

Midweek Study

Notes



Christianity in Shoe Leather

Introduction to the Book of James

One statement that came from the Protestant Reformation is, **“We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”**

1. FACTS ABOUT THE BOOK

Written by? James, half-brother of Jesus

Written to whom? Early Jewish Christians

Written when? A.D. 44-49

Written why?

- 1) To encourage Christians facing persecution.
- 2) To correct wrong doctrine about faith and works.
- 3) To instruct proper Christian behavior.

Key Verse? James 2:26

2. FACTS ABOUT JAMES, THE HALF-BROTHER OF JESUS¹

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.

3. FAITH VS. WORKS

Faith without works cannot be called faith. It is dead, and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work; it must produce; it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough; mental faith is insufficient. Faith must move into action. Throughout his epistle to Jewish believers, James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith “works.” It endures trials; it obeys God’s Word; it produces doers; it harbors no prejudice; it controls the tongue; it acts wisely; it provides the power to resist the devil; it waits patiently for the coming of the Lord.ⁱⁱ

The Bible speaks mainly on two related themes: **the way to God**, and the way to **walk with God**. No one can walk or live day by day with God who has not first returned to Him. Much of the New Testament teaches the way to God- it is by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. James tells his first readers about their **walk with God**. They are saved, but their faith must bring forth works. A faith that fails to show itself is “useless” and “dead,” according to James 2:20, 26.ⁱⁱⁱ

“The people in the Jerusalem church - the first church had been scattered to a number of Roman provinces due to persecution. James feels compelled to exhort and encourage them in their struggles. Genuine faith, James explains, will produce real changes in a person’s conduct and character. In a style similar to that of the Old Testament book of Proverbs, James presents a series of tests by which a person’s faith in Christ can be measured. If real change is absent, then readers are to examine their faith to make sure they are not exhibiting symptoms of dead faith-which is really no faith!”^{iv}

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT JAMES^v

1. James is one of the earliest of the twenty-seven New Testament books.
2. James is one of only two New Testament books written by a brother of Jesus (see also: Jude).
3. The epistle of James has more figures of speech, analogies, and illustrations from nature than all of the Apostle Paul’s epistles combined.
4. While James does not ever quote Jesus directly, he does present more of Christ’s personal teachings than any other New Testament writer.
5. The language of the Sermon on the Mount is reflected more in this epistle than in any other New Testament book.
6. In many ways, James is the “Proverbs” of the New Testament.
7. James is the most practical book in the New Testament, containing little formal theology.
8. The epistle of James is very Jewish in nature (with no mention of Gentile believers), and contains twenty-two allusions to Old Testament books.

ⁱ Daniel Akin handout for a local church on “James” www.danielakin.com

ⁱⁱ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1983), 462.

ⁱⁱⁱ Irving Jensen, *Simply Understanding the Bible* (World Wide Publications, 1990), James.

^{iv} Jim George, *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook* (Harvest House Publishers, 2006), 263.

^v Jeff Lasseigne, *Highway 66* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2004), 179-180.