

THE BOOK OF JAMES



Faith & Works



GULF SHORES

CHURCH OF CHRIST

Gulf Shores, AL

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by Ray Reynolds

THE BOOK OF JAMES: Faith & Works



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Study Guide for the Book of James

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This study guide was created by Ray Reynolds for use in Bible classes at the Gulf Shores Church of Christ (Gulf Shores, AL). The material presented in this class series will be gleaned from personal notes, the New King James Study Bible, Homer Hailey, Dr. Coy Roper, Dr. Steven Guy, Gleason L. Archer, Irving L. Jenson, Mark Copeland, J. Vernon McGee and various other sources.

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INTRODUCTION

Author of the Book of James:

The book of James was written by “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (**James 1:1**). The name James is the English form of Jacob. There are at least four men called James in the New Testament. Of those four, James, the Lord’s brother, is the best candidate for authorship and it is accredited to him by most early church scholars (**Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3**).

It should be noted that James was an unbeliever during the Lord’s ministry (**John 7:5**). It was only after a special resurrection appearance did James come to believe (**I Corinthians 15:7, Acts 1:14, 2:4**). This certainly helped the case for the resurrection because Jesus’ own brother, a former doubter, had now become a disciple. After his conversion James became an early leader in the church at Jerusalem (**Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18, Galatians 1:19, 2:9, 12**) and a very influential member of the fellowship of Christians. He is called a “pillar” in the church by Paul (**Galatians 2:9**). It seems that he assumed this role after Peter left Palestine (**Acts 12:17**).

According to tradition, James was put to death by the Jewish High Priest at Jerusalem in 62 AD. James’ letter was among the last to be given a place in the Bible. In 323 AD it was listed as one of the disputed biblical books but read anyway in most churches because of its content and the connection to Jesus and the Jerusalem church. The book is considered the most “Jewish” of the books in the New Testament.

Date of the Book of James:

It is generally accepted to have been penned when the church was in its infancy. It may have been written in the mid to late 40’s or early 50’s AD. There are no clues within the book to help us with a point of reference. The most conservative scholars put a date of 44-45 AD with it because of James’ influence in Jerusalem at that particular time. It also seems to be void of any of Paul’s teachings, which reveals that James may not have been aware of Paul’s writings and influence.

There are other scholars that think it may have been written just prior to James death (58-62 AD) in an effort to correct some of Paul’s theology. It seems like James is asserting himself with the likes of the other gospel writers, specifically the apostles John and Peter, and the apostle Paul. This seems to be without merit because, if that were James’ intent, it would have been made clear in the writing of this book and nothing like that is present.

Theme of the Book of James:

The theme of the book is common sense Christianity or practical Christianity. He clearly wants Christians to see that our faith is not merely a series of religious steps, but an outward faith that compels us to perform good works. Faith must be living and active. Is this in conflict with Paul's thoughts on being saved by grace? Of course not! Paul is the one who introduced us to the fruit of the Spirit, planting and watering seeds, and growing in Christ. Our works alone cannot save us, but they help us to bring glory to the Father, as Jesus intended.

There is clearly a "pastoral" flavor to the book. As an elder of the Jerusalem church, a protégé to Peter, and brother of Jesus, he would have had great power to wield within the church. Instead of pushing doctrine or tradition, he uses this letter to encourage and challenge.

Audience for the Book of James:

The letter does seem generic and impersonal, but it is addressed to the "twelve tribes of the dispersion" (**James 1:1**). This is a reference to the tribes of Israel. The early Christians thought of themselves as the true Israel (**Galatians 6:16**), the true circumcision (**Philippians 3:3**), and the true seed of Abraham (**Galatians 3:29, Romans 4:16**). Therefore, it is not surprising that Christians outside of Palestine considered themselves as the "twelve tribes of the dispersion" (**James 1:1**) that were still part of God's covenant.

Since the letter is addressed to a more Jewish audience, James uses illustrations for prayer and patience but turns to Old Testament characters (i.e. prophets, Elijah, Job) instead of the teachings of our Lord. In fact, he makes no reference to the great events of Jesus' life, omits any reference to the death or resurrection of our Lord, and Jesus is only mentioned by name twice (**James 1:1, 2:1**). It is also interesting to notice the similarities with the Sermon on the Mount (Goldman):

James 1:2	↔	Matthew 5:10-12
James 1:4	↔	Matthew 5:48
James 1:5	↔	Matthew 7:7ff
James 1:20	↔	Matthew 5:22
James 1:22	↔	Matthew 7:24ff
James 2:10	↔	Matthew 5:19
James 2:13	↔	Matthew 5:7
James 3:18	↔	Matthew 5:9
James 4:4	↔	Matthew 6:24
James 4:10	↔	Matthew 5:5
James 4:11ff	↔	Matthew 7:1-5
James 5:2ff	↔	Matthew 6:19
James 5:10	↔	Matthew 5:12
James 5:12	↔	Matthew 5:33-37

Key Verses in the Book of James:

James 1:2, 1:12, 1:17, 1:22, 1:27, 2:1, 2:10, 2:18, 2:24, 3:8, 3:13, 4:7-8, 4:12, 4:13, 4:17, 5:8, 5:12, 5:13-14, 5:16, 5:19-20

Outline of the Book of James:

- I. Genuine Perspective (*James 1:1-11*)
- II. Genuine Religion (*James 1:12-27*)
- III. Genuine Love (*James 2:1-13*)
- IV. Genuine Faith (*James 2:14-26*)
- V. Genuine Speech (*James 3:1-8*)
- VI. Genuine Wisdom (*James 3:9-18*)
- VII. Genuine Humility (*James 4:1-7*)
- VIII. Genuine Judgment (*James 4:8-17*)
- IX. Genuine Behavior (*James 5:1-8*)
- X. Genuine Prayer (*James 5:9-20*)

Practical Subjects & Themes of James:

- | | | |
|---|---|---------------|
| F | = | Fear |
| A | = | Action |
| I | = | Individuality |
| T | = | Tongue |
| H | = | Humility |
| W | = | Wisdom |
| O | = | Obedience |
| R | = | Righteousness |
| K | = | Kindness |
| S | = | Submission |

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LESSON ONE: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Perspective (James 1:1-11)*

1James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. 2My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. How should we as Christians view trials in our life?

Why should this be our point of view?

What is the value of developing patience?

5If 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. 6But 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. 7For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

If we lack wisdom, what should we do? Why?

How can prayer be a life-line for humanity?

What would we do without prayer?

What can we expect if we doubt? Why?

9Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits."

What should the "lowly brother" do? Why?

What should the "rich man" do? Why?

What can we learn about the comparison between these two examples?

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LESSON TWO: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Religion (James 1:12-27)*

12Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

When is the man who endures temptation blessed? How?

Why are we blessed for enduring temptation? Explain.

What should we "not" say when we are tempted? Why?

How are we tempted? Who is to blame?

How is sin described? What does sin produce?

16Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.

What is the source of every good gift and every perfect gift?

How has God brought us forth into this world?

Why did He do this?

What does it mean to be the "first-fruits" of His creatures?

19So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

What does it mean to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath?

Why should we avoid showing wrath?

21Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. 26If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

What should we as Christians lay aside? Why?

What needs to be received with meekness? Why?

In order to avoid deceiving ourselves, what must we be? Why is this significant?

How should we be affected when we hear the word of God?

Who will be truly blessed in what they do? Why?

Whose religion is useless? Why?

What is pure and undefiled religion before God?

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LESSON THREE: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Love (James 2:1-13)*

1My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. 2For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool.”

What is the danger of showing partiality?

What example does James use to illustrate his point?

Does this happen today in the church? How? Why?

4Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? 7Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

If we are guilty of showing partiality, what condemnation is given to us?

How can showing prejudice against the poor be dangerous in the church?

What had the rich been doing against others in the church?

8If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; 9but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

What would be a good rule for these brethren to follow?

What is the consequence of showing partiality?

How then should they speak and act? Why?

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LESSON FOUR: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Faith (James 2:14-26)*

14What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

What question does James ask? How would you answer this question?

What example is given to illustrate the futility of faith without works?

What is the condition of faith by itself, without works?

How does James challenge the person who only has faith?

What example does James use to show the futility of faith only?

20But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.

How was Abraham justified?

What did he do to prove himself?

What was the relation between Abraham's faith and works?

What two things were the result of Abraham's faith and works?

If he was called the friend of God, what does that say about his relationship with God? Explain.

What point did the example of Abraham illustrate?

24You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. 25Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? 26For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

What final example does James appeal to?

What do we know about her works?

What does that say about the works of others?

What is James' conclusion regarding faith and works as seen in this chapter?

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LESSON FIVE: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Speech (James 3:1-8)*

1My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. 2For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

Why does James caution against many becoming teachers?

What is the danger of teaching?

What is one indication of maturity and self-control?

3Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 4Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.

What can we learn from the bit in a horses' mouth?

What can we learn from the rudder that controls the ship?

What does this tell us about our tongue?

5Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

What can we learn from a small fire?

What will the defiling of our tongue do to the rest of the body?

What does this tell us about our tongue?

7For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

What can we learn from beasts, birds, reptiles and sea creatures?

If we fail to tame our tongue, what is our fate?

Why is it so difficult to accomplish this task?

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LESSON SIX: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Wisdom (James 3:9-18)*

9With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. 11Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? 12Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

What example does James use to show how the tongue is often misused?

What illustrations does James provide to show the inappropriateness of such speech?

What does this tell us about our tongue?

13Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

What is a sign of someone who is wise?

How is the wise and understanding person to manifest himself?

14But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

What characterizes wisdom that does not descend from above?

What is the source of such wisdom?

What exists when there is envy and self-seeking?

Why does this happen?

17But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

What are the qualities of wisdom from above?

Who produces the fruit of righteousness?

Why is peace such a valuable asset to Christians?

How can we be peacemakers?

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LESSON SEVEN: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Humility (James 4:1-7)*

1Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Where do wars and fights find their origin?

Should Christians lust and covet things we do not have and cannot obtain? Explain.

Why do some not receive what they ask for? What does this tell us about the power of prayer?

4Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? 6But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

What does James call those who would be a friend of the world? Why?

Compare and contrast the phrases “friend of God” and “enemy of God.”

Whom does God resist? Why?

Whom does God show more grace? Why?

7Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
What counsel does James give to those tempted by the world?

How can we submit to God?

Why should we resist the devil? Can we defeat him?

What promise is given to those who resist the devil?

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LESSON EIGHT: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Judgment (James 4:8-17)*

8Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Why should we draw near to God?

What is the purpose of cleansing our hands?

How can we purify our hearts?

What does it mean to be double-minded?

10Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. 11Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

What will happen if we humble ourselves?

Why should one not speak evil of a brother?

What reasons does James give for not judging one another?

Who is our judge?

What is our role in judgment?

13Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Why should we be careful about making plans for the future?

What qualifications should guide us when we make plans for the future?

Why should we pray and plan around the Lord's will?

What will happen if we boast in our own arrogance?

Discuss the dangers of sins of omission.

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LESSON NINE: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Behavior (James 5:1-8)*

1Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.

Who is being condemned in this chapter? Why?

What sort of miseries will come upon the people? Why?

What will happen to their riches?

What will happen to their flesh?

4Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. 6You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

Why is God so angry at these rich?

What specifically is their sin? Explain.

Is this a problem today? Explain.

7Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Why are they commanded to be patient?

What illustration does he use to teach patience?

What does it mean to establish your heart?

What is the significance of relating this teaching to the second coming of Christ?

How can we be sure we are anticipating the return of Jesus?

What are we commanded to do each week as a church family until He comes?

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LESSON TEN: *Faith & Works Produce Genuine Prayer (James 5:9-20)*

9Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! 10My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

What are the Christians to do in response to such oppression?

What should they avoid? Why?

What can we learn about the patience of the prophets?

What can we learn about the patience of Job?

12But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes,” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.

What do these verses teach us about taking vows?

What can we know about the significance of keeping our word?

How can we know that God takes vows very seriously?

13Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

What does James encourage one to do when suffering? Why?

What does James encourage one to do when cheerful? Why?

What does James encourage one to do when we are sick? Why?

What are the elders supposed to do? Is it sacramental or medicinal?

What will save (or heal) the sick? Who will raise him/her up?

What if the one who is sick has committed sins?

16Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

What are Christians to do with one another? Why?

What are Christians to do for one another? Why?

What kind of a prayer avails much?

What can we learn about Elijah?

What happens when someone turns a sinner from the error of his way?