

"THE BOOK OF JAMES"
TALK THE TALK BUT WALK THE WALK

Introduction To The Book Of James

INTRODUCTION

1. Not everybody who grows old, grows up; there is a vast difference between AGE and MATURITY
2. Ideally, the older we are, the more mature we should be; but too often the IDEAL does not become the REAL!
3. The result is problems--problems in personal lives, in homes, and in churches
 - a. Problems in these areas are caused by immaturity more than by anything else
 - b. If Christians would just grow up, they would become VICTORS instead of VICTIMS
4. **The Book of James** was written to help us understand and attain spiritual maturity:
 - a. **"...that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."** ([Jm 1:4](#))
 - b. Or as translated by J. B. Phillips: "...any you find you have become men of mature character, men of integrity with no weak spots."
5. With this lesson, we shall begin a series of expository lessons based upon The Epistle of James, which I hope will help us all to reach this goal of spiritual maturity!
6. Beginning a study of a book of the Bible is something like preparing for a trip...you like to know ahead of time:
 - a. Where you are going
 - b. What you can expect to see-- So perhaps the best way to launch a study of The Epistle of James is to answer some important questions

[The first question is...]

I. WHO WAS JAMES?

A. SEVERAL MEN BORE THIS NAME IN NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY...

1. **James, son of Zebedee and brother of John**
 - a. A fisherman, he was called by Christ - [Mt 4:17-22](#)
 - b. Together with John, they were nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" because of their impulsiveness - cf. [Mk 3:17](#) with Lk 9: 51-56
 - c. Killed by Herod in 44 A.D. - [Ac 12:1-2](#)
2. **James, son of Alphaeus**
 - a. Another of the apostles - [Mt 10:3](#); [Ac 1:12](#)
 - b. Very little is known about him
 - c. There is no indication that this James wrote the epistle
3. **James, father of Judas the apostle**
 - a. He is even more obscure
 - b. One of the few references to him is found in [Lk 6:16](#)
4. **James, the brother of our Lord**
 - a. He is the most likely candidate for the author of this epistle
 - b. Even though he humbly identifies himself only as **"a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"** ([Jm 1:1](#))
 - c. That Jesus had a brother named James is evident - [Mt 13:55](#)
 - 1) Who at first did not believe in Jesus - [Jn 7:5](#)
 - 2) But after the resurrection of Jesus and an appearance by Jesus to him, he became a disciple - [1Co 15:7](#); [Ac 1:14](#)
 - 3) Eventually becoming a leader of the church in Jerusalem - [Ga 2:9](#)
 - a) When Peter was delivered from prison, he sent a special message to James - [Ac 12:17](#)
 - b) He played an important role in the conference at Jerusalem - [Ac 15:13-33](#)
 - c) When Paul visited Jerusalem, it was to James that he brought greetings - [Ac 21:18-19](#)

B. WHAT KIND OF MAN WAS JAMES?

1. He must have been a deeply spiritual man to gain such prominence in the congregation at Jerusalem
2. Tradition tells us that he was a man of prayer
 - a. This may explain the emphasis on prayer in his letter
 - b. It was said that he prayed so much, his knees were as hard

as a camel's!

3. Again, tradition tells us that James was martyred in 62 A.D.
 - a. That he was cast down from the temple, and then beaten to death with clubs
 - b. That as he died, he likewise prayed "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

[It most likely this man who wrote the epistle bearing his name. The next question is...]

II. TO WHOM DID JAMES WRITE THIS EPISTLE?

A. "TO THE TWELVE TRIBES WHICH ARE SCATTERED ABROAD" ([Jm 1:1](#))

1. James wrote to Jews living outside the land of Palestine
 - a. "Twelve tribes" refers to people of Israel, the Jewish nation - [Ac 26:6-7](#)
 - b. Since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, many of the Jews were scattered throughout different nations - cf. [Ac 2:5-11](#)
2. James wrote his letter to Christian Jews
 - a. At least nineteen times he addresses them as "brethren"
 - b. That these were brethren "in the Lord" and not just brethren "in the flesh" is evident from [Jm 2:1](#)

B. IT IS LIKELY THAT MANY OF THESE CHRISTIAN JEWS WERE POOR AND OPPRESSED...

1. Being Jews, they would often be rejected by Gentiles
2. Being Christian Jews, they would also be rejected by many of their own countrymen
3. The letter indicates that most of these believers were poor, and some were being oppressed by the rich - [Jm 2:6-7](#)

[Another question is...]

III. WHY DID JAMES WRITE THIS EPISTLE?

A. THE EPISTLE SUGGESTS THAT PEOPLE WERE HAVING PROBLEMS IN THEIR PERSONAL LIVES AND IN THE CHURCH...

1. They were going through difficult trials
2. They were facing temptations to sin

3. They were hearers, but not necessarily doers
4. Some were catering to the rich, others were oppressed by the rich
5. Some were competing for positions in the church
6. Improper use of the tongue was a problem, as was worldliness
7. Some were straying from the faith

B. THESE PROBLEMS ARE NOT MUCH DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OFTEN BESETTING CONGREGATIONS TODAY!

1. Are there not in churches people who are suffering for one reason or another?
2. Are there not members who talk one way, but walk another?
3. Is not worldliness a serious problem?
4. Are there not Christians who cannot control their tongues?
-- It appears that James is dealing with very "up-to-date" problems!

C. BUT JAMES WAS NOT DISCUSSING AN ARRAY OF UNRELATED PROBLEMS...

1. All of these problems had a common cause: **SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY**
 - a. These Christians were in need of "growing up"
 - b. Look again at some the problems dealt with and you can see that each one of them is characteristic of little children:
 - 1) Impatience in difficulties - [Jm 1:1-4](#)
 - 2) Talking but not living the truth - [Jm 2:14ff](#)
 - 3) Lack of control over the tongue - [Jm 3:1ff](#)
 - 4) Fighting and coveting - [Jm 4:1ff](#)
 - 5) Collecting material "toys" - [Jm 5:1ff](#)
2. This gives us a strong hint as to the basic theme of this epistle: **MARKS OF MATURITY IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**
 - a. In fact, James uses the word "perfect" several times, a word that means "mature, complete"
 - b. By the expression "a perfect man" (3:2), James did not mean a sinless man, but rather one who is mature, balanced, one who is "grown-up"

D. AND SO JAMES WRITES TO FULFILL A GREAT NEED: THAT OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY...

1. Spiritual maturity is one of the greatest needs in churches today
 - a. God is looking for mature men and women to carry on His

work,

and sometimes all He can find are little children who cannot even get along with each other!

b. As one person said, "Too many churches are playpens for babies instead of workshops for adults."

2. James wrote to meet this need, so his epistle is very RELEVANT today!

[Finally, the last question to consider...]

IV. HOW CAN WE GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS EPISTLE?

A. FIRST, WE MUST BE "BORN AGAIN"...

1. Apart from spiritual birth there can be no spiritual maturity
2. James writes with assumption his readers have been born again
- [Jm 1:18](#)
3. This "rebirth" is brought about by obedience to the Word of God
([1Pe 1:22-23](#))
4. It involves being "born again of water and Spirit" ([Jn 3:5](#)), traditionally understood to refer to baptism (cf. [Mk 16:16](#); [Tit 3:5](#))
5. So to benefit the most of this study, we must have been born again through obedience to the truth (cf. [Ac 2:38-39](#))

B. SECOND, WE MUST HONESTLY EXAMINE OURSELVES IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S WORD...

1. James compares the Word of God to a mirror - [Jm 1:22ff](#)
2. As we study the Word...
 - a. We are looking into the divine mirror
 - b. And seeing ourselves as we really are
3. We must be honest about what we see and not merely glance at the image and walk away

C. THIRD, WE MUST "OBEY" WHAT GOD TEACHES, NO MATTER THE COST...

1. We must be "doers" of the Word, and not "hearers" only
2. The "blessing" does not come in STUDYING the Word, but in DOING the Word - [Jm 1:25](#)

D. FOURTH, WE MUST BE PREPARED FOR SOME EXTRA TRIALS AND TESTING...

1. Whenever we are serious about spiritual growth, the ENEMY gets

serious about opposing us!

2. But if you wish to develop patience, you should expect some trials - [Jm 1:3](#)
3. However, in the end it will be worth it! - [Jm 1:12](#)

E. FINALLY, WE MUST MEASURE OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH BY THE WORD OF GOD...

1. We should not measure ourselves by comparing ourselves to other Christians - cf. [2Co 10:12](#)
2. But by the WORD OF GOD, and by the SON OF GOD!

CONCLUSION

1. Remember, not everyone who grows old, grows up
 - a. There is often a vast difference between age and maturity
 - b. Just because a Christian has been saved 10, 20, or 60 years does not guarantee that he or she is mature in the Lord
2. Mature Christians are:
 - a. Happy Christians, despite the trials they face
 - b. Useful Christians, overcoming the temptations that cross their path
 - c. Christians who help encourage others and build their local churches

As we study The Epistle of James together, may we with God's help grow and mature together...

Note: Much of the material for this introduction was adapted heavily from **The Bible Exposition Commentary, Volume 2, by Warren W. Wiersbe, pages 334-337.**