RESOURCES

Encountering the New Testament - Walter A. Elwell | Robert W. Yarbrough

James and John - Simon J. Kistemaker

The IVP Bible Background Commentary - New Testament - Craig S. Keener

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Calvary Chapel Lynchburg presents

THROUGH THE BIBLE

with Pastor Troy Warner

MY NOTES

JAMES

While he would go on to be a pillar of the Church and leader of the Jerusalem Christians, Jesus' younger brother did not receive Him during His ministry. James even tried to call Jesus back from His work several times and eventually confronted Him harshly in his home. But after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to him personally, and from then on, James was all in. The same scrappy attitude that kept this construction worker from accepting his brother too easily would be put to great use in the Kingdom of God. The letter of James is extremely practical. While Paul spends extensive time laying down a masterful doctrinal foundation, James is quick and to the point. His impatience with hypocrisy and halfway commitment can look at first blush like a contradiction to Paul, but this is not so. James was the hard-nosed commander the Church needed in its first years, and that we still need today.

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About James

Author: James

Date: Early date ca. 40-45 AD

Late date ca. 60-62 AD

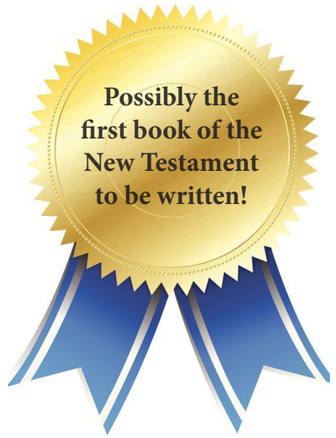
Genre: Epistle

Purpose: To exhort believers to live a life of joy, good works, holiness, and perseverance.

Characteristics: Very straightforward and authoritative. The diverse teachings in James are extremely practical and concise.

Outline

I. Introduction **(1:1)**
II. How to Go Through Trials **(1:2-12)**
III. Resisting Temptation **(1:13-18)**
IV. Real Religion **(1:19-27)**
V. The Royal Law **(2:1-13)**
VI. Real Faith **(2:14-26)**
VII. The Believer's Speech **(3:1-12)**
VIII. Heavenly Wisdom Versus Earthly Wisdom **(3:13-18)**
IX. Why Relationships Go Bad **(4:1-12)**
X. The Pride of Self-Sufficiency **(4:13-17)**
XI. God Will Judge **(5:1-12)**
XII. The Power of Prayer **(5:13-18)**
XIII. The Reward of Turning a Sinner to God **(5:19-20)**



James is often called the "Proverbs of the New Testament"

Who Was James?

It is highly likely, and traditionally accepted, that this letter was penned by James, the half-brother of Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary. He is mentioned three times in the New Testament as being the brother of the Lord (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3, Galatians 1:19). We know from the gospels that Jesus' family, particularly His brothers, initially rejected His ministry (John 7:5). However, 1 Corinthians 15:7 says that Jesus personally appeared to James after the resurrection. We can only assume that, after this appearance, James became a born again believer. He and his family were present with the disciples in the upper room in Acts 1:14. James eventually became a leader in the early church and presided over the Jerusalem Counsel in Acts 15. Interestingly, James doesn't mention any of this in his letter. He simply identifies himself as: "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." How much more this statement must have meant to the man who once rejected his brother, the Messiah, now to name himself as His bondservant! Scripture is silent on how James died; however, tradition tells us he was martyred in Jerusalem by being thrown from the top of the Temple. After surviving the fall, he was beaten to death with clubs while praying the same prayer his brother prayed years before, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Anointing Oil

Have you ever wondered why the church anoints with oil those who are sick? It is simply done in obedience to James 5:14-15, which states, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up." This is something we see practiced by the disciples, presumably under instructions from Jesus, in Mark 6:13. With the whole scope of scripture in view, this certainly is not stating that it is the Lord's will to heal everyone every time. However, the message is clear: if you are sick, come to the leadership of the church to receive prayer and be anointed with oil, that the prayer of faith might bring about healing.

James and the Sermon on the Mount

There are many parallels and allusions to the Sermon on the Mount in James' epistle. Below is a chart looking at some of the similarities:

Subject	James	Sermon on the Mount
Joy in the midst of trials	James 1:2	Matthew 5:10-12
The importance of prayer	James 1:5, 4:3, 5:13-18	Matthew 6:6-13, 7:7-12
Doers of the Word	James 1:22	Matthew 7:24
Poor as heirs of the kingdom	James 2:5	Matthew 5:3
The Royal Law	James 2:8	Matthew 7:12
Peacemakers	James 3:18	Matthew 5:9
Judging others	James 4:11-12	Matthew 7:1-5
Rusted treasure	James 5:2	Matthew 6:19

Chart adapted from *Believer's Study Bible; Believer's Bible Commentary; The Bible Exposition Commentary*

Questions to Think About

1.) James opens his letter by exhorting believers to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." What is your response when you experience trials? Do you count it as joy knowing that the Lord is at work in your life?

2.) Some people see a contradiction between Paul's teaching of "justification through faith" and James' teaching of "faith without works is dead." How do these two clear teachings of the New Testament reconcile with one another?

3.) One of the themes James brings up a number of times is how a believer should speak (1:19, 3:1-12, 5:9, 12). Does your speech reflect a sanctified life?

Through the Bible – James

James vs. Paul by Tyler Warner

Introduction

The book of James gets a lot of grief, especially when it comes to his teaching on salvation. He seems to be at odds with Paul and the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, and many, even prominent believers have had a problem with that. Martin Luther referred to it as "an epistle of straw" for its emphasis on works. Critics of the Bible claim that the theologies of Paul and James are irreconcilable. But this is not the case. While the emphasis is different in the book of James than say, Galatians, it is not a matter of substance but of stress – what needed to be said at the time. Together, the two give us a full, balanced picture of salvation.

James' Thesis

James emphasizes righteous works in his letter. He says in 2:14, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" He goes on to give examples of hypocritical lip-service that have no real-world demonstration. He does not denigrate faith, but he insists that faith be lived out. "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). And of course, there's his famous statement: "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20, 26).

Interestingly, he uses Paul's favorite verse to prove a very different point. Genesis 15:6 says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." James does not emphasize the belief itself in this verse, but the context, where Abraham had been willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. So, James might say that it was the demonstration of his faith that was accounted as righteousness. As the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, it makes sense that James would emphasize real righteousness instead of faux-faith. Doubtless, surrounded by the same pervasive hypocrisy that his Brother had dealt with, James needed to develop a robust theology of righteous deeds done in tandem with true faith, and we see that in the epistle that bears his name.

Paul's Antithesis

Now, when we hear these verses and arguments from James, we might shift uncomfortably in our seats. Isn't salvation by faith alone? All through Romans and Galatians and Ephesians and the rest, Paul teaches us that we cannot save ourselves by our works, and it's only through faith that we receive the grace of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Isn't that the exact opposite of what James taught? How can he say that our faith needs works to be any good?

Paul also uses Genesis 15:6, but to teach a different lesson. "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (Romans 4:2-4). He goes on to talk about promises and free gifts. Salvation can only come by grace, and if we think we can earn it by our works, we are mistaken. As the apostle to the Gentiles and the fierce opponent of the Judaizers, Paul's message was one of liberation from dead ritual.

So, who's right?

Biblical Synthesis

This issue has the reputation of being one of the most difficult in the Bible to solve. Opponents view it as proof positive that the writers of Scripture were not inspired by the same Spirit, but rather squabbling theologians, each with their own ideas. Even Christians worry about this and can end up marginalizing one apostle or the other (usually James) to maintain a system that is easier to understand. But this is not acceptable. We do not have a "canon within the canon", where certain authors are more inspired or authoritative than others. Paul does not trump James; the fact that he wrote more Scripture does not give him a leg up over the shorter epistle. So, we are not looking to figure out who is right, but to understand how the two emphases complement each other.

When viewed that way – as differences of emphasis, not of substance – this problem is not so bad. Paul wrote strongly about salvation as a gift. We cannot earn the grace of God, and our works do not increase or decrease our standing before Him. James emphasized the need for faith to be lived out and demonstrated. The person who claims to have faith and yet experiences no change, no life transformation, has useless religion. Both of these things are true. Even James acknowledged the sovereign grace of God: "Of [God's] own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). And Paul knew the importance of righteous works to the life of a believer: "[Jesus Christ] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). When you lay it out like that, the differences don't really amount to much.

Conclusion

The Bible often gives us strong truths that seem to be opposites. But together, they present a complete Gospel that keeps us centered. Sometimes we need to hear comfort from Paul and be reminded that we don't have to earn our salvation. Other times we need a strong exhortation from James, who reminds us that faith without works is dead. If we can come to the Bible with humility and a willingness to be taught, we won't get hung up on things like this. Our aim should be to learn the whole Bible, and come to appreciate the individual glory of each book and verse.