

Genuine Faith

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James

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

GENUINE FAITH: JAMES

Adult Bible Study Book

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Preface

The book of James reads like a manual for practical daily life. In fact, James has been called the Proverbs of the New Testament because it prepares believers to live wisely. James stirred up his readers to realize that saving faith is living faith. Faith is dead, said James, if it does not display itself in works.

The chapter titles in this study reflect how faith demonstrates itself in a person's life. Chapters 2 through 13 all begin "Faith is"; then each one focuses on some outworking of faith.

Believing and behaving are inseparable. However, right behaving cannot earn salvation, which God gives based on faith, not works. The proper order is right believing first, and then right behaving should follow. Attempting to practice the works James demands will be impossible and frustrating for the person who has not received the gift of eternal life by faith in Christ.

The life-related nature of James should make applying the book easy. Don't skip the Making It Personal sections at the end of each lesson. Be diligent to examine your life in light of the plain, practical truth of James.

Lesson 1

The Author and the Epistle

*God expects us to practice what we believe
and teach.*

James Overview

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (James 2:14).

What would you think if you took a class on how to take care of your car and the teacher pulled up in a rusted out clunker that backfired before he turned it off? Or how would you respond if you were kept waiting in your doctor’s office because your doctor was taking a smoke break?

When we turn to experts, we expect them to practice what they preach. If they don’t, we usually don’t have a lot of confidence in what they say.

Getting Started

1. What kind of teacher would you want to teach you how to handle your money? to teach you to cook? to teach you how to raise your children?

2. Why is it important for teachers to “practice what they preach”?

The book of James is packed with practical information addressed to the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” Though the epistle is general as to its audience, it is relevant and specific. You will see that the writer practiced what he taught.

Searching the Scriptures

The Apostle’s Identity

Evidence indicates James is one of the earliest, if not the earliest of the books of the New Testament. James was probably written between AD 48 and 50.

3. James is a very practical book. So why do you think God made it one of the first New Testament books He inspired for the early church?

The epistle is named for the writer identified in verse 1. The writer referred to himself as “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Nothing further is said about his credentials or about his relationship with his intended readers.

4. What might this lack of mentioning credentials suggest about the relationship between the writer and the readers?

There are several possibilities for the writer of the book of James, but the most probable writer is James, the half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55). James was likely the firstborn of Mary and Joseph’s children.

James was an unbeliever during the days of Jesus's earthly ministry (John 7:5). In fact Jesus' half-brothers, including James, believed Him to be "beside himself" (Mark 3:10). They thought He was out of his mind, or insane.

5. How might the familiarity between Jesus and His half-brothers have been a hindrance to their believing in Him as the Christ?

6. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4, 7. How do you think James was affected by his personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus?

James's meeting with Jesus was apparently a transforming experience in James's life, for he was soon numbered among the apostles and emerged as a leader in the church of Jerusalem (Gal. 1:19; Acts 15:13). These facts make James the most probable writer of the book that bears his name.

7. How might being the half-brother of Jesus have influenced James as he wrote his book?

James's Integrity

James is one of those unsung heroes of the New Testament. While Peter and Paul were, under the Spirit's direction, "making the headlines," James ministered consistently and humbly behind the scenes.

8. What are some of the "claims to fame" James could have made to legitimately establish his credentials?

James began his epistle, referring to himself as a servant. Although he was numbered with the apostles, he did not refer to himself as such. Here is a man whose life was marked by humility. He valued his ministry, not his title.

In addition, James made no reference to being a blood relative of Jesus. He was not a “name dropper.” For James, the joy of exalting and extolling the Son of God was not to be diluted or polluted by selfish interests or claims.

Not only was James a humble man; he was a committed man. James 1:1 declares his commitment to Jesus Christ. It also reveals his commitment to his people. Some scholars believe the “twelve tribes” is a reference to those scattered by the persecution that erupted in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1–4). If so, James was writing to people he knew and loved. He had pastored them in Jerusalem, prayed for them in their dispersion, and now was writing to them with a shepherd’s concern.

Finally, extra-Biblical information that gives us a spiritual X-ray of James’s heart testifies to his integrity. He earned the name “Old Camel Knees” because his knees were calloused, apparently from long hours spent in prayer. Kneeling on the stone floor of the temple or in his residence, James spent long hours before the throne of grace.

In light of James’s selflessness, it is probable that he, like Jesus, prayed mostly for those the Lord had put under his charge rather than for himself. When some were scattered to regions beyond Jerusalem, his burden for them increased all the more. When the ones who remained in Jerusalem were ravaged by poverty and hunger (2 Cor. 8), he would pray for their needs to be met. When matters of spiritual concern arose, he would seek the mind of God (Acts 15).

9. Are your prayer requests weighted toward the Lord’s working for the benefit of others or for the benefit of yourself?

James’s Impartiality

James’s most prominent role, other than writing the epistle, was

his involvement in the Jerusalem Council. This meeting concerned one important agenda item: the place of the Mosaic law as a rule of life for Gentile Christians. The nature of the discussion in Acts 15 makes it clear that the Jewish Christians were struggling with the authority of the law in their own lives.

James's role at the council was one of moderator or president. He carefully listened to the evidence, allowed for debate, then summed up the matter and stated his verdict in Acts 15:13–21.

James had already chided his readers about showing partiality and favoritism in this epistle, written prior to the Jerusalem Council. James's life was marked by a ready acceptance of all individuals who knew Christ as Savior, whether they were Jew or Gentile, rich or poor. Genuine faith breaks down ethnic and economic barriers. All in Christ are members of the same family and should readily be accepted as such.

10. What are some personal preferences we might impose on other people in order to have a basis to make spiritual judgments?

11. What can we learn from James in this regard?

James's Incorruptibility

James died a martyr's death, as all the other apostles except John. He refused to recant his faith even though he knew it would cost him his life.

Reports state that James was stoned to death under the orders of Albinus, successor to Festus. Other reports state that James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple by those angered at his teaching.

12. Read James 5:10, 11. How do you see James' incorruptibility expressed in these verses?

Target Audience

James's letter is often called "The Proverbs of the New Testament." This title is based on the practical nature of the epistle and the exhortation to integrate the truth of Scripture with the demands of living in the world. The radical change Jesus made in James's life was a change he desired for all the believers he loved.

As noted earlier, James addressed his audience as "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." A number of attempts have been made to identify the "twelve tribes." The most popular interpretation among conservative scholars, however, is that the "twelve tribes" were believers of Jerusalem who were scattered abroad as mentioned in Acts 8.

13. Read Acts 8:1–4. How did God turn the persecution of the Jerusalem church to a good outcome?

Luke noted that everyone from Jerusalem fled, "except the apostles." The last count of the church's size in the beginning verses of Acts 4 was about 5,000 men. If Luke were counting heads of households, the church had experienced incredible growth in a very short time. That would make the flight of those in Acts 8 an incredible number of "instant missionaries."

James's letter, beginning with a reference to trials and difficulties, would strike home to the hearts of those who had suffered for their faith. They had been forced to leave all they knew and loved to preserve their lives and protect their families. Luke related the good news that they went "every where preaching the Word!" (Acts 8:4). James wrote to them to keep on, to stay true, to hang in there, and to do right.

14. Describe the thought processes of these severely persecuted believers who chose to proclaim the word boldly in their new home areas?

Themes

The letter addressed several themes, with the first chapter serving as an introduction to all that will follow, from “words” to “worldliness.”

The book of James has no apparent systematic treatment of the themes. The organization of the content reflects a pastor writing a letter to people he dearly loved. As he wrote, under the superintendence of the Spirit, he wrote from his heart.

The epistle begins with a treatment of subjects that relate to the personal walk of faith, confronting the reality of trials and temptations. James warned of bitterness against God. He challenged believers to be doers of the Word.

15. What does it take to be a doer of the Word and not only a hearer?

The second part of the book discusses subjects that involve the public testimony of one’s faith. James gave instruction regarding proper treatment of others, both saved and unsaved. He emphasized that speech as well as actions give witness to the genuineness of faith.

16. How should the public testimony of one’s faith relate to that person’s personal walk of faith?

The third part of the book involves a strong confrontation of sin in the lives of the readers. The influence of the world system in their disposition and decisions is glaring. The book concludes with a strong warning that failure to repent of willful sin may lead to a premature death at the disciplining hand of God.

17. Why should we describe a premature death at the hand of God as discipline and not punishment?

This New Testament “book of Proverbs” challenges the Christian to a life of wisdom rather than folly. Digestion of the material and integration of its principles will show themselves in a transformed walk. “Pure religion” will be public, not just private. The obedient Christian will practice what he learns.

Making It Personal

18. Look through the book themes by reading the chapter titles and browsing the book of James. Mark any areas in which you struggle to practice the faith you believe.

19. Make the areas you marked a matter of prayer for the next twelve weeks, paying special attention when those areas are studied in detail.

20. Memorize James 2:14.