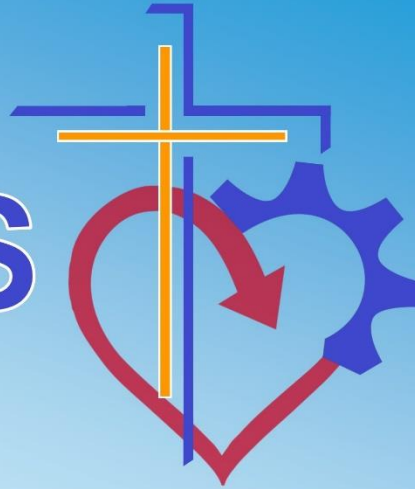


faith WORKS

The Book of James
-DEVOTIONAL PODCAST-



The Book of James: Author, Audience, and Purpose

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

Before we interpret and expound on any book or passage of Scripture (or any other human communication for that matter), it is critical for us to understand the author, their audience, and the purpose of their writing. Otherwise, words and ideas can be clipped out of context and be easily misunderstood or even deliberately manipulated. While false teachers and critics regularly employ this tactic to distort the Scriptures, perhaps few books in the Bible have been so misused as the book of James. So before embarking on this series we best begin with caution.

Who is the author of the book of James? The letter itself does not give us a definitive answer. James was a common name, but among the leading possibilities are: two of Jesus' Twelve Apostles had the name James—one was a son of Zebedee and brother of John and the other was known as James, son of Alpheus (cf. Matt. 10:2-3). Jesus also had a half-brother named James from the union of Mary and Joseph (John 7:55). We know from Scripture that James, the brother of John, was among the first martyrs, beheaded by King Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2). We have no biographical or historical references to James, son of Alpheus, as the author of this letter. Therefore, the most likely candidate, then, is James, the half-brother of Jesus.

Along with Jesus' other brothers and sisters, James did not initially believe that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. John 7:3-5, Mark 3:21), but after his crucifixion Jesus personally appeared to him to prove his identity (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7). Evidently this overturned James' doubts because he now calls his half-brother "the Lord Jesus Christ"—thereby proclaiming him to be both God and God's true Messiah. Soon thereafter James became a leader at the Jerusalem Church, even presiding over the council that considered the question of the circumcision of the Gentiles and their obedience to the ceremonial laws of Moses (cf. Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Acts 15:13ff). However, despite his familial relationship with Jesus and his prominence in the church, James' humility is evident in that he considered himself only "a servant of God and of Jesus Christ". A good reminder for any pastor, teacher, or any Christian not to think too highly of ourselves.

As a leader at the church in Jerusalem, James was uniquely situated to share the truth of the Christian faith with his fellow Jews. His **target audience** was "the twelve tribes [of Israel] scattered among the nations." On multiple occasions in their history the Jews had been dispersed from their homeland. First the Assyrians deported the northern Ten Tribes in 722 BC, and in 586 BC the Babylonians carried the majority of Judeans into exile while others fled to Egypt. In the intervening centuries the Jews had been dispersed throughout the Mediterranean

world. Recall the listing of all the different regions of the Jews and Jewish converts that were present on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:5ff).

However, James is not writing his letter as an evangelical appeal attempting to convert skeptical fellow-Jews to faith in Christ. Instead, he is writing to those who already shared his conviction that Jesus is the Lord God and Christ. Simply put, James presupposes that his readers are those who already hold to Jesus as their Savior. This context is something similar to the audience that Jesus had for his Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew Chapters 5 through 7, where he was teaching his disciples and unpacking the spiritual depth of God's law.

So then, **the purpose of James' letter** is to expound upon what it practically means and looks like to live out the Christian faith, and he communicates these truths in keeping with his culture and Scriptural precedent. James writes in the style of Eastern wisdom literature—think of the writings of Solomon in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes—with a moral focus that is prescriptive in tone. As compared to Western thought, Eastern philosophy is more circular in structure, meaning that a topic will be mentioned once and come up again and again until it is thoroughly explained. This is exactly what we see in James' letter. James is in no way opposed to the free grace of God that gives the gift of salvation through faith in Christ, but he is equally insistent that living faith is always accompanied by good works and strive after godliness. Thus, the title for our series: *faith works*. Stay with us this summer as we learn from James how to put our faith in Jesus into action.



Reflection Questions:

- 1.) When sharing the truth of God's Word, why is it equally important to know both WHAT you are communicating as well as WHOM you are talking to?

- 2.) What comfort is yours in knowing that you are part of a spiritual family that consists of all believers everywhere?



Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, give us humble hearts and heavenly wisdom as we begin our series on the Book of James. Use this message to arouse our faith to action so that our everyday thoughts, words, and deeds may more closely match our heart's conviction that you are our Savior. Amen.*