

LESSON 1



FAITH IN ACTION: AN OVERVIEW OF JAMES

Greetings: Even though there are no red letters, the book of James *may* be the most “Christ-spoken” New Testament book of all the epistles. Why is that? {*Show how many scriptures from James line up with the words of Jesus, especially from the Sermon on the Mount.*}

JAMES, a bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings. **James 1:1**

Use this first verse as a key to unlock the treasures in understanding the overall book of James. Lesson 1 is designed to highlight the overall letter and **James 1:1**, broken up into 4 segments, is simply used as a launching pad to help in this overview.

In the first segment, we identify who this James is. In **1:1b** the lesson identifies James as a servant of the Lord. The many instructions from this book, much like those in the Sermon on the Mount, are not an easy “task” for one to check off; but the reader is expected to hear and obey God’s perfect words of wisdom as a devoted and mature servant of our King Jesus.

1:1c shines the light of the church being dispersed, or scattered abroad, like seed that will be planted throughout the world. This implies our growing to completion—not in spite of, but because of the various trials we encounter.

And finally, we get to the book’s greetings. The greetings part of James invites us to rejoice in these trials as our faith is put into action.

JAMES...

- James, the apostle and brother of John? No, he was executed too early. (Acts 12)
- James, son of Alphaeus? But this apostle James is not mentioned after Pentecost and the N.T. epistles written by apostles identified as such.
- James, father of the apostle Judas (not Iscariot)? (Luke 6:16) No, certainly not this James, of which very little is known.
- James, the brother of Jesus and second oldest son of Joseph and Mary? (Mark 6:3) Yes! This James makes the most sense and is the most likely author.

The brother who initially lacked faith.

- James did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah until *after* the resurrection.
 - He thought Jesus *has lost His senses*. **Mark 3:21, 31-35**
 - He pushed Jesus to do miraculous works. **John 7:3-10**

- Thus, the apostle John, NOT his half-brother James, was asked to look after Jesus's mother when Jesus died. (Pre-eminence of spiritual family)
John 19:26-27
- James transforms into a man of faith, leadership, and prayer.
 - The resurrection of Christ radically changes the reality of James. (I Corinthians 15:7; Acts 1:14)
 - James matures as a pillar and leader in Jerusalem. (Galatians 2:9, Acts 12:17, 15:13ff, 21:17-18)
 - James "the Just" was historically known as a man of prayer. (James 5:13-18.) "James was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people...his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constant bending them in his worship of God and asking forgiveness for the people." (Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History, Book II*)

...A BOND SERVANT OF GOD AND OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST...

- Why does James use bond-servant language?
 - Christians are born again. We were slaves to sin but now to Christ/ righteousness.
 - "God's servant" is not a new concept. James (Jacob) in the O.T. was one of the first to be identified as such (Deuteronomy 9:27) as well as the prophets of old: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos Zechariah, Malachi.
- For James, the example of being the Lord's servant will help in fulfilling the royal law (the law of King Jesus).
 - The book of James is full of imperatives, or commands, in the Greek.
 - There are over 50 imperatives in James! What does this mean for us?
- James is the Nike book of the New Testament: JUST DO IT!
 - But our Lord is not Nike (the winged goddess of victory). We submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Victor and Rewarder. **1:12**
 - James strings together thoughts our Lord Jesus Christ spoke and, as servants, we are through endurance to be perfect...*telion*. **James 1:4, Colossians 1:28**

...TO THE TWELVE TRIBES WHO ARE DISPERSED ABROAD...

- The dispersion/scattering of the Jews is found in both New and Old Testaments.
 - New Testament Jewish Christians scattered due to persecution. **Acts 8:5**
 - Old Testament Jews scattered, yet many would later become disciples.
 - ✓ The Northern Kingdom with Samaria as capital was conquered by Assyrians and carried away.
 - ✓ Babylonians conquered the Southern Kingdom and Jerusalem.



- ✓ Pompey conquered Jews in 63 BC and took many to Rome.
 - Jacob (James) acts as a father figure from Jerusalem giving the 12 tribes (true Israel) a perfect gift from above—the Word of God.
- Having been scattered presented many trials. Note that the words trial and temptation come from the same Greek word, meaning “pressure”.
 - Trials can come from God, which would be the test. (Genesis 22)
 - Trials/temptations can come from Satan. (Matthew 4)
 - Trials can be brought on by our own choices. (James 1)
 - Life itself is short and full of trouble (trials). (Job 14)
- James writes through the lens of trials beginning in **James 1:1-16** and bookmarks facing one’s trials in **James 5** with patience and prayer. “Because we are God’s *scattered people* and not God’s *sheltered people*, we must experience trials.” (Warren W. Wierse in *Be Mature*)
- Having been dispersed abroad also implies we act as seed in how we *speak* and so *act*.
 - Seed scattered. **1:1**
 - Seed implanted. **1:21**
 - Seed produces righteous fruit. **3:18**
 - Through patience and endurance, we become precious produce. **5:7**
 - This seed illustrates the book of James for our lives. Be patient, asking God through prayer for one’s blessed reward.

...GREETINGS

- James is the only New Testament author to use this type of salutation.
 - ✓ **James 1:1**
 - ✓ **Acts 15:23** (This book uses *brethren* and the *Lord Jesus Christ*) which is another connection to James from Jerusalem and the brother of Jesus.
 - ✓ Greetings is the same word as “to rejoice”—*charein*.
- This rejoicing is an invitation to join the life of **Faith in Action** and receive the crown.

□ Faith in Action Endures Trials	1: 2-12
□ Faith in Action Stands on the Word	1:13-26
□ Faith in Action Seeks to Love Others	2:1-13
□ Faith in Action Results in Good Deeds	2:14-26
□ Faith in Action Is Mindful of the Tongue	3:1-12
□ Faith in Action Seeks Wisdom from Above	3:13-18
□ Faith in Action Does Not Love the World	4:1-6
□ Faith in Action Submits to God’s Will	4:7-17
□ Faith in Action Is Charitable with Resources	5:1-6



- Faith in Action **Is Patient** 5:7-12
- Faith in Action **Prays Always** 5:13-20

Discussion Questions:

- ❖ Why do you think James does not introduce himself as Jesus's brother?
- ❖ How can James's faith journey—starting with unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah to a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ—encourage us and others in our faith walk?
- ❖ What is a bond servant, and why do you think James uses this description as his identification?
- ❖ Why would the early church be identified as “scattered seed”?
- ❖ What kind of trials did the early church face? What trials and temptations do we still encounter today as they did in the first century? Are there some trials that we have today which the first century Christians did not face?
- ❖ Why do you think there are so many thoughts/words/phrases that James wrote in his epistle that correlate with what Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount?
- ❖ What does **Faith in Action** mean to you? What are some ways to put our faith into action this week?
- ❖ How can we plan to get the most out of this study?

Prayer

