

# JAMES

## Study Guide

### AUTHOR

The author names himself as James (James 1:1 – actual Hebrew name was Jacob), most likely the (half) brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:5; Mark 6:3). The oldest of Jesus' younger brothers, James was at first was a skeptic (Mark 3:20-21; John 7:5) but later became a key leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9) and a faithful martyr for the faith in A.D. 62 according to Josephus, the Jewish first century historian.

### DATE

Given that James was martyred in A.D. 62, it is safe to assume it was written before his death. Because the book is written to the "twelve tribes scattered" (James 1:1), it had to have been written long enough after Christ's life and resurrection for Jewish Christians to disburse to outlying locations. Content within the book hints that perhaps James wrote prior to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) which took place around A.D. 49. Therefore, we can conclude the letter was written between the early A.D. 40s – A.D. 62.

### ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

James is quite clear in his intended audience – Jewish Christians. The locations of these Jewish believers could include within Palestine, based on the reference in James 5:4 of a hired field laborer. In that time, only in Palestine would farmers employ hired labor rather than slaves. However, the mention of scattered twelve tribes strongly indicates Jewish believers scattered outside Palestine in Syria and Asia Minor, otherwise known as the Diaspora.

### LITERARY STRUCTURE & CHIASM

Similar to an epistle in some ways, it really fits more as an epistle designed for publication. Here is a basic outline of the book:

- Address & Greeting (1:1)
- Test of Faith (1:2-18)
- The Word in Practice (1:19 - 2:26)
- Worldliness in the Church (3:1 - 4:12)
- The Christian Life (4:13 – 5:11)
- Concluding Exhortations (5:12-20)

However, the book also contains a strongly Hebrew structuring called chiasm. Chiasm involves repeated words and themes set in such a way that the outline looks like more of an arrow, with the main point of the writing at the most indented point. Here is a simple example:

- A – The *Lord is God*
- B – The Lord is good
- C – **All good things come from the Lord**
- B<sup>1</sup> – How good the Lord is
- A<sup>1</sup> – *God is Lord*

We see a similar structure taking place within each of the chapters of James, but also of the book as a whole. Here is a different way to outline the book of James based on the chiasm structuring. Note that sometimes the secondary points (D', A') have similar topics, but are demonstrating the opposites of those topics.

- A. 1:2-8 – Trials, faith, steadfastness
- B. 1:9-27 – Suffering, patience, etc.
- C. 2:1-7 – Rich and “the poor man”
- D. 2:8-13 – Love, liberty, and mercy
- E. 2:14-26 – Justification [*dikaio*] & works
- F. 3:1-12 – The tongue
- E' 3:13-18 – Righteousness [*dikaiousune*], Wisdom, & works
- D' 4:1-12 – The members at war
- C' 4:13-5:6 – Rich & “the righteous one”
- B' 5:7-18 – Suffering, patience, coming judgment, fruit, etc.
- A' 5:19-21 – Wandering, sin, death

*Chiasm Outline by Jeff Meyers*

### **OBSERVATION WORDS**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ▪ Jesus                                   | ▪ Trials / Troubles / Suffering               |
| ▪ Holy Spirit                             | ▪ Temptation                                  |
| ▪ God                                     | ▪ Works / Actions / Good deeds (all synonyms) |
| ▪ Faith                                   | ▪ Tongue                                      |
| ▪ Wisdom                                  | ▪ Pray / Prayer                               |
| ▪ Unbelief / Double-minded (all synonyms) |   |

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did you learn about Jesus through this book?
  
- What did you learn about the Holy Spirit through this book?
  
- What did you learn about God through this book?
  
- What lesson did the Spirit highlight to you out of this book? How will you go about applying what you've learned? In what way(s) will your life look different as a result?
  
- Name the various topics James addresses and what do you learn about them? What specific instructions does James give to believers?
  
- Does James 2:19 and Romans 3:28 conflict with each other? Why or why not? Use the following verses to help guide your conclusion, and feel free to look up other verses to defend your answer.
  - Gal. 5:22
  
  - James 2:24
  
  - Eph. 2:8
  
  - Gal. 5:6

- How is judging others being critical of God's law (James 4:11-12)? What does James mean by judging others? How is this applied in modern day?

**KEY WORD:**

**KEY VERSE:**

**KEY CHAPTER:**