



A GLC  **JAMES:**
BOOK STUDY
SESSION 1

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of James — Faith that Works

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

(James 1:1)

In the years following Pentecost (Acts 2) the church was based in Jerusalem and continued to grow at a rapid rate despite the difficulties they faced. However, it was never God's will for all the early believers to stay in Jerusalem, (Acts 1:8) so He had permitted a time of great persecution (Acts 7-8:3) and many Jews fled to Judea and Samaria taking the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ with them.

There were already many Jews living throughout the Roman Empire but now these early believers spread out among them faithfully sharing the gospel and planting little churches wherever they went. Most scholars believe that the Book of James was written during this time. (AD 45-50)

A great majority of the early believers were Jews and the Apostle Paul, who would pioneer much of the work among the gentiles, was just embarking on his first missionary journey. During this time the early believers looked to the Apostles and their associates for their leadership and doctrine. One of these men was the half-brother of Jesus Christ and an Elder in the Church at Jerusalem, he was known as James.

JAMES: A GLC BOOK STUDY

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A. Who was James?

Now James does not actually tell us who he is. He simply introduces himself as “*a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*” so we need to do a little work and using the process of elimination we can be fairly sure we have the right person.

There are 4 men called James in the New Testament:

1. *James the Son of Zebedee*

- He was one of the 12 disciples, the brother of John.
- Jesus used to call them “Sons of Thunder.” (Luke 9:51–56)
- He was the first of the disciples to die for his faith, killed by Herod in AD 44. (Acts 12:1–2)
- Most scholars believe his death was too early for him to have written this book.

2. *James the Son of Alphaeus*

- We know very little about him.
- He may have been the brother of Matthew. (Mark 2:14)
- We are not given any reason or evidence to believe that he wrote James.
- Most scholars do not consider him a serious candidate.

3. *James the Father of Judas*

- We know nothing about this man, other than the fact that he was the father of the disciple Judas. Not to be confused with Judas Iscariot. (Luke 6:16)
- No one seriously considers him as the author.

4. *James the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ*

This leaves us with just one man that we can seriously consider. The half-brother of Jesus, one of at least 4 sons that Mary had with Joseph after Jesus was born. (Matthew 13:55–56, Mark 6:3) It is interesting to note that Jesus’ brothers were not saved at this time. (John 7:3–5) In fact the first indication we have that they were saved at all is when Luke tells us that they were in the upper room praying with the other believers after His ascension. (Acts 1:14)

- In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians we discover that Jesus made a special appearance to James after His death and prior to Pentecost. This could have been the moment of his conversion but we cannot be sure. (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- Paul also reveals to us that Jesus brothers had all taken believing wives. James and his wife were believers and were serving in ministry together. (1 Corinthians 9:5)
- Before Paul had left on his first missionary journey James was already an Elder in the Church at Jerusalem. (Acts 12:17)
- After his first missionary journey, Paul reported to Jerusalem to discuss some problems that had arisen in the church and it was James who presided over the Council in Jerusalem. He spoke for the leadership there and affirmed the work God was doing through Paul among the gentiles. (Acts 15:1–29)
- Later on Paul made another trip to Jerusalem. There he met with the elders and once again James is singled out. No one can dispute the important role James played in the early church, in fact early historians knew him as “James the Just.”

So James the half-brother of Jesus is by far our best candidate when we look for the author of this wonderful book. Here are just a few of the reasons scholars give us as evidence for his authorship:

- a. The book was written between AD 45 and AD 50. The very time James was leading in Jerusalem.

- b. The book is written to the Jews scattered and living outside Palestine. Some of whom James would have known and pastored prior to the persecution. (James 1:1)
- c. The author doesn't tell us who he is because everyone in the early church knew this James.
- d. The book of James contains a number of unique Greek words and parallels also used in James' discourse at the Council in Jerusalem. (Acts 15:13–29)
- e. Then one of the weightiest arguments of all. The early church fathers Origen, Eusebius and Jerome all believed that James the Lord's brother was the author.

B. Who was he writing to?

James tells us he was writing to Jewish believers that were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The term "*diaspora*" is used of Jews living outside of Palestine. (James 1:1 – dispersed)

- Remember the gospel was only just beginning to be preached to the gentiles, so a majority of the believers at that time would have been Jews and because of the persecution many of them were a long way from home.
- This in no way softens the message for us. They were Jews, but they were also members of the body of Christ and all that the Holy Spirit reveals through James is equally relevant to us today. (2 Timothy 3:16)

It is also vital to note, that while the book is obviously written to believers it also contains warnings to those that are not really saved. They are professors of, but they are not possessors of, true saving faith. They are referred to as hearers who delude themselves, those with dead or demonic faith. They have earthly, natural or demonic wisdom and they are friends of the world. They are enemies of God and they are referred to

as sinners, terms that are never used anywhere in the New Testament of a true believer.

This is not unusual, in the gospels Jesus often pointed out the difference between true disciples and those that were deceived. (Matthew 7:21–23, 25:1–13, John 8:30–31, John 15:1–8) It is also an ongoing theme throughout the New Testament especially in the books of Hebrews and 1 John. Just like our churches today we have those that are genuinely saved and those that are deceived into thinking they are.

- All true believers produce some fruit, others produce more and some produce much fruit. James is writing to them all, calling them to greater maturity in Christ.

C. Why did he write the book?

The easy and true answer is because he was moved by the Holy Spirit to do it. While we certainly see much of James in this epistle, every word that was written down came straight from God Himself. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21) There are many themes running through the books of the Bible and James is no different. Yet, each book is carefully put together by the Holy Spirit to make a strong persuasive argument for truth.

Those that are familiar with the Sermon on the Mount will see a lot of similarities between the teaching of Jesus and James. One writer says ***"we may conclude that James reflects the thoughts and often the very words of Christ."***

The teachings of Jesus and James

Matthew 5:10–12	James 1:2
Matthew 5:48	James 1:4
Matthew 7:7–12	James 1:5
Matthew 7:21–27	James 1:22
Luke 6:20	James 2:5
Matthew 7:16–20	James 3:10–12
Matthew 5:9	James 3:18
Matthew 7:1–5	James 4:11–12
Matthew 6:19–21	James 5:1–3
Matthew 5:34–37	James 5:12

There are also a number of similarities between the book of James and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. James quotes from the book of Proverbs and makes a compelling argument for wisdom from it.

The teaching of Proverbs and James

Proverbs 2:6	James 1:5
Proverbs 29:20	James 1:19
Proverbs 11:30	James 3:18
Proverbs 3:34	James 4:6
Proverbs 27:1	James 4:13–16
Proverbs 10:12	James 5:20

While there are many ways of looking at the book of James the main thrust of this book is easy to see. In his commentary on James, J. Sidlow Baxter says **“The argument of the epistle is that true Christian faith must express itself in practical goodness... We may say that the theme of this epistle is the proofs of true faith.”**

To put that into CCF terminology we could say that: *“Genuine saving faith will show up in a transformed life.”* If you claim to have saving faith and there is no evidence in your life to prove it James says you are deceiving yourself. (James 1:22)

The bottom line is genuine, living, saving faith changes everything and effects every area of your life:

If you are born again,
 If you are a new creation,
 If you are a child of God,
 If you are a friend of God,
 If you have left the kingdom of darkness and entered the kingdom of light,
 If you have been justified and are being sanctified,
 If you have received a brand new nature,
 If you have received the Holy Spirit,
 If God has begun a good work in you,
 If you are being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ,
 If your faith is real,

It **MUST** show up in your life! (John 8:31, 15:8, Acts 26:20, Ephesians 2:10, Titus 2:11–14, 1 John 5:3–4)

Years later the Apostle Paul would write these words:

“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you - unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

These words are great advice to all of us as we work our way through the book of James and put our lives to the test, so that we may prove what kind of faith we really have.

JAMES CHAPTER ONE

Faith that Works

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.
(James 1:1)

Outline:

- A. Faith that works, resilient in trials.**
- B. Faith that works, resisting temptation.**
- C. Faith that works, responding to truth.**

The book of James is a series of tests. Firstly, to see if our faith is genuine saving faith and secondly to see if it shows up in our daily lives.

- James certainly recognizes that we all sin to varying degrees at different times and that some believers are more mature than others. (James 3:2)
- But he will not accept any faith as genuine that does not transform a person's life and produce some fruit. (James 2:20)
- Your ability to endure the trials of life, no matter how severe proves that your faith is genuine.
- Throughout the New Testament we are reminded of this over and over again. (1 Corinthians 15:2, Colossians 1:23, Hebrews 10:39)

John 8:31, Hebrews 3:14, 1 John 2:19

So the Bible clearly teaches us that if our faith is genuine it will persevere:

Eternal Security = Divine Sovereignty
Perseverance in faith = Human Responsibility

- Jesus is the great Shepherd, He does not lose sheep, and they have eternal life and never perish. (John 6:39-40, 10:28)
- If we are His true sheep we will listen to His voice, know and follow Him. (John 10:27-30)

1 John 5:4-5

A. Faith that works, resilient in trials.

Now in verses 2-12 James will show us how real faith deals with trials.

1. Real faith works to bring joy. (James 1:2)

“Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual we will not be able to count it all joy. If we live only for the present and forget the future then trials will make us bitter not better.”

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2. Real faith works to bring understanding. (James 1:3)

3. Real faith works to bring submission. (James 1:4)

4. Real faith works to bring trust. (James 1:5-8)

5. Real faith works to bring humility. (James 1:9-11)

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12)

B. Faith that works, resisting temptation.

James now turns his attention from trials to temptations. Actually the Greek word for both is the same. (peirazó) It is your response that determines which it is.

- A test on the outside may quickly become a temptation on the inside.
- Trials are permitted by God and call us to trust and obey.
- Temptations do not come from God at all and they call us to stop trusting Him and disobey.

So the question asked is where do temptations come from?

1. Real faith understands the nature of God. (James 1:13)
2. Real faith understands the fallen nature of man. (James 1:14)

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12)

In verse 15 James changes the metaphor to childbirth. He wants us to understand that no sin is an independent act but rather a process that can be beaten with the Lord’s help.

Downward Spiral of Sin

Desire	Emotions = feelings, longings
Deception	Mind = Rationalize & Justify
Disobedience	Will = You sin disobeying God
Death	Penalty = Spiritual death

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.” (James 1:16)

3. Real faith understands the character of God. (James 1:17)
 - a. God is good.
 - b. All the time.
4. Real faith understands the nature of the new birth. (James 1:18)

C. Faith that works, responding to truth.

At first glance this final section in the chapter looks like an untidy collection of random thoughts, but nothing could be further from the truth.

- James continues to develop the truth that the Word of God gave birth to us, found in verse eighteen.
 - You already know how powerful the Word of God is. Having experienced its power to give you life you now need to allow it to continue its transforming work.
 - One of the proofs of real saving faith is that you will continue to receive it, obey it and share it with others.
1. Receiving the Word of God. (James 1:19-20)

“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)

2. Obeying the Word of God. (James 1:22)

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.” (James 1:23–24)

“But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

(James 1:25)

3. Sharing the Word of God. (James 1:26)

“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (James 1:27)

How can I be sure I am a sheep?

Real sheep are not perfect, they make mistakes and sometimes those mistakes are very serious but when all is said and done the normal pattern of their life is described below.

1. Real sheep listen to His voice.
2. Real sheep know Him personally.
3. Real sheep are His disciples and follow Him.

