

James

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MOODY DISTANCE LEARNING

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Revised 1995, 2004, 2011, 2014.

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Description

The book of James is one of the most fascinating books of the Bible, and yet this book is one of the most frequently misunderstood. This course will discuss why James is controversial, and it will show you why the teachings of James are so important to the daily life of the Christian. Therefore, before you begin your work in this course, ask the Lord Jesus to help you understand the material covered in the lessons and to give you persistence to finish what you have set out to do.

Course Components

Your course consists of two components – this study guide and an envelope containing four color-coded answer sheets.

The Study Guide

- The study guide contains all of the lessons and exams for this course. There is a self-check quiz after every lesson (true and false questions and/or multiple choice). An exam follows Lesson 2, 5, 8, and 11.

The Scantron Answer Sheets

- The color-coded Scantron answer sheets come with your course. These correspond to the exams in your study guide. Please use these sheets to mark your answers for each exam. **Use only a #2 lead pencil** to mark your answers. (Because these tests are electronically graded, ink or harder leads are not acceptable.)

Requirements and Procedures

Requirements

In order to receive credit, the four exams must be completed with an overall average grade of 70% or better. A Grade Record Sheet is provided at the beginning of your study guide to help you keep track of your standing in this course.

Procedures

Please follow the procedures listed for completing the lessons and exams in this course. As you complete each exam, mail the answer sheet to the following address:

Moody Distance Learning
820 N. LaSalle Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60610-3284

Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return of your graded answer sheet. If you prefer, you may send multiple exams in one envelope. We request that you use the envelopes provided for this purpose.

The Lessons

- Read the study guide at a time when you can concentrate. Pick a time of the day you are most likely to be alert and relatively uninterrupted.
- Read with a pencil or pen in hand. You will want to underline words or phrases, even sentences, for later reference.

The Exams

- When you have completed all of the lessons that an exam covers, go back and review the material in the study guide. You may want to prepare by writing out your own outline of the material covered. The outlines will help you focus on the major truths discussed in each lesson.
- All exams are objective in nature and utilize the special answer sheets, or Scantron forms, provided with this course.

When taking the exam, please follow these instructions:

- It is important that you select the proper answer sheet for each exam. The answer sheet are as follows:
 - Exam 1 is blue
 - Exam 2 is green
 - Exam 3 is red
 - Exam 4 is tan
- Fill in the blanks at the top of your answer sheet. Please write legibly.
- We encourage you not to refer to your textbook or notes of any kind while taking the exam.
- Please use a #2 lead pencil to mark your answers. Fill in the spaces darkly and completely—be sure to erase any mistakes thoroughly.
- Mail your answer sheet to Moody Distance Learning along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return of your graded answer sheet. If you prefer, you may send multiple exams of the same course in the same envelope. Please use the envelope provided with the course, for this purpose. Please do not send the pages of the exam from the study guide.
- When you receive your graded answer sheet from Moody Distance Learning, record your grade in the appropriate box on the Grade Record Sheet. Please mail in the Grade Record Card with your last exam(s). Keep your exams for future reference.

Lesson 1

How Did It All Begin?

The books of the New Testament didn't just happen! Behind each book is a great deal of history. If we understand just a bit of that history we will understand the book itself a great deal more. Let's begin our study of James with a historical glimpse into the background of this brief New Testament letter.

Who Wrote It?

It has been said that to really understand what a man has written one must know the man. Although we know that the Holy Spirit of God is the one and only true author of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), we also know that He chose and motivated certain men as His instruments for the actual writing (2 Peter 1:21). These men wrote in styles characteristically their own, often reflecting much of their personal background and personality. This is true of the author of the book of James, as we will see.

Before we begin to investigate the man who wrote the letter, we must first identify him. The writer refers to himself in the opening verse of the letter as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1), but this greeting needs amplification, for no less than four men with the name *James* are identified in the New Testament.

1. James the Father of Judas

This James, the father of one of the twelve apostles (not Judas Iscariot), is mentioned only twice in the New Testament (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13) and is otherwise unknown. It is highly unlikely that he would be the author of this letter.

2. James the Son of Zebedee

This James, one of the twelve apostles and the brother of John, suffered an early martyrdom under Herod (Acts 12:2). His early death would eliminate him as the possible author.

3. James the Son of Alphaeus

This James, called “James the Less,” was also one of the twelve apostles, and is considered by some to be the author of this letter. He probably was not the author, though, for except for brief mention in the lists of the apostles (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Acts 1:13), he is almost unknown.

4. James the Half Brother of Jesus

Of the four possibilities this is the most likely, and traditionally the letter of James has been ascribed to him. “The similarity of the language of the epistle with James’s speech in Acts 15, the heavy dependence of the writer on Jewish tradition, and the consistency of the contents of his letter with the historical notices in the New Testament concerning James, the half brother of the Lord, all tend to support the traditional authorship.”¹

What, then, do we know about James, the half brother of the Lord? We know first that he was not one of the original twelve apostles. Nor was he a believer before the Resurrection (John 7:5). After the Resurrection, however, we find him gathered with the apostles and others in the Upper Room (Acts 1:13, 14), apparently a believer, perhaps as a result of the resurrected Christ’s appearing to him (1 Corinthians 15:7). He became a leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem and was recognized as an apostle (Galatians 1:19; 2:9, and Acts 12:17). He presided over the First Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) and seemed to maintain strong Jewish sympathies (see Acts 21:18–26, the last New Testament reference to James). Tradition informs us that he was surnamed “The Just” because of his faithful adherence to the Jewish law and his virtuous manner of life. Tradition further declares that he suffered martyrdom at the hands of the high priest in Jerusalem in about 60 A.D.

1 Walter W. Wessel, “The Epistle of James,” *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1962), p. 1429.

In addition to these notations we may safely conclude that he was raised in a godly home, Mary and Joseph both being noted for their piety. In that home he undoubtedly gained a knowledge of and reverence for the Old Testament Scriptures. His letter reflects the highest regard for the Word of God and for the view that right doctrine should be wedded to correct duty.

To Whom Was It Addressed?

James directs his letter “to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (James 1:1). The phrase “the twelve tribes” was used in James’s day to indicate the entirety of the Jewish nation, but clearly James is employing it to refer to Jewish Christians everywhere. We know from history and Scripture (Acts 2:9–11; 6:9; and others) that at this time the Jews were probably scattered over the whole known world and that the gospel had been carried to many of these places by missionaries drawn from among the Jewish people. Some Bible students believe that this letter was written particularly for Jewish believers in the Eastern Dispersion. They draw this conclusion because Peter specifically addresses his first general epistle to those dispersed in Asia Minor, something he probably would not have done if they had had the benefit of having the letter from James. Although James has primarily Jewish Christians in view in this letter, there was much in it for Gentile believers too, as we shall see.

Many have called the epistle of James the most Jewish epistle in the New Testament. The meeting place is called a synagogue (James 2:2; translated “meeting” in the *New International Version*). Expressions such as “our ancestor Abraham” (James 2:21) and “the Lord of Sabbath” (James 5:4, KJV) occur. The Law is lifted up and revered (James 2:8–12; 4:11). The sins mentioned are those condemned again and again in the Old Testament—the love of money (James 5:1); class distinction (James 2:2–4); worldliness and pride (James 4:4–6); and grumbling (James 5:7–11). It contains many illustrations that assume the reader’s familiarity with the Old Testament accounts of Abraham, Rahab, Job, and Elijah (James 2:21; 2:25; 5:11; and James 5:17). There are frequent references to the Old Testament—especially to the Wisdom Literature—in the practical appeals: ten allusions to Proverbs; six allusions to the book of Job; and fifteen allusions to Ecclesiastes.

Doremus Hayes writes: “If we eliminate two or three passages containing references to Christ, the whole epistle might find its place just as properly in the Canon of the Old Testament as in that of the New Testament, as far as its substance of doctrine and contents is concerned. That could not be said of any other book in the New Testament.”²

Henry Clarence Thiessen, in *Introduction to the New Testament*, observes that “some [writers] have even thought that [James] was written by a non-Christian Jew, and that it was later adapted to Christian use by the insertion of the two phrases that contain the name of Christ (James 1:1 and James 2:1).”³ Dr. Thiessen’s own view is that “the Christianity of the Epistle is seen, not so much in its subject-matter, as in its spirit. It is an interpretation of the Old Testament law and the Sermon on the Mount in the light of the Christian Gospel.”⁴

We conclude, then, that though the epistle was primarily written to Jewish Christians, its present application and value to the church as a whole is abundantly clear. In fact, the very practical and clear directives for the day-to-day life of the believer are what the church so desperately needs today, as it has in every age.

When and Where Was It Written?

We cannot be sure of the precise date when this letter was written. Those who accept the traditional authorship date it from around 45 A.D. to the early 60s (usually just before the death of James). Some who have rejected the traditional authorship and assigned the book to an “unknown James” place its composition as late as 150 A.D. However, we must reject such a late date, because it denies the genuineness of this letter.

Although it is impossible to be dogmatic, there are at least two factors that would favor an early date:

2 Doremus Almy Hayes, “Epistle of James,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. James Orr, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), Vol. III, p. 1562.

3 Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), pp. 271, 272.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

- The epistle reflects a Judaic Christianity that is basically concerned with moral principles rather than with doctrinal problems and controversies.
- Although the language of the book of James is similar to that of the speech of James in Acts 15, there are no references in the book of James to controversial subjects that were being debated about the time of the Jerusalem Council and shortly thereafter (approximately 49 A.D. or 50). The author does not refer, for example, to the false doctrine that salvation could be obtained through keeping the Law (the view challenged in Galatians); to false teaching concerning the deity of Christ (an error challenged in Colossians); to false doctrine concerning the Resurrection (an error challenged in 1 Corinthians); nor to the worry some felt concerning the delay of the Lord's return (an error challenged in 1 Thessalonians).

Because of these factors, it is best to date this epistle somewhere around 45 A.D., thus making it most likely the first of the New Testament writings.

Though the place of writing is not specifically designated in this letter or elsewhere, and though a number of opposing suggestions have been made, there can be little doubt that the book of James was written from Palestine. The details of James 1:10, 11; 3:11, 12; and James 5:7 suggest that the author was a Palestinian. Further, if the traditional authorship is accepted, it would be safe to conclude that the letter was written from Jerusalem, the home base for James the half brother of Jesus.

Why Was It Written?

The letter was occasioned by the outward experiences, spiritual distress, and doctrinal misconceptions among the Jewish Christians in the Dispersion. These Christians had been experiencing various trials and testings: their own countrymen were persecuting them, the rich and powerful were oppressing them, and physical afflictions from various sources were plaguing them. Some were in a low spiritual state, taking a wrong attitude toward the goodness of God and His gifts. They indulged themselves in unbridled speech and allowed strife and division to grow amongst themselves. Many had adopted

a worldly spirit and failed to see that it was not sufficient merely to know the truth. Does not their condition sound all too much like some present-day situations among believers?

James writes to counteract these wrong thoughts and actions. He analyzes the nature of genuine faith and exhorts his readers to demonstrate their faith and the validity of their convictions in practical day-to-day Christian living. He wants their faith to be vital and consistent. While an appreciation of correct doctrine certainly underlies his remarks, James stresses not the beliefs but the duties of the Christian. His appeal may be expressed best in his own words: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).

One wonders if James would have to add anything to this epistle if he were writing it for the first time to Christians living in the twenty-first century!

Self-Check Quiz 1

This self-check test will help you evaluate what you have learned in the preceding lesson and will also help you prepare for upcoming exam. Indicate your answer to each of the following questions.

1. True or False: The writers of the New Testament never displayed their own personality or style in their books.
2. True or False: There is only one man in the New Testament with the name James.
3. True or False: The writer of the epistle of James is most probably James the son of Zebedee.
4. True or False: The most probable writer of this epistle was one of the original twelve apostles.
5. True or False: James addresses his letter primarily to Jewish believers.
6. True or False: The precise date when this letter was written is unknown.
7. True or False: The author of this course believes James was written in 45 A.D.
8. True or False: The letter was most likely written from the city of Jerusalem.
9. True or False: James stresses the duties of the Christian.
10. True or False: James has little practical value for Christians today.

Refer to the answer key at the end of this study guide. Please do not send your answers to Moody Distance Learning.