

JAMES

ADVANCED  
BIBLE  
STUDY  
SERIES

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*James*

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SAMPLE

## How the Advanced Bible Studies Series Courses Can Be Used

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The best place to start is with the course on “How to Study the Bible.” This course teaches the principles of how to interpret the Bible and how to study it effectively by means of some of the most important Bible study tools. The 2012 edition of the course is enlarged and improved.

The next course that we recommend is “Old Testament History and Geography,” which gives an overview of the Bible and how that each part fits together within the whole. The 2014 edition of this course is enlarged and improved.

After this we recommend The Four Gospels, then Acts.

After that we suggest studying the courses in whatever order best fits your need and interest or that of your class.

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## **About the Review Questions**

A lot of time and effort has gone into the creation of the review questions which are designed to draw the student's attention to the most important points of the lessons and to help him remember these points after the course is finished. Each question deals with things that the Bible student needs to keep in mind beyond the life of the course. The review questions go over all of the important points in the lessons, thus pointing the student's attention to the most significant material.

The questions help to focus the student's attention on the things that he should take away from the course and helps him remember these things by providing a means by which he can easily go back to test himself.

If you take the courses by yourself, don't skip over the very important review questions. Find someone who will test you and let them present the review questions to you. It is a very important part of the learning process.

For the classroom setting, the teacher can use the review questions (plus his own) to create appropriate sectional and final tests at the learning level desired.

SAMPLE

## Assignments

1. Each student is required to read the book of James four times.

As you read, have pen and paper at hand and write down any questions you have. These can be discussed at the teacher's discretion, or the student can search out the answers on his own. This will help develop the good habits, first, of thinking carefully about the text during Bible reading and, secondly, of searching for answers to things that are not understood. Each Bible student should make these his life-long habits. It is not enough to read the Bible; it must be understood, and that requires diligent study.

2. Memorize the following verses:

James 1:2-3, 12, 17, 19, 21, 22, 25; 2:5, 8, 17; 3:1, 8, 13, 15, 17; 4:4, 7, 10, 14, 17; 5:9

## Introduction to the General Epistles

1. The General Epistles are composed of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, and Jude. They are called the General Epistles because they are not addressed to any particular church or group of churches.
2. They have been called the “Hebrew Christian Epistles” but actually only two of them are addressed to Jewish believers. These are James and 1 Peter.
3. They are also called “Catholic Epistles” in the sense that they are of universal application.
4. In the ancient New Testament Greek manuscripts the General Epistles are commonly grouped together and in ancient versions they are placed between the book of Acts and the book of Revelation. For example, in the Waldensian Romaunt New Testaments the order of books is as follows: The Four Gospels, Paul’s Epistles (Romans to Hebrews), Acts, the General Epistles, and Revelation. I have had the privilege of examining two of the seven extant Waldensian New Testaments, the one at the Cambridge University Library and the one at Trinity College, Dublin.



# Introduction to James

## 1. The author of James' Epistle

The Greek word is *Iakobos*, which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name *Jaaqob*, who was the father of the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 49). The English equivalent is Jacob, James, or Jake.

a. James was the half-brother of Jesus (Mk. 6:3).

(1) The apostle James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, who is mentioned throughout the four Gospels, was put to death in Acts 12. Beginning in Acts 12:17, the James that is mentioned as a prominent leader in the church at Jerusalem is James the brother of Jesus, the author of this epistle.

(2) Mary had other children, but they did not believe in Jesus as the Christ during His earthly ministry (John 7:5). They even tried to restrain Jesus at one point (Mark 3:21, 31). Jude was also one of Jesus' half brothers and a full brother to James (Jude 1). Their conversion apparently came at the time of Jesus' resurrection appearances. Christ appeared personally to James (1 Cor. 15:7). By the time the believers gathered in the upper room to await the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' brothers were with them (Acts 1:13-14).

b. James was a leader in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; Gal. 2:1, 9, 10, 12; 21:18). It appears that James was highly respected in the church and was considered the senior pastor-elder. In the council in Acts 15, after the others had spoken, James assumed a position like that of a moderator or senior elder. He summarized what had been said, showed that it was in accordance with Scripture, and then gave his opinion as to what should be done. The other elders and apostles agreed and the matter was thus settled (Acts 15:13-22).

c. According to Josephus, James was martyred in A.D. 62. He was brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin by Ananus the high priest at Jerusalem, condemned as a breaker of the Law of Moses, and stoned to death.

d. We give no credence to the description of James by Hegesippus of the second century (died about A.D. 180), which is quoted by many commentators from the writings of Eusebius. Writing more than a century after the death of James, Hegesippus' description was far-fetched and colored by his heretical asceticism. He wrote: "James drank neither wine nor strong drink, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head; he never anointed himself with oil; and never used a bath. He never wore woolen, but only fine linen garments. He was in the habit of entering into the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, asking for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became hard like a camel's knees in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God." It should be obvious that an informed Christian Jew like James would not have been a vegetarian. Even before his conversion to faith in Christ, James would have abstained from forbidden meats such as pork, but he would have partaken of the Passover lamb at the very least. After his conversion, James would have had no reason to abstain from meat. He also would not have taken a Nazarite vow to let his hair grow long and to avoid the fruit of the vine. And certainly he would not have abstained from bathing! These are the types of things that the heretical ascetics associated with Rome practiced. Hegesippus believed in "apostolic succession" and was the first to embark on the ridiculous custom of tracing a list of "popes" from "St. Peter" to his time.

## 2. The date of the Epistle of James

This epistle is traditionally thought to have been written about 45 A.D. and is possibly the oldest book in the New Testament. It has a strong Jewish flavor, fitting for that period in church history, and there is no mention of anything pertaining to the decisions made at the great council at Jerusalem in Acts 15. As we have seen, in ancient New Testament manuscripts the book of James follows Acts.

## 3. The canonicity of the Epistle of James

John Gill gave the following summary of its acceptance into the canon of Scripture:

"Eusebius (c. 265-340) indeed says, that it had been accounted spurious by some, and that not many of the ancient writers had made mention of it: but he himself says, that it was publicly read in most churches; and certain it is, that some very

early writers have respect unto it [Ecclesiastical History, l. 3. c. 25]. Irenaeus manifestly refers to it [2nd century, Against Heresies, l. 5. c. 1], and so does Tertullian [3rd century, Adversus Judaeos, c. 2]; and it is expressly mentioned by Origen among the canonical books of Scripture [3rd century, Homil. 7. in Josuam, fol. 156. E]. The objections against it are of no weight, which are taken from the seeming disagreement between the Apostle Paul, and the writer of this epistle, concerning the doctrine of justification; and from his calling the law the perfect law of liberty, and insisting so much on the doctrine of works; all which will be seen to be agreeable to the other parts of Scripture, and easily reconciled with them; nor is there anything in it unworthy of an apostle and an inspired writer.”

#### 4. The recipients of the Epistle of James

a. It is addressed “*to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*” (Jam. 1:1). This refers to Jewish believers in Christ who were scattered because of persecution (Acts 8:1). For many years the churches were composed almost entirely of converted Jews. The mother church at Jerusalem was a Jewish church. The 3,000 that were saved on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41) and the multitudes that were added to the Jerusalem church later were Jews (Acts 5:14; 6:7). For some time the Jewish believers still congregated in the synagogues. James is the only New Testament epistle that uses the Greek word “sunagoge” (synagogue) (Jam. 2:2).

b. It took time for these Jewish believers to understand their new position in Christ and that the Gentiles had been placed into Christ on the same spiritual footing. God chose Paul to deliver the mystery of the “church” as one body (Eph. 3:3-6), and Paul had not yet started writing when the book of James was written. In Acts 10 God had to deal with Peter firmly to make him understand that the Gentiles were being accepted by grace (Acts 10:9-28). Even after this powerful experience many Jews were teaching that believing Gentiles had to be circumcised and to keep the Law (Acts 15:1, 5). The great council in Jerusalem was held to settle this matter, and the decision was made that the Gentiles are not under obligation to keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15:13-29), but the point was settled only after much disputation (Acts 15:7).

c. James’ letter was intended to encourage the Jewish believers in their trials. The epistle appears to have been written before the Acts 15 conference and before

Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch to establish Gentile churches and while the center of Christianity was still at Jerusalem where James was a leader. This was about 25 years before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies.

## 5. The interpretation of the Epistle of James

As we have seen, the book of James was written to Jewish believers in the early days of the church age. It was written during that transitional period before the Jews had learned the meaning of the church as the body of Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles. This does not mean, though, that James is only for Jewish believers, nor does it mean that it is God's will for Jewish believers to follow the Law of Moses as their rule of life.

The General Epistles cannot be separated from the Pauline Epistles. All of the New Testament Epistles are equally inspired and authoritative and all are necessary "*that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Peter, even though he was the apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7-8), exalted Paul's writings and called them Scripture (2 Peter 3:1-2, 15-16).

a. This refutes the error of Messianic Judaism which follows the Old Testament Pentateuch and intermingles law and grace. Paul taught us that the believer is not under the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:24-25). He taught that the law "written and engraven in stones" was a ministration of condemnation and death that is done away in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:7-11).

b. This refutes the error of hyper-dispensationalism that says the General Epistles are dispensationally different from Paul's Epistles. While James does not say everything that Paul said, everything that James says is written by divine inspiration and is profitable for all believers. None of what James or Peter wrote contradicts what Paul wrote. They preached the same gospel. See Acts 15 where they all agreed that salvation is by the grace of God alone through faith alone. James was the moderator of that meeting (Acts 15:13-22). (See "Study the Bible Dispensationally" at the Way of Life web site.)

## 6. The theme of the Epistle of James is three-fold:

a. A major theme of James is that true faith is evidenced by good works (James 2:20). Faith, so-called, that doesn't produce works is not true saving faith. This theme is repeated many times in James. In chapter one we learn that those who merely hear the Word of God and do not obey it, and those who seem to be religious but do not live accordingly, are deceived (Jam. 1:22, 26-27). This theme is seen in chapter 3 where James says the man who has true wisdom will "*shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom*" (Jam. 3:13). This theme is seen in the reminders that the believer has a law to live by. We are saved by grace without the law but we are saved to keep the law of God -- not the Law of Moses, but a new law in Christ. James calls it the "*law of liberty*" (Jam. 1:25; 2:12) and the "*royal law*" (Jam. 2:8). We will look at the meaning of these terms later in the studies on James, but the point here is that there is a law for the Christian to follow. We are not saved to sit; we are saved to serve. We are not saved to live as we please, but to live to please the Saviour.

b. Another major theme of James is patience in trials. The words "patience" and "patient" appear seven times (James 1:3, 4; 5:7, 8, 10, 11). The epistle begins and ends with the exhortation to be patient in suffering (Jam. 1:2-3; 5:10-11).

c. Another theme is Christian maturity. The word "perfect" appears six times (James 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 3:2). It means mature, complete. The word is defined in James 1:4 -- "*that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*." To be perfect as a Christian is to be lacking nothing that is necessary to please God. We see the same thing in 2 Timothy 3:17, "*That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*." To be perfect is to be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. James is burdened that those who profess Christ go on into spiritual maturity, and the epistle contains many lessons on how this can be accomplished.

## 7. The need for the Epistle of James today

Though James was written to Jewish believers in the early days of the church age, it is needed today as never before. We can understand its importance when we consider the condition of churches in our day, even of the staunchest, most fundamentalist, Bible-believing types of churches.

- a. Persecution and affliction is widespread among Christians in these last days. There is affliction from living in a wicked world and being opposed by the devil. There is persecution from unbelievers in general, from Cultists, from Muslims, from Hindus, from Communists, from Homosexual activists, from Atheists, from Evolutionists. James addresses this matter in its theme of patience in trials.
- b. Immaturity is rampant among professing Christians today. There are multitudes of people who profess Christ but who remain babes in their knowledge of the Scripture and in scriptural maturity. They are like those to whom James addressed his epistle. They doubt God during trials; they are not strong in God's Word; they have carnal divisions and strife; they love the world. James addresses the issue of immaturity with the theme of going on to spiritual perfection.
- c. "Easy Believism"\* is rampant today. Multitudes claim to be saved when there is nothing in their lives to show it. Multitudes are on the church rolls as members, but they live like the Devil and never darken the doors of the assembly. James addresses this with its theme that true faith is evidenced by good works. (\* I prefer to call this "quick prayerism," because the term "easy believing" gives the wrong impression. Believing is what God requires for salvation and it is not difficult. Quick Prayerism is the evangelistic methodology that is quick to get people to "receive Christ" or "pray a sinner's prayer" even when there is no evidence that they have had a change of heart toward God and is quick to give them "assurance of salvation" even when there is no evidence that they have not been born again.)
- d. Biblical ignorance and shallowness is widespread among professing Christians today. Even in the staunchest Bible-believing churches the average church member typically lacks a strong knowledge of the Scripture and does not have a fruitful and consistent daily Bible study habit. The average Christian knows more about sports and video games and pop songs and romance novels and American idols and Hollywood movies and television serials and other vanities than he knows about the Bible. James addresses this by emphasizing the power and necessity of God's Word (Jam. 1:21-25).

e. Worldliness is widespread among professing Christians today. Christians rock out like the world and dress indecently like the world and have the same love of sports and other vanities as the world and are addicted to Hollywood like the world and have the same philosophy of toleration as the world. James addresses this by emphasizing the evil of worldliness (Jam. 4:4-10).

f. Unwholesome speech is rampant among professing Christians in our day. *Christianity Today* has reported on the way that many evangelicals use curse words. Many Contemporary Christian musicians use such words. Mark Driscoll of Seattle is called the “cussing pastor” in the book *Blue Like Jazz*. Many Christians even use the Lord’s name in vain (“Well, Lordy, can you believe that”; “Oh, God, would you look at that”; “My God, I can’t believe that”; “Jesus, that’s amazing”; “Lord, have mercy, isn’t that something!”). James addresses this by emphasizing the necessity of taming the tongue (Jam. 3:1-12).

g. Christians today are caught up in this present life, in making money and seeking comfort and being enraptured by entertainment, and we need rather to lift up our eyes and to get into the spiritual battle in a more earnest way and be fruitful for Christ and thus be ready for His return. James addresses this by emphasizing the imminent return of Christ (Jam. 5:8-9).

## 8. References to the Old Testament in the Epistle of James

There are four direct quotations from the Old Testament:

James 2:8 -- Leviticus 19:18

James 2:11 -- Exodus 20:13-14

James 2:23 -- Genesis 15:6; Isaiah 41:8

James 4:6 -- Proverbs 3:34

There are also at least 54 other references to the Old Testament, which is one for every two verses. The mind of James was saturated with the Jewish Scriptures so completely that his belief and utterances are rooted in them. “His references are traceable to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah,

Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Zechariah; and there may be references to other O.T. books” (Scroggie).

## 9. An outline of the Epistle of James

There are several ways to outline the book. Following are two examples:

In *The Annotated Bible* Arno Gaebelein outlined the book according to the theme of Patience. I. Exhortations to patience in suffering God’s will (Jam. 1:1-18). II. Exhortation to patience in doing God’s will (Jam. 1:19 - 4:17). III. Exhortation to patience in awaiting God’s will (Jam. 5:1-20).

In *Explore the Book* J. Sidlow Baxter outlined the book according to the theme of Proofs of Faith. I. Endurance of temptation (Jam. 1). II. Impartial benevolence (Jam. 2). III. Control of the Tongue (Jam. 3). IV. Godliness in all things (Jam. 4-5).

I have decided not to try to arrange the book’s teaching into a formal outline but rather to consider each individual exhortation separately. I believe that by this method we will be less likely to force the text into a preconceived meaning.

### I. Introduction (Jam. 1:1)

### II. Miscellaneous Exhortations (Jam. 1:2 - 5:20)

- Be patient in trials (Jam. 1:2-12)
- Be strong in temptation (Jam. 1:13-18)
- Be doers of the Word (Jam. 1:19-27)
- Do not have respect of persons (Jam. 2:1-13)
- Faith without works is dead (Jam. 2:14-26)
- The power of the tongue (Jam. 3:1-12)
- The wisdom from above vs. the wisdom from below (Jam. 3:13-18)
- Spiritual adultery is reproved and revival commended (Jam. 4:1-10)
- Evil speaking is reproved (Jam. 4:11-12)
- Boasting is reproved (Jam. 4:13-17)



- The rich are warned (Jam. 5:1-6)
- The brethren are encouraged (Jam. 5:7-11)
- Swearing is reprovved (Jam. 5:12)
- The sick and afflicted are instructed (Jam. 5:13-18)
- Effectual prayer is described (Jam. 5:16-18)
- The conversion of sinners is commended (Jam. 5:19-20)

## 10. Various statements about the Epistle of James

“It might be described as the Christian book of Proverbs. It is strikingly fresh and vivid; the writer is rich in illustrations which are always appropriate and impressive. A vein of poetry pervades it, so that it may almost be considered as a prose poem” (Dr. Gloag, quoted from W. Graham Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*).

“It is well known that Martin Luther had problems with this book. He called it a ‘right strawy epistle.’ But it is only ‘strawy’ to the degree it is ‘stickly.’ There are enough needles in this haystack to prick the conscience of every dull, defeated, and degenerated Christian in the world. Here is a ‘right stirring epistle’ designed to exhort and encourage, to challenge and convict, to rebuke and revive, to describe practical holiness and drive believers toward the goal of a faith that works. James is severely ethical and refreshingly practical” (J. Ronald Blue, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

“Due to its practical nature, this epistle has been compared to the Book of Proverbs as well as to the Sermon on the Mount. James argues that justification by faith is demonstrated by works; it must be poured into the test tube of works (ch. 1–2), of words (ch. 3), of worldliness (ch. 4), and of a warning to the rich (ch. 5)” (J. Vernon McGee).

## REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE INTRODUCTION TO JAMES

1. What seven books of the New Testament make up the General Epistles?
2. In ancient Bible versions the General Epistles follow what book?
3. What is another English equivalent of the Greek word translated James?

4. What verse says that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him during His earthly ministry?
5. What other author of a New Testament epistle was the brother of James?
6. In what chapter of Acts does James act as the senior elder at a council of the church at Jerusalem?
7. What historian recorded the death of James?
8. The description of James by Hegesippus in the second century was colored by his heretical \_\_\_\_\_.
9. What was the Old Testament vow that required that men not cut their hair?
10. Written about 45 A.D., James is possibly the \_\_\_\_\_ book in the New Testament.
11. James does not mention anything pertaining to the decisions made at the great \_\_\_\_\_ at Jerusalem.
12. What early Christian writer said that the epistle of James was publicly read in most churches?
13. To whom is the epistle of James addressed?
14. What mystery did Paul reveal in Ephesians?
15. How many of Paul's epistles had been written when James wrote his?
16. The council in Jerusalem in Acts decided that the Gentiles are not under obligation to keep the \_\_\_\_\_.
17. In what book and chapter did Peter exalt Paul's writings, calling them Scripture?
18. What book and chapter says the law of Moses was a ministration of condemnation that is done away in Christ?
- 19-21. What is the three-fold theme of James?
- 22-24. What are three reasons why we need the epistle of James today?
25. How many times does James directly quote from the Old Testament?

## James' Opening Statement

### James 1:1

1. James called himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. This speaks of Christ's Deity. If Jesus were not God it would be idolatrous for James to say that he was a servant of God and also of Jesus Christ. Anytime God and Jesus Christ are included together like this, the Bible is telling us that they are equal. No mere man could be spoken of in direct connection with God. Four times in Isaiah the Bible says there is no God beside the Creator Jehovah God (Isa. 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21). Exodus 34:14 says, "*For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*"

(1) Jesus claimed to be God (John 10:30-33).

(2) Jesus accepted worship as God. Six times in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus accepted worship (Mat. 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9). Thomas worshipped Christ and called Him God (John 20:28). Unlike the elect angels and the apostles who refused to accept worship (Acts 14:11-15; Rev. 19:10), not once did Jesus refuse it. The Bible teaches that it is idolatry and wickedness to worship anyone or anything other than the one true and living God (Ex. 20:3-5; 34:14; Isa. 42:8; Mat. 4:10). Therefore, the fact that Jesus accepted worship is indisputable evidence that he is Almighty God.

(3) Jesus is called God many times in the New Testament Epistles. See Philippians 2:5-6; Colossians 1:15-17; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8-9; 1 John 5:18. (For more on this see "Who Says Jesus Is God" at the Way of Life web site.)

b. James does not mention his natural relationship as the half-brother of Jesus. Paul said that natural relationships will be done away in Christ (2 Cor. 5:15-17). This shows the gross error of Rome's doctrine of Mary. Though she is the mother of Jesus, that special relationship is not eternal. Jesus gave her away to John when He was on the cross (John 19:26-27). Never in the epistles is Mary referred to as Jesus' mother, and certainly not as the Mother of God or the Queen of Heaven or the Ever-Virgin or the Immaculate. Even in His incarnation, Jesus

downplayed his relationship with Mary and exalted the spiritual relationship above the physical (Mat. 12:46-50).

c. James called himself a servant. The believer has many different relationships with God by means of his redemption in Christ. He is an adopted son (Gal. 3:26), a part of the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:24-27), a member of Christ's body (Eph. 5:31), a friend of Christ (John 15:15), and a priest (1 Pet. 2:5). But even though the believer has such an exalted standing in Christ, he is still called God's servant. This servant-master relationship will exist throughout eternity (Rev. 22:3).

(1) We are made to serve God (Ecc. 12:13). Sin separated us from God and made it impossible for us to serve God acceptably in holiness. We have broken His laws and our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags before a thrice holy God (Isa. 64:6).

(2) By believing in Jesus Christ and trusting Him as Lord and Saviour we are washed from our sins and justified by His blood so that we can serve God acceptably. The word "justified" means to be declared righteous by God on the basis of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

(3) Being the servant of God through Jesus Christ is a description of the Christian life in a nutshell. Paul often described himself as a servant of Christ (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). So did Peter (2 Pet. 1:1) and Jude (Jude 1). This is the basic meaning of the term "disciple." It refers to one who obeys the teaching of a Master. The term "disciple" is used many times in the New Testament to describe the believer, and Christ said that a true disciple continues in His Word (John 8:31). No one has the right to claim to be a Christian if he does not keep God's Word. It is not by keeping God's Word that we become a Christian; but keeping God's Word is the evidence and fruit of believing in Christ in a saving manner. See 1 John 2:3-4. We are not saved to sit around and to do our own will; we are saved to serve God and to do His will and to accomplish His purposes in this present time. We are saved to bring forth fruit to the glory of God (John 15:1, 2, 16).

2. James addressed the epistle to the twelve tribes scattered abroad.