

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

## JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

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### DO SOMETHING

*JAMES*

If you're looking for fluffy and soft, don't read the book of James. But if you're looking for truth-driven and practical because you care what God has to say, then you can soak yourself in the deep well of Christian commentary that exists in this action-packed book of the Bible. It's been said that James writes like an Old Testament Prophet with a New Testament Theology. You also might be interested to know that many view this letter to be a sort of commentary on Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." You might be surprised at how many similarities you can find!

Getting back to the character of the letter, for those of you with a heavy Christian home life with parents who knew how to get straight to the point when you did something wrong, you'll know how to approach the book of James. If you can recall the face of your mom or dad when they confronted you with a problem in your life; if you can remember the feeling of wanting to do better whenever they corrected you because you knew they were only saying things you needed to hear for love's sake, this book will speak to you in a special way. For those of you who don't know that feeling, the book of James shows you what it's like to be rebuked.

You might also be interested to know that James wouldn't have always been able to give an address like this. Earlier in his life, there was a time when his advice and his attitude would have been completely different than we find here.

The reason this is the case is because there was a time in James' life when serving Christ was the last thing on his mind, even though growing up, he was as close to Christ as you could possibly be. You see, out of the three individuals called 'James' in the New Testament, this is believed to have been James, the half-brother of Jesus. Jesus was James' older brother in the household. James would have been filled with all kinds of information that we would like to have known. What kind of games did Jesus like as a child? What was His favorite meal? What were His study habits? Did He laugh often? Did He have any personal effects that meant something to Him? What was it like growing up around someone who is perfect? James could have answered that and more.

But if we were to trace out James' life, there was a point where James would not have known the answer to the most important question of his life: You know Jesus as your half-brother, but do you know Him as your Savior? James would not have been able to answer that question.

Going back to Jesus' earthly ministry, there were a few clues the Gospel writers gave us to help us put some pieces together.

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For example, **Matthew 13:55-57**, “Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? Ans they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” Mark tells us the same thing in 6:3

If we move along a little further down the road in Jesus’ ministry, **John 7:3-5**, says, “His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show theyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him.”

But all of this changed. Paul writing to the Corinthian church, and explaining the importance of the resurrection of Jesus, began to go down the list of all of the individuals who had seen Christ once He was raised from the dead. **1 Corinthians 15:5-7** says, “And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve. After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.”

This is getting exciting, but we’re still not done. If you make your over to **Acts 1:13-14**, you read that several of the apostles were in an upper room together, but it wasn’t just them. Look at the end of verse 13, “... and Judas the brother of James.” Now look at verse 14, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with he women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

We can safely proclaim that once Jesus was resurrected and had shown Himself, James, along with the rest of Jesus’ other brothers, became followers!

But the story of James goes even a little further than this. Paul gives us a little more information in building our information. As Paul is writing the Galatians, he mentions contact with James and says in **Galatians 1:19**, “But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.” And then again in **Galatians 2:9**, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived to grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.”

There are a few other places in Acts where James is mentioned, but you get the idea. James, who started out as a non-believer, became a believer, and from being a believer, became a leader in the Church of Jerusalem. Many believe he was the pastor, and if not the sole pastor, a co-pastor in that church.

Also, as you would expect, James was known to be a very godly man. Tradition holds that he was known as “Old Camel’s Knees” because of his strong prayer life. It was said that he spent so much time in prayer that his knees became worn and callused just like an old camel. That may have not been fun to look at, but it was a great testimony to have.

You may be wondering why so much time was spent on this man. Well, to understand the message is to understand the man. You need to know what kind of life James came from and consider now what James is telling you.

So let’s do that. Let’s see what James is telling us.

### *How to Think About James*

**Let’s Fight Our Battle (James 1:2- James 1:16)**— These verses speak to us about temptation and what to do about it. Here is something that will help you. A test comes from God; a temptation comes from Satan. God tests you to grow your faith. Satan tempts you to destroy your faith. Watch James as he deals with each of these categories.

**Sometimes a Christian is Tested (1:2-12):** You are to count it all joy when you fall into the different kinds of

temptations that come against you, but you also need to know how to deal with it when it comes. That's why James points you to God's wisdom when you need to know where this testing is coming from.

**Sometimes a Christian is Tempted (1:13-16):** Temptation comes from what you're naturally attracted to in your sin nature. Satan uses what you desire against you, and intentionally puts things in your path. He can never make you sin, but he will try to convince you to sin.

**Let's Use Our Bibles (James 1:17-27)**— God's Word is not given to be considered; God's Word is given to be obeyed.

**What the Bible Says Believe, Believe (James 1:17-18):** "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..." (1:17). However, you're not going to know what many of those gifts are, or how to identify them if you don't know what is in God's Word, or you don't take it seriously.

**What the Bible Says Keep, Keep (James 1:19-22):** James tells us that the word is to be engrafted in us. It is supposed to become a part of who we are.

**What the Bible Says to Change, Change (James 23-27):** James describes God's Word here as a mirror. It will show you who you really are so that you can make adjustments so that you can look like Jesus instead.

**Let's Help Our Brethren (James 2:1-13)**— James, here, is speaking against showing favoritism to some, and shunning others simply based off of how they look.

**Let's Correct Our Beliefs (James 2:14-26)**— In this section, James is showing a difference between faith and works. In the Christian faith, we have a faith that works! James gives a scenario of someone being brought into our lives who has a need to be fed and clothed and we just look at them and say, "You should be fed and clothed! Go do that, and God bless you!" It's absurd. James says that you should always be able to see the faith that you say that you have— there should be some evidence you can point to. He then concludes this section by using Abraham, the 'father of faith' and how we could look at and examine his faith by the work he performed.

**Let's Surrender Our Behavior (James 3:1- James 4:12)**— Out of all the sins that James could have singled out, there was one that appears to be the most threatening to the lives of the believers as far as James was concerned— corrupt speech.

**Your Tongue is Powerful (James 3:1-10):** James gives illustrations here about how small your tongue is, but how much trouble it can cause. James tells us that our tongue is like a horse's bit, like the rudder of a ship, like a small match. All of these things are small, but they do a great deal of damage if they're not used correctly.

**Your Tongue Should be Tamed (James 3:11-12):** James points out the inconsistency of a Christian who doesn't know how to use their speech. You can say the worst words to your spouse on a Sunday morning before church, and then come and sing, "Bless the Lord, O My Soul"? That doesn't make sense. James says you should tame your speech.

**Let's Stop Our Boasting (James 4:13- James 5:6)**— James mentions another devastating sin alongside corrupt communication, and that is corrupt wealth. What we think of our speech and how we use it has to do with what we communicate to people, and what we think of our wealth and how we use it has to do with what we communicate to God. The speech you use will reveal how you feel about others, and the way you use your wealth will reveal how you feel about God.

**Surrender Your Work to God (James 4:13-17):** You should never assume that you'll be able to do a single thing. It's only God who has information on what you will accomplish in this life, and therefore, only God should be sought in determining the pursuits in your life.

**Surrender Your Wealth to God (James 5:1-6):** Wealth has a way of poisoning how you think of other people. It inflates how you feel about yourself, while at the same time deflates what you think of others. James has some

sharp words for anyone in that place, “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten.” (5:1-2) Ultimately, God says, you have nothing, and that is all your life will amount to if you are trusting in your wealth to find your worth.

**Let’s Release Our Burdens (James 5:7-20)**— James, as he closes out this letter has a few more intersections for those who are hurting.

**Be Patient in Trials (James 5:7-12):** Pain and persecution always scream at the Christian to give up, but James points us to steady our hearts by looking to Christ and His coming as your motivation to continue in your faith.

**Be Faithful in Prayer (James 5:13-18):** Prayer and songs are two things that define God’s people. There is always a need to lift up, and there is always a reason to shout out. Along with this is the instruction for accountability to each other. James says also to confess your sins to one another. Obviously, the need here is prayer once the sin is confessed.

**Be Loving with People (James 5:19-20):** Don’t be surprised when some of the people you love fall into some sort of sin. But if you can help it, don’t leave them there either. When possible, we need to come after them in a spirit that wants to restore them by reminding them of what God has done for them.

### *What to Look for in James*

**Key Teachings**— Two main subjects surface in making your way through the book of James.

**Works:** If you’re a part of a Bible-believing Gospel-minded Church, you’ve probably heard a line like this, “We are not saved by works! We are saved by faith in Christ alone!” That’s true! In fact, depending on your upbringing, you might have been in church long enough by now you could recite it in your sleep. However, though works of faith can never be part of the reason we make it to heaven, works of faith should never be missing from the Christian life. When we talk about works of faith, ultimately, we’re talking about our public behavior before others. And make no mistake brothers and sisters, God is after your behavior once He saves you. It is our works of faith which become our public profession to the world that we have been changed by God. In the Christian life, your life needs to preach, and it preaches through your good works!

**Behavior:** This is really what you’ll notice most of all. James is aiming for these Christians to change their behavior. James wants every Christian to understand that we have to live out our faith before a world without faith. James wants us to take the Biblical truth we know and put it out on the table for everyone to see. That’s why you see instructions about how to treat the poor, how to think about what you earn, how to view your wealth, how to use your speech, how to restore someone caught in sin, how to pray, how to confess, how to deal with temptation and testings, how to gain wisdom. James wants you to know that your behavior matters.

### *What to Gain from James*

**A Tested Faith is a Strong Faith**— In the very first verse you read these words, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting:” (James 1:1)

That phrase we see James use, “scattered abroad” is just one word in the Greek. It is the word “Diaspora” and it’s where we get our word “dispersion”. James is writing to a predominately Jewish audience, and you can tell by the use of words and terminology that he uses throughout his letter. But what you’ll also notice by the use of these words is that the Jewish people James is writing to are those who have been dispersed because of persecution. Life just got exponentially harder for many of

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these poor saints, but James isn't letting them off easy just because life wasn't turning out like they thought it should be. He is pushing them toward growing in the faith in the midst of what was happening.

Think about it in terms of the muscles of your body. If you sit in the same in the same place, day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, your muscles are going to break down and not be useful at all. Why? Because they're not being used. For your muscles to stay strong, they have to regularly be placed under stress, or else they're not going to be of any use to you when it matters.

The same is true for your faith. God tests your faith, to grow your faith, or else it's not going to be of any use to you when it matters— like when Satan comes not to test, but to tempt.

An Active Faith is a Legitimate Faith: Do you know why God put you where you are? It was to be an influential force before everyone in your life for the sake of the Gospel. But we can't do that if our faith is not acted upon. Remember what James says, "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." (2:18) Do you know what James is saying, "Do something!"



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