



Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Eighth Series: “The Right Edge” New Testament: Epistles

Lesson 28: Book of James

I. Introduction

A. The epistle of James has been characterized as the wisdom literature of the New Testament. It has been called the Amos of the New Testament. It has a great deal of imagery from nature – and deals with social injustices as did Amos. It is probably one of the most contested books of the New Testament. Both as to both its canonicity and authorship. Martin Luther dismissed it from the canon of scripture and declared it to be a “right strawy epistle, without evangelical character.”

But, properly understood, the epistle of James is a practical effective discourse on the true value of faith explored and publically expressed in good works.

B. The book of James is a practical outworking of Christianity in daily life. It is to help mature the Christian in his faith. Our faith will be evidenced in how we face trials (chapter 1), in how we treat people (chapter 2), in what we say (chapter 3), in how we deal with sin in our lives (chapter 4) and in our prayer life (chapter 5).

C. Content

1. It shifts abruptly from topic to topic.
2. It has been called the “Proverbs of the NT” because it is written in such a terse style. It is concise, authoritative, and unvarnished.

II. The Canonicity of James

There was considerable hesitation in admitting this book into the canon of scripture. The doubts centered on two main facts.

1. The epistle had remained for a long time unknown to a great many churches
2. The authority of the writer was questioned – especially as to whether he was an apostle or not

III. The author of James

A. Which James? There are 4 James’ – spoken of in the New Testament.

1. James – the son of Zebedee – brother of John (Matt. 4:21, 10:2, 17:1)
2. James – the son of Alphaeus – known as James the Less (Matt. 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13)
3. James – the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:19, Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3)
4. James – the father of Judas “not Iscariot” (Luke 6:16)

#1 & #4 are easily eliminated. The question is between James the son of Alphaeus and James the Lord's brother. It is most generally believed that James the Lord's half brother is the author.

Initially James didn't believe his own brother was the Messiah (John 7:3-5 and Mark 3:31-34). Apparently after the resurrection, he was convinced (I Cor. 15:7)

B. His characteristics

He was not a commonplace dull man. But was rather sharp, crisp and authoritative. His thinking has a stormy Jewish background. He is a man of deep moral and religious convictions. It is said that his knees were made like a camel's hoof by such frequent prayer.

IV. Date

Probably an early date, about 46 AD, at least before 49 AD. This view makes James the earliest book in the New Testament.

V. Location

Because of the physical allusions in the book:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| 1. "the early and latter rain" | 5:7 |
| 2. hot winds on vegetation | 1:11 |
| 3. cultivation of figs and olives | 3:12 |
| 4. the sea nearby | 1:6, 3:4 |

All speak of conditions in Palestine

VI. Audience

Specifically – "to the 12 tribes..."/Jewish believers scattered around the world

VII. The purpose of the book

James had a purpose centered on practicality. He had information that the condition of his readers was such that faith was not vitally operative in their lives. The epistle develops the theme of tests for the genuine-true-active-living-Christian faith.

VIII. Special notes:

- A. Notice the similarity between the teaching of this epistle and the sermon on the mount.

<u>James</u>	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>James</u>	<u>Matthew</u>
1:2	5:10-12	3:17-18	5:9
1:4	5:48	4:4	6:24
1:5 – 5:15	7:7-12	4:10	5:3-4
1:9	5:3	4:11	7:1-2
1:20	5:22	5:2	6:19
2:13	5:7-6:14-15	5:10	5:12
2:14-16	7:21-23	5:12	5:33-37

It is important to see that James thoroughly develops the teaching of Jesus. It has been said that if John had lain on the Savior's bosom, James sat as this feet.

- B. The Greek word for "trial" and "temptation" (1:2) is the same
1. Trial comes from outward circumstances
 2. Temptation comes from our hearts (sinful nature)

Hebrews 2:18 *"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*

We are to face our trials with joy.

1 John 4:4 *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."*

IX. An outline

- Introduction 1:1-18 The tests of Christian faith
- Faith tested by its attitude toward the Word of God 1:19-27
- Faith tested by its reaction to social distinctions 2:1-13
- Faith tested by its production of works 2:14-26
- Faith tested by its production of self-control 3:1-18
- Faith tested by its reactions to the world 4:1-5:12
- Faith tested by its resort to prayer 5:13-20

X. In general, the content of James covers a wide scope of topics...

- Temptations 1:2-18

B. Hearing and doing the Word of God	1:19-27
C. Respect of persons	2:1-13
D. Works	2:14-28
E. Dangers of the tongue	3:1-12
F. True and false wisdom	3:13-18
G. Worldliness	4:1-12
H. God and business	4:13-17
I. Social injustice	5:1-6
J. Patience and prayer	5:7-18

XI. So what?

How does James 2:18 display itself in your life?

Discussion Questions:

1. Consider the topics listed in section X. Which section needs some extra attention in your life?
2. Why do you think the tongue is such a big issue for women?