

Spiritual Wholeness
“A Timely Call”

Introduction: Few New Testament books as controversial as James

- Place in canon hotly contested
- Martin Luther—“an epistles of strew” (works emphasis)
- So much prominence given to works of law—seen by many as “holdout from Judaism.”
- Yet one of the most popular New Testament books, best known, most quoted
- Reasons for popularity

1. **Intensely Practical**

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:22 NKJV

- a. Highest frequency of imperative verbs of any New Testament book
 - b. Goal: not to INFORM...to Exhort, Encourage, and Chastise
2. **Noticeably Concise** (similar to Old Testament wisdom literature/especially Proverbs)
 3. **Vividly Revealed** (metaphors, illustrations, make it easy to understand)—billowing sea, withering flower, bit in horse’s mouth

I. Preliminary Issues of James

A. Author—James the brother of Jesus

1. 5 men named James in the New Testament (note: 3 appear in Acts 1:13)

And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. Acts 1:13 NKJV

2. James the brother of John beheaded in AD44 (too early see Acts 12:21)
3. No evidence at all for James the father of Judas, James the younger (son of Mary; wife of Cleopas) or James, son of Alphaeus
4. Almost assuredly—James, the brother of Jesus

a. Family of at least 7

Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" So they were offended at Him. Mark 6:3 NKJV

- b. Family in stress if Joseph left Mary widow (at cross)
- c. Sheds light on James

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:27 NKJV

- d. Became believer after resurrection

After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:7 NKJV

5. Attained position of prominent leadership in Jerusalem Church

- a. One of Paul's first contacts after conversion (Galatians 1:19)
- b. Peacemaker at Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13-21)
- c. Very empathetic to Judaism

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. Galatians 2:11-13 NKJV

See also Acts 21:18-25—suggest Paul take vow with four Jews to prove

- 4. Jews to prove to Jews he was not anti-Semitic

B. Recipients of the letter

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. James 1:1 NKJV

- 1. General Epistle (not one church)
- 2. Jewish Christians living in Palestine in Syria
- 3. Dispersed (Diaspora/scattered due to persecution—shalom)

C. Genre of letter

- 1. Opening words are typical letter
- 2. Borrows greatly from traditional teaching (depends on Jesus' teaching more than any other book—similar to Matthew)

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment. James 5:12 NKJV

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. Matthew 5:33-37 NKJV

3. Does lack clear organization—wisdom literature like
4. Similar to a sermon/homily

D. Situation of recipients

1. Jews who met in synagogue (2:2)
2. Monotheistic (2:19)
3. Centrality of the law (1:21, 24-25; 2:8-13; 4:11-12)
4. Of the Diaspora—impoverished and oppressed by the king (5:1-4)
5. Trials have led them into spiritual deficiency that James will address

II. Primary Issues of James (Theology)

- A. God (His oneness, jealousy, constancy, and grace)
- B. Eschatology

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! James 5:9 NKJV

C. The Law

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. James 1:25 NKJV

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. James 2:8-10 NKJV

D. Wisdom

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5 NKJV

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. James 3:13-17 NKJV

- E. Poverty and Wrath
- F. Ethics of Pure Religion

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:27 NKJV

- G. Faith, works, justification

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. James 2:24 NKJV

III. Particular Context of James

A. Significant trial/testing

1. Christians living in a pagan world
2. Their faith is costing them something (jobs, business, position, property—they are outside looking in.

B. Also temptation to compromise to survive

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4 NKJV

- C. Speaks to church today societally!

IV. Priority Challenge of James—Spiritual Wholeness

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:2-4 NKJV

A. Perfect (teleios)—te-□ ' -os

1. Completely brought to its end

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2. Mature is not enough

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48 NKJV

B. **Complete** (holokeros)—ho-la-kl'ros

1. No part unsaved
2. No blemish or defect

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 NKJV

(See completely and words)

C. **Lacking nothing** (leipo-l'p)

1. To come behind
2. To lag or be inferior

So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Luke 18:22 NKJV

Challenge—In midst of adversity, trial, struggle, and while being ostracized, marginalized, and trivialized, the people of God are called to Spiritual Wholeness!

- To reach full completeness
- With no part unsound
- With no part lagging behind

THIS IS QUITE A CHALLENGE—And a timely one

Conclusion: Cannot be spiritual adulterers and cozy up to the world—called to maintain purity of the covenant.

1. Cannot compromise/be double-minded
2. How do we attain to Spiritual Wholeness?

Intimacy—

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

Purity—

“Cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded” (James 4:11).

Honesty—

*Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.
James 4:9-10 NKJV*

Humility—

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. James 4:10 NKJV

THIS IS THE CALL OF JAMES—SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS