

James

Faith without works cannot be called faith. It is dead, and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work, produce, and be visible. Verbal faith is not enough. Mental faith is insufficient. Faith must move into action. Throughout his epistle to Jewish believers, James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith “works.” It endures trials. It obeys God’s word. It produces doers. It controls the tongue. It acts wisely. It provides the power to resist the devil. Faith waits patiently for the coming of the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout his Epistle, James develops the characteristics of true faith. He effectively uses these characteristics as a series of tests to help his reader evaluate the reality of their relationship to Jesus. The purpose of this work is not doctrinal but practical, as James seeks to challenge these followers of Jesus to examine the quality of their daily lives in terms of attitudes and actions. A genuine faith will produce real changes in a person’s conduct and character, and the absence of change is a symptom of a dead faith.

Faith gives us the ability to choose wisdom that is heavenly and to shun wisdom that is earthly. Faith produces separation from the world and submission to God. It provides us with the ability to resist the Devil and humbly to draw near to God. Finally, faith waits patiently for the coming of the Lord. Through troubles and trials faith changes our perspective.

AUTHOR

Four men are named James in the New Testament. At least three are clearly identified: (1) James, the son of Alphaeus, called “James the less” (Mark 15:40). He is mentioned in the list of apostles, but very little is known concerning him. (2) James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John, called by Jesus “son of thunder” (Mark 3:17). He was slain by Herod (Acts 12:1-2). (3) James, the Lord’s brother (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3), in reality a half-brother. He became head of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). This James is evidently the writer of this epistle (Galatians 2:9).

The name *Jakobo* (James 1:1) is the basis for the early title *Jakobo Epistole*, “Epistle of James.” *Jakobos* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Jacob, a Jewish name common in the first century.

DATE & SETTING

James is addressed “To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1) and refers to Hebrew Christians outside of Palestine (James 1:19 & 2:1,7). These Jewish believers were facing problems that tested their faith. James was concerned that they were yielding to impatience, bitterness, materialism, disunity, and spiritual apathy. As a resident of Jerusalem and a leader of the church, James no doubt had frequent contact with Jewish Christians from a number of Roman provinces and desired to exhort and encourage them in their struggles of faith.

The probable date of writing ranges from A.D. 45 to 50. This was the first book of the New Testament to be written.