

Living out Your Faith

A Study in James

Introduction

As we look at the author of this important letter, packed with wisdom, we understand that there are several New Testament believers with the name of James. There is James, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, who was also the first apostle to be martyred (Mat 10:2, Mar 15:40, Act 12:2). There is James, the son of Alphaeus, who was another of the twelve apostles (Mat 10:3). And there is James, the father of the other apostle, whose name was Judas (Luk 6:16). But most scholars agree that the author of this letter was James, the son of Mary and Joseph, the blood half-brother of Jesus, and the brother of Jude (Matthew 13:155, Jude 1:1). In speaking of him in Galatians 1:19, the word Paul used for brother is the word “adelphos,” which is a derivative of the Greek word “delphus,” meaning “the womb.” Paul is clearly stating that the “brother” he is referring to is James, the Lord’s brother “from the womb.”

James was not a believer during Jesus’ earthly ministry (Mark 3:21, John 7:5) but he had an encounter with Christ after His resurrection that is mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:7. After this encounter, his conversion to faith in Christ led him to become a leader and pillar of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:12-13, Galatians 2:9). We know that Paul was not referring to John’s brother, James, in Galatians 2:9 because “that” James had already been martyred by that time. Paul refers to him as an “apostle” in Galatians 1:19, but this is not a matter of discrepancy. Although he was not one of the original twelve, Paul calls himself an apostle, and Barnabas, as well as Paul, is called an apostle in Acts 14:14.

The book of James is often referred to as the New Testament Proverbs. James writes with the wisdom of the Old Testament Proverbs, and his focus, which is consistent throughout this letter, is that a sincere life of faith is accompanied by practical actions and works.

This letter is believed to be written somewhere between 45 and 48 A.D., just prior to the council in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, which was around 49 A.D. Some scholars actually believe this letter from James may have been the very first of the New Testament writings.

The audience James addresses is to Jewish Christians, referring to “the twelve tribes, who are scattered abroad.” These are Jewish Christians who have been scattered among the Gentiles. James welcomed the Gentiles into the faith, as we read in Acts 15, but there is no mention of the Gentile believers in this letter, which gives some strong evidence to the early date and the fact that at the time of this letter there were not yet a great number of Gentile believers. However, there is no doubt that the wisdom we find in this letter most certainly applies to all believers, both Jew and Gentile.

I have primarily used the NKJV in writing this study, unless otherwise indicated. As you answer the questions, please keep that in mind and regardless of which version you prefer, make sure to refer to the NKJV for the best clarification of the question being asked.

Please have the first lesson completed when you come to the first study. We strongly encourage you to complete your lesson each week. Don't try to do it all in one sitting but spread it out throughout the week. That will give you more time to glean all that the Lord has for you and to come prepared to share your thoughts in our discussion time.

If for some reason you were not able to complete your study, **we want you to come anyway.** I know that you will receive much from the overview and discussion each week and you can always go back to complete the lesson later.

Take a few moments before you begin your time of study in God's Word to ask Him to quiet your mind from all other distractions and open your heart to the things He wants to show you. Take notes as you read, jotting down those things the Lord impresses on your heart. Keeping a study journal is a good way to do this and I encourage you to use one, or you can use the blank sheet at the back of each lesson for that purpose, as well as for taking notes from the overview.

We are so excited that you are joining us in this study, and we look forward to all the Lord wants to speak to our hearts.

*Shawn Van Hook
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