

BOOK OF JAMES – WES MARTIN

PART 1: OVERVIEW

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

- A. Most first impressions is that the book of James is very practical showing Christianity for daily living. It's not mostly focused on doctrine but rather on action.
- B. Many books written about James are titles such as *Truth in Action*, *Faith that Works*, *Belief that Behaves* and *Make Your Faith Work*. Most emphasize the key word of "do".
- C. James directs his message directly to believing Jews that have been scattered to other places because of persecution. This scattering started just before Jesus came on the scene.

Jewish believers scattered abroad faced the problem of assimilation (becoming too influenced by an unbelieving world). Many were embarrassed to be known as Christians and were too lax in their behavior. Their problem was greed, because most of them had left Israel for business reasons in search of riches elsewhere. – David Pawson

- D. When considering the setting and culture of the first century world, James is a major pastoral piece guiding the early church to be an influencing light. And, without debate, this still speaks in our day.

Your lives light up the world. Let others see your light from a distance, for how can you hide a city that stands on a hilltop? And who would light a lamp and then hide it in an obscure place? Instead, it's placed where everyone in the house can benefit from its light. So don't hide your light! Let it shine brightly before others, so that the commendable things you do will shine as light upon them, and then they will give their praise to your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

- E. Justification by faith – Does the theology in James and Paul's writings contradict each other?
 - 1. Paul was defending Gentiles from Jewish legalism (rules to attain salvation). James was defending Jews from Gentile perversion of grace (license to sin). It's no surprise then to see the difference in emphasis.

God is giving us two different angles on this crucial issue so that we get it in balance and get the whole truth. Legalism says we are saved by works; license says we are saved without works; but liberty says we are saved for works, works of love. Legalism says, "We are going to make sure that you are not free to sin, by making rules and regulations." License says, "We are free to sin." Liberty says, "We are free not to sin." I believe that the letter of James needs the rest of the New Testament and the rest of the New Testament needs James. – David Pawson

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. Ephesians 2:8-9

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:17

F. James includes 23 references to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE PERSON

A. James was one of four half-brothers of Jesus (Mark 6:3, Galatians 1:19). One of these brothers is the author of the book of Jude. James is considered a half-brother of course since his biological father was Joseph. Jesus was conceived of Mary and the Holy Spirit.

B. James and much of his family did not believe who Jesus claimed to be:

When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. "He's out of his mind," they said. Mark 3:21

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters (Feast of Tabernacles and a time Jews believed the Messiah would make Himself known), and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" For even his brothers didn't believe in him. John 7:1-5

Even my own brothers pretend they don't know me; they treat me like a stranger. Psalms 69:8

He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Isaiah 53:3

B. James grew up in the same home subjected to the wisdom of God found in his brother's words yet he didn't believe who Jesus claimed to be. This doubt and unbelief blinded him to the knowledge of God right in front of his eyes for years and even caused him to mock God (John 7:3-4).

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:6-8

And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. James 3:4-6

C. Jesus places the care of his mother into the hands of John, one of his disciples, not James (John 19:26-27). Though James was Jesus' brother and son of Mary, Jesus as the older son was selective in who would take care of her after his death due to James' absence at the cross.

- D. After Jesus is raised from the dead He specifically visits with James and...James believes. I think James describes this meeting in his letter leaving out the names of Jesus and himself (James 5:19-20)?

He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:4-7

Finally, as members of God's beloved family, we must go after the one who wanders from the truth and bring him back. For the one who restores the sinning believer back to God from the error of his way, gives back to his soul life from the dead, and covers over countless sins by their demonstration of love! James 5:19-20

- E. He would become known as James the 'Just' or 'Righteous' and become the primary leader of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 12:17, 15:13, 19, 21:18).

His role in Acts 15 (known as the Jerusalem Council or Conference) was especially crucial. He faced a most difficult and delicate crisis – the biggest in the early church's life. It concerned the whole question whether Christianity would remain a Jewish sect or would become a universal faith. James presided over the meeting that could have split the church right down the middle if agreement had not been reached. But James saved it by appealing to the Spirit and to the Scriptures. – David Pawson

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

- F. Even Josephus (37-96 CE), who was not a believer, but a Jewish contemporary of James, knows about him, and even insists that James' death was the reason the Jewish people believed Jerusalem fell: *"These things [the Uprising and consequent destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans] happened to the Jews in requital for James the Righteous, who was a brother of Jesus known as Christ, for though he was the most Righteous of men, the Jews put him to death."*
- G. James the servant of his older brother!

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...James 1:1

bond-slave, without any ownership rights of their own. Ironically this word is used with the highest dignity in the New Testament – namely, of believers who willingly live under Christ's authority as His devoted followers.
