



ST ANDREWS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Kerang

FAITH AND DEEDS

A BIBLE STUDY FROM JAMES

INTRODUCTION

READ JAMES 1:1-2

1. AUTHOR

The general consensus among scholars of the Bible is that James was the eldest brother of Jesus Christ (see *MAT 13:55, GAL 1:19*). At first he did not believe in Jesus to be the Christ, and even challenged Him and misunderstood his mission (see *JOHN 7:2-5*). Later he became a very prominent leader in the church in Jerusalem. He was however not one of the Twelve Apostles.

READ *1CORINTHIANS 15:7*. What would the impact of this event have been on James?

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READ *GALATIANS 2:9*. What in this verse leaves us to believe that James was a prominent leader in the church?

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READ *GALATIANS 1:19*. Why would Paul visit James and not see the other apostles?

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READ *ACTS 21:18*. James was one of the last people Paul saw before he was arrested and taken to Rome. Why would this be significant?

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READ *ACTS 12:17*. Peter requested that his miraculous rescue from jail be reported to James. Why?

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READ *ACTS 15:13*. What do we deduce from this text in terms of James' position in the Jerusalem church?

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READ *JUDE 1*. Jude identified himself as the brother of James with no further explanation. Why is this significant?

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If anyone could be seen as the "pope" of the early church, it was James. What James said/wrote should therefore be seen as weight-bearing. His letter is indeed Spirit-breathed and God-inspired.

2. DATE

There is some dispute among the scholars about the date of the letter. The majority, following the most logical arguments, date it as one of the oldest New Testament writings, probably written at the same time, if not just before, the letter to the Galatians, about 40 A.D.

3. RECIPIENTS

READ JAMES 1:1

James writes to the Jewish Christians, now scattered “among the nations”.

READ ACTS 7:59-8:4. What happened to the believers after the stoning death of Stephen?

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READ JAMES 2:1. What happened to these former Jews so that James calls them “brothers”?

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The fact that this letter was written quite early in church history before the issue of receiving people of non-Jewish background in the fellowship of the church, and the fact that it was received by those who were once Jews but now became followers of Jesus Christ, explains:

- *the obvious “Jewish” nature of the letter:* it emphasises deeds (works) which must follow faith, because without works, faith is dead.

But, we cannot understand the message of the Old Testament as if those saved under the old dispensation were saved by *works* (law) and those saved in the New Testament dispensation are saved by *grace*. On the contrary, in the same way as God required those saved by grace in the Old Testament to live holy lives, so He requires of us all, now living in the New Testament era, to live holy lives.

Faith and works go hand in hand: faith produces good works. The wrong approach is to think that good works can produce saving faith. Good works without a saving faith is impossible, because we are by nature dead in our sins. James argues that, just as trees bear fruit, so believing Christians must show by their deeds *that* they indeed believe, and *what* they believe.

- *why there is no explicit reference to grace.*

Some believe because James emphasises works and not grace, this letter is not authentic and should not be included into the canon of the New Testament.

READ MATTHEW 5:17-21. If James understood the relationship between grace and works wrongly, how should we interpret the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in these verses?

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- *why there is no explicit reference to the Person and work of Jesus Christ in the letter.*

When James wrote his letter, he used the Old Testament in the same way as our Lord did when He was teaching the people: *it is God’s authoritative Word*. Jesus, and indeed many of the writers of the New Testament, only had the Old Testament to quote from. Later New Testament writers showed how Christ was the fulfilment of the promises of the Old Testament.

Always important to keep in mind is that the Old Testament, although in essence the book of promises is never *less* Word of God than the New Testament, just because the New Testament showed how those promises were fulfilled in Christ. One part of the Bible cannot be read without reference to the other.

Therefore, James took Biblical theology already known in the Old Testament and gave it practical implications: faith has to be seen in works, or faith is dead.

ONCE AGAIN LOOK AT JAMES 1:1. Of whom is James a servant?

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It would be wrong to state that James displays nothing of the work and Person of Christ. In the short statement of verse 1 James acknowledges:

- *God* – this would include everything the Old Testament would know about the Father: Creator, Sustainer, God of Hosts, King of all kings, Lord of lords, etc. He demands our loyalty and service.
- *Jesus as LORD* – worthy of worship and service in the same way (not alongside as if He was another God) the Father demanded worship and service.

READ ACTS 2:36. What does this verse say about our Lord?

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James would have been there when Peter preached on Pentecost Day. He fully understood the meaning of the statement of Peter.

John has a very clear way in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Read *REV 17:14* and *1JOHN 5:20*. What is the statement of the Bible concerning Jesus Christ?

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- *Jesus as CHRIST* – Jesus was more than the carpenter’s son, He was/is the Christ (Messiah) – the anointed One of God, the King of kings, more and far better than the great David of Israel.

Of God the Father and the Son James is a *servant*.

A servant does the bidding of his master (lord – owner of the servant [slave]) because he does not belong to himself.

READ GENESIS 32:10, JUDGES 2:8, PSALM 89:3-4. What was the relationship of these Old Testament figures with God?

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In the light of James being a servant (slave) of God and the Lord Jesus Christ why do you think James puts so much emphasis on works?

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Final question for discussion: If a sinner is saved from sin and eternal destruction by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, what should his attitude be to his Lord? (Think about the Lord’s words in *MARK 12:30-31*)

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