

# **Faith in Action**

## **Studies in James**

Mike Wilson

Spiritbuilding Publishing  
Summitville, Indiana

© 2008 Spiritbuilding. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by  
Spiritbuilding Publishing  
15591 N. State Road  
Summitville, Indiana 46070

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture citations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

Page design, typesetting and cover by Hinds Design ([www.HindsDesign.com](http://www.HindsDesign.com)).

Cover original artwork, *Presenting the Oil (James 5:14)*, by Brian Ward.

Wilson, Mike.

Faith in Action: Studies in James / Mike Wilson.



[www.SpiritBuilding.com](http://www.SpiritBuilding.com)

To Jay, my son-in-law



## Contents

Favorite Sources .....	viii
1. By Way of Introduction (1:1) .....	1
2. External Trials (1:2–12) .....	9
3. A Contrast of Two Births (1:12–18) .....	15
4. No Self-Deception Allowed (1:19–27) .....	23
5. Injustice in the Assembly! (2:1–13) .....	31
6. Faith without Works (2:14–26) .....	37
7. Bonus Lesson: “Altar Call Salvation” .....	43
8. Controlling the Tongue (3:1–12) .....	51
9. How to Gauge Wisdom (3:13–18) .....	57
10. Man’s Pleasure or God’s Will? (4:1–12) .....	63
11. “Come Now” (4:13–5:6) .....	69
12. The Triumphant Patience (5:7–12) .....	73
13. Spiritual Power (5:13–20) .....	79
Review and Recap .....	87

## Favorite Sources

Rather than providing an exhaustive list of commentaries that went into preparing this booklet, I would rather note the following. They are personal favorites, most likely to be cited in the pages that follow. In some cases, their influence over the author is not expressly mentioned because, as someone has said, “Originality is the ability to forget where you got it.”

Barclay, William. *The Letters of James and Peter* (The Daily Study Bible Series). Westminster, 1976.

Keener, Craig S. *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Loh, I-J. and Hatton, H. A. *A Handbook on the Letter from James* (UBS New Testament Handbook Series). United Bible Societies, 1997.

MacArthur, Jr., John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Moody Press, 1983–2005.

Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Mature: Growing Up in Christ*. Cook Communications, 2004.

# By Way of Introduction

## James 1:1

James is a picture book—“a series of pictures of what faith looks like—in the confronting of trial, in regard to speech and obedience to God’s law, in response to gradations in people’s social standing and to people in economic need, in the exercise of patience and prayer for the sick.”

—*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*

### The Author: James

The New Testament contains many people named James, but only two of them are prominent enough to have written a book that begins, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” One of the two is James the son of Zebedee, brother of John, but he was executed too early to be seriously considered (Acts 12:2).

The other is James the Lord’s brother, son of Joseph and Mary (Mt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). Midway through Jesus’ ministry, James and his brothers were skeptics. John sadly reports, “For not even his brothers believed in him” (John 7:5). James and other family members apparently thought

Jesus was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21, 31–35). Something changed, and this may have occurred after the resurrection. James was one of those to whom Jesus appeared as a risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:7). In any case, Jesus’ brothers are among the band of believers in Acts 1:14. As time passed, James took on a leadership role within the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13–21), virtually on par with the apostles in influence (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; 1 Cor. 9:5). Later, he would meet with Paul in Jerusalem, with “all the elders” present (Acts 21:18–25).

According to Josephus, the high priest Ananus had James stoned to death (*Ant.* xx.9.1), an event that occurred around A.D. 62. The early Christian historian Hegeppus calls him “James the Just.” He says that James had “camel” knees for his many prayers. He adds that eventually the Jews cast him down from a pinnacle of the temple and then stoned him to death (cited in Eusebius HE ii.23.3–18). Perhaps the writer of Hebrews had in mind James, among others, when he speaks of former leaders who “spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (13:7). It is a testimony to James’ widespread influence that Jude, another brother of the Lord, introduces himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (Jude 1).

## Recipients: the Twelve Tribes in the Dispersion

Normally the “dispersion” (or “diaspora”) would refer to Jews living outside their homeland. The setting of this book is decidedly Jewish. James speaks of the “twelve tribes” (1:1), of a man coming into your “assembly” (lit. “synagogue,” 2:2), and of rain patterns familiar to Palestinian Jews (5:7). However, a closer look at the message of James makes it clear that he is addressing *Jewish Christians*—those who hold their faith “in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1). John MacArthur suggests that James’ “primary audience

### POWER POINT

Does any Christian feel completely at home in this world?

We are living in what C. S. Lewis called “enemy-occupied territory.” Wherever we may live, we are “dispersed.”



were those Jews who had fled because of persecution and were still suffering trials because of their faith (1:2).” No one knows exactly when James was written, but many scholars now argue that this may be one of the earliest books of the New Testament and a vivid picture of still-predominant Jewish Christianity. One is tempted to think of the scattering of Jerusalem disciples after the persecution of Acts 8. Could it be that James was a communiqué to “beloved brothers” (1:16, 19; 2:5), formerly with him at Jerusalem, who were now “scattered because of the persecution” (Acts 11:19)?

### **The Channel of Communication: A Letter**

A distinction must be made between *what* James says and *how* he says it—the manner of revelation. There are many literary devices by which God communicates his message in the Bible. Among them are law codes, historical reports, poems, dreams, visions, parables, curse formulas, songs, prophetic oracles, legal briefs, outbursts of praise, royal decrees, love stories, genealogical records, prayers, sermons, dirges, treaties, and role playing. These vehicles constitute the Holy Spirit’s “delivery system.”

God could have used other literary instruments. Some modern examples include dissertations, handbooks of rules and regulations, sales transactions, or certificates of grand prize eligibility. Even some of these elements are in the Bible—*e.g.*, sales transactions (*cf.* Jer. 32).

As is the case with many New Testament documents, the message of James is packaged in the form of a letter. What makes letters so special? For starters, God has allowed us to be snoopers, reading other people’s mail! These little documents contain real-life people in real-life situations. They are more *personal* than other forms of communication.

Every society has its own conventions for letter-writing. This is not as prevalent in our society today, as the letters of Abraham Lincoln are much more formal than a modern email message. New Testament letters follow a conventional pattern that was familiar in that day and age:

- ◆ Author's name
- ◆ Recipient's name
- ◆ Greeting ("Grace and peace" was a Christianized phrase; James has the more common and generalized, "Greetings.")
- ◆ Prayer for the recipient's good health (missing in James)
- ◆ The main reason(s) for writing (sometimes underscored by, "I urge you...")
- ◆ Special salutations and personal greetings (which often contain the nuts and bolts of congregational life)

Even though James is a letter, parts of it read like a sermon ("Listen, my beloved brothers"—2:5). A modern reader listening to this master preacher can envision what it was like being in a first-century "assembly" (2:2). Other parts of James resemble the wisdom poetry of the Old Testament, especially the book of Proverbs (*cf.* James 3:13–18). James has been called "the Amos of the New Testament" because of his strong statements against social injustice (*cf.* James 5:1–6). Finally, there are strong parallels between the epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount. Here are a few examples:

- ◆ Joy in trial (James 1:2; Mt. 5:10–12)
- ◆ Doers of the word, and not merely hearers (James 1:22; Mt. 7:21–27)
- ◆ Blessed are the poor (James 2:5; Mt. 5:3; *cf.* Luke 6:20)
- ◆ Adultery and murder (James 2:11; Mt. 5:21–22, 27–32)
- ◆ Mercy over judgment (James 2:13; Mt. 6:14–15)
- ◆ Dangers of the tongue (James 3:6; Mt. 5:22)
- ◆ Fruit of the mouth (James 3:10–12; Mt. 7:15–20)
- ◆ Friendship with the world is hostility toward God (James 4:4; Mt. 6:24)
- ◆ Judging (James 4:11–12; Mt. 7:1–5)
- ◆ Moth-eaten riches (James 5:2–3; Mt. 6:19–20)
- ◆ Oaths—do not swear (James 5:12; Mt. 5:33–37)

## **Outline of James** **(a Preview of Future Lessons)**

- I. External Trials—1:2–12**
  - a. A joyful heart—1:2
  - b. An understanding mind—1:3
  - c. A submissive will—1:4
  - d. An unwavering conviction—1:5–8
  - e. A humble spirit—1:9–11
- II. A Contrast of Two Births—1:12–18**
  - a. The birth of sin—1:13–16
  - b. The birth of a child of God—1:17–18
- III. No Self-Deception Allowed—1:19–27**
  - a. Receiving the Word—1:19–21
  - b. Implementing the Word—1:22–25
  - c. Living the Word—1:26–27
- IV. Injustice in the Assembly!—2:1–13**
  - a. The practice of injustice—2:1–4
  - b. The cure for injustice—2:5–9
  - c. The judgment on injustice—2:10–13
- V. Faith without Works—2:14–26**
  - a. Dead faith—2:14–20
  - b. Dynamic faith—2:21–26
- VI. Controlling the Tongue—3:1–12**
  - a. A universal problem—3:1–2
  - b. Little but powerful—3:3–6
  - c. Cannot be tamed—3:7–8
  - d. Blessing and cursing—3:9–12
- VII. How to Gauge Wisdom—3:13–18**
  - a. Worldly wisdom v. godly wisdom
  - b. The self-serving heart v. the servant heart
- VIII. Man's Pleasure or God's Will? 4:1–12**
  - a. What is the source of your problem? 4:1–3
  - b. Do you not know...? 4:4–6

- c. The remedy—4:7–10
- d. The cure realized—4:11–12

**IX. “Come Now”—4:13–5:6**

- a. To the entrepreneurs—4:13–17
- b. To wealthy landowners—5:1–6

**X. The Triumphant Patience—5:7–12**

- a. Be patient—5:7–8
- b. Do not complain—5:9
- c. Look at the examples—5:10–11
- d. Do not swear—5:12

**XI. Spiritual Power—5:13–20**

- a. Plugging into the right spiritual outlet—5:13–14
- b. The power of prayer—5:15–16
- c. Elijah: an example of the power of prayer—5:17–18
- d. The power to change an eternal destiny—5:19–20

**REINFORCING THE LESSON**

1. James calls himself a \_\_\_\_\_ of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone introduces himself in a certain way to others. It is the way we define and present ourselves to the world. How is James a powerful model in this regard?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The recipients of this letter are God’s people who are “dispersed.” In what sense are all Christians “sojourners and exiles” (1 Pet. 2:11)?

