Warren Wiersbe)

Theme: The practical faith of the perfect (mature) Christian
(Note 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 3:2—where “perfect” means mature)

- I. The perfect man and suffering
 - 1. The perfect work—God’s purpose. 1:1-12
 - 2. The perfect gift—God’s goodness. 1:13-20
 - 3. The perfect law—God’s Word. 1:21-27

- II. The perfect man and service
 - 1. Faith proved by love. 2:1-13
 - 2. Faith proved by works. 2:14-26

- III. The perfect man and speech
 - 1. The exhortation. 3:1-2
 - 2. The illustrations. 3:3-12
 - a. Bit and rudder. 3:3-4
 - b. Fire and beast. 3:5-9
 - c. Fountain and tree. 3:10-12
 - 3. The application – true wisdom. 3:13-18

- IV. The perfect man and separation
 - 1. The enemies we must fight. 4:1-7
 - a. The flesh . 4:1-3
 - b. The world. 4:4-5
 - c. The devil. 4:6-7
 - 2. The admonitions we must heed. 4:8-17
 - a. Warning against pride. 4:8-10
 - b. Warning against criticism. 4:11-12
 - c. Warning against self-confidence. 4:13-17

- V. The perfect man and the second coming
 - 1. Patient when wronged. 5:1-11
 - 2. Pure in speech. 5:12
 - 3. Prayerful in trials. 5:13-18
 - 4. Persistent in soul-winning. 5:19-20

Five Marks of a Mature Christian (From the Book of James)

<u>Chapter</u>		<u>Verses</u>
I.	<u>He is patient when tested.</u>	
	1. He rejoices in trials on the outside.	1-11
	2. He resists temptations on the inside.	12-27
II.	<u>He practices the truth.</u>	
	1. Faith and love go together.	1-13
	2. Faith and works go together.	14-26
III.	<u>He has power over his tongue.</u>	1-18
IV.	<u>He is a peacemaker, not a troublemaker.</u>	1-17
V.	<u>He is prayerful in troubles.</u>	
	1. He prays about financial problems.	1-6
	2. He prays about personal problems.	7-12
	3. He prays about physical problems.	13-18
	4. He prays about church problems.	19-20

Emphases in James

	Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Area of Behavior	Trials	Prejudice	Speech	Conflicts	Money
God's Goal	Personal Maturity	Love for Others	Blessing of Others	Peace with Others	Service to Others
God's Method	Acceptance from God	Faith in God	Wisdom from God	Submission to God	Patience with/ Prayer to God

Perils to the Life of Faith in James

With Regard To	The World Says . . .	The Flesh Says . . .	The Devil Says . . .
TRIALS (chapter 1)	avoid them	indulge yourselves	God hates you
PREJUDICE (chapter 2)	favor those who can help you	love yourself	God is withholding something from you
SPEECH (chapter 3)	promote yourself	glorify yourself	God has abandoned you
CONFLICTS (chapter 4)	demand your rights	assert yourself	God will not defend you
MONEY (chapter 5)	grab all you can get	serve yourself	God will not provide for you

The Parallels and Possible Allusions of James to the Sermon on the Mount

<u>James</u>	<u>Sermon on the Mount</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1:2	Matt. 5:10-12 (Luke 6:23)	Joy in the midst of trials
1:4	Matt. 5:48	God's desire and work in us: perfection
1:5	Matt. 7:7	Asking God for good gifts
1:17	Matt. 7:11	God is the giver of good gifts
1:20	Matt. 5:22	Command against anger
1:22-23	Matt. 7:24-26	Contrast between hearer and doers (illustrated)
1:26-27	Matt. 7:21-23	Religious person whose religion is worthless
2:5	Matt. 5:3	The poor as heirs of the kingdom
2:10	Matt. 5:19	The whole moral law to be kept
2:11	Matt. 5:21-22	Command against murder
2:13	Matt. 5:7; 6:14-15	The merciful blessed; the unmerciful condemned
2:14-26	Matt. 7:21-23	Dead, worthless (and deceiving) faith
2:15	Matt. 6:25	Brother without food or clothing
3:12	Matt. 7:16 (Luke 6:44-45)	Tree producing what is in keeping with its kind
3:18	Matt. 5:9	Blessing of those who make peace
4:2-3	Matt. 7:7-8	Importance of asking God
4:4	Matt. 6:24	Friendship of the world = enmity towards God
4:8	Matt. 5:8; 6:22	Blessing on and call for the pure in heart
4:9	Matt. 5:4 (Luke 6:25)	Blessing and call for those who mourn
4:11-12	Matt. 7:1-5	Command against wrongly judging others
4:13-14	Matt. 6:34	Not focusing too much on tomorrow
5:1	(Luke 6:24-25)	Woe on the rich
5:2	Matt. 6:19-20 (Luke 6:37)	Moth and rust spoiling earthly riches
5:6	(Luke 6:37)	Against condemning the righteous man
5:9	Matt. 5:22; 7:1	Not judging—the Judge standing at the door
5:10	Matt. 5:12	The prophets as examples of wrongful suffering
5:12	Matt. 5:33-37	Not making hasty and irreverent oaths

References to Nature in the Book of James

- 1:6 “wave of the sea”
- 1:6 “tossed by the wind”
- 1:10 “wild flower”
- 1:11 “sun . . . with scorching heat”
- 1:11 “the plant . . . blossom falls”
- 1:17 “the heavenly lights”
- 1:18 “firstfruits”
- 3:3 “bits into the mouths of horses”
- 3:4 “ships . . . driven by strong winds”
- 3:5 “a great forest is set on fire by a small spark”
- 3:6 “a fire”
- 3:7 “animals, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea”
- 3:8 “deadly poison”
- 3:11 “fresh water and salt water”
- 3:12 “can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs”
- 3:18 “sow in peace [and] raise a harvest of righteousness”
- 4:14 “you are a mist”
- 5:2 “moths have eaten your clothes”
- 5:3 “gold and silver are corroded”
- 5:4 “workmen who mowed your fields”
- 5:4 “the cries of the harvesters”
- 5:5 “fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter”
- 5:7 “the farmer waits for the . . . crop”
- 5:14 “anoint him with oil”
- 5:17 “prayed . . . that it would not rain”
- 5:17 “it did not rain on the land”
- 5:18 “the heavens gave rain”
- 5:18 “the earth produced its crops”

DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

“For we maintain that a man is justified
by faith apart from observing the law.”

Romans 3:28

“[We] know that a man is not justified
by observing the law, but by faith
in Jesus Christ.”

Galatians 2:16

“You see that a person is justified
by what he does and not by faith alone.”

James 2:24

In Paul’s Writings

In James’ Epistle

Justification
before God –
by faith

Justification –
an eternal position

Justification –
believing in Christ

Justification
before men –
by works

Justification –
a daily proof

Justification –
behaving like Christ

“If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about –
but not before God.” (Romans 4:2)

The Two Aspects of Justification

Leadership Principles from James

Christian Leaders:

1. Ask God for what they need. 1:1-8
2. Know actions speak louder than words. 1:22-25
3. Help the less fortunate. 1:27
4. Never show favoritism. 2:1-5, 9
5. Have a balance of faith and works. 2:14-17, 20, 26
6. Control the tongue. 3:1-12
7. Are peacemakers not troublemakers. 3:13-18
8. Make friends with the right God. 4:1-6
9. Submit to God and are humble in Spirit. 4:7-10
10. Do not presume concerning God's will. 4:13-17
11. Put wealth in proper perspective. 5:1-6
12. Seek the Lord in prayer when trouble comes. 5:13-20