

Outline of James

We hope this outline of James will assist you in your study of God's Word.

There has been much controversy about the book of James. First, we have the question of authorship. There are four possibilities from the New Testament. There is James the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, an apostle, James the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18), James the father of Judas (not Iscariot — Luke 6:16) and James the half brother of the Lord (Galatians 1:19). The author does not identify himself as an apostle and James the apostle died early in the history of the church (Acts 12:2) therefore he is not a likely candidate. The second and third James are too little known to have the authority to give such an epistle. However, James, the half-brother of Christ, was a powerful figure in the early church. He is called a pillar of the church at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9) and figures much in the early church history. History records that he was the first bishop of the church at Jerusalem and was martyred in 62 A.D. He was an exceedingly holy man, respected even among the Jews for his piety. He prayed so much that his knees became like those of a camel, thus "old camel knees" was affectionately used of him.

The epistle was written to a Jewish Christian audience. This indicates that this is an early letter of the church. There is no sign of the Jewish/Gentile conflict. The letter should be dated sometime in the mid to late 40's, within approximately 15 years of the death of Jesus Christ.

To James, the readers were brothers, a term he uses 19 times in the book. The word "Lord" occurs 15 times in the book. In many ways the book is an exposition on the Sermon on the Mount of Christ found in Matthew 5-7. Compare the following:

James	Topic	Matthew
1:2-4	Joy in suffering	5:10-12
1:5-8	God's grace in giving	6:6, 33; 7:7-11
1:9-11	The poor and rich	5:3; 6:19-21
1:12	Blessing to those who endure	5:5
1:13-16	Temptations	5:27-28; 6:13, 22-23
1:17-18	God's goodness	6:25-34
1:22-27	Be doers	7:12; 24-27
2:1-13	Don't be partial	5:43-48
2:14-26	Be workers	7:12; 24-27
3:13-18	mEEK, mercy and peace	5:5, 7, 9
4:1-5	You need to ask, rightly	5:6:14-15; 7:7-8
4:9	blessed are those who mourn	5:4
4:11-12	Don't judge	7:1-5
4:13-17	Look properly at the future	6:31-34
5:1-6	Beware of riches	6:24
5:7-11	Deal patiently with persecutors	5:39-42

5:12	Don't swear	5:33-37
5:13-18	Pray	6:5-15

The themes developed in the book are all set forth in the first chapter. Patience, wisdom, prayer, rich versus poor, relationship with God, our tongue, our practice — these are the themes of the book. The book is a sermon on the service of faith. The book should give us encouragement in our lives. James notes that we all stumble in many things (3:2). He notes that our stumbling occurs because we are enticed through the bait of human desire (1:14). But he tells us that if we receive and do the word of God, it is able to save our souls (1:21).

This book has been referred to as the Proverbs of the New Testament, being written in a very practical vein. Gone are the great theological treatises of Paul. In its place are a series of very practical lessons to life's problems.

Problems addressed:

- How to handle temptations 1:2-4
- How to pray for wisdom 1:5-8
- How to handle poverty and riches 1:9-11
- Where is the source of temptations 1:13-16
- What should we do with our tongue 1:19; 3:1-12; 4:11-12
- What should we do with the word 1:21-25
- What is the nature of true religion 1:26-27
- How to treat people 2:1-13
- The place of works in faith 2:14-26
- What is the test of true wisdom 3:13-18
- Why are our prayers not answered 4:1-5
- How can we get God to be close to us 4:7-10
- What role should planning have in our lives 4:13-17
- What about the rich 5:1-6
- What about suffering 5:7-11
- What about swearing 5:12
- What should we do when we suffer 5:13
- When we are happy 5:13
- What should we do when we are sick 5:13-18
- What about those who go astray 5:19-20

Date: 45 A.D. (?)

I. Introduction 1:1

II. Count temptations to be joy 1:2-11

- A. Brings patience 1:2-4
- B. Opens up wisdom 1:5-8
- C. Reckons on the fleeting nature of life 1:9-11
- D. Brings a crown of righteousness 1:12
- E. But temptations are not from God 1:13-16
- F. God brings good gifts 1:17-18

III. Consider a life of righteousness 1:19-27

- A. Man's wrath does not produce righteousness 1:19-20
- B. Be doers of the word 1:21-25
- C. Pure religion is doing and being 1:26-27

IV. Do not show partiality 2:1-13 (development of 1:9-11)

V. Works demonstrate faith 2:14-26 (development of 1:22-27)

VI. Beware of the tongue 3:1-12 (development of 1:19-21)

VII. Distinguish heavenly wisdom 3:13-18 (development of 1:5-8)

VIII. God is a jealous God 4:1-10 (development of 1:12-18)

IX. Bring your speech in line with godly views 4:11-17 (development of 1:19-21)

X. Warning to the rich 5:1-6 (development of 1:9-11)

XI. Encouragement to the oppressed 5:7-12 (development of 1:2-4)

XII. Effective prayer 5:13-18 (development of 1:6-8)

XIII. Watching out for others 5:19-20 (development of 1:22-27)

Key Idea: Faith works

Key Passage: 2:22

Key Lesson: Practice the Word.