

The Gospel in

James

Belief that behaves!



Field



Notes

The Gospel in *James*

Belief that Behaves!

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Field Notes

a journal of exploration and discovery



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How does this book work?

Field Notes

INTRODUCTION

Keys to your Field Notes

Welcome to your *Field Notes* on James. You are about to embark on a journey of discovery. Your destination is Christianity scattered throughout the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. In order to be ready for your exploration of this book, we highly recommend you spend a few minutes understanding the way your *Field Notes* work. This book serves as a guide to the ancient biblical text as well as a journal for your discoveries along the way. Let's get started.

Studying the Bible

Studying the Bible is much like heading off into an unknown land to dig around the ruins of an ancient civilization. You need to know where to dig, what you are discovering, and what is important about what you find. This book will guide you on a journey of ancient discovery: the discovery of the meaning of the biblical text.

This Bible study follows the metaphor of an expedition, or a quest in search of biblical and theological discovery. Your *Field Notes* contain three specific parts which correspond to the three steps used in an ancient dig. Each step will help you in the process of understanding and applying God's Word to your life. Each *Field Study* begins with learning the content and meaning of the text, followed by a section called *Discoveries*, which includes discussion questions, exercises, and activities to apply the text to your life. Let's begin by understanding the three steps.

Step one: Survey the land

The first step to making a discovery is a comprehensive survey of the land, notating everything that is around. In your *Field Notes*, the site is the biblical book we will study. This inspection helps us to better understand the characteristics of the terrain. With regard to the Bible, our survey helps us see the function of a book as part of the grand

A Field Study

Your *Field Notes* are divided into individual field studies. Each *Field Study* is designed to take a minimum of 30 minutes. The content of the *Field Study* takes around fifteen minutes to read, and the remaining time is for the *Discoveries*. This includes discussion questions, exercises, and activities which provide over an hour's worth of interaction if so desired. The exercises are designed for you to choose the ones that are most helpful for you or your group.



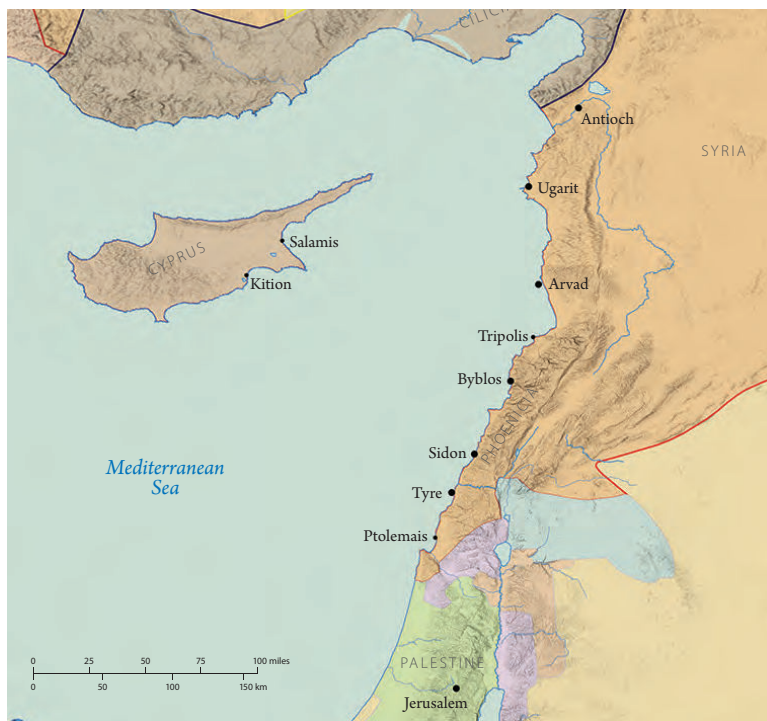


The Setting of James

James writes to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. Undoubtedly this was a reference to Jewish Christian churches throughout the Roman Empire.

The Jerusalem Church

Persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem when Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:54–8:1). In Acts 11:19 Luke records that those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. James's letter to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations may have included these three places north of Palestine.





immature in the faith. The hardships of life molded the attitudes, values, and behavior of Christians according to the pattern of the world instead of Christ. *Tough times can do this!* Such skewed living exposed something that concerned James about the authenticity of their faith.

Therefore, James saw a faith problem in Christian misbehavior. No believer's behavior should be inconsistent with the model of Christ's life. Difficulties will test the character and reality of our faith. Trials reveal the loyalties of our heart, but they need not bring out the worst in us. They can refine our faith in Christ, deepening our devotion to God. In calling for belief that is consistently lived out, James simply calls for a full-fledged dedication to Jesus, the object of our faith.

Acts 11:19–21

So those who had been scattered because of the persecution connected with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch speaking the word to no one except to Jews. But there were some of them, from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the Lord's hand was with them, and a large number believed and turned to the Lord.

Who was the audience?

James refers to his readers as “the twelve tribes in the Diaspora.” The *Diaspora* was simply a Jewish way of referring to the world outside of geographical Israel into which many Jews were scattered. It was the lands of the Gentiles or non-Jews.

The *twelve tribes* was also a common Jewish way of referring to themselves because, like provinces or states, Israel was originally composed of twelve tribes descending from the sons of Jacob.³

James 1:1

James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora: Greetings.

As the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, James had seen persecution disperse his congregation across the Roman Empire. Many likely had abandoned most of their possessions to flee for safety. Furthermore, Jews had previously been exiled and scattered among foreign nations because of God's discipline centuries earlier. Many of these dispersed Jews returned to Jerusalem every year to celebrate Jewish festivals like Pentecost. Acts 2 indicates that many of these pilgrims became Christians when the Holy Spirit was poured out and Peter preached the gospel. After the feast was over, they took the gospel back to their homes in foreign lands, long before Paul's missionary journeys.

James's letter is addressed specifically to all of these Jewish *Christians* living outside of Israel. In the early days of Christianity, the majority of Christians were ethnically Jews. Many were still meeting in Jewish

The Diaspora

There were many Jews scattered among the Gentile nations as a result of God's discipline. Assyria's invasion of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. and the seventy-year Babylonian exile in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 17; 25) are two examples. Most Jews never returned to their homeland after exile. They either assimilated into the foreign cultures or maintained their own Jewish identities abroad. The Jewish *synagogue* was key to keeping Jewish culture alive on foreign shores. By the first century A.D., the *Diaspora* had become a technical category in the Jewish mindset referring to the Jews scattered outside Israel.

3. Genesis 49:1–33; Exodus 1:1–7



Are they really Christians?

James repeatedly addresses his readers through the affectionate Christian term *brothers* (James 1:2; 2:1; 3:1; 4:11; 5:7). His message intends to persuade genuine Christians to live out their faith. But in the process of addressing the issue, James accepts that the absence of appropriate Christian living may speak of a deeper problem: the absence of genuine faith among some of them.

Outline of Acts

1. The Gospel spread among Jews (Acts 1–8)
—Jerusalem
2. The Gospel spreads among Jews and Gentiles (Acts 8–11)
—Judea-Samaria
3. The Gospel spreads among Gentiles (Acts 11–28)
—End of the earth

First book written?

James was probably the first book written in the New Testament. The first Christians were primarily Jewish, which is why James addressed Jewish Christians scattered across the Roman world.

synagogues in the Diaspora regions.¹ So, it would be quite natural for James to write to Christian churches using Jewish terms. Gentiles were not excluded from becoming Christians, but the book of Acts shows the gospel initially spread out both geographically and ethnically through Jewish people.



The Coming of the Holy Spirit

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit comes while Jews from the Diaspora are celebrating Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks. Thousands of Jews become believers in Jesus and returned to their foreign countries as Jewish Christians.

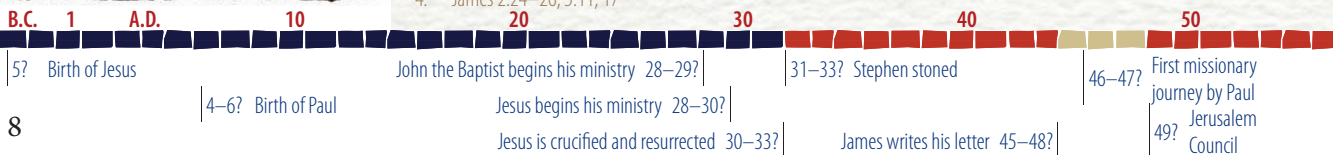
When did this happen?

The book of James was written early in the New Testament period, at a time when the church was still primarily composed of Jewish believers. For this reason, James refers to the Christian meeting place as a synagogue, quotes the Law as a basis of appeal,² uses Jewish technical labels,³ and employs Old Testament characters as examples.⁴ A Jewish audience would be familiar with all of these things, whereas recently converted Gentiles would not.

An early date is also likely in light of what James does *not* say. He does not address key issues that the church would struggle with once more gentiles came to faith. These matters included Christian teachings on salvation, the nature of Christ, and the sacraments. James did not even hint at issues relating to the Jewish-Gentile Christian controversy in A.D. 49 or restrict his own use of Jewish customs and language. The Council of Jerusalem in A.D. 49 affirmed that Gentile converts did not have to take on the Jewish practices of circumcision, dietary regulations, and Jewish festivals to be followers of Christ. Since James presided over the meeting, he surely would have mentioned something in his letter if the council had already occurred.

In light of these factors, the book of James was probably written in the mid to late A.D. 40's, before the Council of Jerusalem and before the church had become primarily Gentile.

1. James 2:2
2. James 2:8–13
3. James 1:1
4. James 2:24–26; 5:11, 17





Excavate the Site

James 1:1–18

Respond to life God's way

James 1:1–18

FIELD STUDY 2

Field Study 2

Previewing James

1:1–18 Christian Living

1:19–2:13 Responding to the Gospel

2:14–26 The Gospel

3:1–4:12 Responding to the Gospel

4:13–5:20 Christian Living

How is the text arranged?

We now begin our exploration of the text of James. This *Field Study* excavates the first major section where James explains how to respond well to life's difficulties. Here we learn about the process of growing in godliness. Read the biblical text several times with the help of the outline provided:

James 1:1–18

Section	Bible Text
Introduction	¹ James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora: Greetings.
Rejoicing in Trials (1:2–12)	
The process of maturity	² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you fall into various kinds of trials, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance accomplish its perfect work, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
Ask for help	⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God —who gives generously to all without reproach —and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith, without doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Arranging the Text

Visually arranging the text in this outline helps us to appreciate the progression in James's reasoning. The indentation of phrases and sentences illustrates their relationships to each other.



James 1:1–18

Section	Bible Text
An Example: Your economic situation	⁹ The brother of humble circumstances should take pride in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich man in his humiliation, because he will pass away like a flower of grass. ¹¹ For the sun rises with burning heat and dries the grass; its flower falls and its beauty is destroyed. So also the rich man will fade away in the midst of his pursuits.
The reward of God	¹² Blessed is the man who endures under trial because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Resisting Temptation (1:13–18)

God is not at fault	¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God." For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.
Man causes his own temptation	¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is lured and dragged by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.
Warning against deception	¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.
God causes good	¹⁷ Every good act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸ He willed to give us birth through the word of truth, that we would be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.



Firstfruits from the Olive Harvest

In much of the Ancient Near East, olives played a very important role not only in people's diet, but also for the oil they produced. James's audience may have pictured the olive harvest as they thought about the idea of *firstfruits*.

As you can see from the outline above, after the introductory verse, the main portion of this passage is divided into two sections. In the first part, James calls believers to respond to their *external* trials with joy. Secondly, he shifts toward the *internal* struggles of temptation. As a whole, James teaches Christians how to face trials and temptations in light of our belief in God.

What is this passage saying?

What are some key terms and phrases?

Now that you have an overview of James 1:1–18, let's dig a little





Excavate the Site

James 2:14–26

Faith and works go hand-in-hand

Field Study 4

Previewing James

1:1–18 Christian Living

1:19–2:13 Responding to the Gospel

2:14–26 The Gospel

3:1–4:12 Responding to the Gospel

4:13–5:20 Christian Living

James 2:14–26

FIELD STUDY 4

How is the text arranged?

Our excavation has arrived at the most well-known passage of the epistle of James. What you will study in this section is what this book is most famous for and has caused men like the Reformer Martin Luther great unease. Here James's single focus is on *responding to the gospel* or declaring that true religion works. In this study, he shows why it is essential for Christians to produce works of faith. Take some time to read and meditate on the text we are about to dig through, following the structure provided below:

James 2:14–26

Section	Bible Text
A Dead Faith (2:14–17)	
Proclaimed faith without works is dead	¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that kind of faith save him?
Example	¹⁵ If a brother or sister is clothed poorly and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm and well fed,” but does not tend to their physical needs, of what good is that?
Proclaimed faith without works is dead	¹⁷ So even faith by itself is dead if it does not have works.
A Fake Faith (2:18–26)	
Objection	¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.”
First response	Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works.



James 2:14–26

Section	Bible Text
Second response	¹⁹ You believe that God is one. You do well; even the demons believe, and shudder!
Third response with examples	²⁰ But do you want evidence, you foolish person, that faith without works is useless?
	²¹ Was not our father Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?
	²² You see that faith was working together with his works and faith was perfected by his works;
	²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.
	²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.
	²⁵ In the same way, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them off by another way?
	²⁶ For just as the body without the breath is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Abraham Believes God

In Genesis 15, God makes a covenant promise to Abraham that one day he will have his very own son. Even though Abraham and Sarah had tried to have children for years and had grown old, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

James 2:14–26 is divided into two parts, which helps in our examination. In the first section, James uses an example to stress his point that claiming to have faith without works is useless or dead. In the second section, he responds to an objection that genuine faith is inseparable from works of faith. Both parts help us understand James’s call to an active faith that is lived out daily.

What is this passage saying?

What are some key terms and phrases?

Take some time now to study and understand the following key terms, phrases, and concepts. Sometimes biblical authors use the same words in very different ways so it is important to understand the meaning of the word within the context it is being used. These key terms will be very useful in following the significance of this central section of James.



James Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1866–1902

B.C. 2000 1850 1700 1550 1400 1250

2091? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1446?

1925? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1260?

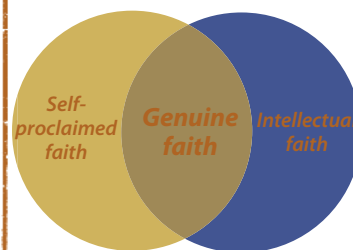
Period of Judges begins 1375?



Meaning of Key Terms

Key word or phrase	Meaning and significance
Faith (2:14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26)	James uses the word <i>faith</i> to refer to several different and paradoxical types of faith. It is very important that this is clear in order to understand what James does and does not say. Self-proclaimed faith (2:14–18) This is a verbal profession of faith without an actual love of the Savior. To say one has <i>faith</i> but not be able to show it outwardly means that this type of faith is dead. It is dead in actions because it is dead within. This is not saving faith in the eyes of God. Intellectual faith (2:19) This is the type of faith that simply means one believes certain truths about God. It is rational acknowledgement without heart transformation. This is the type of faith that demons possess. A <i>self-proclaimed faith</i> without works of faith may simply be an <i>intellectual faith</i> since these can overlap. Neither of these types of faith is saving faith in the eyes of God. Genuine faith (2:10–26) This is a proclaimed and intellectual faith that pours out into works of faith because God has transformed the heart. This <i>faith</i> is genuine and therefore finds expression in daily life. It is a living faith within and so it is alive outside. This is saving faith in the eyes of God. These distinctions must be clear as we encounter the word <i>faith</i> throughout James and elsewhere in Scripture.
Works (2:14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26)	In these verses, James qualifies what he means by <i>works</i> through the examples he employs. <i>Works</i> are: - Active and practical expressions of compassion and help toward needy people (2:15–16) - Active and sacrificial surrendering of what we love most in obedience to God's desires (2:21) - Acts of hospitality toward God's servants in loyalty to God despite the intrinsic dangers (2:25) We have also seen from previous verses that caring for orphans and widows (1:27), watching your speech (1:26), living a holy life (1:27), and not showing favoritism (2:1) all help explain what James means by <i>works</i>. He teaches that works are the behaviors expressing the royal law of "loving God and loving people." Works are practical and often charitable acts of obedience to God that are produced in the life of those who possess genuine, saving faith.

An Illustration of True Faith



1250

1100

950

800

650

500 B.C.

Saul becomes king 1050

David becomes king 1010

930 The kingdom divides

722 Northern kingdom falls to Assyria

Southern kingdom falls to
Babylon and the temple is destroyed 586

1220? Period of Judges begins

971 Solomon becomes king



Meaning of Key Terms

Key word or phrase	Meaning and significance
Justified (2:24)	James states that Abraham was <i>justified</i> by works and not by faith alone. This has caused huge debates within Christianity for centuries because the apostle Paul states that man is <i>justified</i> by faith apart from works (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:15–16). For now, it is necessary to layout the relevant meanings of this term that are important for our study of James. The term <i>justify</i> can be used in different ways to mean different things. The first meaning of justify is <i>to declare righteous or innocent</i> . This is how the term is used in a legal context as a verdict is passed or pronounced on a person. Paul uses this definition. The second meaning of <i>justify</i> is <i>to prove or show that a person is righteous</i> . It is not a <i>declaration</i> of innocence but a <i>demonstration</i> of innocence. Distinguishing between these two meanings is important to the broader discussion between James and Paul for they are using the same term but not in the same way. James speaks about how Abraham <i>demonstrated</i> his faith by offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God.
Two types of Christians	In James 1, two types of Christians were identified. One was maturing while the other was wavering in the faith. Toward the end of James 1, two types of Christians emerged again. There is the one who verbally professes faith and the one whose verbal profession of faith is displayed in active obedience. Up to this point, the assumption has been that all these types of Christians are genuine Christians. Doubt is now added. James begins to insinuate that there is a type of <i>Christian</i> that may not actually be a genuine believer at all. One who makes a verbal profession of faith without works may not actually possess genuine saving faith. By the end of James 2, three categories of people emerge: <i>genuine Christians</i> who are maturing in Christ-likeness, <i>genuine Christians</i> who are immature, wavering, and not growing, and <i>self-professing Christians</i> who are not genuine at all.

The Master of Diatribe

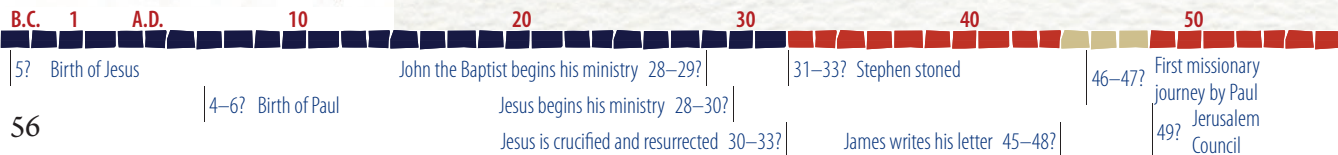
The apostle Paul was an expert communicator and his letters are filled with examples of good writing and speaking techniques. Like James, Paul used the diatribe style. In Romans 9:19–21, Paul uses both rhetorical questions and a hypothetical conversation with an objector:

‘You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault?” For who resists his will? But who are you, O man, who answers back to God? Shall what is molded say to the molder “Why did you make me like this?” Does the potter not have the right to make from the same lump of clay a vessel for honorable use and another for common use?’

What about the culture?

James used a well-known and respected style of argumentation known as *diatribe*. It was a style of communication that used techniques such as asking rhetorical questions, using multiple analogies, or introducing real or hypothetical objections. It was a common way of arguing a point more forcefully because it brought clarity, thoroughness, and interest to the topic. It was also very effective in engaging the intended audience. Note how James asks multiple rhetorical questions to hook his listeners into this passage. See also how he introduces a hypothetical conversation in 2:18:

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works”





James introduces an argument to be able to address objections to his point. Introducing and carrying on a conversation with a real or made-up objector allows the reader to listen in on a dialogue and understand the subject from different angles. James is an engaging communicator.

The Structure of James 2

James 2:1–13	James 2:14–26
General Point (2:1)	General Point (2:14)
Scenario (2:2–4)	Scenario (2:15–17)
First reason (2:5–6a)	Response to first reason (2:18)
Second reason (2:6b–7)	Response to second reason (2:19)
Third reason (2:8–13) (quoting Biblical Law)	Response to third reason (2:20–26) (quoting Biblical characters)

What is the explanation?

Let's now excavate into this text a little deeper. Keep in mind the different types of faith that James is talking about as we work through these verses.

(14) **A Dead Faith (2:14–17):** James begins by asking what good faith is without deeds. He does so to make the main point that there is no benefit in the type of faith, which is all talk and no action. This type of faith questions whether it is genuine at all. It is useless and not the type of faith that saves one before God. To claim to have faith does not mean one actually has genuine saving faith. James is rightly suspicious of such professions that do not spill over into works of faith.

(15–16) James presents a hypothetical scenario probably rooted in a real situation he is aware of, to highlight how useless a profession of faith is without action. He brings a needy person before an individual who claims to have faith. The needy person lacks the very basics of life. He or she is not looking for luxuries but the necessities of clothing and food. Now, the one who claims to have faith may sound like a *Christian* in wishing the needy person the blessing of peace, warmth, and food but such inactive and unhelpful concern is superficial and worthless. The needy person remains in need despite coming before one who claims to have faith in the *Ultimate Provider*. This is hostility cloaked in sympathy ridiculing the needy individual with useless well wishing. This unmoved individual can claim to love God and love people but without a faith that clothes and feeds the needy, that profession is without merit. Therefore, James returns to reiterate his main point in a

Dead Faith

James wants readers to feel nauseated by a dead faith. Invoking death is a powerful way to speak of a useless faith. A dead corpse connotes tragedy, despair, stench and much more. First century Jews would associate coming into contact with what is dead as rendering them unclean religiously (Numbers 5:2). Consider the priest and the Levite who ignored the man left for dead in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. A dead faith is intended to be disturbing.

Useless well-wishing

It is easy to detect the insult in saying to a hungry and under-clothed person, "Go in peace, keep warm and well fed." The phrase *go in peace* was a common way in which Jews, and then Christians, wished God's blessing upon one another when they greeted or said farewell (2 Kings 5:19; John 20:19). To call for God's blessing upon a needy person whom you are choosing to ignore is to make a mockery of that needy person and of God.

50

60

70

80

90

100 A.D.

49? Jerusalem Council

62 James martyred

70 Temple is destroyed

John writes Revelation 95–96?

50–52? Paul's second missionary journey

52–57? Paul's third missionary journey

79 Pompeii and Herculaneum are destroyed by Vesuvius eruption



A Demonic Faith

Demons certainly believe in God. They believe in eternity, judgment, and hell. Demons believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God through whom judgment will come (Mark 3:11; 5:1–20). They believe the *Statements of Faith* of most Christian churches. Demons are orthodox—they have true beliefs. This should be a warning to many. Just like demons, it is possible to believe the right truths and not be a genuine Christian exhibiting saving faith.

Breath of Life

This section ends with another powerful analogy, *breath of life*. Many Bible versions have the term *spirit* rather than *breath* in 2:26. Both are legitimate translations, but to a first century audience, death would be understood as the absence of breathing. Just as *breath* is a sure sign of life in a body so works testify to a living faith.

Is Paul the Fool?

In 2:20, James refers to his hypothetical objector as a foolish person. Some try to suggest James is referring to the apostle Paul. This is simply unfair and untrue. Paul and James are not opposed in what they teach, and James is not engaging in a hypothetical conversation with Paul.

different way. There is no *benefit* in the type of faith that is all talk and no action because a professed faith without deeds is an imposter, or a fake.

A Fake Faith (2:18–26): In the first part of verse 18, James introduces a potential objection to his main point that a self-professed faith without *works of faith* is most likely fake. He introduces an imaginary person to raise the objection he seeks to discredit. The objection is that someone can have faith and someone else can have works suggesting that it is possible for a Christian to have one without the other. James counters this objection in three ways. (18)

The first response to the objection that faith and works can be separate occurs in the remainder of verse 18. James challenges whoever believes this to prove it, knowing it is impossible to do so. How can

Three Types of Faith

1. *Faith-claim:* all talk and no walk
2. *Mental-faith:* all mind no heart
3. *Genuine faith:* all one's being

someone prove faith without works when it can only be proven through works? We need to see the evidence but we cannot look into anyone's heart. James however, can show his faith because of his works.

The second response to the one claiming faith and works are divisible is found in verse 19. James accepts that it is possible to separate faith from works only if one's faith is *not* genuine saving faith. He consents to the existence of a type of faith that is nothing more than an intellectual acceptance of a truth. That type of faith, however, is not saving faith. A person can have a head knowledge of the central foundational teachings or creeds of the Old Testament and only be exhibiting the type of belief in God that demons have. This is worse, however, because the demons actually do something with that knowledge—they physically tremble.

The third response to the

The second response to the (19)



The Shema: God is One

Shema is the first word in Hebrew from Deuteronomy 6:4–5 which states that God is one. This fundamental truth was held by James's readers and is still affirmed daily by godly Jews. Christians also accept this as a central truth as Jesus affirmed it in Matthew 22:37–40. Demons believe this Christian essential and yet are not genuine Christians. (20)

B.C. 2000

1850

1700

1550

1400

1250

2091? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1446?

1925? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1260?

Period of Judges begins 1375?



Matthew 12:36–37

In (Jesus) tell you that people on the day of judgment will have to give account for every careless word they speak. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned

objector who claims faith and works can be separated comes in verses 20–26. Here, James invokes two Biblical examples in order to prove that faith and works are inseparable. Before we look at the two

examples, note how verses 20 and 26 escort the reader in and out of these illustrations. The way these verses encase the Abraham and Rahab examples leaves no doubt to the point James is making through these illustrations.

(21–24) The first illustration in verses 21–24 is that of Abraham. James calls his readers back to the story of the father not only of the Jewish nation but also of all those who possess genuine

faith.¹ James is not concerned here with how one becomes a Christian because he has already acknowledged he is writing to Christian *brothers*. His concern is with the results of genuine faith within those who are already believers. This is basic Christian living.

Romans 4:16

For this reason it is by faith in order that it may be according to grace and guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law (Jews), but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all...

Abraham and his wife Sarah longed to have children but had grown too old. In Genesis 15, the Lord promised Abraham descendants like the stars in the sky and Abraham believed. It would be 25 years before their beloved Isaac was born. When Isaac was a young boy, God called Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Abraham obeyed and ultimately God intervened to spare Isaac's life. James argues that Abraham's offering

Genesis 15:6

Abraham believed the LORD and he credited it to him as righteousness.

1. Genesis 12–22



Caravaggio, 1603

RÉSUMÉ ABRAHAM

ALSO KNOWN AS ABRAM
CURRENT HOMETOWN:
LAND OF CANAAN

BACKGROUND

From Ur (southern Iraq)

EXPERIENCE

Wandering shepherd or herder in Canaan
Recipient of God's promise to bless the nations
Father of the Jewish race
Father of Jesus, the Savior to come
Father of those who believe by faith

REFERENCES

Genesis 12–22
Hebrews 11:17–19 (Hall of Faith)

The Binding of Isaac

The binding of Isaac was considered by Jews as the greatest expression of Abraham's love for God. All James highlights in the use of the example is that Abraham's faith in God was demonstrated outwardly through obedience.

1250

Genesis 12–22

1100

Saul becomes king 1050

David becomes king 1010

1220? Period of Judges begins

950

971 Solomon becomes king

800

930 The kingdom divides

650

722 Northern kingdom falls to Assyria

Southern kingdom falls to
Babylon and the temple is destroyed 586

500 B.C.



A Friend of God

James states that Abraham was God's friend from a common Jewish understanding, not directly as a quote from the Old Testament. It was a well-known way of describing God and Abraham's relationship. For example, in the second century B.C. Jewish writing, *the Book of Jubilees* 19:9 notes that heavenly tablets record that Abraham was the friend of God. It is likely this Jewish understanding comes as an allusion to Scriptural passages which refer to Abraham as God's beloved such as Isaiah 41:8 and 2 Chronicles 20:7.

of Isaac was a *work* or *action* that showed that his faith in God expressed years earlier was genuine.¹ Authentic faith grows into the fruit of works in the Christian life. The type of faith that saves is inseparable from the works of obedience it seeks to produce.² Abraham's faith was not merely a professed faith because it expressed itself through his obedience.

Hebrews 11:17

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...

Joshua 2:11

For the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Rahab is presented as the second surprising (25–26) illustration.³ Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who came to believe in the God of Israel after hearing about him. Her act of receiving and hiding the Israelite spies

Hebrews 11:31

By faith the prostitute Rahab did not perish with the disobedient because she welcomed the spies.

in Jericho who were sent in by Joshua as well as sending them off away from danger proved the genuineness of her faith in God. Rahab's faith was shown to be authentic through the actions it produced.

Patriarch and Prostitute

Why does James pick Abraham and Rahab to illustrate the relationship between faith and works? Perhaps it was because they are on opposite ends of the social spectrum in the eyes of the first century Jews:

man—woman
Jew—Gentile
ruler—prostitute

However, they are equal before God because of their faith. It may be a subtle suggestion that anyone between these two opposites who has the same living faith is accepted by God. Perhaps it is because both of these individuals expressed their living faith through a practical act of hospitality avoiding the favoritism presented in James 2:1–13 (Genesis 18; Joshua 2).

What is God saying?

The truth that genuine faith is inseparable from works of faith is not unique to the book of James. God has repeatedly communicated this truth to us throughout Scripture.

The *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4–5 is the most famous Old Testament creed summarizing God's law. It teaches that genuine faith toward God is something expressed through one's entire being. In the New Testament, John the Baptist called for those who had repented before God to produce fruit

1. Genesis 22:1–18
2. Ephesians 2:8–10
3. Joshua 2:1–24; 6:1–27

RÉSUMÉ RAHAB

(CURRENT HOMETOWN: JERICHO
(MODERN WEST BANK))

BACKGROUND

Prostitution

EXPERIENCE

Hosted, hid, and helped Israelite spies
Ancestor of Jesus

REFERENCES

Joshua 2:1–24
Hebrews 11:31 (Hall of Faith)

B.C. 2000

1850

1700

1550

1400

1250

2091? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1446?

1925? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1260?

Period of Judges begins 1375?



in keeping with this repentance.⁴ Likewise, the apostle Paul reminds us that he along with James, John, and Peter were eager to express their faith in Christ practically through remembering the poor.⁵ Paul repeatedly calls for obedience of faith throughout his letters.⁶ Peter also addresses believers as those set apart by the Spirit for obedience and John calls for Christians to walk in the light because those who say they live in God must walk as Jesus walked.⁷ It is no surprise then that James's teaching here comes from Jesus Christ himself. Jesus taught that fruit would provide the evidence to identify both genuine and deceptive faith.⁸ He even gives the feeding and clothing of those in need as examples of the practical expressions of the genuine faith that receives reward.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the people from one another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you cared for me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you in or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.'



James Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1896–1902

Rahab and the Two Spies

In Joshua 2:10–11, Rahab explains that she had heard of how God dried up the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape Egypt. Her knowledge of the acts of God led to her confession that he is the God in heaven above and the earth below.

Matthew 25:31–46

4. Matthew 3:8
5. Galatians 2:10
6. Romans 1:5
7. 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 2:6
8. Matthew 7:15–23

1250

1100

950

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500 B.C.

Saul becomes king 1050

David becomes king 1010

930 The kingdom divides

722 Northern kingdom falls to Assyria

Southern kingdom falls to Babylon and the temple is destroyed 586

1220? Period of Judges begins

971 Solomon becomes king



Where else is this taught in Scripture?



The Apostle Paul

Paul wrote Romans that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

James and Paul have been unwittingly thrust into a theological battle for centuries. James declares, “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24) whereas Paul states, “a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Romans 3:28). While these verses might seem to contradict one another, together they present a clear picture of salvation. The key to resolving this controversy is to understand that these verses cannot be stripped from their contexts. Paul and James have different agendas and write into different situations dealing with different problems. They have intended very different meanings even though they are using the same words.

Paul uses the term justified to mean a declaration of righteousness before God. James uses justified in the sense of a demonstration of righteousness through works. Paul’s concern has to do with how one becomes a Christian or how one is justified or declared righteous before God. James is concerned with the evidence

of righteousness, which justifies genuine Christian belief. Paul explains how we enter the Christian life through a faith union with Christ, while James shows the reality of possessing a Christian life given the union with Christ. Moreover, by works Paul means those acts of the law through which a person sought to enter into a relationship with God such as circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and keeping food laws. James is talking about works, which are often acts of love. They are outward expressions of a living faith, which affirm the inner faith that granted right standing before God in the first place.

Paul presents God’s truth that faith alone saves. James presents God’s truth that the kind of faith that saves never comes alone but is intended to produce observable fruit. James would agree that according to Paul’s use of justified, Abraham was justified long before he went to sacrifice Isaac. Paul also clearly teaches that James’s use of justified is inseparable from genuine faith (Romans 1:5; Ephesians 2:8–10; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Titus 1:16–2:1). Most, if not all of Paul’s letters are structured according to doctrine and duty, or how to live the Christian life in light of Christian truth. Correct belief or orthodoxy is incomplete without correct behavior or orthopraxy. Paul’s call for Christians to fulfill the law of Christ in Galatians 6:2 in living by faith working through love (Galatians 5:6) is equivalent to James’s call for Christians to fulfill the royal law (2:8) or to be justified by works of faith and not faith alone (2:24).



James ‘The Just’

James wrote that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

James versus Paul

	James 2:24	Romans 3:28
Justified	Displays righteous standing	Declared righteous in standing
Works	Expressions of genuine faith	A competing partner to saving faith
Faith	Faith-claim	Saving faith



Where else does this happen in history?

Martin Luther's initial disregard for the letter of James has become infamous because of his belief that it lacked the gospel. Luther's call to faith alone struggled to appreciate James's words on the importance of works. Yet, Luther's introduction to his 1522 commentary on Romans could pass as a paraphrase of James. Here is what he says concerning genuine faith:

Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever... Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you freely, willingly, and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire.

(Translated by Robert E. Smith for Project Wittenberg, 1994)



Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a German professor of theology who became the dominant figure in beginning the Protestant Reformation.

What does God want?

We are now at the place where we need to think through what God wants us to do with this passage. Here are a few thought provoking points for you to apply to your life.

A profession of faith without accompanying works is likely a fake faith

This statement is cause for some soul searching. Works of faith go hand in hand with genuine belief. If there are never any practical expressions of faith in our lives then that is cause for alarm. This is not an attempt to guilt us into doing things for God. That would be unnecessary because living for God will flow out of one who has genuine belief in him. However, this fact is supposed to jolt us into some inner reflection to test our hearts and see what type of faith resides there. A deedless faith always needs attention. Either it is the symptom of a dead and ultimately false faith, or it is the manifestation of sin in the life of a genuine believer. Either way, a response of repentance on our knees is essential. Let's begin our soul-searching by asking ourselves if anyone would know by our actions whether we have genuinely trusted in Jesus Christ. From ourselves, we must ask



others who confess Christ as Lord who are close to us whether their actions reflect genuine faith.

Christian duty does not end with wishing people well

Christians are to do more than wish people's struggles away. Stating that *our thoughts and prayers are with you* is not genuine Christianity. Our duty is to provide more than emotional sympathy for hurt and pain. Belief in God yields practical compassion. However, God understands our limitations. He is not asking us to do more than we can possibly do. However, honest limitations are no excuse for laziness. We must open our eyes to people's struggles around us, ask our neighbors or pastor about who is in need, go to a local police station, contact a local charity, or talk to a local politician to find out about social problems in your city. Turn feeling sorry for others into much more. Help them.

Fake faiths produce dead churches

James uses death to describe a useless faith that is not genuine. This is a disturbing word picture and is powerful because it jolts us. Something that is dead is characterized by coldness, stiffness, unresponsiveness, and lifelessness. Death is sad, tragic, and disturbing as one's spirit is separated from his or her body. Yet, too many *Christian* churches today are rightfully described as such and that is very troubling. If there is no warmth, change, activity, and life in our churches, there is a problem that needs to be addressed. It is either a fake church, or a genuine one in need of help to change. James writes to churches encouraging them to live out their faith. Perhaps they might even begin with a Bible study of James.



Discoveries

Now that you have completed your third excavation into the rich soil of James, it is time to consider what you have learned. Choose the questions that are most helpful to you or your group.

Connecting with the community

These group questions are designed to help you apply what God wants from you. When applicable, think of these questions not only as an individual but also in terms of your family, your community, your nation, and your church.

1. What is the difference between a self-proclaimed faith, an intellectual faith, and genuine faith? How can someone who has a self-proclaimed faith or an intellectual faith become someone with genuine faith?
2. James calls us to have a faith that results in works. What is a specific work of faith that James illustrates in verses 15–16? James uses the examples of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and Rahab's willingness to hide the spies as works of righteousness. In light of these examples, what works of righteousness can you do?
3. Have you ever encountered a person with a dead faith? How did you know his or her faith was dead? According to the illustration used by James in verses 15–16, what is the practical result of dead faith? What can you do this week to demonstrate a living faith?
4. James uses Rahab as an illustration of righteousness in James 2:25. Read Psalm 87:1–7. What does the psalmist say about Rahab? What can we learn from this Psalm about *those who acknowledge the Lord*?
5. James use of Abraham and Rahab as examples of righteousness tend to draw strong emotions. Abraham is the father of the Jews who was asked to sacrifice his son. Rahab was a Gentile prostitute who betrayed her countrymen by hiding the Israelite spies. She ends up being in the family line of Jesus according to Matthew 1:5. Why might James being using such different people as examples of righteousness? What should our strong emotions produce in light of these two examples?

Notes, Observations & Questions



Notes, Observations & Questions

6. James states that even the demons believe that *God is one and shudder*. Read the account of Jesus casting out the legion of demons in Mark 5:1–20. What can we learn about demons specifically by what they say to Jesus in this story?
7. James states that the idea of a fake or phony faith produces deadness. Have you ever been a part of a church that could be described as *dead*? According to James, how does a *dead* church become a living church? Come up with several examples from James that could help a church produce a vibrant, living faith.

Probing deeper

These research exercises are for your continued study of James in connecting key ideas with other Scripture. They require you to look at other passages beyond the text of James and need to be thought of in terms of yourself, your family, your community, your nation, and your church.

1. James reminds his audience in verse 16 that if you wish a blessing on those who need the basics of life without meeting their needs, it is worthless. Years earlier, Jesus told his disciples that meeting the needs of those with the least, was the same as meeting Jesus' needs. Reread this account in Matthew 25:31–46. Why does Jesus identify with the hungry, thirsty, lonely, sick, and imprisoned? What then is the result of our faith both individually and as a church?
2. Just like James in James 2:24, the apostle Paul also clearly teaches that a person of genuine faith *demonstrates* their righteousness through works of faith. Read the following passages by Paul:
 - Romans 1:5
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:3
 - Ephesians 2:8–10
 - Titus 1:16–2:1How would you summarize what Paul is stating in these passages? According to Paul and James, what does genuine faith always produce? Why?
3. Read the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac in Genesis 22:1–19. What does God say about Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in Genesis 22:12? What are we supposed to learn about righteousness in light of the extreme example of Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son?
4. Read the story of Rahab in Joshua 2:1–24 and 6:1–27. From Joshua 2:9–11, why did Rahab hide the spies and betray her own



Excavate the Site

FIELD STUDY 5

James 3:1–4:12

The gospel bears practical fruit

Maler der Grabkammer des Menna, 1422–1411 B.C.



Ancient Egyptian Riverboat

Pictured here is a stern-mounted steering oar of an Egyptian riverboat. This small oar served as the ship's rudder and directed the course of the ship. The depiction is from the Tomb of Menna from around 1422–1411 B.C.

Forest Fires

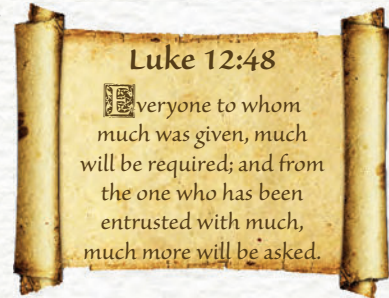
In ancient times, very little could be done to stop a raging forest fire. Even today with all of the modern equipment that exists, fires that start from the tiniest of sparks can decimate vast areas of land. James wants his audience to consider this imagery.



Johan Christian Dahl, 1846

This great responsibility results in greater accountability and therefore the appropriate warning. All Christians, and especially Bible teachers, are at risk of sinning with their words. It takes a perfected or mature person to rein in their tongue.

This ability marks the epitome of self-control.



Luke 12:48

Everyone to whom much was given, much will be required; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

(3–6)

In order to highlight the power and danger of the tongue, James provides several illustrations. This tiny part of the human body makes a huge impact on the speaker's life and others. The tongue's power to steer the direction of a life is like a bit in the mouth of a horse. It's body can be tamed and guided through this small instrument put just in the right place. The power of the tongue to influence an entire life is also like the rudder of a ship. A large sea vessel moves according to the larger forces of the wind but through a small rudder a pilot can control the ship, using the wind bearing upon it to set the vessel's direction. Even though the tongue is small, it can claim power disproportionate to its size. Lastly, the power and danger of a tiny tongue is like a small fire or spark that can ignite and destroy an entire forest. If uncontrolled, our speech can be an instrument of evil found within our own bodies. It can corrupt the course of our own lives and the lives of others, fueled from the home of evil itself—hell.

Speaking is clearly a powerful and dangerous work. The reason the tongue is so hazardous is made clear in verses 7–8. Though the tongue can exert control over a life and influence the lives of others, it is itself uncontrollable by man. Humanity may have begun to fulfill God's mandate in creation to rule over the world of creatures by training dogs to sit, teaching birds to talk, charming snakes, and making whales do tricks but he is still unable to tame his own tongue.¹ The tongue remains a restless evil that can destroy just like a snake's poison.²

(7–8)

1. Genesis 1:26–28

2. Psalm 140:3



Analyze the Find

James

Believe in Christ—behave like Christ

Field Study 7

Reviewing James

- 1:1–18 Christian Living
- 1:19–2:13 Responding to the Gospel
- 2:14–26 The Gospel
- 3:1–4:12 Responding to the Gospel
- 4:13–5:20 Christian Living

The Message

FIELD STUDY 7

We arrive at our final *Field Study* in James. With our excavations completed, let's devote our attention to analyzing the significance of our findings. We begin by placing the contribution of James into the broader story of redemptive history as narrated by God in Scripture.

What is the contribution to the Scriptures?

From Genesis to Revelation: The story of history

From the beginning of the world, God's desire is that mankind's behavior reflects belief in him. The idea of pursuing both the ways of the world and God was never his intention for us. Too many people try to live a comfortable Christian life. We want to believe in Jesus for the benefits of salvation, but we are slow to behave like him because of the cost. These split loyalties are exactly what James condemns. It is misbehavior at its core. The letter of James calls us to works of faith as an expression of worship to God. This is our primary purpose of life.

As we travel through Biblical history, we will see God's insistent desire that man be loyal to him in both word and deed.

Adam and Eve were called to represent God over his creation as they ruled it on his behalf. From the very beginning, mankind was created to be loyal to God through works of faithful obedience to him.¹ Working for God was an expression of real faith. The two went hand in hand. Faith at work ascribed greatness to God. Work only became tedious and tiresome when we stopped believing God's voice and

Adam and Eve driven from the Garden

While Adam and Eve originally enjoyed a perfect life in the garden, they were attracted by the serpent's promise of being *like* God. Walking with God and believing the serpent ultimately led to disobeying God.



1. Genesis 2:15



José Nepara Gimeno, 1726-1799

Cain and Abel

Cain and Abel were the first sons of Adam and Eve. By faith, Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock to the Lord for an offering. Cain also brought some of the fruit of his crops but ultimately his heart was not right. God did not look at Cain's offering with favor and in a fit of rage, Cain killed Abel.

The Promised Land

These borders approximate the size of Israel from the vision that Ezekiel sees in Ezekiel 48. It seems to be larger than the original dimensions in Numbers 34, but because of Israel's unfaithfulness, these borders are never realized.



B.C. 2000

1850

1700

1550

1400

1250

2091? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1446?

1925? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1260?

Period of Judges begins 1375?

began focusing on ourselves.¹ By selectively listening to God, man strayed from the Lord's will. It was through choosing to trust and obey God only half-heartedly, that Adam and Eve began life in the godless world that they inaugurated with their disobedience.

Within this now fallen world, God committed to do a new work. He would undo the intrusion of evil through the offspring of Eve, the Lord Jesus Christ.² The first generations of history testify to a conflict between the many who opposed God and the few who lived with loyalty to him. Cain tried the double-life of pleasing God and himself and failed.³ His brother Abel stood in contrast to Cain's false faith. Abel's offering to God was received with favor. He was a man of genuine faith at work for God.

Despite the wavering faith of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they also learned to trust God by living out their lives his way. Abraham's faith in God became so devout and practical that he walked up a mountain to offer up his son as a sacrifice in obedience to God's voice.⁴ Jacob may have tried to follow God according to the manipulative and deceitful schemes of the world, but he too learned to live and lean on God, though this did not come without many trials.⁵

A major focus of the story of redemption narrated in the Scriptures, concerns the nation of Israel. Israel was called to be God's representative nation among the nations of the world. Israel was to show the world the beauty of full-fledged loyalty to God through works of faith. Israel would display the fruit of genuine faith in God through living out the practicalities of the Law in all spheres of life.⁶

The clearest verbal expression of God's desire that his people live in exclusive loyalty to him is the famous

1. Genesis 3:8-19
2. Genesis 3:15
3. Genesis 4:1-16
4. Genesis 22:1-24
5. Genesis 32:24-31
6. Exodus 19:5-6

Genesis 1:26

When God said 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, over the livestock and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth.'



Jewish confession of faith found in Deuteronomy 6:4–5. It has come to be known by the Hebrew word *Shema* which is the first word, *listen* or *hear*. This creed fuses loyalty to the only true God with loving obedience to him. The love God is calling for is more than a feeling of emotion. It is a commitment to obey God's law. The *Shema* is a call to active loyalty away from double-minded living.

These two verses in Deuteronomy are really just a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first four commands call for true loyal love for God, which are expressed through the remaining six laws in loyal love toward others. The whole Old Testament Law, the religious festivals, and the activities of the sacrificial system were all meant to be expressions of faith. Without faith, these acts were empty rituals, which had no value before God. Partaking in the requirements of the law, the sacrificial system, and the religious festivals was God's guidance for expressing genuine faith. True faith was always articulated through works of faith.

In the period of the conquest, Joshua expressed his loyalty to God through active obedience to his Word. He called his generation away from a divided heart exhorting them to choose God alone. In the period of the Judges, women like Ruth and men like Boaz displayed the active

Deuteronomy 6:4–5

Listen, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all you heart and with all your being and with all your strength.

The Shema

The Ten Commandments

1. No other gods before me
2. Do not commit idolatry
3. Do not misuse my name
4. Keep the Sabbath

LOYAL LOVE
TO GOD

5. Honor your parents
6. Do not murder
7. Do not commit adultery
8. Do not steal
9. Do not give false testimony
10. Do not covet

LOYAL LOVE
TO OTHERS

The Ark of the Covenant Crosses the Jordan

One of Joshua's first acts of obedience as the new leader of Israel was to lead the people across the Jordan river in the manner God had prescribed. The Ark of the Covenant representing God's presence led the way.



Benjamin West, 1800



Joshua 24:14–15

Now, therefore, obey the LORD and serve him with integrity and loyalty... choose today whom you will serve... I and my family will serve the LORD.

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650

500 B.C.

Saul becomes king 1050

David becomes king 1010

1220? Period of Judges begins

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722 Northern kingdom falls to Assyria

Southern kingdom falls to Babylon and the temple is destroyed 586



1 Kings 18:21

Elijah went before the people and said to them 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him' but the people remained silent.

Peter on the Water

Peter's wavering faith is demonstrated when Jesus was walking on the water. Peter exercised true faith by getting out of the boat and walking towards his Savior in the stormy waters. However, he wavered by focusing on the wind and began to sink. Peter eventually became a pillar of true faith and action for God.



loyal love of God by the way they treated others, even at significant personal cost.¹

The centuries in which kings ruled in Israel were saturated with a false faith and ongoing pursuit of the ways of the world. Eli the priest served the Lord but his sons were wicked and worldly. Ultimately, God removed Eli's descendants from the priesthood.² King Solomon had unsurpassed wisdom and wealth, but his love of foreign women split his loyalty to God with foreign idols.

There were however, prophets like Elijah who called the people away from divided loyalties and indecision. There were also rulers like Josiah who sought to reform God's people into going back to living God's way. Even in exile, men like Daniel made decisions to live out their faith in an uncompromising way.³

Then God himself did what he said he would do. God entered the world as a man, in the person of Jesus the Christ. Jesus modeled true faith and obedient behavior for mankind.⁴ Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ grants us a holy standing before God in heaven. However, God requires that those who believe in him would faithfully represent him through holy and active living while on earth.⁵ Christians like Peter, Paul, Timothy, Barnabas, and many more show us in action the way of faith in Christ until the age to come. They model worship through works of faith, which God rewards.

1. Ruth 1:14–19; 4:9–12
2. 1 Samuel 2:22–36; 1 Kings 2:27
3. 2 Kings 22:1–2; Daniel 1:8
4. Ephesians 5:1–2; Romans 12:1–12; 1 John 2:15–17; 3:1–3
5. 1 Peter 1:15–16



Ruth and Boaz

Naomi and her family fled Bethlehem for Moab during a famine. There, Naomi's husband and sons died leaving her two Moabite daughters-in-law. Ruth showed loyal love by returning with Naomi to Bethlehem and becoming a follower of the one true God. With two widows in the family, Boaz showed loyal love by purchasing their land, marrying Ruth, and continuing the family name and lineage.

Revelation 22:12–13

See, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to pay each one according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

B.C. 2000

1850

1700

1550

1400

1250

2091? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1446?

1925? God calls Abraham

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai 1260?

Period of Judges begins 1375?



The Contribution of James

James makes several contributions to Scripture. He writes in the tradition of Jewish wisdom, which is in many ways similar to the book of Proverbs. He writes for the development of Christian maturity leading to perfection. He encourages a life of active faith, which deals with temptations that may arise from the love of money or abusive speech. James's words are essential to understanding and living out our walk with God.

The first contribution the book of James makes is to clarify the relationship between faith and works. It is easy to drift toward one or the other. The Spirit inspired James to write this book because God wants us to understand clearly how faith is lived. James affirms that salvation is a gift of God by faith in Christ. It is given by God through the word of truth, which is the gospel.⁶ His emphasis, however, is on what genuine saving faith looks like practically in the life of the person who possesses it. Genuine faith and works of faith cannot be divorced.

In focusing on the everyday implications of genuine faith, the book of James contributes to our understanding of the Christian life through very practical guidance. James is not unique in calling Christians to behave their belief. However, the book does stand out in the concrete ways in which we learn about our responsibilities in day-to-day Christian life. It is also emphatic in framing all behavior as a matter of loyalty to either God or the world.

Another contribution James makes to Scripture is to model wisdom, which guides life. James shows us how things in everyday life speak to our faith in God. Waves, flowers, mirrors, planets, rudders, trees, springs, and even earwax pass on wisdom. James teaches us to open our eyes and heed God's routine reminders about faithfully following him. The next time you look in the mirror, remember to respond:

- Look at the waves of the sea and remember to trust in God and not waver in faith (1:6–8)
- Look at the flowers or sun drying up the land and remember that pursuing anything other than God in life is fleeting (1:9–11)
- Observe that fishing or trapping an animal that dies is warning of the dangerous process of sin (1:14)
- Look at the movement of sun and moon and the shift in shadows on the ground and look up to God, praising him for being unchangeable in power and goodness (1:17)
- Watch the birth of a child and remember the new birth into life with God because of his goodness (1:18)

1 Peter and James

There are many similarities between James and 1 Peter. They both write to a *Diaspora* audience, use the same Old Testament passages such as Proverbs 3:34, 10:12, and Isaiah 40:6–8, and have themes of suffering. Peter shows signs of having read and been influenced by James before writing his letter. Perhaps we should expect 1 Peter would repeat James in such closely-knit ways. It may be written many years later but was under the direction of God and addressing similar situations to churches scattered across the world.

The Shepherd of Hermas

The letter that Clement of Rome wrote to the Corinthians (1 Clement) toward the turn of the first century A.D. reiterates James in many ways. Clement addresses the *double-minded* life, calling for Christians to talk and live out their faith. About a century later, the Shepherd of Hermas, writes as though repeating James in dealing with the dangers of the tongue, pure religion, the refining work of patience within trials, and warnings against living a double-life.



Painting in catacomb, mid 3rd century A.D.

6. James 1:18
1250

1100

950

800

650

500

B.C.

Saul becomes king 1050

David becomes king 1010

930 The kingdom divides

722 Northern kingdom falls to Assyria

Southern kingdom falls to

Babylon and the temple is destroyed 586

1220? Period of Judges begins

971 Solomon becomes king

**By Faith Alone**

The 16th century Reformation helped clarify the way in which God saves people. The reformers reminded the church that the Bible taught that we are saved by faith alone. This came to be known by its Latin *Sola fide*. We are *justified* or *made right before God*, by faith alone. However, faith that justifies is never alone. It is always accompanied by works of faith.

John Calvin

The Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) reflects the book of James when he writes, “Man is not justified by faith alone, that is, by a bare and empty knowledge of God; he is justified by works, that is, his righteousness is known and proved by its fruits.”

(1948 translation by John Owen, page 316)



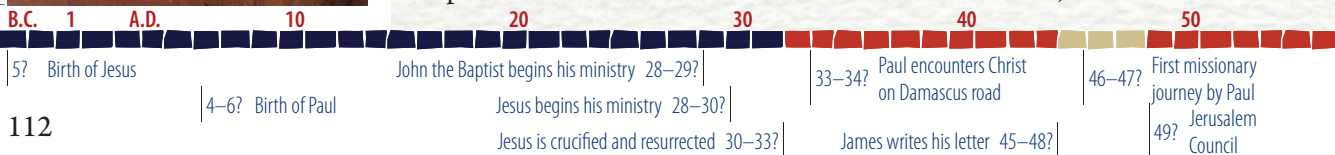
- The next time you clean out your ears remember to listen to God (1:21)
- Look at yourself in the mirror and think about what God wants you to *do* with your faith today (1:22–25)
- When you encounter a beggar or someone homeless, remember to do more than wish them well (2:15–16)
- Remember, just as breathing is a sure sign of life in the body, so works of faith testify to a living faith (2:26)
- When thinking about the importance of your speech remember: a bit in the mouth of a horse, the rudder of a ship, fire, the taming of wild animals, poison, supplies of water, and fruit bearing trees (3:3–6, 7, 8, 11, 12)
- Remember, planting seeds, and gathering harvests are calls for peace (3:18)
- When you think of friendship, ask whether you are a friend of God or of the world (4:4)
- When you wash your hands, ask yourself whether your heart is pure in loyalty to God (4:8)
- When you see morning mist, think of how temporary life is (4:14)
- When you get dressed, pay with money, or check your bank balance, think about how you treat your resources (5:2–3)
- When you eat fruit, bread, cereal, or watch the rainfall, remember to wait patiently on the Lord (5:7–8)
- When you use oil, remember to lean on the power of God (5:14)

In James, we learn that correct doctrine produces correct behavior. We cannot say we love God and then disobey him.

How did it end?

There is no surviving record of what happened among the Christians scattered across the Roman Empire in response to James’s message. We cannot assume that all churches or individuals responded in the same way. If James was written in the mid to late A.D. 40’s, then most of the New Testament letters and scrolls were written after James. These books of the Bible give us a portrait of life in the early church. A varied picture emerges, but the church generally grows, continues to scatter, and becomes a predominantly Gentile-filled body as narrated in the book of Acts.

Tensions between faith and works remained in the church in the first century, but took a different form. The apostle Paul recognized that some might misunderstand salvation by faith to exclude practical responsibilities toward God and man. On several occasions, he wrote





to correct that immature thinking in a manner that reiterates James's point.¹ However, Paul also writes about faith and works in a very different way from James 2:14–26. Those who miss the shift in focus tend to see James and Paul saying the opposite thing. The faith and works situation Paul devotes much attention to in books like Galatians is related to how one receives a righteous standing *before* God, not how one lives out an already received righteous standing *from* God. Unfortunately, failure to appreciate this subtle distinction rendered James's intentions secondary to Paul's purposes.

James, the brother of the Lord, continued to be a main leader in the early church for the rest of his days.² There are several accounts of James's death. The Jewish historian Josephus indicates that James was illegally stoned to death in Jerusalem in A.D. 62. The first century A.D. historian states that the Jewish High Priest was taking advantage of the absence of a Roman ruler in the killing of James.

(Josephus Antiquities 20.9)

The early church historian Eusebius gives more details on the death of James by quoting an early church chronicler named Hegesippus:

So the scribes and Pharisees made James stand on the pinnacle of the temple and they shouted to him, "O righteous one, whom we all ought to believe, since the people are going astray after Jesus who was crucified, tell us, what does 'the door of Jesus' mean?" He replied with a loud voice, "Why do you ask me about the Son of Man? He is sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Great Power, and he will come on the clouds of heaven..."

So they went up and threw down the just man and said to each other, "Let us stone James the Just" and they began to stone him because he was not killed by the fall. But he turned and knelt down and said, "I plead with you, O Lord God and Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

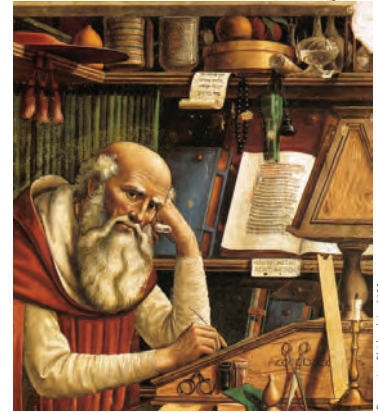
...Then one of them, a cleaner of cloth, took the club that he used to beat out clothes and hit the just man on the head and he suffered martyrdom.

(Eusebius, *Church History*, 2.23 quoting Hegesippus, *Memoirs*, Book 5)

James had no way of knowing how important his letter would be. In A.D. 66–70, there was

1. Roman 6:1–23; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 2:8–10

2. Acts 15:1–41; 21:18



Jerome in His Study

In the fourth century A.D., Jerome, an early Christian writer and theologian wrote a collection of 135 short biographies called *On Illustrious Men*. He stated that James had such godly character that he was known as *James the Just* and developed knees like a camels because of his devotion to prayer.

The Death of James

This is a model of the Second Temple rebuilt under Ezra and then radically reworked and enhanced by Herod the Great. James may have been pushed from the top of this temple which is thought to have been about 165 feet (45 meters) high.



Rhonne van Dyck, 2012

50 60 70 80 90 100 A.D.

49? Jerusalem Council

62 James martyred

70 Temple is destroyed

John writes Revelation 95–96?

50–52? Paul's second missionary journey

52–57? Paul's third missionary journey

79 Pompeii and Herculaneum are destroyed by Vesuvius eruption



Francesco Hayez, 1867

The Destruction of the Temple

The Roman Army led by Titus surrounded Jerusalem cutting off food and water supplies. With continued resistance from the Jews, the Roman army pressed forward and on July 29th or 30th of A.D. 70, the temple was set on fire. Ultimately Jerusalem was sacked, and according to the Jewish historian Josephus, 1.1 million Jews were killed.

Roman Catapults

These siege engines are the types of catapults that the Roman army used in penetrating and ultimately destroying Jerusalem in A.D. 70.



Edward Bortner, 1868

a Jewish uprising in Israel for independence against the Romans. It was the first of three Jewish-Roman Wars, sometimes known as *The Great Revolt*. For four years battles raged, and initial Jewish victories were overrun by the Romans. By A.D. 70, the primary Jewish stronghold was the city of Jerusalem. Under Titus, the Romans eventually breached the fortified walls, destroyed the temple, and burned the city. Many surviving Jews were dispersed or enslaved and spread across the Roman Empire.

The Third Jewish Revolt in A.D. 132–136 was brutally crushed by the massive Roman army. The majority of the Jewish population of Judea was killed, exiled, or sold into slavery. This included Jewish believers who were permanently barred from Jerusalem along with the unbelieving Jews. With virtually all Jews removed from Judea, James's letter to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations took on new meaning. Jewish believers remained dispersed from their homeland for centuries to come.

The early church accepted the book of James into the Scriptures just as we hold to today. The work even influenced other New Testament books such as 1 Peter as well as other early church writings of great importance. It was much later in history at the time of the Protestant

Reformation in the 16th century that some questioned James's teaching on the issue of works. However, this was quite understandable. For some time James was misused to place works as copartners with faith in Christ for a righteous standing before God. However, the unofficial slogan of the Reformation reiterates James: *"We are justified by faith alone, but faith that justifies is never alone."*

As the centuries progressed, generations of Christians since James have found direction and comfort in what James says. Today, Christians scattered across the world learn about living out their faith in a practical and God-honoring way. Many human rights movements such as the abolition of slavery in the United Kingdom

