

Introduction to James

James 1:1

Here we go! It's a new year! New service times! New record in Raleigh for consecutive days below freezing! **Some of you are on new diets and new work out plans!**

And today we start *a new book of the Bible!*

The book of James will be our focus for the next three months.

James is a book all about spiritual action, about having a living faith, a genuine faith.

- His theology is relatively simple – not shallow; but it's not Romans.
- His exhortations just keep coming: **there 59 commands in 108 verses!**
 - A higher frequency of imperative verbs than any other NT letter.

He writes with enormous energy, as he confronts various forms of hypocrisy.

- He roasts those living inconsistent, hypocritical lives – those living w a false piety.
- **He wants us to be great doers of the Word!**
- He tells His readers that **God is gracious God (1:17-18)**, but He is also the jealous God, seeking our complete devotion (4:5).
- James wants his readers to give themselves wholly to the Lord.

James also writes not only with strong rebukes, but also with great tenderness and love, as he encourages suffering saints in the grace of God.

In both rebuke and encouragement, He wants his readers **to grow up into maturity (1:4)**

He motivates us with a variety of images.

- We chose **mirror illustration** for our sermon graphic (1:22ff), but there are many more illustrations: **horses, springs of water, fire, farming, mist, travel, demons shuddering, desire becomes pregnant and gives birth to sin, rotting of riches, and more.**
- He also adds several OT illustrations: Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah.

Today, I want to look at **(1) his life, (2) his Lord, and (3) his letter.**

#1: His Life: Identity and Testimony

A. His Identity

**1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
Greetings.**

“**James.**” Stop there. “Who is this James?”

- **I asked the kids, they said, “not our brother!”**
- Nope, **but he was named after Jesus’ brother!**

Several lines of evidence point to James as being **the half-brother of the Lord Jesus.**

- That is, James was **the natural born son of Mary and Joseph – probably their first child born after Jesus was born.** (James is mentioned first in the list).

- **This is virtually undisputed among Christian commentators.**
- **Galatians 1:19** – Paul mentions him explicitly as Jesus’ brother.

Galatians 1

¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except **James the Lord’s brother**.

- James, the Lord’s brother. Many find this surprising.
- **We often think of Jesus as an only child!**
- And there’s not a lot about his early days – we know **Luke 2:52**, and then we find him teaching.
- Some of the **creeds** – which are summaries of some of the essentials -- go from **birth** and say little of his life, and then go to his **death**, “born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate.”
- The *Ligonier Statement on Christology*, we read sometimes adds a nice line, “**He was born of the Virgin Mary and lived among us**. Crucified, dead, and buried, He rose on the third day, ascended to heaven, and will come again in glory and judgment.” That of course is implied in the Creeds, but it’s nicely stated.
- **That would be a sad obituary if that was all that was ever said about you – “he/she was born and he/she died!”**
- But the Gospels show us clearly that Jesus had **at least four brothers and at least two sisters** (**Matt 13:55-56**).
- **He lived in a house with others. Jesus probably worked alongside his brothers in the carpenter’s shop. He had quite a large family.**

Matthew 13:55

⁵⁵ **Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”**

(Side note: It would stink to have the name **Judas! It’s like “I’m Sam Hussein, not Saddam. “Ken Jong-un” not “Kim.”** He is actually called **Jude** in the book of Jude).

- Here, people are dissing Jesus because they know him as a carpenter.
- **Nothing wrong with being a carpenter, but the Messiah? That’s like saying, “Hey, the Messiah works down at Home Depot in the lumber section.”**
- Jesus wasn’t honored in his hometown.
- Based on the order of these names, it’s like that **James was the oldest of the brothers, after Jesus.**
- James would have known him the longest.

Some hold that James is Jesus’ **cousin**, but that’s a highly unlikely.

Others hold that these brothers were born before Joseph married Mary (**step brother**). These views are found in Catholic circles and other circles where people want to hold to the *perpetual virginity of Mary*.

The reason for believing that the writer is this James, the brother of Jesus:

First, **the process of elimination...**

- James **assumes his readers know who he is**, hence the simple statement in verse 1 – “the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus.”
- There are **four primary men named James in the NT**.
- The apostle James of the trio of Peter, **James, John, suffered martyrdom (Acts 12)**.
- James of **Alpheus (Mk 3:18) was also an apostle**, but we know next to nothing about him.
- **James the son of Judas (not Iscariot)** is also unknown (Acts 1:13).
- That leaves James, the brother of Jesus, who is **well known in the NT**.

Second, **the book of Acts and church history point to James, the brother of Jesus.**

- **Acts 15** is important for understanding his identity.
- We see that **James was the leader** of the early church in Jerusalem.
- He was **the presiding officer** over the controversial matter that they were discussing.
- **James’ speech in Acts 15** sounds like the letter of James:
 - Rare word in the Greeting, James 1:1/Acts 15:13;
 - “listen, my brothers” James 2:15/Acts 15:13;
 - Three other rare words that appear in both James and Acts 15.
 - You also see James’ **passion for the law, for peacemaking, and also his exaltation of the grace of God – and James’ letter carries a strong Jewish flavor.**

Acts 15:11ff

Peter speaks in verse 11... then we hear from James in v. 13....

¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” ¹² And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, **James replied, “Brothers, listen to me.** ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written...

Lest we think James is all about works, but not faith, we must read Acts 15.

James, Peter, Paul, Barnabas all agree on the gospel of grace, and they maintain the unity of the church comprised of Jew and Gentile.

Peter says, we believe that it Jew and Gentile are saved “through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11), and then **James confirms this idea in verses 12ff, as he expounds the OT.**

James 4:6 – Dorani, “the rhetorical climax of the letter, “**But He gives more grace. That is why the Scripture says “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.**

James believes the gospel of grace to be transformative, leading to a life of works.

B. His Testimony

One way you get to know a person is by knowing their friends and family, and so getting to know James, we actually know a bit more about Jesus.

James Disbelieved Jesus

- From the Gospels, we see that not only did James not believe in Jesus, but it seems he didn't respect him either...

Mark 3

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “**He is out of his mind.**”

- It's kind of like **Joseph's brothers despising him**, once they learned of his exalted status.
- After Jesus began his public ministry, his family declared, “**He is out of his mind**”
 - I mean that's understandable.
 - I don't want to imply that Jesus' family didn't love him, they did.
 - But his siblings didn't believe in him.
 - Would yours?
 - **What if your big brother went on Facebook and changed his status to the Son of God?!**
- Then later, as Jesus is teaching, **his family interrupts him (Matt 12:46-50)**

James Disbelieved Jesus (Mark 6:3-6; John 7:1-5)

Mark 6

⁶ He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” ⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ **And he marveled because of their unbelief.**

And he went about among the villages teaching.

They are offended by his beliefs/teachings!

(Sometimes you will have a hard time convincing your family that you're different)

In **John 2**, his family is with him after the first miracle, but still not convinced. So after mocking Jesus in verses 3-4, we read in **John 7**...

John 7

⁷ After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. ² Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. ³ So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. ⁴ For no one works in secret if he seeks

to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” ⁵ **For not even his brothers believed in him.**

Finally, at the cross, **only Mary is mother is present**, but not his brothers (Mark 15:40; Jn 19:25).

James Believed Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:3-7)

So what happened? **Why did John eventually believe in Jesus as Messiah?**

- Answer: After the resurrection.
- Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 15** that Jesus appeared to James (15:7), in what seems to be a special meeting.

1 Corinthians 15

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ **Then he appeared to James**, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

- **What grace! Can you imagine, Jesus knocking at the door!?**
- Immediately after that, James doubts no more!
- **What changed James' view? The Resurrection of Jesus.**
- **It's cause and effect.**
- If Jesus rose from the dead, then everything changes!

- **So James now declares that his older brother is the Lord and Savior!**
- **Not many little brothers believe their older brother to be anything close to divine!**

James has had **two nicknames** passed down through church history.

- The first is “**James the Just**” or “James the Righteous” because of his passion for righteousness. You will see that in various passages (5:1-6).
- The second is “**Camel Knees**” because of his practice for prayer. Camels have like leather pads on their knees. Whether that it is mythical or not is debated, but it surely indicates something about James' reputation for being a praying man. That too comes out in this letter: James 5:13ff.
- He was a leader who **promoted a practical faith of personal righteousness, social justice, and a life of prayer.**

James joined the early church and became a leader

(Acts 1:14; 12:17; 15:1ff; 21:17ff; Gal 1:19; 2:9-10; James 1:1)

¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and **his brothers.**

After noting the disciples in verse 13, Luke mentions James as being in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, praying with his mother and the rest of the disciples.

- He would have been around **30 years old** at the time.

James and his brother Jude become leaders in the church (cf Jude 1; Gal 1:19)

James' Leadership

Galatians 1:19 – already mentioned, Paul goes to meet with him after his conversion (before Acts 15)

Galatians 2:9-10 – Later, around **Acts 11:27-30**, (still before Acts 15)... look at this powerhouse meeting, and how Paul calls James a **“pillar.”**

Gal 2

⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

- A pillar – He's a load-bearing guy.
- We visited the Capitol and they showed us the pillars that hold up that beautiful dome. We got to touch them, and say, wow. That's a good pillar.
- Firm, reliable, James.

This concern for the poor fits well with the concerns of James' letter.

Acts 12:17 – after the death of John the Apostle, Peter miraculously is released from prison and goes to visit the church.

- After they eventually let him inside, and before he goes to another places, He says, **“Go tell these things to James and the other brothers!”**

This speaks of James' leadership.

Acts 15:13ff. shows his James' leadership.

Paul and Barnabas and others travel some 250 miles to Jerusalem to discuss the Gentile-Jew issue. **Do Gentiles have to become Jews first?** They answer “no,” and all agree on the gospel, and it's James takes a real lead.

- (This would have been around AD 48 – so James who was born after Jesus would have been around 45 years old).
- James was likely written before this, between 40-45. The first completed epistle.

Acts 21:17ff – James welcomes Paul, before Paul is arrested in Jerusalem.

They celebrated all the things God had done among the Gentiles.

All of that is **behind James 1:1!**

Now, by faith in Christ, “whoever does the will of God” becomes part of Jesus' family. We are the “brothers” that James refers to in verse 1.

#2: His Lord: Jesus

James has an exalted view of Jesus...

A. Jesus' Deity (1:1)

1:1 – the brother of Jesus mentions Jesus in the same breath and the same sentence as he mentions *the divine name (God)*: “servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ”

- Jesus is **Lord** (*Kurios*), the word used in the Gk version of the OT to translate the divine name, Yahweh.
- James is saying: “I am a servant of God and the divine, Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **Here’s a Jewish man, making the most audacious claim possible about God – which if not true, is blasphemous. Jesus is none other, than Jesus is Lord.**
- To Jews, it was **blasphemous**.
- To Gentiles, it was **dangerous**.
 - To say Jesus was Lord meant that Caesar would not.
 - This was the claim the Roman Empire zeroed in on as they sought to destroy the church – “Do you say that Jesus of Nazareth is **the Lord**?” “Do you believe that He is exclusively Lord?”
- This is the world that we live in, as well. **People scoff at the idea that Jesus and Jesus alone is Lord.**

B. Jesus' Glory (2:1)

2:1: “Jesus is the Lord of glory”

- This is another amazing claim.
- **In the OT, God says “I will give my glory to none other”**
- **James says that the same glory that belongs to God the Father belongs to God the Son.**
- **James very well could have shared a bed with Jesus, and now he understands him to be divine.**
- This is why James is so eager to see Christians live consistent lives – because to do otherwise shames the name of this Jesus.

We should be doers of the Word because Jesus is worthy!

C. Jesus the Coming Judge (5:7-9)

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, **until the coming of the Lord**. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for **the coming of the Lord is at hand**. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, **the Judge is standing at the door**.

- James places many of his practical exhortations in the context of future judgment.
- Like we said last week: **Eschatology isn’t for the purpose of wild speculation but practical sanctification.**
- **Here James speaks of not grumbling because the end is near!**

- Now that Jesus, the Messiah has come, the day is at hand – therefore, be faithful in all things, including your speech.

D. James the Servant of the Lord Jesus

- **James doesn't mention himself as brother.**
- **Neither does Jude.** Jude speaks of himself just as James (Jude 1:1)
- No, James takes the appropriate title for one believing Jesus is Lord: a servant of Jesus.
- Jesus is the “Kurios” and James his slave.
- Notice that James doesn't see this as servitude that destroys dignity, but as we will see it is liberty to give your life wholly to Jesus.

#3: His Letter: Proverbial/Prophetic/Pastoral

Central Message: James writes about “spiritual maturity” or “wholeness” (Moo) – note “perfect and complete” (1:4), or more specifically what it means to **live out ones faith as a mature Christian.**

- James is after **a consistent faith. A faith that functions.** A faith that endures.
- Perhaps the most popular exhortation in the book: “But be doers of the word, not hearers only.”
- James calls of obedience, arguing that faith without obedience is dead.

James' letter is very popular for this focus, and for **the way in which it is conveyed....**

It's Proverbial/Prophetic/Pastoral

- **Proverbially:** James Applies Scripture to specific situations with great wisdom.
- **Prophetically:** James rebukes the indifferent, the hypocrite, and the oppressor – and advocates for the poor.
- **Pastorally:** James comforts his brothers and sisters (“my brothers”) who are suffering, and he points everyone to the transforming grace of God.

Proverbially, several passages come across as wisdom literature in style and content.

- Wisdom is the ability to apply the truth to one's situation.
- James does that in his letter. He's very practical.
- **It requires meditation on the word, and the observation of the world.** (Dorani).
- **Observation** language in wisdom literature: “I have seen” (Job 5:3, Eccl 1:14), or “Do you see?” (Prov 22:29, 26:12, 29:20).
- James: **observing the snubbing of the poor (2:1-4), not living out our faith rightly and compassionately (2:14-17), how our tongues run out of control, and our selfish desires leads to quarrels (4:1ff).**
- **Both James and Solomon also describe wisdom as a gift we seek from God (1 Kings 3:7-12; 1:5-8), as we should do just that.**
- Like in other wisdom literature, **James states that blessing comes to the person who lives obediently and wisely (James 2:8).**

- For these reasons, James is often called “the Proverbs of the NT.” You can see the similarities here in this sample:

| | James | Proverbs |
|--|---------|----------|
| God gives wisdom | 1:5 | 2:6-7 |
| Riches will “wither away.” | 1:10–11 | 11:28 |
| It is a virtue to be “slow to anger.” | 1:19 | 14:29 |
| Partiality to the rich dishonors the poor. | 2:6 | 14:20-21 |
| The wise tame the tongue | 3:2 | 10:19 |
| The tongue can be a deadly “fire.” | 3:6 | 16:27 |
| The arrogant boast of tomorrow. | 4:13–14 | 27:1 |
| Multiple sins may be “covered” by love | 5:20 | 10:12 |

- 2:6 For the LORD gives wisdom;
 from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
 7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
 he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
- 11:28 Whoever trusts in his riches will fall,
 but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.
- 14:29 Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,
 but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
- 14:20 The poor is disliked even by his neighbor,
 but the rich has many friends.
- 21 Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner,
 but blessed is he who is generous to the poor.
- 10:19 When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
 but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.
- 16:27 A worthless man plots evil,
 and his speech is like a scorching fire.
- 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow,
 for you do not know what a day may bring.
- 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife,
 but love covers all offenses.

Prophetically, several passages can be compared to several of the prophets in style and content, like Isaiah and Amos.

- Concerning Rich oppressors:

- Isaiah 5:8-9
 - Amos 5:11-12
 - James 5:1, 4-6
- Concerning hypocrisy, James doesn't hold back like a prophet: **4:4**.

Perhaps most influential on James, is the prophetic **message and style of Jesus**.

Though James never quotes Jesus, it is clear that he is saturated in Jesus' teaching.

- Some scholars even argue that James is actually recording a lot of sayings of Jesus directly.
- **And many hold that this is the earliest completed Epistle in the NT.**
 - Loving neighbor as the great command (James 2:8, Matt 22:39)
 - Boasting leads to humiliation (James 4:6-10; Matt 23:12)
 - Taking no oaths (James 5:12, Matt 5:33-37)
 - Being blessed as a peacemakers (3:17-18, Matt 5:9)
 - Not judging (James 4:11-12, Matt 7:1-5)
 - Moth and rust destroying riches (James 5:2, Matt 6:19)
 - The coming of the Lord (James 5:8-9, Matt 24:33)
 - Rejoicing in trials (James 1:2, Matt 5:11-12)
 - Growing into Maturity (1:2, Matt 5:11-12)
 - Asking God for good gifts (1:5, Matt 7:7)
 - Being doers of the word, not just hearers (1:22, Matt 7:24-27)
 - Acting upon our faith (2:14-26, 7:21-23)
 - Being accountable for every word (3:2; Matt 12:36-37)
 - Not serving two Masters 4:4, 6:24)

We will encounter **Jesus' gospel of the kingdom** throughout James' Epistle.

The strong prophetic words are meant to lead us to repentance – a gift of grace.

This leads us to maturity.

Pastorally: His Audience; His Word to Suffering Saints; & His Gospel of Transforming Grace

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:

Greetings.

His Audience: "to the twelve tribes in the dispersion"

- Diaspora – the scattering of the 12 tribes during Israel's exile
- This is why Paul could go to synagogues in various places. They had been dispersed.
- James calls believers "the twelve tribes" to **the new covenant people of God, who are scattered**. Many of them seem to be mainly Jewish Christians (synagogue and other references).
- These Xians are scattered it seems because of persecution and oppression (**Acts 11:19ff**).
- James was pastoring them from a distance, through his writing.

Grace for the Suffering: 1:2-12 and then at the end of the book – 5:7, 5:13ff.

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James is tender with those who are suffering.
- He speaks of God's **purposes**, the need for **patience**, and **prayer**.

His Gospel of Grace: James reminds his readers of the transforming grace of God (4:6)

- **1:18:** By God's grace, and through his Word, He regenerates us
- **1:21:** The implanted Word is saving us
- **2:1:** Faith in Jesus Christ changes us
- **2:12:** God's law reveals how glorious his mercy is toward us
- **3:17:** God's mercy toward us leads to God's mercy displayed by us
- **5:19-20:** God sends people to rescue us

Don't think James is minimizing God's grace and mercy – it's everywhere.

It is available to all who will humble themselves under the mighty hand of God.

**So James thunders like a prophet, applies wisdom like a sage,
and exalts grace as a pastor.**

Outline

It's a hard book to outline!

1. **Introduction: The Path to Maturity (1:2-1:27)**

- Dealing with Trials and Temptation
- Doing the Word

2. **Body: The Nature of True Faith & Exhortations to Repentance & Patience (2:1-5:11)**

- **1:26-27** is like the "table of contents": controlled tongue, compassionate ministry, and a clean life
- Compassion: Chapter 2, Tongue, chapter 3, clean life chapter 4, and a mingling of these, esp compassion in chapter 5.

3. **Conclusion: Oaths, Prayer, & Rescuing the Perishing (5:12-20)**

Let James rebuke you where you need it; let him lead you to wisdom, and let him remind you of the amazing grace of God.

Let's humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, believing that He will lift us up.

What you need to let this study transform you is just that: **humility**.

James 1:21: "Receive it with meekness" that it may transform you.