

MY BIBLE STUDY: The Epistle of James

Introduction



THE EPISTLE OF JAMES:

The book of James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith without works is not faith. True faith must work, must produce, it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough. It must inspire action. Faith endures trials—trials come and go but a strong faith will face them head-on and develop endurance. Faith understands temptations—it will not allow us to consent to our lust and slide into sin. Faith obeys the Word—it produces doers; it is demonstrated by obedience. It harbors no prejudice and overtly responds to the promises of God. It gives the ability to choose heavenly wisdom and shun earthly wisdom. It produces separation from the world into a submission to God. It patiently waits for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Epistle of James is the Proverbs of the New Testament—it is written in the terse moralistic style of Wisdom Literature. It is evident that James was profoundly influenced by the Old Testament, especially its Wisdom Literature, and by the Sermon on the Mount. This Epistle can be divided into *The Test of Faith* (James 1:1-18), *The Characteristics of Faith* (James 1:19-5:6), and *The Triumph of Faith* (James 5:7-20).

ETYMOLOGY:

Iakobos means James, the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Jacob.” The early title of this epistle was *Iakobou Epistole*.



THE AUTHOR OF JOHN:

James, the Lord’s brother (son of Mary and Joseph after the birth of Christ) was one of pillars of the early Christian church. Tradition points to this prominent figure as the author of the epistle and it best fits the evidence of the scripture. There are several clear parallels between the letter of Acts 15:23-29 and this epistle (the unusual word *chairein* is found only in Acts 15:23, 23:29 and James 1:1). The Jewish character of this epistle with its stress upon the law, along with the evident influence by the Sermon on the Mount complement what we know about James “the Just” from Scripture and early tradition.



TIME OF JOHN:

James addresses this letter “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” that it refers to Hebrew Christians outside of Palestine. The Greek text of 2:2 and the whole epistle reflects Jewish thought and expression. There are no references to slavery or idolatry thus fitting an originally Jewish readership. According to the historian Josephus, James was martyred in A.D 62. Therefore, according to those who accept James as the author claim that this epistle was written from A.D. 45 to the end of his life. However, several factors indicate that this letter may have been the earliest writing of the New Testament (c. A.D. 46-49): (i) There is no mention of Gentile

Christians or their relationship to Jewish Christians as would be expected in a later epistle; (ii) Apart from references to Christ, there is practically no distinct theology in James suggesting an early date when Christianity was viewed in terms of Messianic Judaism; (iii) Allusions to the teaching of Christ have such little verbal agreement with the synoptic Gospels that they probably preceded them; (iv) James uses the word “synagogue” in addition to “church” which indicates a very simple organization of elders and teachers which was patterned after the early synagogue; and, (v) James does not mention the issues involved in the Acts 15 Council in Jerusalem (A.D. 49).

KEYS TO JOHN:

8→ KEY WORD/PHRASE:

Faith that Works: This is a predominant theme of characteristics of true faith. It is a series of practical tests to evaluate the quality of one’s relationship to Christ. It challenges believers to examine the quality of their daily lives in terms of attitudes and actions. For, a genuine faith produces real change in a person’s conduct and character, and the absence of change is a symptom of a dead faith.

8→ KEY VERSES:

James 1:19-22—“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

James 2:14-17—“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

8→ KEY CHAPTER:

James 1—one of the most difficult areas of the Christian life is that of testing and temptations. James reveals our correct response to both: to testing, count them all joys; to temptations, realize that God is not their source.

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