

## James Introduction

James 1:1  
ABC 1/13/19

Many scholars have said that James is like Proverbs in that it doesn't seem to have a clear outline. Others go to great trouble to outline it. I'm not entering that fray, but does James have a theme? Proverb's theme is clearly to instill wisdom that's based on a fear of the Lord. It's important for us to know the theme of James because we need to understand the bigger picture before we can appreciate the individual parts. What is the theme of James? Different people put forth a variety of ideas, but all based around the fact that we must live out our faith. We're to be doers & not just hearers. James demands that Christian faith must be functional. A living faith is a working faith. James' central aim in this letter is to challenge us to test the validity of our faith. Hopefully, prayerfully, in the months ahead, this goal will be worked out in each of our lives as we examine our faith in light of the teachings of this book. The genuineness of something valuable is verified through a process of examination or testing. Whether it's art, jewelry, stamps, coins, or whatever. Anything that has value is subject to testing.

Any of you bid this past Thursday on the 1943 copper penny put up for auction? A 16-year-old found it in his HS cafeteria change in 1946. In the 50s he contacted the US Mint & they assured him there were no 1943 copper pennies. He kept it anyway. In 1958 one was sold for \$40k. Last fall his was examined & declared authentic.<sup>1</sup> This was important because there are many counterfeits & forgeries of this coin. Take a steel 1943 penny & coat it in copper & find a sucker to buy it. Or take a 1948 penny & remove the left half of the 8 & you've got a much more expensive coin. There are thought to be somewhere between 10 & 40 authentic 1943 copper pennies. The one this week was expected to bring \$1.7 million but someone got it for a steal at \$204k.<sup>2</sup>

If the testing of coins, & everything else of value, is important, how much more true is this of so-called saving faith? If I buy a 1943 steel penny coated with copper & pay \$204k for it, I'm only out a bunch of money. But if I assume my faith is genuine when it isn't, the consequences are far more serious. This is why the testing of our faith is a very prominent theme throughout the Scriptures. James is a letter that does virtually nothing but challenge Christians to faithful living & it does so with specifics. & some will ask, isn't this legalism, or, at least moralism? Legalism is the belief that we earn our salvation by our obedience or good works. Moralism is a concentration on behavior,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.coinnews.net/2018/08/14/ngc-certifies-lutes-discovered-1943-bronze-cent/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://fortune.com/2019/01/11/ultra-rare-penny-auction/>

obedience, & performance that minimizes the importance of God's grace; in salvation entirety as by God's grace. Neither is correct. Salvation is all by God & we are saved for good works, not because of them. PRAY

**1. Tests of Faith** We see the emphasis on examination in various Old & NT vss, some of which were listed in last week's question insert (Ps 17:3; 26:1-2; 139:23-24; Lam 3:40; Ezek 18:28; 2 Cor 13:5). Because of the ever-present danger of counterfeit faith, God's Word continually calls for professed salvation to be tested for validity. Not only do we have many vss throughout the Scriptures that emphasize self-examination but we have whole sections of Scripture dedicated to the various tests that we need to apply.

**A. SOTM** The SOTM is one of those passages. There Jesus gives a number of tests that need to be applied to unmask counterfeit or false religion.

**1)** In Mt 5:3-12 we find the familiar beatitudes which focus on attitudes. Those in Christ's kingdom are poor in spirit, mournful, gentle, they hunger & thirst after righteousness, they're merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, & are persecuted. Having the right attitudes is a mark of true salvation.

**2)** In vss 13-16 Jesus communicates the importance of influence as a test of our faith. Those with genuine & true faith are the salt & light of this world. Rather than being an evil influence or a having no influence, those with true & genuine faith will be a positive influence.

**3)** Jesus continues in vss 17-20 & talks about true salvation being marked by a commitment to the Word of God. In other words, true salvation can be tested by whether or not we obey God.

**4)** Mt 5:21-48 talks about the importance of the heart. We could call this the test of heart righteousness or hypocrisy. You say this but on the inside it isn't the case at all.

**5)** Jesus speaks about genuine faith that can be seen in a right worship In Mt 6:1-18. This could be called the right worship test. Jesus in these vss speaks about how people should pray, give, & fast. & we could continue to go through this sermon & see other tests.

**B. 1 John** Not only do we see large portions of Scripture given to provide us with certain tests of living or genuine faith but entire books. 1 Jn is an example of this. It's filled with specific tests of genuine faith from the very beginning all the way to the end. Vss 6-10 of the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter say,

If we say that we have fellowship with Him & yet walk in the darkness, we lie & do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, & the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves & the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful & righteous to forgive us our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar & His word is not in us.

2:3-4 tells us, **By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," & does not keep His commandments, is a liar, & the truth is not in him.**

2:5 continues, **but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.**

2:9 says, **The one who says he is in the Light & yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.**

Jump to 2:15. **Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him.**

& so on throughout the book.

**C. James** This continues throughout the book & James is very similar to this. It's filled with various tests of genuine or living faith. The world is committed to the testing of things that have value. We must be even more committed to the testing of ourselves to see if we have living or genuine faith because the consequences are much more far reaching than simply the loss of money. Why is this such a dominant theme in the Bible? Because without these tests Satan can very easily lead us to conclude that we're saved when we aren't. Satan wants to lead people into a false sense of security. He wants them to believe their salvation is secure even when it isn't. To say it another way, if we don't examine ourselves biblically, it's possible we may embrace a counterfeit or non-saving faith. This is why, as professing believers, it's so important that true saving faith is verified by the way we live & by the things that we can observe in our lives. In Mt 3 we find Pharisees & Sadducees coming to John the Baptist in order to be baptized while confessing their sins. At 1<sup>st</sup> glance, this seems good. But how does John respond to them? In vss 7-8 he says, **You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.** In essence he was saying it doesn't matter what you may say, it's what you do that really counts. In Jn 15:8 Jesus says, **By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, & so prove to be My disciples.** Did you notice what bearing fruit accomplishes? It proves you're a disciple of Jesus. Christ's disciples are known by their fruit. In Acts 26, when Paul is giving his testimony

before King Agrippa, he makes it very clear when we come to Jesus in true, saving faith it will make a difference in our lives. In vss 19-20 Paul says,

**Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, & also at Jerusalem & then throughout all the region of Judea, & even to the Gentiles, that they should repent & turn to God (this is in the context of by faith embracing Jesus as their Lord & Savior.)**

What does Paul say next? **Performing deeds appropriate to repentance.** He tells us in Eph 2:8-10,

**For by grace you have been saved through faith; & that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

I finish with these vss to make it clear that we aren't saved by works. Even Martin Luther, who made some disparaging remarks about James' letter, wrote

*O it is a living, busy active mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this, & is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes & looks around for faith & good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks & talks, with many words, about faith & good works.<sup>3</sup>*

Those who are truly saved will produce works that are consistent with their profession. Because of this, we can examine our faith by testing our lives for fruit. The tests that James gives us throughout this book will help us to examine our own faith & help us see how we might be able to minister to others as well who may not be living consistent with their profession of faith. Look at **5:19-20**.

Notice it says, **if any among you strays from the truth.** The person represented as straying from the truth isn't identified as one outside the professing church but inside. **The truth** isn't talking about truth in respect to doctrine but truth in respect to life or the living of truth. What happens if we're able to turn a so-called brother from a lifestyle where truth isn't practiced? We **will save his soul from death.** Why? Because before being exposed as an unsaved person by the way he lived, he thought he was saved. Not only will the study of this book help us to discern our standing before the Lord but, hopefully, it will help us in ministering to others. Our goal is that each of us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, would examine ourselves in light of this teaching. Which brings the question, will there be people who think they possess genuine saving faith when they don't? In other words,

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Douglas Moo, *Letter of James*, p 144

are there people who think they're going to heaven who in fact are not? The answer is, of course, yes! In Mt. 7:21-23 Jesus tells us,

**Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, & in Your name cast out demons, & in Your name perform many miracles?' & then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."**

Through our study of James we each will have the opportunity to make sure we aren't one of these. The intended & inevitable result of saving faith is a life of good works, & it was for that very purpose that Christ redeemed all those who make up His church.

**2. Author** With this in mind, let's look at the very 1<sup>st</sup> vs as we continue to lay the framework for our study of this letter. **1**

The 1<sup>st</sup> question we have to address is who wrote this letter? Who a letter is from changes the way we read it, doesn't it? Do you read a letter from the IRS the same way you do from a loved one? I hope not! The author is identified as **James**, but which **James** is it? By the way, *James* was a popular name for Greek speaking Jews. In Hebrew it's *Jacob*, one of the Patriarchs. If you attended a G<sup>2</sup> this past week, you know which **James** it is. But for those who didn't, we have 4 different choices, 2 of which are obscure.

**A. James the Son of Alphaeus** was one of the 12 original disciples of Jesus. We find his name mentioned anytime the list of the 12 disciples are mentioned. But apart from that, there's no mention of him in Scripture.

**B. James the father of Judas.** Among Jesus' disciples there were 2 disciples named Judas. One was Judas Iscariot & the other Judas is identified as being the **son of James**. That's all we know about him. Neither of these Jameses are considered by anyone to be a possibility for having written this letter. But there are 2 more choices that are more prominent. Just as there were 2 Judases in the original 12 disciples there were also 2 Jameses. There was James the Son of Alphaeus, but there was also...

**C. James the son of Zebedee** whose older brother was John. These 2 brothers were the **Sons of Thunder** (Mk 3:17). They were men of great excitement & intensity. James & John were more than just 2 of the 12. They were in the inner circle of 3, along with Peter. Every time in the biblical record

that this James is mentioned he's always mentioned in conjunction with his brother John, except once. The one exception is in Acts 12:2 where we're told about his execution at the hands of Herod Agrippa the 1<sup>st</sup>. The timing of his death is very important in determining who wrote the epistle of James. His death most likely occurred in 44 AD. There's no evidence that by that date he'd attained a special position of leadership among Jewish Christians that would justify this letter. He isn't prominent in the 1<sup>st</sup> 12 chapters of Acts & is always identified in terms of his father or his brother, John. That he was the author of this epistle is improbable. If not, James the brother of John, then who wrote this letter?

**D.** The answer is **James the brother of Jesus** (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3; Acts 1:13; 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 2:9, 12). He's a very prominent figure in the early church. After the birth of Jesus Mary & Joseph went on to have other children. & the oldest of those was probably James. The James who wrote this epistle was James the ½-brother of Jesus. This James wasn't a follower of Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry. He didn't know Him as his Lord & Savior. He only knew Him as his older Brother who happened to do miracles. This is clear from Jn 7, where we read,

**After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near. Therefore His brothers (James, Joses, Simon, & Judas {Mt 13:55-56} these brothers) said to Him, Leave here & go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing (1-5).**

What works? They're referring to His miracles. Why would they encourage Him to do this? They go on to say, **For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.** They're encouraging Him to go into Jerusalem to make a name for Himself. It's as if they're wanting to manage & promote Him. But how do we know they didn't accept Jesus as more than just a miracle worker? How do we know they didn't accept that Jesus was in fact their Messiah? Because of vs 5, **For not even His brothers were believing in Him.** They missed the point of the miracles. But things changed drastically for James & his brothers after Jesus' death. Acts 1:14 records for us a gathering of Christ's disciples shortly after His ascension & notice who's included with them. **These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, & Mary the mother of Jesus, & with His brothers.** What happened? The resurrection happened! It seems James was converted after the resurrection of Jesus. In 1 Cor

15:7 James is listed as one of those to whom Jesus appeared after He'd risen from the dead. It appears he came to faith then &, apparently, his other brothers as well. This is why we see James & the other brothers of Jesus in the upper room waiting for the descent of the Spirit of God & the birth of the church. Of course, being a brother of Jesus gave James no authority to admonish other Christians as he does in this letter. What qualified James to write such a letter wasn't his physical relationship to Jesus but his spiritual relationship. What kind of man was James? **1) Personality** James had a forceful personality. His sentences in this letter are short & direct. He's different from Paul in that Paul brings up an issue & explores it thoroughly before moving on. Not James. He just blasts the target & moves on. In these 108 vs there are more than 50 imperatives. James is black & white. He's like John in this way. John is black & white about concepts. James is black & white in terms of applications. John is black & white about theological issues. James is black & white about matters of life. What about his ...

**2) Spirituality?** He's deeply spiritual. In fact, he was known in history as *James the Just* or *James the righteous*. It was said he was so holy that his knees were like the knees' of camels because he spent so much time in prayer. Thus the nickname, *Camel Knees*. His humility is seen in the way he introduces himself here in vs 1. **James, a bondservant of God & the Lord Jesus Christ.** He might have said, *James, the brother of Jesus*, but, he only wanted to be identified as a slave of Jesus. &, yes, *slave* is a better translation than *servant* or **bondservant**. Christians committed themselves to Jesus as their absolute divine Master just as actual slaves had to swear unconditional allegiance to their human masters.<sup>4</sup> To be a slave of God & of Christ was to acknowledge Him as Lord & God & worship Him as such. But also to serve & do His bidding at all times. Some of you may feel like slaves of your older brothers or that your older brother treats you like a slave. With that in mind, can you imagine willingly, happily, enthusiastically, & joyously calling yourself a slave of your older brother? & yet James does. It's interesting that Paul uses this same word, *slave*, to describe Jesus in Phil 2:7, that Jesus emptied Himself & took the form of a slave. Think about that! The One who made everything, the One who always enjoyed His Father's smile, love, & fellowship. Paul says He

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<sup>4</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A NT Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*

became a slave! That ought to speak to us because James says, *That's who I am. I'm a slave of the one who became a slave for me.* That's unlike anything else in this world. No other religion, no other philosophy, no other worldview gives you a God who becomes a slave. Only Christianity! & James says, *Now that I've understood & believed that by faith, I am a slave to the One who was a Slave for me.* & that's what he's calling us to remember & to understand about who we are. The central trait of a slave at this time was someone who had lost his ability & privilege to live as he pleased. & isn't that fitting for what happens to us when we become Christians? We don't belong to ourselves anymore. We don't get to do as we please. We listen to the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, & we do what He says. That's what it means to be a slave! It means that we're no longer ours. James was a slave & died a martyr. Tradition says he was tossed off a high point of the temple but didn't die so was stoned &/or beaten to death. James was a spiritually amazing man. He must have been, to rise to the place of prominence that he had in the early church.

**3) Ministry** He wasn't simply a leader in the church. He was a respected & effective leader within the church. In fact, he was the primary leader in the Jerusalem church. In Acts 9:26-29, we see Paul visiting Jerusalem only 4 years after Pentecost. & according to Gal 1:19-20 who does he meet? Peter & James, the brother of Jesus. This is amazing. 5 years before this particular period of time, James was an unbeliever. He wasn't even one of Christ's followers. But now we see him having risen to a place of prominence in the Jerusalem church. How did he get there? By being committed to the Lord & His Word & growing in his relationship to both. He obviously was a man committed to the congregation & it's needs. But wait! There's more! In Acts 12, after the birth of the church, Peter was miraculously delivered from prison & when he'd finally gained entrance into a group of believers that had been praying for him what did he tell them? Vs 17, **Report these things to James & the brethren.** This incident took place approximately 10 years after the birth of the church. But there's more! In Acts 15, we not only have the opportunity to see him again identified as a leader in the church, but we have the opportunity to see him functioning in this leadership role. This is the account of the Jerusalem Council. Paul & Barnabas had come from Antioch to give a report



about a problem they were having among the Jewish Christian community about the place of the Law in Gentile evangelism. After hearing everyone who had something to say, we read,

**After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. With this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ‘After these things I will return, & I will rebuild again the tabernacle of David which has fallen, & I will rebuild its ruins, & I will restore it, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, & all the Gentiles who are called by My name,’ says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago. Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols & from fornication & from what is strangled & from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (13-21).**

This response avoids the problem of legalism which would require Gentile converts to be circumcised & it also avoids a total disregard for Jewish sensitivities on the part of the Gentile converts. This incident took place about 50 AD. In fact most people put the writing of this letter by James before this time since there’s no mention of Gentiles or the things spoken of in Acts 15. That would put this letter being written sometime in the mid 40s AD making it the earliest writings to be included in the NT canon of Scripture. But we’re still not finished with James. We see him again in Acts 21 when Paul comes back to the church in Jerusalem with a gift of money from the churches of Macedonia & Achaia. James is still in a position of leadership. Luke tells us, **After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. & the following day Paul went in with us to James, & all the elders were present (17-18).** This took place some 20+ years after Pentecost. James ascended to leadership in the church at Jerusalem very quickly, not because he was a spiritual slouch but because of his spiritual depth. & he remained in leadership because of his spiritual depth. James was a godly man & a man of great prominence & respect in the early church.

### **3. Recipients Who is James writing to? 1**

Who are the **12 tribes**? This, obviously, refers to Jews. Though it isn’t clear in vs 1, it’s evident from the rest of the epistle that he isn’t speaking to Jews in general who are dispersed but Christian Jews, probably from Jerusalem, who are dispersed. In 1:2 & 2:1 he calls them **brethren**. He isn’t talking to just any Jews who’d been scattered but to Jewish Christians who’d been scattered. How did Jewish believers get scattered? In the OT & the time between the testaments many Jews were taken into captivity & taken to foreign lands. But in James’ day it was due to persecution from

fellow Jews. When the church was born in Acts 2, we see it exploding in growth in Jerusalem. When we get to Acts 7 we have the martyrdom of Stephen. Following his death we have persecution breaking out, including Saul's persecution. In Acts 8 it tells us, **& on that day** (the day Stephen was killed) **a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, & they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea & Samaria, except the apostles** (1-2). When James is speaking to the **12 tribes** of the dispersion, he's speaking to Christian Jews outside of Jerusalem, possibly to those who'd been driven out of Israel centuries ago in various forced expulsions by the Gentiles, but more specifically to those who'd recently been driven out by persecution from fellow Jews who hated Christ & the Christian message. James had seen a number of his congregation dispersed into a very hostile world because of the persecution that had broken out in Jerusalem. Even though, at the time of the writing of this letter, the persecution had decreased partly due to the conversion of Paul, the Christian Jews who'd left were still scattered & he's writing to them & to other Christian Jews who were dispersed throughout the world. Why? Because he wants their faith to be proven in the places to which they'd fled; that their faith would prove itself to be a vibrant & living faith.

I'll say this throughout our study of this book & that is that James knows that salvation comes through God's grace. In 2:5, **Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith & heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?** James knew that salvation brings Christ's imputed righteousness. In 2:23 he writes, **& the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "& Abraham believed God, & it was reckoned to Him as righteousness."** But he also knows that the sovereign act of God in bestowing divine grace will always be verified by a transformed life. This is the message that James, the ½-brother of Jesus, wants to deliver to the former members of his congregation who've been scattered to various places. As a **bondservant of God & of the Lord Jesus Christ**, he wants to share with them various tests that will help them to verify whether or not they're a part of God's family.

Before we end, I can't help but mention that James thought very highly of his ½-brother. Did you note that he considers his brother as God? James says he's a **bond-servant of God** & of who else? **The Lord Jesus Christ.** James realized that his big Brother was actually God in human flesh, God

incarnate. The NT word for **Lord** is an interesting word in that when the OT was translated into Greek, wherever the word for God's personal name, *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*, was used, this is the word it's translated with. It's more than simply *master*. It's full of the connotations of deity. So even though this little letter isn't seen as a deep doctrinal book, we see it begins with the deity of Jesus. At the very least, Jesus is Master & Messiah (**Lord & Christ**). Vs 1 ends with ...

**4. Greetings** This is the common secular Greek greeting in letters of that day. Paul didn't use it but James does here & in the Jerusalem Council's letter to the Gentile believers (Acts 15:23). It literally means *rejoice or be glad*. James was expecting what he wrote to bring joy & gladness to his readers by giving them a way to verify the genuineness of their salvation. He knew this would provide comfort to them in their trials as Satan tried to make them doubt they were truly God's children & fellow heirs with Jesus Himself. This letter was written so that Christians would test or examine their faith. James the brother of Jesus knew Jesus very well. He'd grown up with Him. He knew a lot more about Jesus than any of Christ's disciples in certain ways. James knew all about Jesus but he didn't truly know Him until after His resurrection. James wanted people not to simply have a superficial knowledge of Jesus or an uneventful encounter with Him. Instead he wanted them to have a life-changing, life-transforming, fruit-bearing experience. Certainly we can know then why he would choose to write this letter & outline for us the tests of living, genuine faith. What James is saying to us is basically an invitation, like his older ½-brother gave which was, *Do you want to do life differently? Are you tired of where it is for you right now? Are you tired of sin & feeling like a slave to it? Come with Me & let Me show you a better way.* James is inviting us to walk with him as we walk with Jesus as a slave of grace. Could there be any kind of slavery that could ever be any better than to be enslaved to the One who became a slave for us? There's no greater slavery than to be a servant of Jesus while we're a stranger in this world. & so right off the bat, James says, *For the rest of this letter you must understand who you are,* because everything he's going to say starts out with knowing what defines you. PRAY