

James

Summary

The book of James was directed to Jewish Christians, but it spread to the Gentile communities outside of Palestine. James writes to encourage readers to continue growing in their faith, especially since it was such a new experience for them. He emphasizes that the right behavior and good actions flow from having a true and close relationship with Jesus. Good deeds and faith must go together and be consistent, even in the storms and stresses of life. This letter has advice similar to that found in Proverbs, as it gives important guidelines for conduct in daily life. It especially stresses the importance of seeking wisdom from God.

Author

The James that wrote this particular letter is the brother of Jesus. He was doubtful about Jesus being the Messiah (see John 7:5) until he personally met him after the resurrection. James went on to serve as the first head of the church in Jerusalem.

Date

This book was one of the earliest written in the New Testament, most likely between A.D. 45-49. The Jerusalem Council was held in A.D. 50, and there are indicators throughout the book that suggest it had not yet occurred.

Primary Characters

James (James 1-5)

Historical Moments

James Writes His Letter to Jewish Converts (James 1-5)

Major Theological Themes

Fallen Human Nature - God does not tempt us; our own flesh and sinful nature tempts us. When we are tempted and when we face various trials, we must persevere; in doing so, we please Him and receive the crown of life that He offers in the end.

Emulating Christ's Character - As followers of Jesus, we must be careful to behave in a manner that emulates His example. We each control our own speech and behavior so as to demonstrate His love in life's daily interactions. Mercy, not judgment, comes from having a right relationship and right understanding of God's character.

Submission to God - We submit to God and resist the devil. As we do, He gives us wisdom that guides us and gives us the strength to overcome trials and temptations. This wisdom is different from worldly wisdom, which cannot provide answers that satisfy.

God Cares About the Downtrodden - James warns that oppressing the poor is displeasing to God and will result in misery to the oppressors. At times we must wait for answers, direction, and relief in our difficulties. While this is hard to do, God promises we will receive His compassion and mercy.

Prayer - We are encouraged to pray and rejoice in all circumstances and situations. Healing often comes from faithful prayers to God and for each other. This should be a large part of our community life.

Lessons Learned from James

Faith Without Works Is Dead - We do not do works to earn God's favor; instead, we grow strong in faith, and then an increasing desire to help others will follow. This pleases God. If we are not seeking to do good works, it can be a sign that our inner life with Jesus is lacking or undeveloped.

Our Speech Must Honor God - *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing (James 3:10).* Blessings are a solid witness to Jesus living in us, but curses cause great damage to others and to our witness for Christ.

Prayer Is Important - In faith, we pray in all circumstances, offer our lives to God in humble submission, and stand firm in our struggles. By standing firm in struggles, we develop greater perseverance and patience, trusting God to hold us close even in persecution.