

HOW FAITH WORKS
PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: JAMES
James 2:14-26

I. INTRODUCTION

A. TITLE

- ΙΑΚΟΒΟΥ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ—from **Ἰακωβος**—in **1:1**

B. TYPE OF LITERATURE

- NON-PAULINE EPISTLE

C. AUTHORSHIP

1. BOOK IDENTIFIES AUTHOR—AS JAMES

1:1—*James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*

2. JAMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

a. James—mentioned 38 times in NT

b. **Four possibilities**—if he is one already mentioned in NT

1. **James Son of Alphaeus**—**Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13**

a. One of 12 Apostles—little is known about him

b. Possibly brother of Matthew/Levi—‘son of Alphaeus’—**Mk 2:14**

c. Possibly ‘James the Less’—**Mk 15:40; 16:1; Mt 27:56**

d. Church tradition: crucified in Lower Egypt (at Ostrakine), then sawn to pieces

e. A minor figure—not likely to have been this author

2. **James the father of Judas**—**Lk 6:16** and **Acts 1:13**

a. Not Judas Iscariot—**Jn 14:22**—but another Apostle

b. James’s son also identified with Thaddeus—**Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18**

c. Nothing else is known of him

3. **James, Son of Zebedee and brother of John**

a. Martyred by Herod Agrippa I in 44 AD—**Acts 12:2**

b. Died so early—almost certainly not the author

4. **James, brother of Jesus**—**most likely candidate**

a. A doubter of Jesus ministry at first—**Jn 7:2-5**

- b. Jesus' appearances convinced him to become a believer—I Cor 15:7; Acts 1:14
- c. Early leader of Jerusalem church
 - 1. Paul called him a 'pillar' with Cephas and John—Gal 2:9
 - 2. After released from prison, Peter sent word to James—Acts 12:17
 - 3. Leader of Jerusalem Council—Acts 15:13—he issued the decree
 - 4. Paul met with James after returning from 3rd missionary journey—Acts 21:18
 - 5. Tradition says—he was first bishop of Jerusalem—succeeded by Simeon
- d. Regarded as an Apostle—though not one of the original 12—Gal 1:19
- e. He continued to have strong Jewish ties and sympathies
- f. Called James 'the Just'
 - Hegesippus—for austere lifestyle and adherence to the Law
- g. Martyred about 62 AD in Jerusalem
 - Probably at the command of the High Priest Ananus
 - Stoned to death—falsely accused of breaking the Law

c. **Internal evidence**—suggests Jesus' brother was the author

1. Two passages are reminiscent of Sermon on the Mount

1:22—*But prove yourselves to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

5:12—*But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.*

2. He was a sincere/devout man of prayer—like person described in **Ja 5:16-18**

5:16-18—*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.*

- Hegesippus (155)—said he was severely ascetic/devout—follower of the Law
- Eusebius—said he prayed so much his knees became hard as those of a camel.

D. DATE OF WRITING

1. VERY EARLY

- a. Before early 60s
 - Before James's death
 - Josephus dated his death in 62—Hegesippus said 66
- b. Some say—as early as the 40s
 - No mention of Gentile Christians
 - No evidence the Jerusalem Council (49 AD) had yet met
 - If so—this is the earliest NT writing

2. FURTHER EVIDENCE FOR EARLY DATING

- a. Economic distress suggested in letter
 1. Most early Christians were still poor
 2. After Jewish rebellion 66-73—most Jews were poor—and this distinction disappeared
- b. Primitive leadership structure of the church
 1. No hierarchy of offices had yet developed
 2. Only elders are mentioned—**5:14**

- c. Imminent view of the *Parousia*—like first generation Christians—see **5:7-8**

5:7-8—*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.*

- d. Content
 1. Filled with Jesus' teachings—some quoted directly, but mostly paraphrased
 2. More than any other NT epistle—this uses and applies Jesus' teaching to the church
- e. Apparent conflict with Paul's views
 1. Especially Romans 4 and Galatians 4—*apparent* conflict between works and faith
 2. James was probably written before Romans and Galatians
 - James does not really disagree with Paul
 - James probably would have quoted Paul to *support* his points in James
 - Romans was written about 56-7 from Corinth
 - Galatians was written before the mid-50s (maybe as early as 48-49)

E. RECIPIENTS

1. TO JEWISH CHRISTIANS SCATTERED AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN

2. EVIDENCE

a. Explicit reference in salutation

1:1—*James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.*

b. Further internal evidence—see **2:2**

1. The term ‘meeting’ or ‘assembly’ is synagogue—**συναγωγη**

2. This was the gathering and worship place for Diaspora Jews—not the Temple

F. THEMES AND TONE

1. STRONG ETHICAL EMPHASIS—on personal morality and social justice

- Personal morality
- Social justice

2. PRACTICAL APPLICATION—of the Gospel to everyday situations

3. THEOLOGICAL INTEGRATION—faith that lacks works is useless and empty

4. PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE—in difficult times—as we wait for the Lord

5. MANUAL FOR USE BY THE CHURCH—for its unity and health

6. IMPERATIVE TONE—like an OT prophet

7. PASTORAL ADVICE—drawn from wise sayings and sermons

G. STRUCTURE

I. Greeting (1:1)

II. The Testing of Faith (1:2-18)

A. Trials Produce Perfection (1:2-11)

1. Through the development of perseverance (1:2-4)
2. Through growth in wisdom (1:5-8)
3. Through a right perspective on wealth (1:9-11)

B. Perseverance Produces the Reward (1:12-18)

1. The ultimate reward—the crown of life (1:12)
2. The chief impediment: sin—its cause and result (1:13-16)
3. The source of all good—and His gift to us (1:17-18)

III. Obeying God’s Word (1:19-27)

A. The right conditions (1:19-21)

1. The right attitude (1:19-20)
2. The right reception (1:21)

B. The right behavior: doing and not just hearing (1:22-25)

C. The right standards (1:26-27)

1. Empty religion (1:26)
2. True religion (1:27)

IV. Living Ethically (2:1-13)

A. Avoid partiality (2:1-7)

B. Follow the ‘royal law’ and mercy (2:8-13)

V. Faith Producing Good Works (2:14-26)

VI. Practicing Personal Discipline (3:1-18)

A. The Problem of the Tongue (3:1-12)

B. The Proof and Sources of Wisdom (3:13-18)

1. The proof of wisdom (3:13)
2. Worldly wisdom (3:14-16)
3. Wisdom from above (3:17-18)

VII. Avoiding Evil Behavior (4:1-17)

A. The Source of Evil and Division (4:1-4)

B. The Cure of Single-mindedness and Humility (4:5-10)

C. Judgmental Behavior (4:11-12)

D. Worldliness, arrogance and the cure (4:13-16)

E. A definition of sin (4:17)

VIII. Abuse of Stewardship (5:1-6)

IX. Practicing Endurance (5:7-11)

X. Simple and Straightforward Speech (5:12)

X. The Ministry of Prayer (5:13-18)

XI. Restoring Christians Who Have Strayed (5:19-20)

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

14 *What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15* *If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17* *Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18* *But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” 19* *You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20* *But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21* *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he*

offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

III. EXPOSITION

A. LIVING FAITH PRODUCES WORKS

- **2:17**—*Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead*
- **2:18**—*I will show you my faith by my works*
- **2:20**—*faith without works is useless*
- **2:26**—*faith without works is dead*

B. FAITH IS NOT STATIC—BUT DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP

1. Faith goes beyond the mind—belief—*assensus*
2. Faith acts on conviction—trusts—*fiducia*

C. JAMES’S SEVEN PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF FAITH

1. FAITH ENDURES TRIALS—AND GROWS—TO MATURITY—**1:2-3**
2. FAITH SHOWS NO FAVORITISM—**2:1**
 - It doesn’t rely on human wealth, power, influence
 - It remembers God’s priorities—blessed are the poor
3. FAITH HELPS OTHERS—IN NEED—**2:15-16**
 - **Meals on Wheels**
 - **ESL**
4. FAITH OBEYS GOD—**2:21-23**
 - Even when we do not understand His will
5. FAITH STANDS UP TO EVIL—OPPOSES SATAN—**4:7-8**
6. FAITH WAITS PATIENTLY—ON GOD’S TIMING—**5:7-11**
7. FAITH CHANNELS HEALING—**5:15**
 - Physical
 - Emotional
 - Spiritual