

Who wrote the book?

JAMES overview

While James did not specifically identify himself as to which “James” he was ([James 1:1](#)), the author is widely thought to be James the half-brother of Jesus. James was not a follower of Jesus during the Saviour’s time on earth ([Mark 3:21–35](#); [John 7:5](#)) but eventually became an apostle however James never called himself an Apostle possibly due to the unbelief he held towards his half-brother Jesus. After witnessing the Lord’s resurrected body, James became one of the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Peter singled him out among the other Christians there following Peter’s miraculous release from prison ([Acts 12:17](#)). James made the deciding speech at the Jerusalem Council ([15:13–22](#)), and Paul called James one of the pillars of the church ([Galatians 2:9](#)).

Where are we?

As one of the chief leaders in the church at Jerusalem, James wrote from that city prior to the meeting of the Jerusalem Council, which Luke recorded in [Acts 15](#). At that council, James, along with Peter and Paul, affirmed the decision to take the gospel message to the Gentiles. This council met in AD 49, meaning James likely wrote his letter in AD 45–48. Such a significant event as the Jerusalem Council warranted comment from James, as he was writing to a Jewish Christian audience. But James made no mention of Gentile Christians at all, making an early date for the letter most likely. In fact, it was likely the first New Testament book written.

Why is James so important?

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](#)).

A basic look at the idea?

Throughout the book, James contended that faith produces authentic deeds. In other words, if those who call themselves God’s people truly belong to Him, their lives will produce deeds or fruit. In language and themes that sound similar to Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, James rails against the hypocritical believer who says one thing but does another. For James, faith was no abstract proposition but had effects in the real world. James offered numerous practical examples to illustrate his point: faith endures in the midst of trials, calls on God for wisdom, bridles the tongue, sets aside wickedness, visits orphans and widows, and does not play favourites. He stressed that the life of faith is comprehensive, impacting every area of our lives and driving us to truly engage in the lives of other people in the world. While James recognized that even believers stumble ([James 3:2](#)), he also knew that faith should not coexist with people who roll their eyes at the less fortunate, ignore the plight of others, or curse those in their paths.

How do I apply this?

More than any other book in the New Testament, James places the spotlight on the necessity for believers to act in accordance with our faith. How well do your actions mirror the faith that you proclaim? This is a question that we all struggle to answer well. We would like to point to all the ways our faith and works overlap but too often see only gaps and crevices. As you read the letter from James, focus on those areas that he mentioned: your actions during trials, your treatment of those less fortunate, the way you speak and relate to others, and the role that money plays in how you live your life. Allow James to encourage you to do good, according to the faith you proclaim.

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF

James

Lord's Words Red Old Testament reference blue man's words pink

1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

1:3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

1:4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

1:6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

1:7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

1:8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

1:9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.

1:10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.

1:11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

1:14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

1:15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

1:16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.

1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

1:18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

1:19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

1:20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

1:21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

1:23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror

1:24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he

looks like.**1:25** But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

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1:26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James

Chapter 2

2:1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.

2:2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in.

2:3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"

2:4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

2:5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

2:6 But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?

2:7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "[Love your neighbour as yourself](#)," you are doing right.

2:9 But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

2:11 For he who said, "[You shall not commit adultery](#)," also said, "[You shall not murder](#)."see ([Ex 20:13](#)) If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

2:12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,

2:13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

2:14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

2:15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.

2:16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

2:17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

2:20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless ?

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2:21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

2:22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

2:24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

2:25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

2:26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James

Chapter 3

3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

3:2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

3:3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

3:4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

3:5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

3:6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

3:7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,

3:8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.

3:10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

3:11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

3:12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

3:14 But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

3:15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

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3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

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Chapter 4

4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

4:2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

4:5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us ?

4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble."

4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

4:8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

4:9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

4:11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour?

4:13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

4:14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

4:16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.

4:17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

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Chapter 5

5:1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.

5:2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.

5:3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.

5:4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

5:5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

5:6 You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

5:7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

5:8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

5:9 Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

5:10 Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

5:11 As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

5:12 Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.

5:13 Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.

5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.

5:15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

5:17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.

5:18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

5:19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back,

5:20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.