

# James

As we start a new study, open with me to the first book written in the New Testament, the book of James. To best help us start this study I did a “personal” interview with James this week. Please listen as he talks to us.

## **An “Autobiography” of James, Brother of Jesus**

“Good morning my brethren in Christ Jesus our exalted Lord and King. My name is James. I am a servant of God and of my big brother, Jesus Christ, while He was on earth. I was not always such a follower of Christ. Let me tell you my story.

“I grew up in a devout Jewish home with a saintly mom, a sickly dad (who died when I was young), three brothers, two sisters, and a perfect half-brother. What a difficult thing it is to live with the Son of God. I never got along well with my oldest brother. He was always right; He was never wrong, never bad. He was never mischievous or impatient. He never argued, stewed, or fought. He was kind, humble, generous, and hard working. He seemed to never sleep whether or not He worked late in dad’s carpentry shop. He always was up before the family. In fact He would come in just before breakfast each morning from outside. We could tell He had been out there quite a while. Mother always would just look at Him with such wistful and wonder-filled eyes.

“When He spoke, which was seldom compared to us whose words filled the small house in Nazareth, His words seemed to sweep all of us along. When we sat at the table so well made by Jesus my big brother, He would say amazing things that defy explanation. He was so profound and yet easily understood. All of us boys would leave the table saying, ‘Yeah, that’s just what I would have said.’ Although we could not resist His wisdom, we hated His words. The older we got they pierced our souls and irritated us to the bone!

“I remember the last day He was home. It was the day the small door leading to the carpenter’s shop closed for the last time. Gone would be the hours of wonder-filled talks the local folks had enjoyed with the kindest man they ever had met. No more would the wide eyes of children be seen looking wistfully off as stories from the Scriptures of David and Elijah and Moses came alive. When He taught it seemed to all of us that He had been there and had witnessed those events Himself and knew those heroes of our faith personally.

“On that day when our meek and lowly Carpenter brother headed toward the Jordan winding His way through the crowds, our cousin John the Baptist was preaching at the river’s edge to people gathered from all over the land. A group of scowling Pharisees stood off to the side as John’s fiery words aimed at them told of their utter viper-like lack of contrition that was excluding them from his baptism of repentance. Looking back at the crowds John was struck by the serenity of One confidently striding to the waters edge. As he looked into the eyes of my brother, he experienced what we had growing up with Jesus. It was the first time John had seen such purity, and such holiness and living truth in any man. To us watching it was almost funny. Immediately the same lips of the Baptist that denied the wicked and proud Pharisees now were disqualifying himself. In the presence of Jesus, John saw his own sinfulness. Yet by the persuasion of Jesus, John yielded and baptized the Christ.

“After Jesus was baptized, there was a loud unusual noise like thunder. My brother was never the same. Looking into the distance He headed straight into the barren desert of the Judean wilderness. He disappeared for over a month. It was like His life at our hometown and in His little carpenter's shop was done. We wondered why He left Mom all alone.

“When He finally returned, we picked on Him mercilessly because He was still home with Mom. We all fell in love with our childhood sweethearts. He never dated or even looked with anything but kindness and respect upon women. Many would have longed for such a man as a husband, but with His work supporting Mom and those long early morning walks He did every day, marriage was never an option.

“When I was growing up at home, those early walks Jesus had always taken had intrigued us boys. We even used to try and find Him, and once we did. I will never forget that morning. When we came up on Jesus, He was looking straight up into the sky talking in such a wonderful way to someone we never saw. He called Him Father—He must be really missing Joseph or something we thought. After that we never tried to find Him on His walks again.

“Let me get back to the story. After Jesus returned, we hounded Him to go to the Feast at Jerusalem and show Himself as if He were a prophet or something. And you know what? He went. He started to walk up and down through Jerusalem. Soon crowds in the hundreds, then into the thousands, and finally into the tens of thousands were following Him hanging on every word. We were told that He had fed them all from a tiny lunch basket, that He healed blind and crippled folks, and so much more, but we didn't believe it. Stories have a way of growing. Stories about Jesus my big brother were legendary.

“Time flew by, three years or more. I was married, we had our first child. It was during that time period that Jesus came to speak in His hometown of Nazareth.<sup>1</sup> None of us ever moved far away from Mary our mother. We stayed there working in Nazareth. When Jesus first came back everyone loved Him again, just like when He worked in the carpenter's shop. It was kind of neat to have all the town excited that my strange brother was coming, but all that soon changed. You see after He read from the Scriptures He began to speak to us as if He had written those words. We all became quite uncomfortable. There were murmurs and finally some of the less inhibited of the town jumped up. They actually grabbed Jesus and in a frenzy of rage half dragged and half carried Him up to the edge. Our home town has a spring-fed well and an edge of a cliff that falls so far that we all were warned to never get near it. They were going to kill Him. I cried out ‘Stop!’ But their fury was unstoppable. Then it happened before my very eyes. He serenely looked at me with eyes of sadness and then just kind of evaporated. The mob was shocked, I ran to tell mom and what do you think I saw, it was Him, walking far down the road headed to Capernaum.

“I could not shake the sermon He said or that strange power He wielded so gently. I started following at a distance. Never like one of those hot-headed fishermen James and John and Peter and Andrew. No, I was not a disciple yet.

“It was a few weeks later just before Passover, and Mom said she had to go to Jerusalem. I could not let her walk alone. So, I left my wife and little ones with the

family and set out with Mom. My younger brother Jude came too. Mom said we had to hurry something awful was happening. She said Jesus told her He was going to die.

“Well, the rest is unforgettably etched upon my soul. Each step along the hard packed paths of the hills and then up to Jerusalem were filled with sights and sounds of my brother. It all started to fit. Dad’s stories to us about angels and wise men following a bright star, shepherds who saw lights and listened to angels, and mom’s first child flooded back to my mind. Joseph always spoke to Jesus differently, never as a son, almost as a best friend. Then there was the temple story when Jesus was twelve, the baptism when Cousin John shouted that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and now Mom saying He was going to die at Passover.

“We arrived in time to see it all. Jesus was in Jerusalem preaching when the religious leaders hatefully attacked Him. Next thing I knew, I saw Him bound by the Romans. He was horribly beaten and made to stagger through the streets. They used the dreaded death machine on Him, the cross. He was crucified, bleeding and gasping for air. I watched it all. It runs together now in my soul.

“However, let me finish. I am no longer just His little brother. You see, at the cross I too believed that He was the Son of God. After He rose the Scriptures record, He appeared to Peter, the Apostles, and to James.<sup>2</sup> That’s me, and now I am James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

There are four men named James in the New Testament. You have just met James the brother of Jesus (one of Jesus’ four half-brothers and two half-sisters).<sup>3</sup> It was this James who rose to the place of pastoring the church at Jerusalem. His profiles are contained in Acts 12:17, 15:13–21, 21:18; and Galatians 2:9–10. In his short letter of 108 verses there are no less than 50 commands. As he writes he addresses his comments to the believers who have left Jerusalem perhaps because of Paul’s persecution. These believers are called *brethren* eighteen times and *beloved* three times. James reflects his Jewishness in the usage of the terms *synagogue* and *Lord of Hosts*. His words also carry a flavor of the Proverbs and blend with Jesus words from the Sermon on the Mount. Paul teaches that faith receives the free gift of God’s righteousness. James agrees and states that faith will also reflect God’s free gift of righteousness. Thus it is a faith that works.

James reflects a good grasp of the Old Testament Scriptures. He refers to four personalities (Abram, Rahab, Job, and Elijah) as well as frequent allusions or references to the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), Joshua, I Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and at least seven of the twelve Minor Prophets. James also draws allusions from the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus (fifteen times) and Wisdom of Solomon (twelve times).

The Sermon on the Mount is never quoted but like reminiscences of special times it is alluded to continually. (Note: Matthew 5:10–12, James 1:2; Matthew 5:48, James 1:4; Matthew 7:7–12, James 1:5–12; Matthew 5:3, James 1:9; Matthew 5:22, James 1:19–20; Matthew 5:7, 6:14–15, James 2:23; Matthew 7:21–23, James 2:14–16; Matthew 5:9, James 3:17–18; Matthew 6:24, James 4:4; Matthew 5:3–4, James 4:10; Matthew 7:1–2, James 4:11; Matthew 6:19, James 5:2; Matthew 5:12, James 5:10; Matthew 5:33–37, James 5:12)

James 2:1 uses a colorful word for “partiality.” This word combines the Greek words *prosopon*, meaning “face” with *lambano*, meaning “receive” to make the word *proso-polampsia* which means to “receive face or to be partial.” As justice is portrayed as a blindfolded woman, so God says He is impartial. This word is used three other times in the New Testament. In Romans 2:11 God says no human face sways His perfect judgment. In Ephesians 6:9 Paul uses it to say God rewards slaves and free impartially, and finally it is used in Colossians 3:25 to say that God does not respect persons in regards to punishment for wrongdoing.

## **A Summary of the Book of James**

Do you want to grow in your spiritual life? James takes us to the heart of the life we are to live in Christ. Listen to just a summary of the topics he, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches about: confession of sin, prayer, wealth—right and wrong usage, temptation, swearing, murmuring, patience, judging, submission to God, worldliness, the origin of strife, rich versus poor, wisdom, joy in trials, heavenly wisdom versus earthly wisdom, tongues, teachers, faith and works, justification, God's Law, liberty, impartiality, true religion, and regeneration.

## **James' Faith List**

Let's take a quick walk through this book and see an overview of what James has to say about faith:

- Faith is enduring trials (James 1:2–8).
- Faith is understanding and overcoming temptation (James 1:12–18).
- Faith is receiving the true Word (James 1:19–27).
- Faith is seeing like God does: impartially (James 2:1–13).
- Faith is living like Jesus did: doing good (James 2:14–26; Acts 10:38).
- Faith is taming the tongue (James 3:1–12).
- Faith is receiving wisdom from above (James 3:13–18).
- Faith is separating from the world and submitting to God (James 4:1–10).
- Faith is patiently waiting for Christ's timing (James 5:7–12).

## **James: A Recipe for Christian Maturity**

Someone has said that the book of James can be likened to a recipe for Christian maturity:

First preheat the oven (trials, 1:2–3). In a bowl put in wisdom (1:5); add faith and works (2:17). This is important because faith without works is like dead yeast (2:20); it will be inactive and not produce life.

Then add a marinated or tenderized tongue (3:17). Strain out any selfishness floating to the top (4:10). And finally, wait patiently basting all the while with prayer (5:8).

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 4:14–30.

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 15:3–7.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 6:3.