

JAMES: The Book of Practical Wisdom

Book of James is sometimes referred to as the “Proverbs of the New Testament”, and is considered by many as the most “practical” of all the books in the New Testament. Learning and putting into practice what the Holy Spirit via James has to teach us will be very valuable as we seek to become more like Christ!

“As the most practical book of the New Testament, James is as relevant today as it was in the first century. Its exhortations concerning trials and temptations, response to the Word, preferential treatment because of social status, control of the tongue, and lure of worldliness are strongly needed in the contemporary church” (Dr. Bruce Wilkinson).

Author:

James. But which James? Most scholars feel it is James, the half-brother of Jesus (refer to Mat 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 7:2-5; Acts 15, 21:18; I Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19, 2:9).

He suffered a violent martyr’s death prior to the fall of Jerusalem (apx. A.D. 62).

Date Written:

Most scholars feel that James was the first New Testament book written! Time written is around A.D. 46-49.

Target audience:

Most feel it was originally written to Jewish Christians, scattered across the eastern world. These Jewish believers were beset with problems that were testing their faith, and James was concerned that they were giving in to a variety of problems such as materialism, impatience, apathy, disunity, etc. As a leader of the church, James felt a responsibility to exhort and encourage them in their struggles of faith.

Theme and Purpose:

Throughout the letter (epistle) James develops the characteristics of true faith. The primary purpose of the letter not doctrinal or apologetic, but practical – examining our lives in terms of attitudes and actions. A genuine faith will produce real changes in a person’s conduct and character, and the absence of change is a symptom of a dead faith.

One suggested short theme is “Faith that Works”.

Tone of the Letter:

James does not beat around the bush – he tells it like it is. He writes concisely, authoritatively and uses 54 imperatives in only 108 verses. On the other hand, James refers to the readers as “brothers” 15 times and tempers the harshness with warmth and concern.

Survey of James (from “Talk through the New Testament” by Boa/Wilkinson):

James is an intensely practical manual on the outworking of true faith in everyday life. It explores Christian conduct from several perspectives and shifts abruptly from topic to topic. Faith perseveres under trial, resists temptations, responds to the Word, overcomes prejudice, produces good works, controls the tongue, manifests wisdom, submits to God rather than worldly pleasure, depends on God rather than wealth, and waits patiently for the return of the Lord. Biblical faith moves from ascent to actions, from words to work.

James is the “Proverbs of the New Testament” because it is written in the terse moralistic style of Wisdom literature. It is evident that James was profoundly influenced by the Old Testament (note: he alludes to 22 Old Testament books – especially the Wisdom literature) and by the Sermon on the Mount. But James’s impassioned preaching against inequity and social injustice also earned him the title of the “Amos of the New Testament”.

OUTLINE OF JAMES

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|-------------|--|-------------------|
| I. | The Test of Faith | 1:1-18 |
| | A. The Purpose of Tests | 1:1-12 |
| | B. The Source of Temptations | 1: 13-18 |
| II. | The Characteristics of Faith | 1:19 – 5:6 |
| | A. Faith Obeys the Word | 1:19-27 |
| | B. Faith Removes the Discriminations | 2:1-13 |
| | C. Faith Proves Itself by Works | 2:14-26 |
| | D. Faith Controls the Tongue | 3:1-12 |
| | E. Faith Produces Wisdom | 3:13-18 |
| | F. Faith Produces Humility | 4:1-12 |
| | G. Faith Produces Dependence on God | 4:13-5:6 |
| III. | The Triumph of Faith | 5:7-20 |
| | A. Faith Endures awaiting Christ’s Return | 5:7-12 |
| | B. Faith Prays for the Afflicted | 5:13-18 |
| | C. Faith Confronts the Erring Brother | 5:19-20 |

STUDY NOTES

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 - A. The Purpose of Tests** **1:1-12**

 - B. The Source of Temptations** **1: 13-18**

- II. The Characteristics of Faith** **1:19 – 5:6**
 - H. Faith Obeys the Word** **1:19-27**

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 - J. Faith Proves Itself by Works** **2:14-26**

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