



Background information on the book of James

James

Welcome to what is probably the *oldest book in the NT!*

It was written by *James, the half-brother of Jesus*, at a time when the church was still within the general circle of Judaism, around 45-49 AD. He *addressed it to Jewish Christians* scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Many were enduring severe *persecution* for their faith in Christ, suffering at the hands of fellow-Jews who saw them as deserting from the true Jewish faith.

Being a Jew himself, James was very familiar with the OT, and his letter contains a large number of references to it. In fact he *quotes or refers to 17 OT books!* He also uses many phrases that echo statements made by Jesus in the Gospels, especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7).

The lessons James teaches are not for Jews only; they are relevant to *all* Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile in background, and whether living in the 1st century or the 21st.

There is no single theme running all the way through this letter. James seems to be tackling a whole range of practical Christian issues. We can identify ten of these and the breakdown of the book below is based on these ten topics.

1.	1:1-18	Trials and temptations
2.	1:19-27	Hearing and doing
3.	2:1-13	Favouritism forbidden
4.	2:14-26	Faith and actions
5.	3:1-12	Taming the tongue
6.	3:13 – 4:12	Wisdom: earthly and heavenly
7.	4:13-17	Boasting about tomorrow
8.	5:1-6	Warning to the rich
9.	5:7-12	The need for patience
10.	5:13-18	The prayer of faith

How to make the most of this Diggers study

- The Bible version being used as a basis for the series is the *New International Version (NIV)*. Try to bring a copy to the sessions as it is much easier if everybody has the same version as a starting point. But by all means use other versions alongside it for reference. You may, for example, have the *Good News Bible (GNB)*, the *New American Standard Bible (NASB)* or *The Message*.
- The letter of James is short, so try to *read the whole letter through* at least half a dozen times during the series. This will give you a balanced view of the book.
- *Before you come to each session read the passage to be studied—several times if possible.*

- Jot down your thoughts and observations as you go along so that you can come to the group with something to contribute.
- Read it with an eye to its practical application in everyday life.

JAMES

This short introduction to James is from *The Bible From Scratch* by Simon Jenkins, Lion Publishing, 1987.



THIS LETTER WAS WRITTEN BY JAMES.

James who?

WELL, THERE'S BEEN SOME DISAGREEMENT ABOUT THIS. BUT THE TRADITIONAL VIEW IS THAT IT WAS JAMES, THE YOUNGER BROTHER OF JESUS. DURING JESUS' LIFE, HE HAD THOUGHT JESUS WAS A RELIGIOUS NUT. BUT JESUS APPEARED TO HIM ALIVE AGAIN AFTER THE RESURRECTION, AND JAMES BECAME A BELIEVER. HE WENT ON TO LEAD THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.

THE HEART OF JAMES' BOOK IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FAITH AND ACTION (JAMES 2:14-26). SOME PEOPLE WERE DIVORCING FAITH FROM ACTIONS. THEY SAID -

What's important is what I believe inside. As long as I believe the right things, I can behave exactly as I want!

JAMES ATTACKED THIS - QUITE SAVAGELY. HE SAID TRUE FAITH ALWAYS SHOWS ITSELF IN THE WAY WE BEHAVE. HE GIVES AN EXAMPLE: WHAT GOOD IS IT TO SAY...

God bless you - eat well!

IF YOU DON'T GIVE A HUNGRY PERSON SOMETHING TO EAT?

SO, SAYS JAMES, FAITH AND ACTION SHOULDN'T BE DIVORCED - THEY NATURALLY WORK TOGETHER. HE SUMS IT UP BY SAYING:

“Faith without works is dead.”

JAMES 2:17

James then goes on to show how this 'active faith' works out in some very practical situations...

Prejudice against the poor (James 2:1-13)

Controlling the tongue (James 3:1-12)

The danger of riches (James 5:1-6)

