

## **BOOK OF JAMES**

1. This letter is from James. It is one of the easiest epistles to understand but the hardest to accept.
2. It is not a doctrinal book but a practical one which many find it hard to put into practice.
3. Most epistles are doctrinal in nature first, then practical. This book is almost totally practical.
4. It is a letter but it does not seem like one. It has a whole bunch of advice but has no greetings unlike a normal letter.
5. There seems to be no obvious structure in this book, just James sharing the crystalized wisdom that God had taught him. Many of these practical advice came from the book of Proverbs (which is the Old Testament book of wisdom) and from Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapter 5). James is in effect the book of wisdom in the New Testament.

### **Who is James?**

1. His name in Hebrew was Jacob or Yacob.
2. He was the half-brother of Jesus because he was a son of Joseph and Mary. Unlike him, Jesus has no earthly father because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.
3. Initially, James did not believe in Jesus. (See John 7:5)
4. Later, two of Jesus' half-brothers were converted and they wrote the books of James and Jude.
5. After the ascension of Christ, James became a "pillar" in Jerusalem. While Peter moved around, James became the leader of the Jerusalem Church Council. James was the leader who settled the issues raised by the Jewish Christians about the need for Gentile believers to be circumcised. James and the council members confirmed that there was no need for Gentile Christians to be circumcised. The Church of Christ is a universal Church and not a Jewish church! Modern Christians do not look Jewish nor follow Jewish culture, traditions, etc.
6. Acts Chapter 15 shows that James knew the Old Testament very well. He had a godly mother, Mary, (the mother of Jesus Christ). In Acts 15: 15-17, James verbally quoted from the Old Testament.
7. He was also called James the Just. (Note that there is more than one James mentioned in the New Testament.)
8. The church in Jerusalem was persecuted terribly, so James had a very tough life.
  - a) The Jewish establishment opposed the Christians every day.
  - b) James was martyred during the period when there was a changeover of governors. The Jews brought James to the pinnacle of the Temple and threatened to throw him down unless he denied Jesus. According to tradition, James claimed he saw the Son of Man coming down in clouds of glory. He was thrown down from the pinnacle of the temple but he did not die. After he fell, the people threw stones at him and James said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (This is also what Jesus said in Luke 23:34 when He

was on the cross.) A man then took pity on him and killed him by hitting him on the head with a wooden club.

- c) When they washed him for burial, they found his knees were like a camel's knees, full of calluses. This suggests that James was a man of prayer who was always on his knees.

### Who did James write to?

James wrote to the Jewish Diaspora (i.e. the 12 tribes which were scattered). There were more Jews outside Israel than those in Israel after the exile. Many Jews became tradesman and bankers and they were very rich. But they had also, as a result, assimilated into the pagan culture outside Israel. Hence, James wrote this to warn these Jewish Christians.

### What is the Structure of this Book of James?

1. Chapter 1 is an introduction to gems of wisdom about life.
2. Chapters 2 to 5 are 12 lessons for us to know. Though intended for Jews, they are also practical lessons for successful and rich Christians today who are materialistic and influenced by the world.

### Chapter 1

1. James 1:1. James did not identify himself as the brother of Jesus Christ but just a bondservant. This is because he knew Jesus is the Son of God. This verse makes it clear that the letter was written to the 12 Jewish tribes scattered abroad. This address is the only indication that this book is a letter or epistle. Unlike the other epistles, there is also no closing salutations.
2. James 1:2-4. James went through many trials and knew that a trial teaches patience or endurance. To succeed, you need to finish what you begin.
  - a) Trials are stamina training, so count trials as joy.
  - b) "Perfect" in Verse 4 means wholesome or complete. The word "Perfect" appears 7 times in the book of James. Note that the number 7 is the number of Perfection!
  - c) If you are brilliant but have no endurance, you will never succeed.
3. James 1:5-8. If you lack wisdom, ask from God in faith. To succeed in life, you need wisdom besides endurance! God will give wisdom!
4. James 1:9-10. God is more equal than you think. God exalts the poor as "the rich", because they become children of God. Although the rich now appear to have more on Earth, both the rich and the poor have the same future. Riches on Earth will disappear, but eternal rewards do not perish.
5. James 1:12-15. Blessed is he who endures temptation. There is a difference between being "tested" and "tempted":
  - a) Testing comes from God. God uses it to show us our weaknesses, just like our school exams show us our weaknesses. The purpose of testing is to help us improve. God's goal is to build us up. The trial from God is to make you stronger.

- b) Temptation comes from the Devil and his goal is to make us fall. Hence, you can see that the motivation of testing and temptation is very different although both are trials to us.
6. James 1:14 says that we are tempted not by Satan but by our own lusts!
- a) Satan cannot tempt me if I have no lust to say, look rich, be powerful or whatever!
- b) So we fall not because of Satan's temptation but because of our own lust.
7. James 1:19-20. We are to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. This is especially so for rich people, as they do not like to listen. It is hard to be rich and humble at the same time! The rich do not want nor think that they need any advice! They get angry easily and think others are stupid.
8. James 1:22-25. We are to be doers of the word, not hearers only. Some only pretend to listen. Anyone who does that is like a man who looks into the mirror and walks away without correcting, forgetting what he has seen. Note that we hear with our ears but listen with our mind.

### Chapters 2 to 5: Twelve Practical Lessons

#### Lesson 1 - James 2:1-13 – Partiality is a sin

1. James 2:1-4. We tend to favor the rich and neglect the poor! This is partiality!
2. James 2:5. God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. We should focus on the poor, not the wealthy. Yes, with the rich church attendees, the offering grows faster. However, if we focus on the rich, the church grows slower spiritually.
3. James 2:8 – Know that partiality is sin.

#### Lesson 2 - James 2:14-21 – Check if your faith is real

1. This passage teaches us to check if our faith is real. Many think that this passage is controversial and that James was teaching salvation by works. However, it is not true if we read the passage carefully.
2. James 2:14 asks, "Can "that faith" (ESV) save him?" If someone says (only verbally claiming) that he has faith, can that faith really save him?
3. James 2:17 says that "Faith without works is dead!"
4. James 2:18 uses the phrase, "Show me".
  - a) We cannot see the heart of a person as to whether he has faith but James said, "You can show me your faith by your works."
  - b) James was also saying that Salvation is by Faith but this true faith is evidenced by works.
  - c) We are His workmanship and we are saved for good works (See Ephesians 2:10)
  - d) To be Christ-like means to do good works.
5. James 2:21. We know that Abraham had faith because he offered Isaac. God does not need to see Abraham's works because God can see his heart. But we, being human, can only see a person's faith through his works.
6. James 2:25. This also applies to Rahab who showed her faith by her works of risking her life for the Jewish people.

7. James 2:26. So, faith apart from works is dead. A man who does not breathe is dead. It is not whether he looks alive!

Lesson 3 - James 3:1-12 – The tongue needs to be controlled

1. James 3:1-6. Our tongue can cause a lot of trouble with just one word.
2. James 3:7. No one can tame the tongue. So, ask God for grace to control it.

Lesson 4 - James 3:13 -18 – Two kinds of wisdom

1. James 3:13. Wisdom is shown in good works.
2. There are 2 kinds of wisdom:
  - a) James 3:16. Worldly wisdom which teaches us to grab.
  - b) James 3:17. Heavenly wisdom which teaches us to give and will cause great peace. Heavenly wisdom says God will provide. No need to worry etc.

Lesson 5 - James 4:1-10 – Worldliness versus Godliness

1. James 4:1-7. Worldliness is feeding on our passions and lusts. It is an attitude of grabbing and trying to be number 1 in all our pursuits.
2. James 4:8. Godliness is drawing near to God and moving away from the worldly mindset. When we do so, He will purify our hearts. Do not be double-minded in wanting both. If we are exposed 6 days a week to worldly thinking and only 1 day to church, the world will win. Let us not fool ourselves.

Lesson 6 - James 4:11-12 – Do not slander

Do not slander. One way that people move up is to push others down!

Lesson 7- James 4:13-17 – Do not be boastful

Do not boast! Successful people talk like this, “I have 3 shops already, so I am planning for the 4<sup>th</sup> one!” This is arrogance! God can pull everything down with just one pandemic.

Lesson 8 - James 5:1-6 – Your riches can disappear overnight

1. The rich can collapse overnight as we can see in the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Corrupted riches take advantage of others.
3. Self-indulgent rich people have no real satisfaction.

Lesson 9 - James 5:7-8 – Be patient

Unlike farmers, who know they must wait 7 years for durian trees to bear fruit, successful people lack patience. So they think Jesus must return quickly.

Lesson 10 - James 5:12 – Do not swear

Do not swear. Swearing is a mark of people who do not know how to be honest.

Lesson 11 - James 5:13-18 – Pray first when in trouble

1. Wealthy people can get out of trouble themselves! But the first thing Christians should do when in trouble is to pray!

2. James 5:14. Beware of hustlers who use this verse on praying with oil for the sick as an excuse for them to sell such oil for financial gains. This verse is not about oil per se. The person is sick and cannot go to church, so he is lying in bed. In such a case, call the elders to pray over him. James 5:15 says “And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick”. It is the prayer of faith that may save the sick, not the oil. It is the prayer that moves the hand of God. Do your best and let God do the rest! In olden days, oil was used for rubbing to help sick people so using oil was practical advice.
3. The verse does not say call for faith healers but church elders. It is not about magical means or the gift of healing.
4. James 5:16. Confess your sins to one another, not to the priests. It means get right with one another.

Lesson 12 - James 5:19-20 – Restore those who fall away

We have to restore the one who falls away! Do not be like the successful who looks down on failures.

What lessons do we learn from the Book of James?

1. We are saved for good works, not mere talk.
2. Be humble, help the helpless.
3. God works. Christ saves the poor and restores them. We should do the same.