

James 1:1

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Introduction

The book of James has gotten a lot of “bad press” throughout Church History. Martin Luther in the first edition of his German New Testament (1522) stated that James was “a right strawy epistle”. Other church leaders struggled with it even being included in the cannon of Scripture. This epistle is often viewed as being contradictory on the matter of Justification by Faith. After all Paul wrote in Romans 3:28 that “a man is justified by faith”. James wrote James 2:24, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” Are these two verses really contrary to one another?

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Introduction

The answer is NO!

Paul deals with the inner faith of man's heart as God sees it, while James concerns his discourse with the outward fruits of faith that man can see. God knows whether or not I am a true believer on the basis of my faith, but men can only know whether or not I am a true believer as they observe my life outwardly. Jesus said we can distinguish between the true and the false only by a man's fruits (Matt. 7:16, 21).

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Introduction

James is a valuable book to the church today. Many Christians have become so caught up in the world that they have forgotten the practical outworking of our faith. This book will cause us to evaluate the concepts of Salvation and Faith. We quote Ephesians 2:8-9 when witnessing, but often disregard verse 10. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**"

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Introduction

2 Corinthians 13:5 warns the reader to “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.” Listen to what Jesus said:

Matthew 7:21-23

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

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Introduction

This epistle is not in contradiction to “Salvation by Grace” but gives us the characteristics of a life which is founded upon true faith. James challenges us to evaluate and try our Salvation and how we are living out or Faith in this world.

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Author

The author identifies himself merely as James. James (Greek) is the equivalent to Jacob in Hebrew. In a real sense, this Letter is written from Jacob to the descendants of Israel. There are three “James” mentioned in the New Testament. James the brother of John, James the Less, and James the brother of the Lord. James the brother of John was martyred and would not likely have been the author of this letter. James, Jesus’ half brother is the best candidate for being the author.

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Author

Joseph and Mary had other children after Jesus was born. Matt 12:46-47, 13:55, Mark 3:31-35, 6:3, Luke 8:19-21, and John 2:12 speak of Jesus’ half brothers and sisters. Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 list Jesus’ half brothers as James, Joseph, Simon and Judas. Surprisingly, although these half brothers grew up with Jesus and observed firsthand His sinless, perfect life, they did not believe in Him until after His death and resurrection.

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Author

By the time of Acts 1:13 something remarkable had happened. Here we find those who believed in Him gathered together in Jerusalem. Acts 1:14 states, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His **brothers**.” The answer to what happened is given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:7. After Jesus’ resurrection, He appeared to James. As a result of that personal, post-resurrection appearance, James came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. James gave total commitment to Jesus and soon came into leadership in the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15). James came to known as James the Just because of his righteous life, and according to Josephus was martyred about A.D. 62.

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James 1:1

James, a bondservant of God and of
the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are
scattered abroad: Greetings.

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James' Character

James 1:1

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

Despite James' prominence, what stands out in this first verse is his humility. He does not describe himself as Mary's son and/or the Lord's brother. Nor does James refer to his position as head of the Jerusalem church. He does not mention that the resurrected Christ personally appeared to him. Instead, he describes himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ".

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James' Character – A Servant

James 1:1

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
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The word "**bondservant**" is the Greek word "*Doulos*" which means "slave or a person deprived of all personal freedom and totally under the control of his master". When James describes himself as a "bond-servant or slave" of Christ it carries four implications.

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James' Character – A Servant

James 1:1

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

1. It Implies Absolute Obedience

The slave must obey the word of the master. The slave has no rights of his own and is the absolute possession of his master. As such, he is bound to give his master absolute and unquestioned obedience.

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James' Character – A Servant

James 1:1

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
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2. It Implies Absolute Humility

This is the word of a man who does not think of his privileges (the master was responsible to provide him with food, clothing, and housing), but of his duties. The slave has no rights, rather he has obligations. In using this term, James indicates that he has lost his "self" in his service of God. James has literally denied himself and said Yes to God.

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James' Character – A Servant

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3. It Implies Absolute Loyalty

This is the word of a man who has no interests of his own, because he is pledged to God. What he does, he does for God. His own profit and his own preference does not enter into his calculations. His loyalty is to God.

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James' Character – A Servant

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4. It Implies Absolute Honor

This title is not one of dishonor but is one of the most honored in the Old Testament. In the Septuagint, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Malachi and the prophets as a whole were under the title "doulos". These had found their freedom, peace, and glory in their submission to the will of God.

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James' Character – A Servant

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The early church was well aware of the true nature of the master/slave relationship. Both Peter and Paul gave instructions to believers who were slaves (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-24; 1 Peter 2:18-21). Christianity found this term appropriate in setting forth the essence of the believer's true relationship to God. As believers, we must understand that Jesus is our Master, and we are His servants.

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James' Character – Of God and Christ

James 1:1

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

James states that he is serving God and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is understood that James is referring to serving two Masters. Yet it is inconceivable for a person to be the slave of **two different** masters (Matthew 6:24). James could not be the slave of two Beings in heaven unless they were co-equal and co-eternal. They must have equal right of ownership of him if they were to be called his joint Master. Since James was Jewish, it would have been unthinkable to name Jesus as equal with God if he rejected Christ's deity.

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James' Character – Of God and Christ

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James uses three Titles in naming his Master. He call his savior the Lord Jesus Christ. For the Jewish reader, the title "Lord" carried with it the implication of deity. In the Septuagint it is the translation for the name "Jehovah" or "Yehweh". Jesus is His human name given to Him before His birth and speaks of His saving work. Jesus Hebrew rendering would be Joshua, meaning "salvation". Christ is the Greek rendering for the Hebrew "Messiah". When the name Jesus and Christ are put together is meant that He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messianic promises. When "Lord" is combined with this is speaks of Messiah being our Emmanuel – our "God with us".

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James' Audience

James 1:1

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

James addresses his letter "to the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad." James as the leader of the Jerusalem church reaches out to a wider ministry to those Jews outside the nation of Israel. There have been numerous scatterings of the Jewish people. Assyria, Babylon, and Rome just to name a few. Though James is writing primarily to Jewish Christians, God's message through him is vital to us Gentiles today. His message is timeless and practical. 2 Timothy 3:16 - All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

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James' Greeting

James 1:1

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It is appropriate in a Letter (a scroll when it was written) to start the letter by stating who it was from, who it was written to, and a greeting. Paul would often take several verses, but James is short and simple. One verse and His greeting is just that – one word – “greeting”. The Greek word though literally means to “rejoice” or “be glad”. Though it was a common secular greeting, James uses it because he expected his Christian brethren to rejoice and be glad in their service for Christ.

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So What ...

As we begin this journey through the book of James, my prayer is that you will carefully examine yourselves. One day we will each stand before God. As believers, our lives will be evaluated and only the things done for Jesus will remain.

We are living in troubling times, but God has His eye on us. God chose you for this time in human history. We need to live brightly, holy, and loving in this world. Your choice impact others! Let's impact them for Jesus!

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