

FAITH IN ACTION

Part 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JAMES

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Chuck Swindoll writes, “The book of James looks a bit like the Old Testament book of Proverbs dressed up in New Testament clothes.

Its consistent focus on practical action in the life of faith is reminiscent of the Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, encouraging God’s people to *act* like God’s people.

The pages of James are filled with direct commands to pursue a life of holiness. He makes no excuses for those who do not measure up. In the mind of this early church leader, Christians evidence their faith by walking in certain ways and not others. For James, a faith that does not produce real life change is a faith that is worthless (James 2:17).”¹

A. AUTHORSHIP

James, whose Hebrew name is Jacob, calls himself a servant (*doulos*) of God (1:1). He was a half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3), but was an unbeliever (John 7:5) until after the resurrection, when Jesus appeared to him especially (1 Cor. 15:7).

James rose to prominence in the Jerusalem church leadership, having the final say in the issue of Gentiles and Judaism (Acts 15:13-21). He was probably the pastor (lead elder) of the Jerusalem church.²

B. RECIPIENTS

James writes to Jewish Christians (12 tribes) who were scattered (dispersed, *diaspora*) around the Roman Empire. Their ancestors were originally scattered under the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek Empires.

It is possible that the recipients had been part of the Jerusalem church (under James’ leadership) and had fled from the persecution that arose from the stoning of Stephen.³

C. DATE

The book of James was most likely written in Jerusalem between AD 45-50⁴ and was possibly the first New Testament book to be written. According to Josephus James died in AD 62 by stoning so the letter was written well before then⁵

D. PURPOSE OF JAMES

The purpose of James is to present a challenge to faithful followers of Jesus Christ to not just “talk the talk,” but to “walk the walk” and to put our faith in action.

Throughout the book, James contended that genuine faith produces authentic deeds. In other words, if those who call themselves God's people truly belong to Him, their lives will produce good deeds or “fruit.”

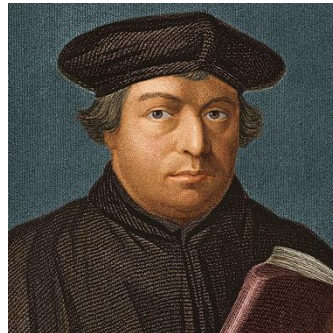
While the Christian faith walk requires a growth of knowledge about the Word, James encourages believers to not stop there. He presents 60 imperatives (action verbs) in only 108 verses. He focuses on the truths of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and motivates believers to act upon what He taught. He explains how genuine faith in Christ is an active faith:

1. Faith endures while going through trials.
2. Faith calls on God for wisdom.
3. Faith bridles the tongue.
4. Faith sets aside wickedness.
5. Faith visits orphans and widows.
6. Faith does not play favorites.

E. LUTHER AND JAMES

Luther had problems seeing James as a legitimate book of the Bible because it contained no doctrine.

Martin Luther famously called the Epistle of James “a right strawy epistle” or “the epistle of straw.” Luther was critical because he did not think it contained the meat of the gospel, including justification, and salvation by faith.



In Luther's mind, James uses language which appears to contradict Paul, who was very influential upon Luther for his conversion.⁶

Martin Luther was openly critical of James, and he wondered whether the epistle belonged in our Bibles, but he never formally proposed it should be removed. He did, however, suggest it be thrown out of schools.⁷