

James

Purpose: “To instruct ‘the twelve tribes scattered among the nations’ in true Christian faith” (James 1:1b).

Outline: 1:1-27 – Joy of enduring trials/Perseverance

2:1-26 – Active faith/Faith

3:1-18 – Making proper use of the tongue/The Tongue (Wisdom in v 13-18)

4:1-17 – Enemy of God is one who befriends the world/Submission

5:1-20 – Speaking about patience/Patience

Author: James, the oldest brother of Jesus

Date: 44-49AD

Highlights:

James – along with Hebrews, the letters of Peter, John, and Jude – have often been designated as the General, Catholic, or Universal Letters. They are addressed to more general audiences rather than to a person or a church.

Scholars love to study the book of James, because there are so many theological discussions that can (and should) be had from this short book of the Bible.

Christians love to study the book of James, because it has so much to teach us about how we are to live out the Christian faith. It is a very practical book with important truths to be applied to our lives.

This is a letter written by James, who was probably the oldest brother of Jesus. This is probably not the apostle James, who died in 44 AD. This is most likely the brother mentioned in Matthew 13:55 and among the brothers mentioned in John 7:2-5.

The *NIV Study Bible* notes ways in which we see how James became prominent in the church:

- 1) He was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after his resurrection (1 Co. 15:7)
- 2) Paul called him a “pillar” of the church (Galatians 2:9)
- 3) Paul, on his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, saw James (Galatians 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 of how well known James was.

The church historian, Josephus, reports that James was martyred in 62 AD. Hegesippus identified him as “James the Just.” It was said that James’ knees became so calloused from prayer that they resembled the knees of camels.

This simple letter is quite obviously written, primarily, for Jewish Christians. The letter was written between 44 AD (the beginning of the persecution that spread to the Diaspora – cf. Acts 12) and 62 AD (the year of James’ death). Since no mention is made of the circumcision controversy leading to the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), it is probable that James was written before 49 AD. This may be the earliest of all the NT writings – with the possible exception of Galatians.

FAITH is the key word in the book of James.

The first chapter begins with a helpful discussion about facing trials. This chapter is so helpful to Christians, struggling to remain faithful when trials and tests of faith occur.

The rest of the chapter begins the transition into the central message of not merely saying that you have faith, but demonstrating it by obedience to the Word of God.

The second chapter gives an example of obedient faith. A person with true faith will not show favoritism to the rich over the poor, but will recognize that we are all sinners in need of God’s grace. Because mercy triumphs over judgment, then those who embrace this faith will also show mercy over judgment in “real life” situations.

The rest of the second chapter gives the strongest teaching about the connection between faith and works. Verse 24 has been seen as a contradiction to the teaching of the Apostle Paul. I have copied an article from the New Geneva Study Bible (on the back of this sheet) about the connection between faith and works to explain how this is not a contradiction.

Chapter three contains discussions about the tongue and about wisdom. The power of the tongue is noted in the first 12 verses. The contrast between earthly and heavenly wisdom is seen in verses 13-18.

The fourth chapter approaches the topics of submission and boasting. Refusal to submit to God's will reveals what is happening in the heart. Each person is either submitting to God, or submitting to the Devil. Thinking that you are in control of your life is a clear sign of the devil's work. If you rightly submit to the will of God, then you recognize that no one is ever really in control of their own life; but you don't really mind, because you are quite content to live under the lordship of Christ.

Chapter five provides helpful words about patience and prayer. It is sometimes hard to be patient when those who are wealthy, in the worldly sense, are oppressing you. Part of true faith is having patience that God will take care of everything. Thus, there is great power in faithful prayer. We praise God when things are going well, we pray to God when there is trouble. When we are sick, we should have the church leaders pray for us – and pray over us, even anointing us with oil.

Verse 15 is the classic proof text for the institution of the Roman Catholic sacrament of “last rites.” The context shows that “last rites” is a misuse of this verse.

Many have mistakenly understood the notion of “faith healing.” Not every prayer of the sick offered in faith will be answered with immediate healing. However, every confessed sin will be forgiven. This is our starting point – confession of sin; and there will be times in which sick people will be “miraculously” healed as a result of God's answer to prayer. The person's faith is a contributing factor; but God's will is the deciding factor. So if someone suggests that a person wasn't healed, because there was something lacking in their faith – that is just completely unbiblical. And by the way there are people who do not have faith that are healed – so faith cannot be the deciding factor in a healing.