

# The Book of James

James Confronts

Christian Conflict.

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# James

## OVERVIEW:

“Jesus is the answer!” . . . “Believe in God!” . . . “Follow me to church!” Christians also make great claims but are often guilty of belying them with their actions. Professing to trust God and to be his people, they cling tightly to the world and its values. Possessing all the right answers, they contradict the gospel with their lives.

With energetic style and crisp, well-chosen words, James confronts this conflict head-on. It is not enough to talk the Christian faith, he says; we must live it. “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” (James 2:14). The proof of the reality of our faith is a changed life.

Genuine faith will inevitably produce good deeds. This is the central theme of James’s letter, around which he supplies practical advice on living the Christian life.

James begins his letter by outlining some general characteristics of the Christian life (James 1:1-27). Next, he exhorts Christians to act justly in society (James 2:1-13). He follows this practical advice with a theological discourse on the relationship between faith and action (James 2:14-26). Then James shows the importance of controlling one’s speech (James 3:1-12). In James 3:13-18, James distinguishes two kinds of wisdom, earthly and heavenly. Then he encourages his readers to turn from evil desires and obey God (James 4:1-12). James reproves those who trust in their own plans and possessions (James 4:13-5:6). Finally, he exhorts his readers to be patient with each other (James 5:7-11), to be straightforward in their promises (James 5:12), to pray for each other (James 5:13-18), and to help each other remain faithful to God (James 5:19-20).

This letter could be considered a how-to book on Christian living. Confrontation, challenge, and a call to commitment await you in its pages. Read James and become a *doer* of the Word (James 1:22-25).

## THE BLUEPRINT

James wrote to Jewish Christians who had been scattered throughout the Mediterranean world because of persecution. In their hostile surroundings they were tempted to let intellectual agreement pass for true faith. This letter can have rich meaning for us as we are reminded that genuine faith transforms lives. We are encouraged to put our faith into action. It is easy to say we have faith, but true faith will produce loving actions toward others.

### 1. Genuine religion (James 1:1-27)

This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is written to Jewish Christians scattered among the nations. Greetings!

[2] Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. [3] For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. [4] So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

[5] If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking.

[6] But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] People like that should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. [8] They can't make up their minds. They waver back and forth in everything they do.

[9] Christians who are poor should be glad, for God has honored them. [10] And those who are rich should be glad, for God has humbled them. They will fade away like a flower in the field. [11] The hot sun rises and dries up the grass; the flower withers, and its beauty fades away. So also, wealthy people will fade away with all of their achievements.

[12] God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. [13] And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. [14] Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. [15] These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death. [16] So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.

[17] Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows. [18] In his goodness he chose to make us his own children by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession.

[19] My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. [20] Your anger can never make things right in God's sight.

[21] So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls.

[22] And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. [23] For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. [24] You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. [25] But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

[26] If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. [27] Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.

## 2. Genuine faith (James 2:1-3:12)

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people more than others?

[2] For instance, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in shabby clothes.

[3] If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, [4] doesn't this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives?

[5] Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the kingdom God promised to those who love him? [6] And yet, you insult the poor man! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? [7] Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

[8] Yes indeed, it is good when you truly obey our Lord's royal command found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [9] But if you pay special attention to the rich, you are committing a sin, for you are guilty of breaking that law.

[10] And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws. [11] For the same God who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." So if you murder someone, you have broken the entire law, even if you do not commit adultery.

[12] So whenever you speak, or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law of love, the law that set you free. [13] For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you.

[14] Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone. [15] Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, [16] and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

[17] So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.

[18] Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." I say, "I can't see your faith if you don't have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds."

[19] Do you still think it's enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! [20] Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?

[21] Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was declared right with God because of what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? [22] You see, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to do. His faith was made complete by what he did—by his actions. [23] And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." He was even called "the friend of God." [24] So you see, we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

[25] Rahab the prostitute is another example of this. She was made right with God by her actions—when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. [26] Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also faith is dead without good deeds.

[3:1] Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness.

[2] We all make many mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way. [3] We can make a large horse turn around and go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. [4] And a tiny rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot wants it to go, even though the winds are strong. [5] So also, the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. [6] And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness that can ruin your whole life. It can turn the entire course of your life into a blazing flame of destruction, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

[7] People can tame all kinds of animals and birds and reptiles and fish, [8] but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison. [9] Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God. [10] And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! [11] Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water?

[12] Can you pick olives from a fig tree or figs from a grapevine? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty pool.

### 3. Genuine wisdom (James 3:13-5:20)

If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life of steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, then you will be truly wise! [14] But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie. [15] For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and motivated by the Devil. [16] For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil.

[17] But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. [18] And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness.

[4:1] What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you? [2] You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it. [3] And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

[4] You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God. [5] What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealously longs for us to be faithful? [6] He gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say,

"God sets himself against the proud,  
but he shows favor to the humble."

[7] So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. [8] Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you hypocrites. [9] Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. [10] When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on him, he will lift you up and give you honor.

[11] Don't speak evil against each other, my dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize each other and condemn each other, then you are criticizing and condemning God's law. But you are not a judge who can decide whether the law is right or wrong. Your job is to obey it. [12] God alone, who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to condemn your neighbor?

[13] Look here, you people who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit."

[14] How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. [15] What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." [16] Otherwise you will be boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.

[17] Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

[5:1] Look here, you rich people, weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. [2] Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. [3] Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. [4] For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

[5] You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every whim. Now your hearts are nice and fat, ready for the slaughter. [6] You have condemned and killed good people who had no power to defend themselves against you.

[7] Dear brothers and sisters, you must be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who eagerly look for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They patiently wait for the precious harvest to ripen. [8] You, too, must be patient. And take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

[9] Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door!

[10] For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. [11] We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. Job is an example of a man who endured patiently. From his experience we see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, for he is full of tenderness and mercy.

[12] But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned for it.

[13] Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord.

[14] Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. [15] And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

[16] Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. [17] Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! [18] Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again.



[19] My dear brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back again, [20] you can be sure that the one who brings that person back will save that sinner from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

## **MEGATHEMES**

### **THEME: Living Faith**

#### **EXPLANATION:**

James wants believers not only to hear the truth, but also to do it. He contrasts empty faith (claims without conduct) with faith that works. Commitment to love and to serve is evidence of true faith.

#### **IMPORTANCE:**

Living faith makes a difference. Make sure your faith is more than just a statement—it should also result in action. Seek ways of putting your faith to work.

### **THEME: Trials**

#### **EXPLANATION:**

In the Christian life there are trials and temptations. Successfully overcoming these adversities produces maturity and strong character.

#### **IMPORTANCE:**

Don't resent troubles when they come. Pray for wisdom; God will supply all that you will need to face persecution or adversity. He will give you patience and keep you strong in times of trial.

## **THEME: Law of Love**

### **EXPLANATION:**

We are saved by God's gracious mercy, not by keeping the law. But Christ gave us a special command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:19). We are to love and serve those around us.

### **IMPORTANCE:**

Keeping the law of love shows that our faith is vital and real. When we show love to others, we are overcoming our own selfishness.

## **THEME: Wise Speech**

### **EXPLANATION:**

Wisdom shows itself in speech. We are responsible for the destructive results of our talk. The wisdom of God that helps control the tongue can help control all our actions.

### **IMPORTANCE:**

Accepting God's wisdom will affect your speech. Your words will convey true humility and lead to peace. Think before you speak and allow God to give you self-control.

## **THEME: Wealth**

### **EXPLANATION:**

James taught Christians not to compromise with worldly attitudes about wealth. Because the glory of wealth fades, Christians should store up God's treasures through sincere service. Christians must not show partiality to the wealthy, nor be prejudiced against the poor.

### **IMPORTANCE:**

All of us are accountable for how we use what we have. We should not hoard wealth, but be generous toward others. In addition, we should not be impressed by the wealthy nor look down on those who are poor.

**An invitation is given to open your heart's door.**

**Rev. 3:20**

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

**To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:**

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print