

>>>>>> James – Introduction <<<<<<<

- 1) Web address – <https://biblical-matters.com>

What is your impression of James from any previous study or reading on your own?

Purpose and Message

- 1) As to content, the book of James is much like the book of Proverbs in its timber.
 - a) In fact, some have even referred to it as the “Proverbs of the New Testament.”
- 2) Additionally, some have considered it to be much like a sermon in the way it sounds.
- 3) However, in the introduction to the first edition of his German New Testament (1522), Martin Luther made the following oft quoted (or misquoted) remark about the book of James:

In fine, Saint John's Gospel and his first epistle, Saint Paul's epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Saint Peter's first epistle – these are the books which show thee Christ, and teach thee everything that is needful and blessed for thee to know even though thou never see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore is Saint James's epistle a right strawy epistle in comparison with them, for it has no gospel character to it.

- 4) The great Reformer was by no means denying the inspiration of James (as his phrase "in comparison with them" indicates).
- 5) Nevertheless, his disparaging remarks about the epistle have been echoed by many throughout the history of the church.
 - a) You probably have heard the phrase “Book of Straw” applied to James – this is where that comes from.
 - b) Luther also had a problem with his Roman Catholic opponents who were using James 2 to defend justification by works.
 - c) Luther was referring to 1 Corinthians 3:12, where Paul contrasts building on the foundation of Christ with materials of varying value-gold, silver, precious stones, wood, or straw.
 - d) James is absolutely NOT THAT and was not meant to be that.
 - i) What many have called “works” are in truth the principles which Jesus himself laid down. We will investigate this more deeply when we study chapter 2.
 - e) MacArthur calls James a “practical manual for Christian living” and further states that “holy living and sound doctrine must not be separated.”
- 6) As I study this letter the bottom line of it is not defense or justification by works nor is it a letter that should beat us up.

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- 7) Rather it is simply a guide to **“Faith Demonstrated.”**
- 8) When we look deeply at James’ thoughts, virtually every aspect of the letter gives us input on how to show our faith in Christ to others by living as He would have us live.
- 9) One further comment seems appropriate here.
- 10) As we will see, James uses some phrases and wordings that must not be just glanced at.
- 11) These more difficult passages are sometimes poetic but also deserving of some detailed explanations to truly understand what James is intending to say to us.

Author

James 1:1 (NASB 2020)

¹ James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. ¹

- 12) Who was this James?
- 13) There are four men in the New Testament by the name of James.
- 14) Two were apostles.

Luke 6:13–16 (NASB 2020)

¹³ And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom He also named Peter, and his brother Andrew; and **James** and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; ¹⁵ and Matthew and Thomas; **James the son of Alphaeus**, and Simon who was called the Zealot; ¹⁶ Judas the son of **James**, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

- 15) Three of the four men named James appear in this list.
- 16) The two apostles and James the father of Judas (not Iscariot).
- 17) James, son of Alphaeus, was occasionally known as James the Less.
 - a) His mother was Mary and is identified in John’s Gospel as the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus.
 - b) She was also identified as the wife of Cleopas, which many scholars believe to be the same person as Alphaeus.
 - i) Now, a bit of clarification so we don’t think we in the Bob Newhart show mode of introducing “Darrel and my other brother Darrel.”

¹ Ἰακώβος (Greek)

Iakobos (Transliterated)

So how did the Jewish name Ya’akov become so Gentilized as James? Since the 13th century, the form of the Latin name *Iacomus* began its use in English. In the 14th century, [John Wycliffe made the first Bible translation into English](#) and translated *Iakobus* as James. (However, in both the Old and New Testaments he arbitrarily used the name Jacob [for the patriarch](#)). In all future English translations the name stuck, especially after 1611, when King James I sponsored the translation then called the Authorized Version. Since 1797 it has been called the King James Bible.

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- ii) The term sister in ancient Jewish and Greek usage could denote not only a biological sister but also a sister-in-law or close female relative.
 - c) All this is why many scholars believe that James the son of Alphaeus was related to Jesus – probably a cousin.
- 18) The other apostle, James the son of Zebedee (brother of John) was martyred sometime during the reign of Herod (41 and 44CE) – most likely in 43 or 44CE just before Herod's death.

Acts 12:1–2 (NASB 2020)

¹ Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, to do them harm. ² And he had James the brother of John executed with a sword.

- 19) The fourth James is the brother of the Lord.
- 20) He is first mentioned directly by name in Matthew 13.

Matthew 13:55–56 (NASB 2020)

⁵⁵ Is this not the carpenter's son? Is His mother not called Mary, and His brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? ⁵⁶ And His sisters, are they not all with us?"

- 21) So – we now have the four James:
- a) So how do we get James, the brother of our Lord being the writer?
 - b) Primarily a process of elimination:
 - i) James the son of Zebedee – martyred before the Epistle of James would have been written.
 - ii) James the son of Alphaeus – not a significant figure and not the attributed writer by any of the early church fathers.
 - iii) James the Father of Judas – mentioned in passing in the Luke passage and no further significant information is given about him in any of early church writings.
 - c) Thus, leaving James the brother of Jesus.
- 22) Based on our next scriptural mention of him (though indirectly) we would likely have doubts about him as well.

John 7:3–5 (NASB 2020)

³ So His brothers said to Him, "Move on from here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. ⁴ For no one does anything in secret when he himself is striving to be *known* publicly. If You are doing these things, show Yourself to the world." ⁵ For not even His brothers believed in Him.

- 23) From the basic timeline of the Gospels we know that Jesus selected the 12 apostles over a year before this event took place.
- 24) So, at that time, we can assume that James was with the rest of the brothers and did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah.
- 25) It then follows that he was probably not a believer during most of Christ's ministry.

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26) The next scriptural mention of the Lord's brother paints a far different picture.

Galatians 1:18–19 (NASB 2020)

¹⁸ Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I did not see another one of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

27) This meeting took place around 35 to 37CE, roughly 5 to 7 years after Christ was crucified.

28) From the phrasing in this passage, we can infer that at this time, James has been elevated to the status of Apostle.

29) Later in the same letter, Paul calls him a pillar of the church in Gal 2:9:

Galatians 2:9–10 (NASB 2020)

⁹ ... and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ They only *asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.

30) This is one of those things I hope to get filled in when I get to heaven.

- a) What takes James from an unbelieving brother of Jesus to a pillar of the Church?
- b) We know that Jesus appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:7) but was that the beginning of his belief or was there other things before that?
- c) We know that His brother Jude also became a believer.
- d) I also want to know if the rest of His siblings became believers.
- e) In that regard, 1 Corinthians 9:5 mentions "the brothers of the Lord."
- f) In context, it seems they were engaged in ministry alongside their wives.
- g) This could be a reference to the other two brothers Joseph and Simon – we just do not know.

31) Continuing down this road however, there is another indication of leadership mentioned in Galatians – this one perhaps not so favorable:

Galatians 2:12 (NASB 2020)

¹² For prior to the coming of some men from James, he {*Peter*} used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and separate himself, fearing those from the circumcision.

32) In this situation we must consider the phrases “men from James” and “fearing those from the circumcision” – why would that have this effect on Peter.

33) We can only assume that James, at this point was having a major “Judaizing” influence on the situation.

34) Setting that aside, we do know that in Acts 15, he becomes the voice of reason in the situation.

Acts 15:12–21 (NASB 2020)

¹² All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.

¹³ After they stopped speaking, James responded, saying, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has described how God first concerned Himself about taking a people for His name from among the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the Prophets agree with this, just as it is written:

¹⁶ ‘After these things I will return,
And I will rebuild the fallen Tabernacle of David,
And I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will restore it,

¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
And all the Gentiles Who are called by My name,’

¹⁸ Says the Lord, who Makes these things known from long ago.

¹⁹ Therefore, it is my judgment that we do not cause trouble for those from the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols, from *acts of* sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has those who preach him in every city, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

35) If we don’t get anything else from this, we can see that James gets what God wants regarding the Gentiles.

36) He goes back to the prophets and brings out the fact that the Gentiles are to be accepted.

- a) Even more than accepted – brought in as equals and not to be burdened with Jewish traditions.

37) The three items that James does mention here are considered by most to be things that would be particularly offensive to their Jewish Christian brothers.

- a) However, beyond that, I personally think he makes it clear that he expects that these gentile believers were or would be educated in the principles of Law.

38) Just a few more comments about James:

- a) He was also known as James the Just.
- b) This title was given to him primarily due to his reputation for righteousness and strict adherence to Jewish law.
- c) Early Christian and historical sources describe him as a man of exceptional piety who was known for:
 - His devotion to prayer (reportedly so much that his knees became calloused "like a camel")
 - His strict observance of Jewish law and traditions
 - His fair and righteous character
 - His ascetic lifestyle (see notes at the end of this file)

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- d) It appears that James had this reputation not only with the Christian community but with non-believing Jews as well.

Notes on James' Nature

- Nazarite Vows: James is described as having taken Nazarite vows, which involved abstaining from wine and other intoxicating drinks, not eating meat, and refraining from cutting his hair 45.
- Dietary Restrictions: He drank no wine or strong drink and ate no flesh 256.
- Personal Grooming: He never shaved his hair, did not anoint himself with oil, and did not bathe in the conventional sense, all of which were considered luxuries or signs of ease 256.
- Simple Clothing: James wore only linen garments, avoiding wool, which was a sign of ritual purity and possibly priestly status 26.
- Prayer and Worship: He was known for spending extensive time in prayer, often alone in the temple. He would kneel so frequently and for such long periods that his knees became as hard as those of a camel 278.
- Temple Privileges: He was reportedly the only one allowed to enter the Holy Place in the temple, signifying his reputation for holiness and ritual purity 256.