

The Epistle Of Straw

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Martin Luther, the celebrated catalyst of the Protestant Reformation, famously took issue with the book of James.

He didn't think it expressed the "nature of the Gospel," it appeared to contradict Paul's statements about justification by faith, and it didn't directly mention Christ.

"Therefore, St James' epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it." —Martin Luther

It's often said that Luther was so opposed to the Book of James that he suggested "it didn't belong in the biblical canon."

But while Protestant churches embraced many of Luther's ideas and teachings, our Bibles clearly still include James today...

And I, for one, am glad for its presence. There is a reason it was selected some twelve hundred years before Luther.

For me, it reminds me of all the Confederacy statuary that is being taken down, stored, and catalogued. History is history.

So, is it true?

Did the great reformer really believe this important book didn't belong in the Bible?

Well, kinda, sorta...

He did not like what it had to say, that is for sure.

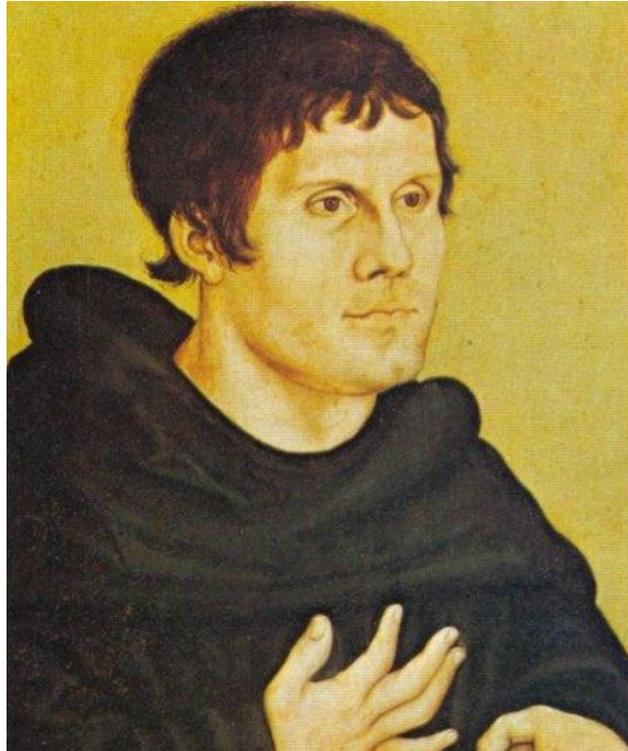
Perhaps his thinking was more pedagogical his concern was more academic for the University students.

Perhaps his fear was of sending them conflicting thoughts...

And we do know that he saw "WORKS" and "FAITH" to be directly in conflict, especially as viewed by the church.

The thought of "working your way" or "purchasing your way" into heaven vis-à-vis the selling/purchasing of a piece of paper signed by Leo X rang hollow.

Indulgences being constantly on the reformer's radar.



Martin Luther was openly critical of the Epistle of James, and he wondered whether the epistle belonged in our Bibles, but he never formally proposed it should be removed.

Thank God, although many have suggested that he did...suggest its removal.

He did, however, suggest it be “thrown out of schools”:

“We should throw the epistle of James out of this school, for it doesn’t amount to much.

It contains not a syllable about Christ.

Not once does it mention Christ, except at the beginning.

I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any.

Yes, he was anti-Semitic.

He was a product of his environment...and his time...

Since he heard that Christians place “great weight on faith in Christ,” he thought, ‘Wait a moment! I’ll oppose them and urge “works alone.”’

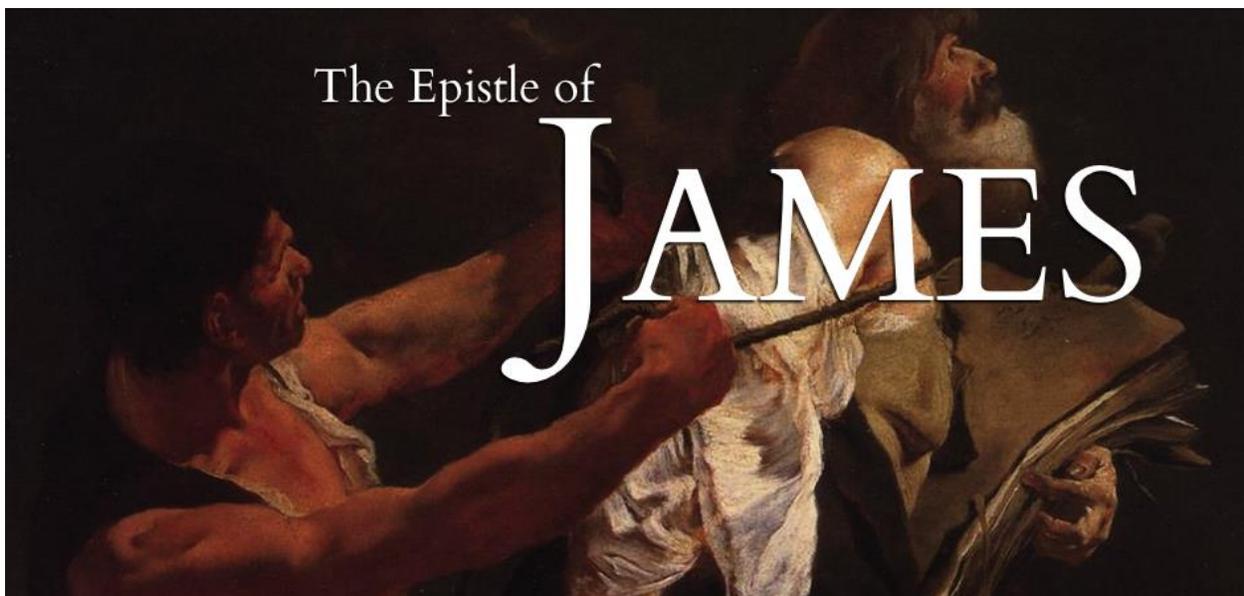
This he did.”

Or so Luther assumed.

Blame the Jews.

Umm, Marty you do realize that Jesus was a Jew, right?

Does James talk about Christ?



If you only looked at direct mentions of Christ by name, Martin Luther is right: the Book of James doesn’t appear to have much to do with Jesus.

It only mentions him twice in passing, once in James 1:1 (“a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ”) and once in James 2:1 (“believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ”). That’s it.

The rest of the epistle or the letter is silent on Jesus.

In spite of that, James makes numerous references to Christ’s teaching, and there are places where he likely uses “the Lord” to refer to Christ.

But that was never enough for Luther.

Even without those more overt references, James’ epistle reflects “the heart of Jesus.” But it was not enough for the grouchy old German!

Jesus frequently alludes to the importance of caring for the poor.

He even goes so far as to suggest that by serving the poor, we are serving God—*and* he links our concern for the poor to our salvation (see the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25).

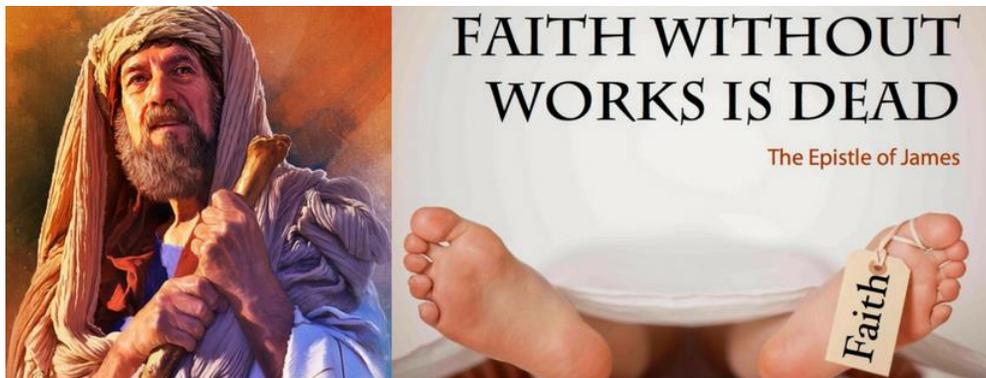
Perhaps this is why James wrote things like:

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” —James 1:27

Luther’s biggest issue with the Book of James was that it appeared to “contradict Paul,” and it seemed to oppose the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which was a central tenet of the Protestant movement.

You never contradict Paul! Never!

Faith without works As the scripture says, “Is Dead!”



The Catholicism of Martin Luther’s time was hyper-focused on “the value of works,” (read buying and selling indulgences) but Luther found that Scripture repeatedly asserts we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, not by anything we do.

And yet the Book of James says that faith *without* works is dead (James 2:26).

So what are we supposed to do with that?

Was Luther wrong—do we need “works” to be saved?

Should Luther have purchased two indulgences, one for each of his parents?

Or is James, contradicting Peter and other important passages about the Christian faith?

The reality is that James is not suggesting in any way that “works *lead to our salvation.*”

That was Luther’s take on it, however.

It’s a result of it.



Jesus uses the metaphor of trees and fruit to capture a similar idea.

If we claim to have faith in Jesus Christ but our lives bear no evidence of that, it's like claiming to have his good fruit, but all we produce is rotten.

And he makes it clear what happens to trees with rotten fruit:

“By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So, by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’ Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers’” —Matthew 7:16–23

Martin Luther called the church to renew its focus “on Christ,” and as part of that he placed greater emphasis on books of the Bible that “most magnified the glory of Christ.”

This is why Luther had strong reservations about James' inclusion in the biblical canon, but that's also exactly why it's stayed there for centuries: James constantly echoes Christ's own words and teachings.

"St. John' Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and St. Peter's Epistle - these are the books which show to thee Christ . . . Therefore, St. James' Epistle is a perfect “straw-epistle” compared with them . . ."

Martin Luther

And, straw is good for the fire.

Luther, according to the Holman Bible Dictionary, Disciple's Study Bible, and other references and commentaries, had the greatest difficulty with what James wrote about “faith and works” in the second chapter of his book.

He was stuck on it. He could not get passed it.

Some of the key parts from verses 14 to 26 which Martin Luther disagreed with are the following.

My brethren, what good does it do, if anyone says that he has faith, and does not have works?

Is faith able to save him? . . .

In the same way also, faith, if it does not have works, is dead, by itself.

But someone is going to say, "You have faith, and I have works."

My answer is: You prove your faith to me through your works, and I will prove my faith to you through my works.

But are you willing to understand, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works . . .

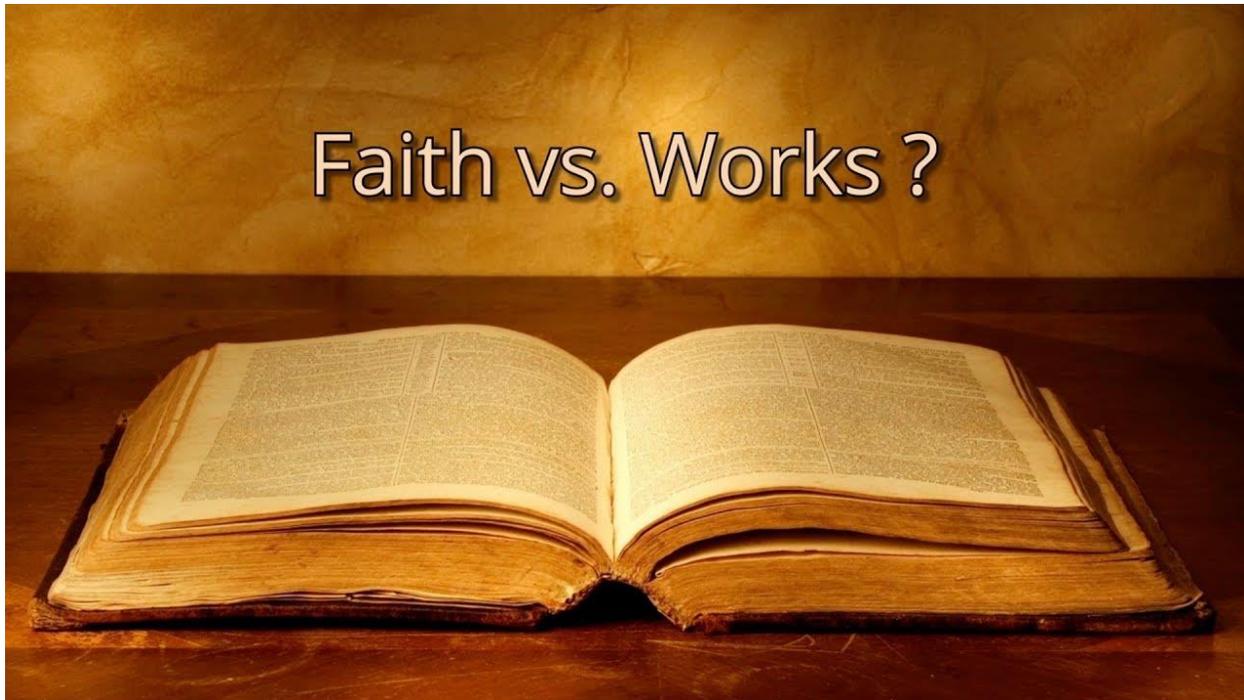
Do you not see that faith was working together with his works, and by works his faith was perfected? . . .

You see, then, that a man is "justified by works," and NOT BY FAITH ONLY (James 2:14, 17 - 18, 20 - 22, 24.)

Luther (and Lutherans) believe that the only correct way to respond to God's plan of salvation, unlike what the book of James (and others) state, is to simply TO TRUST in his perfect love.

What is known as "works" or obedience to God, to them, does not play a leading role in the salvation of the individual.





This has led to an often quote phrase regarding Luther and Lutheranism that it believes in "faith alone" as the means to be saved.

Those who oppose this concept, state that it lessens the responsibility before God that believer's have to produce good works.

The Lutheran rebuttal is that faith MUST BE the sole foundation of a believer and that after it fully exists then good works will flow from it.

What comes immediately to mind is the correlation of Psalm 119 to Hebrews 11 that teaches we must put faith together with works (actions).

It was by and through faith, according to Hebrews, that Abel, Abraham, and others obeyed God (verses 4, 8).

Psalm 119 extols the virtue of those who obey God's law, who keep his testimonies, who walk in his ways and who not only seek God with all their heart but also diligently keep his precepts (Psalm 119:1 - 4)!

An Early Christian verse that refutes Martin Luther's teachings that you only need faith and that once you have it, works will follow, is in the book of Revelation.

This Biblical verse says the life of the saints is one where they not only have faith in Jesus but also keep God's laws (Revelation 14:12).

The book of James also contains other verses regarding the basic way of life Jesus expects of a Christian that contradicts what Luther believed.

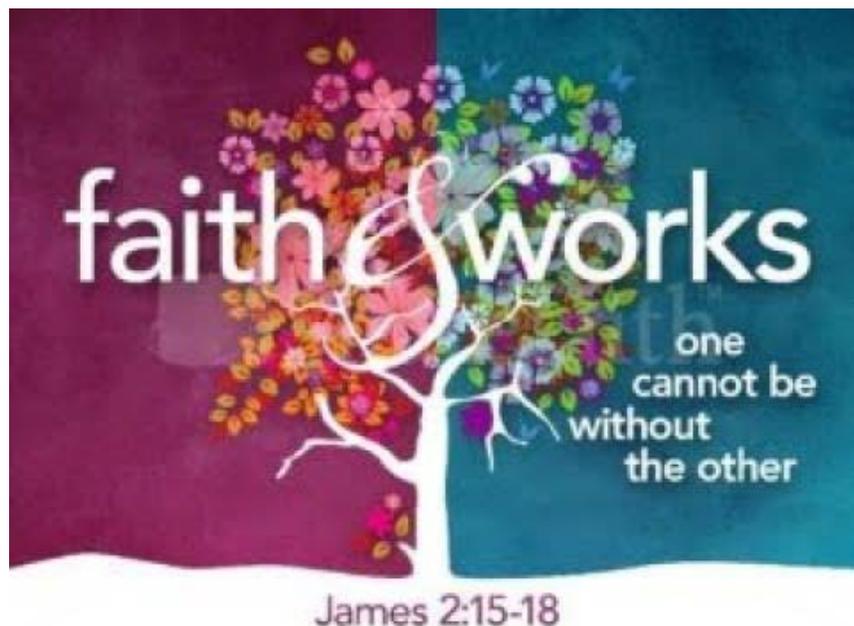
But the one who has looked into the perfect law of freedom, and has continued in it, this one himself has not become a forgetful hearer, but is a doer of the work . . .

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:25, 27)

Those who are believers in God, if they want to worship him in undefiled purity, must not only keep themselves "unspotted" from the world but also do good works!

This acceptable way of living a Christian life is not only supported in the Hebrew Bible see Isaiah 58:5 - 7, etc.), but was a regular theme of Jesus' teachings.

It is primarily because of its sharp focus on WORKS being a critical part of salvation that Martin Luther DID NOT LIKE the book of James.



**Sola Gratia!
Sola Fide!
Sola Scriptura!
Sola Dei!
(Saved by Grace, Saved by Faith, Saved by the
Scriptures, Saved by God!)**

Do you see the word "WORKS" in there? Can "works" save you?

Hey, James here! So, who was this guy?

He's a member of Jesus' inner circle, (PETER, JAMES, and JOHN) and he's writing this letter to Jewish-Christians all throughout the Roman Empire.

He's got some important things to tell them—mainly that there will be tough times, but that it's all good. He's feeling those good vibrations...

I-I love the colorful clothes she wears
And the way the sunlight plays upon her hair
I hear the sound of a gentle word
On the wind that lifts her perfume through the air

I'm pickin' up good vibrations
She's giving me the excitations (oom bop bop)
I'm pickin' up good vibrations (good vibrations, oom bop bop)
She's giving me the excitations (excitations, oom bop bop)
I'm pickin' up good vibrations (oom bop bop)
She's giving me the excitations (excitations, oom bop bop)
I'm pickin' up good vibrations (oom bop bop)
She's giving me the excitations (excitations)

Close my eyes, she's somehow closer now
Softly smile, I know she must be kind
When I look in her eyes
She goes with me to a blossom world

I'm pickin' up good vibrations
She's giving me excitations (oom bop bop)
I'm pickin' up good vibrations (good vibrations, oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (excitations, oom bop bop)
Good, good, good, good vibrations (oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (excitations, oom bop bop)
Good, good, good, good vibrations (oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (excitations)

Ah, ah, my my, what elation
I don't know where but she sends me there
Oh, my my, what a sensation
Oh, my my, what elation
Oh, my my, what

Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happenin' with her
Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happenin' with her
Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happenin'

Good, good, good, good vibrations (oom bop bop)
She's giving me the excitations (excitations, oom bop bop)
I'm pickin' up good vibrations

Na na na na na, na na na
Na na na na na, na na na (bop bop-bop-bop-bop, bop)
Do do do do do, do do do (bop bop-bop-bop-bop, bop)
Do do do do do, do do do (bop bop-bop-bop-bop, bop)

Being arrested and out on trial for your faith may be a bummer, but God will bring some good stuff out of it. Guaranteed.

James also has a major beef with rich folks.

He thinks that they'll pay big time for all the perks they enjoyed in life.

Those golden parachutes don't look so good now, huh?

He also has some strong thoughts on the power of words: don't praise God one day and then badmouth fellow Christians the other—God really gets annoyed with all the double-speak going on.

Finally, Christians have to keep the faith and stay strong because Jesus is coming back real soon.

Seriously...any day now. Seriously... wait...any day...any time, really...soon!

James isn't just a biblical author; he's also a major player in all the first-century Christian drama.

Just Like James

Traditionally, the author of The Epistle of James is said to be Jesus' brother, James. (OR is this JAMES the brother of John, the sons of ZEBEDEE?)

(Way to keep it in the family, JC, if it is your bro.)

In Hebrew, his name would have been *Ya'akov* (or Jacob)—it was a pretty popular name for Jewish boys back in the day...and still, for that matter.

All that's to say that there are a lot of James' mentioned in the Early Christian Writings, so it can be tough to keep 'em straight...and to make sure who is who...

People distinguish this James from others by calling him "James the Just." We know about James the greater and James the lesser. Is there a James "the unjust?" – asking for a friend.

The name comes from the early Christian writer, Clement of Alexandria, who said that "people of old called [him] "the Just" because of his outstanding virtue."

But that does not tell us if this is Zebedee's kid or not.

Later, Eusebius (a church historian) said that James was "recorded to have been the first to be made bishop of the church of Jerusalem."

Now, that would have been Jesus' bro...talk about favoritism, nepotism, and cronyism! Did you know that nepos is nephew in Italian? Let's make our nephew a cardinal? A bishop? How about the next Pope? We've got the votes! Wait for the white smoke to rise!!!

That's why people sometimes call James the "bishop of bishops." Hey, aint that the pope? Or is he the Bishop of Rome?

WHOEVER this guy is...he was a real trailblazer, nepotism, cronyism, favoritism, and all.

Elsewhere in the Bible

James is clearly one of the "head honchos" in the church in Jerusalem: in Acts of the Apostles, he's the one who settles the big question about circumcision at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21).

His verdict?

No snipping necessary!

No more cutting 10% off before you know how big it is going to be!

Keep your junk in your trunk. Keep it all natural! Keep it the way, God intended.

He's also called out as "the brother of Jesus" in the gospels: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James?" (Mark 6:3).

That's a resume builder right there! My brother is the Messiah, the Christ, Christ the Lord. Whose your brother?

But are we really sure, which James is which?

It does get confusing sometimes...and do we trust the ancient authorities, writing years after-the-fact?

The Apostle Paul also mentions him quite a bit.

He says that James is one of the people who saw Jesus after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7).

In Galatians 1:19, Paul calls James "the Lord's brother" and tells a story about going down to Jerusalem to meet with him.

It's sort of a "contentious little meeting."

From what we read in these letters it actually seems like Paul didn't much care for James. Translation: he didn't like him at all. James-ick! What a turkey!

He says that James was one of the "acknowledged pillars" (Galatians 2:9) in Jerusalem, but that he (Paul) wasn't impressed by it.

He also had a bit of a tiff with James over the whole "faith vs. works" thing.

Paul thought that "faith" was much more important than doing "good deeds," and James—as you can tell from his letter—falls on the opposite side of the argument.

And the grouchy old beer drinking Lutheran sided with Paul, time and time again.

And...Christians have been fighting about it ever since. Faith or works? Works or Faith? Which came first the chicken or the egg?

The Man of Letters

So, what does this letter tell us about "the real James?"

Uh...not much.

Will the REAL JAMES...please sign in. God, I am old.

I am channeling the old TV program, What's My Line?" *What's My Line?*

...was a panel game show that originally ran in the United States on the CBS Television Network from 1950 to 1967, originally in black and white and later in color, with subsequent U.S. revivals.

The game uses celebrity panelists to question contestants in order to determine their occupation, i.e. "line of work", with panelists being called on to question and identify a weekly celebrity "mystery guest" while blindfolded.

It is on the list of longest-running U.S. primetime network television game-shows.

Originally moderated by John Charles Daly and with regular panelists Dorothy Kilgallen, Arlene Francis, and Bennett Cerf, *What's My Line?* won three Emmy Awards for "Best Quiz or Audience Participation Show" in 1952, 1953, and 1958 and the Golden Globe Awards for Best TV Show in 1962.



SO, WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT JAMES?

Not much, right?

He's a follower of Jesus (James 1:1).

But he's from a Jewish background—he knows his Hebrew Bible frontwards and backwards.

He's a "teacher" of the faith (James 3:1). Not a coach!

Basically, he spreads the word around.

Yeah, that's not a lot to go on. But that's all we've got! So, WHO IS HE?

You decide?

And I hate to do this to you (BIG HUGE SMILE ON MY FACE) supposing it is someone just using the name of James...???

Really, James is more interested in telling Christians WHAT they SHOULD be doing instead of talking about himself or bragging about his connection to Jesus (brothers or buddies and friends for life...maybe).

Presumably, the folks reading this would have also known his background. Presumably! But that's just a guess on our part...

It would be kind of like opening up a new book by J.K. Rowling.

You know "who she is" and "what to expect from her writing"—you just want to dig in and get to the good stuff. C'mon Harry Potter fans, you know you love her!

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone...

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets...

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban...

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child
The Ickabog
The Christmas Pig

Ghostwriting the Night Away

So, James is kind of a big deal. Kind of.

That means the epistle he wrote must be pretty major, too.

After all, it was written by Jesus' own brother, or was it? One of the witnesses to Jesus' life, first steps as an infant/toddler, teaching, first time with training wheels off his bicycle, and his first date with a hot girl from Nazareth following Home Coming, and oh yeah, the resurrection.

That's a reliable source...right?

Well, maybe not...you knew this was coming...

The letter starts by saying that it's written by "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1), but some scholars seriously doubt this fact.

They do not doubt that he or she was a servant of God...although, Luther may have Hehehe ☐

They think that the letter might have been written by an anonymous author "*pretending*" to be James.

[Verse 1]

Oh yes, I'm the great pretender (Woo-woo)
Pretending I'm doing well (Woo-woo)
My need is such I pretend too much
I'm lonely but no one can tell

[Verse 2]

Oh yes, I'm the great pretender (woo-woo)
Adrift in a world of my own (woo-woo)
I play the game but to my real shame
You've left me to dream all alone

[Bridge]

Too real is this feeling of make-believe

Too real when I feel what my heart can't conceal

[Verse 3]

**Oh yes, I'm the great pretender (Woo-woo)
Just laughing and gay like a clown (Woo-woo)
I seem to be what I'm not (You see)
I'm wearing my heart like a crown
Pretending that you're still around**

[Bridge]

**Yeah! Ooh-ooh!
Too real when I feel
What my heart can't conceal, oh**

The Platter's recorded it, Roy Orbison recorded it, and Freddy Mercury recorded it, which one of them was the Great Pretender?

These scholars believe that the Greek language that James uses is way too polished for a poor kid from Judea.

Does that kick it out Jesus' bro?

Does that kick out and eliminate the fisherman?

It's also a little strange that James doesn't call out any special relationship to Jesus at the start of the letter.

Dude, this is your bro writing...I remember that one time that you.....You'd think if you were the boss's brother, you'd mention it! At least, once, or twice!

Wait...

Why would someone forge a letter from "James? "

Why would someone assign the name MARK to the first gospel written?

Why would someone assign the name MATTHEW to the second gospel to be written?

Why would someone assign the names of Luke and John to the third and fourth gospels respectively? And yet, someone did!

Well, it's a way of adding some "heft and gravity" to your argument.

Does it guarantee placement in the canon?

After all, does anyone really care about what Demetrius from Athens thinks about how Christians should act?

But James the Just, the Lord's brother?

Now there's a source you can trust...maybe

Maybe He's Real Deal

The idea that this is "an authentic letter" *has* been gaining some steam. Notice, I said, some...

Judea was heavily influenced by the Greek-speaking world at this time, so that could account for the language.

There are also parallels with his speech from Acts 15.

James starts by saying, "My brothers, listen to me" (Acts 15:13).

í You'll never know how much I really love you
You'll never know how much I really care

í Listen, do you want to know a secret?
Do you promise not to tell?
Whoa-oh-oh, closer
Let me whisper in your ear
Say the words you long to hear
I'm in love with you, ooh

í Listen (doo da do), do you want to know a secret? (doo da do)
Do you promise not to tell? (doo da do)
Whoa-oh-oh, closer (doo da do)
Let me whisper in your ear (doo da do)

Say the words you long to hear
I'm in love with you, ooh

í I've known a secret for a week or two
Nobody knows, just we two

í Listen (doo da do), do you want to know a secret? (doo da do)
Do you promise not to tell? (doo da do)
Whoa-oh-oh, closer (doo da do)
Let me whisper in your ear (doo da do)
Say the words you long to hear
I'm in love with you, ooh, ooh, ooh

He uses the same phrase in James 2:5: "Listen, Listen, my beloved brother and sisters."

If James wrote this letter, that means it was probably sent out around 48 CE. Which, BTW, would make it the oldest piece of writing in the Early Christian Writings...

Fancy. Gnarly, dude. Awesome. Lit. Cool. I likes it!

The End of James **No wait, we haven't even started, have we?**

Whether or not James actually wrote this letter, he met a pretty gruesome end. Josephus (a Jewish historian) says that James was put to death around 62 CE.

[The high priest in Jerusalem] assembled the Sanhedrin, the Council of elders and judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 20, Chapter 9)

Ouch! Just saying...that had to hurt...

Because you know we are NOT TALKIN' REFER here...

Today, St. James the Just is celebrated in loads of Christian churches.

The Lutheran Church commemorates his feast day every year on October 23.

Happy death day, James!

Hi, My Name Is... _____

You fill in the blank

Ok, this is my take on his letter!

What's up? James here. Servant of God. Follower of Jesus. All-around good guy. Even uses stick deodorant, the roll-on type! No aerosols!

James says that he's writing to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion." In other words: Jewish-Christians who don't live in the Jewish homeland in Palestine. They are no longer his homeboys.

And what does he have to say? I am so glad you asked. For starters—don't fret about tough times.

Tough times don't last...but tough people do!

Sure, going through trials and tribulations is no fun, but some good can come of it. Or, so they tell me... Do tell.

Well, it can be a good test of your faith. Oh, and it can help you learn to be strong and persevere.

So, there's that! But what is good about it? Yeah, I wanna know...

If there's anything you don't know, just ask God about it.

He'll fill you in on the details.

But whatever you do, says James, don't doubt him.

God doesn't like it when you're saying one thing and thinking another.

Doubting Thomas' (or Dicks or Harrys or Betty's or Sue's) get nothing as far as he's concerned.

More Advice from James

Are you poor?

Do-doo-doo-wah shoo-be-doo-be
Do-doo-doo-wah shoo-be-doo-be

How can you tell me how much you miss me
When the last time I saw you, you wouldn't even kiss me
That rich guy you've been seein'
Must have put you down
So welcome back baby
To The Poor Side of town

To him you were nothin' but a little plaything
Not much more than an overnight fling
To me you were the greatest thing this boy had ever found
And girl it's hard to find nice things
On the poor side of town

I can't blame you for tryin'
I'm tryin' to make it too
I've got one little hang up baby
I just can't make it without you

So tell me, are you gonna stay now
Will you stand by me girl all the way now
With you by my side
They can't keep us down
Together we can make it baby
From the poor side of town

Oh, with you by my side
This world can't keep us down
Together we can make it baby
From the poor side of town

Do-doo-doo-wah shoo-be-doo-be
Do-doo-doo-wah shoo-be-doo-be
Do-doo-doo-wah shoo-be-doo-be

Don't worry if you come from the poor side of town, God will make you rich...as only he can do!!!

No problem!

Anyone who follows Jesus and finds themselves short of cash is gonna get a major reward very soon.

\$\$\$\$ Nah, just kidding on the whole ca\$h thingy, Je\$u\$ was not into the "Almighty dollar!" (And neither \$hould hi\$ follower\$ be, either!) We \$hould be too bu\$y helping out folk\$ who have nothing....

Rich guys?

They're gonna wither and die like a plant in the house of the rising-scorching-sun. Uh oh, I feel another song coming on...

There is a house way down in New Orleans
They call the Rising Sun
And it's been the ruin of many a poor boy
And God I know I'm one

Mother was a tailor, yeah, yeah
Sewed my Levi jeans
My father was a gamblin' man, yeah, yeah
Down, way down in New Orleans

Now the only thing a gamblin' man ever needs
Is a suitcase, Lord, and a trunk
And the only time a fool like him is satisfied
Is when he's all stone cold drunk..

It's not going to be pretty.

If you want to do something, but know you shouldn't, keep holding out.
That really makes God happy.

Anyone who can stand their ground in the face of temptation is definitely winning.

See, James doesn't think that God actually tempts people. Neither do I. It is all a matter of your perspective at the time...

You want to eat that extra donut because *you* think it's delicious.

Not because God made it delicious.

The time-to-make-the-donuts guy is kind of to blame there...didn't he work for DD (We do sell Dunkin Donuts Gift cards, just saying!)

When you give into your desires, that leads to sin. And sin? Well, that leads to death.

Everything good that we do and everything awesome in the world comes straight from God, says James.

God created the world then showed it the truth—the truth about Jesus, that is.

And believers are the "first fruits" out of everyone in the whole world.

They're kind of like hipsters—they were into Jesus before he went mainstream.

Anything else?

Yeah, listen to each other. Don't fight and argue—it makes Baby Jesus cry.

Besides, if you listen more, you might be able to help someone find God.

Be a "doer." Note, we did not say drink DEWARS!

Dewar's White Label that is!

A little scotch...Mary, where are you? Double-Tall?



Don't nod along when you hear people talk about doing nice things.

"Go out and do your own good stuff." Go! Get! Do!

Seriously, don't be "a giant hypocrite."

Lord knows, there are enough of those around...

You can't say you're "religious" and then just sit by doing nothing.

This is so tempting...here...so very tempting...get behind me Satan!

Hearing about God isn't as important as doing God's work.

So, get out there and care for some widows and orphans already.

James 2 Sorry, One-Percenters

Being a faithful person means that you don't favor rich people over poor people...or white over people of color, or straight over gay, or left-handed over right-handed, or Vegans over Carnivores...

When fancy folks wearing expensive clothes stroll into church, everyone falls all over themselves to get these hoity-toity guys a seat.

Usually up front, where they can see all the action...everyone knows the first to come to church sit in the last row, every single time...or at least, in the back!!! See how you people are?

But when someone without a lot of cash in his pockets walks in, he's told to stand or sit on the ground.

It's not very polite. It aint right!

If that's how you treat the poor—whom God specifically said were going to be part of his kingdom—then you are really not getting it, says James.

Why should Christians love these rich guys so much anyway?

Wealthy folks are the ones who have you arrested for following Jesus.

They drag you into court and basically mock God.

What's so awesome about them, again? Do tell....I'll wait....

Faith vs. Works: The Ultimate Showdown

Remember when Jesus said that you should "love your neighbor as yourself"? He was pretty serious about that.

If you don't follow his teachings, then you've broken God's law. And we know what happens to law-breakers, don't we? Hint: it's not pretty.

If you're merciful to others, God will repay the favor. But if you spend most of your free time judging people based on their appearances, then God is gonna judge the heck out of you, too.

Seriously, you can't say you follow God and then act like a jerk.

Having faith alone can't save you. You also need to do good works to complete the picture.

James continues - it won't help anyone for you to just smile at poor people and wish them well. Where are they supposed to live? How are they going to eat? If you don't help those who need it, all your pious faith and feel-good beliefs are dead in the water.

Of course, some knuckleheads think that you can separate out faith and works.

These folks say, *Hey I have faith in God. You do the good works. Then everyone will be covered.*

Nope. Sorry. Doesn't work like that.

Look, says James, there's one God, right? That means you can't divide out believing and doing. If you have faith in him, you'll act like it. Put your money where your mouth is.

Take Abraham for example. God told him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and Abraham was totally gonna do it. He had the knife at the kid's throat when God told him to stop.

Abraham didn't just believe that what God said was right. He acted on it. Rahab, too. She might have been a Canaanite prostitute, but she helped the Israelites get into the Promised Land. Because of what she did, God totally dug her.

If your spirit leaves your body, you're dead. And if you just think nice things about God but never do anything, then you're dead, too. 'Nuff said.

James 3 Those Who Can't Do, Teach

Not everyone is cut out to be a teacher like James.

Oh, really?

Teachers have to watch what they do and say at all times because people are just waiting for them to screw up.

Well, it's sort of true.

But teachers also make mistakes. Teechers aint purrfect!

Tons of them. They make tons of errors and mistakes...we all do!

Sometimes it's hard to keep control of your tongue. That's true for preachers, as well...

A person's tongue is the rudder on a ship.

It's a little tiny piece tucked away under the boat, but it can steer the whole vessel through uncharted waters.

The tongue is pretty small, too, but it can take you to some amazing places.

It's sort of like how a whole forest can go up in flames just from a few matches.

Our tongues are like tiny fires ready to set the world ablaze.

Stand back! Look out!

But "an unruly tongue" can produce good words and bad words.

F-Bombs, galore!

We say all kinds of good things about God with our mouths.

But then we talk bad about his creations—"other people"—in the same breath. How rude is that!

Folks really shouldn't be doing this, says James.

It makes as much sense as having a faucet that pours out pure, sparkling water on one day and then raw sewage on another.

Gross. Just sayin'

If you're smart, then you'll be humble and kind.

But if you've got the wrong kind of wisdom (the devilish kind), then you'll be a bitter, envious, selfish, clawing, liar.

Yikes.

The bad kind of wisdom can wreck the world.

The good kind can bring peace and sunshine and rainbows to everyone.

Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows
Everything that's wonderful is what I feel when we're together
Brighter than a lucky penny
When you're near the rain goes, disappears, dear
And I feel so fine
Just to know that you are mine

My life is sunshine, lollipops and rainbows
That's how this refrain goes
So come on, join in, everybody

Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows
Everything that's wonderful is sure to come your way
When you're in love to stay

Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows
Everything that's wonderful is what I feel when we're together
Brighter than a lucky penny
When you're near the rain goes, disappears, dear
And I feel so fine
Just to know that you are mine

My life is sunshine, lollipops and rainbows
That's how this refrain goes
So come on, join in everybody

Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows
Everything that's wonderful is sure to come your way
'Cause you're in love
You're in love
And love is here to stay

Don't forget the unicorns, too! And that sparkly stuff that gets all over the carpeting!!!! Yeah, glitter, that stuff!

James 3 Those Who Can't Do, Teach

Wait, I thought they coached? Sorry coaches...j/k

Not everyone is cut out to be a teacher like James. Am I going to get in trouble here, or what? Coaches dribble Hehehe...



COACH!!!!!!!!!!

Gonna git the teachers mad at me, gonna get the coaches mad at me, am I in trouble or what?

Matthew Patrick LaFleur is an American football coach who is the head coach of the Green Bay Packers of the National Football League. He has served as the quarterback coach of the Washington Football Team and the Atlanta Falcons and has been the offensive coordinator for the Los Angeles Rams and the Tennessee Titans.

Matt says, I am ok and not walking on shaky ground...heck even coaches have to watch what comes out of their mouths...just ask em, they will tell ya.

Let's Fight!

Why do people love to fight so much? Knock that stuff, am I right?

Well, sometimes a person wants something they don't have.

So, they get all freaked out and angry about it and start going to war with other folks. That's one way to get what you want.

But the real reason those people don't have the stuff they want is that they don't ask God.

Or they ask, but they're super selfish about it, so God doesn't hand it over.

He's not gonna help you win the lottery if you're just gonna use the money to buy a garage full of sports cars. Plus, just a warning here, you better buy a ticket!

Seriously, says James, don't you know that if all in love with the things in this world, then you've made yourself into God's enemy?

God likes it when folks are humble,

... Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
When you're perfect in every way
I can't wait to look in the mirror
Cause I get better looking each day
To know me is to love me
I must be a hell of a man
Oh Lord It's hard to be humble,
But I'm doing the best that I can

... I used to have a girlfriend,
But I guess she just couldn't compete,
With all of these love-starved women,
Who keep cowering at my feet
Oh I probably could find me another,
But I guess they're all in awe of me
Who cares?

I never get lonesome
Cause I treasure my own company

... Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
When you're perfect in every way
(I can't wait to look in the mirror)
I can't wait to look in the mirror
(Help me out now! Come on)

I get better looking each day
(To know me is to what?)
To know me is to love me
(Must be a hell of a man)
I must be a hell of a man
(Oh Lord It's hard)
Oh Lord It's hard to be humble,
(When you're doing what?)
We're doing the best that we can

... I guess you could say I'm a loner
A cowboy out lone, tough, and proud
I could have lots of friends if I wanted
But then I wouldn't stand out from the crowd
Some folks say that I'm egotistical
Hell I don't even know what that means
I guess it has something to do
With the way that I fill out my skin tight with jeans

... Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
(When you're perfect in every way)
When you're perfect in every way
(Can't wait to look in the mirror)
I can't wait to look in the mirror
(Cause I get better looking)
I get better looking each day
(To know me is to what?)
To know me is to love me
(Must be a hell of a man)
I must be a hell of a man
(Oh Lord It's hard)
Oh Lord It's hard to be humble,
(What are we doing?)
We're doing the best that we can

... We're doing the best that we can

GOD LIKES IT WHEN FOLKS ARE HUMBLE...or so says, James....AND

not when they act like “entitled jerks.” That’s Jerks with a capital J.

If you snuggle up with him, he'll snuggle up with you, too. The him is none other than God, of course!

Don't be "double-minded" (thinking one thing and doing another).

Walk the straight and narrow with God and everything will be a-okay. You know, walk the walk, and talk the talk.

More rules: don't badmouth another believer.

If you're saying nasty things, you're judging.

Remember, only God can judge you.

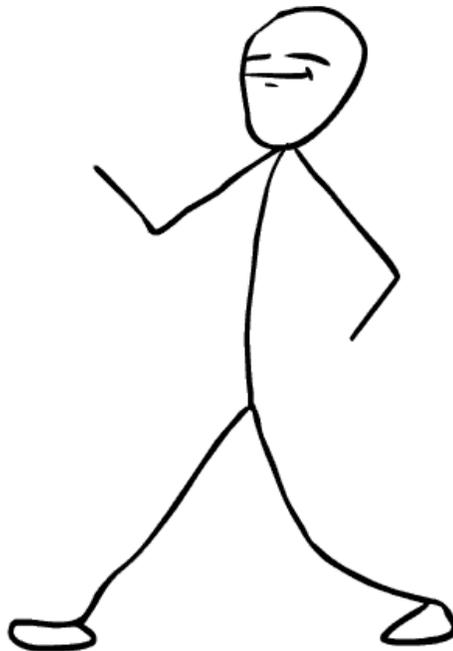
Forget the haters, because somebody loves you. Didn't Taylor Swift say that?

Haters gonna hate, hate, hate...

It had to be her...

'Cause the players gonna play, play, play, play, play
And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
I shake it off, I shake it off (Whoo-hoo-hoo)

Haters
Gonna
Hate



And don't make too many plans for the future.

It's kind of arrogant.

Maybe you plan on graduating from college in four years and making mega bucks in the recording industry.

Well, you don't know what's gonna happen between now and then.

Only God knows that, says James. And it's true. We don't know, one day from the other...

The world doesn't revolve around you and your dreams. Even though you think it does...

You're like a mist that floats into the world and then disappears a few seconds later.

(Has your self-esteem plummeted yet?)

James would rather you say *Maybe I'll get my degree and then start dropping albums left and right.*

If that's what God wants.

At least then you're showing respect to the Big Guy.

James 5 Mo' Money, Mo' Problems

Listen up, rich folks: God is NOT AMU\$ED with you.

Major bad time\$ are coming your way.

All your wealth will rot.

Your fancy designer clothe\$ are gonna be eaten by moth\$.

Your gold and \$ilver coins are gonna ru\$t.

Then the ru\$t is gonna eat away at your \$kin like fire.

Yeah. It's gonna be pretty mi\$erable.

It's bad enough that you hoarded money, says James, but you didn't even come by your ca\$h honestly.

The folks you've cheated out of their hard-earned dollars have appealed to God and he's heard them.

You lived in the lap of luxury during your time on Earth, but all that will be over soon.

But believers (who we're assuming aren't rich) should just be patient.

Jesus will be coming back anytime now.

Wait for him like a farmer waits for his crops to grow, says James.

You know they're coming.

It's just a matter of finding the right time.

Stay strong and don't start complaining about everyone else.

Otherwise, you're gonna be judged.

Big time.

If you're looking for examples of folks who have done it right, look no further than the prophets of the Hebrew Bible.

Especially Job.

These guys faced tough times, but they kept on keeping on.

More Advice

Also, when you say something, really commit to it.

Seriously, no means NO and yes means YES. Put up or shut up!

Whether you're having a good time or a bad time, you should pray.

God likes it when you check in every once in a while, says James.

If you're sick, ask some of the elders in the church to pray over you and anoint you with oil.

Hey, it can't hurt.

And that oil really smells good. It will slick your hair down!

If you sin (oops!), admit what you did to the community.

God will totally forgive you if you take responsibility when you come up short.

Everyone should also pray for each other.

Prayer can be pretty powerful.

Pray in all things.

Keep Praying...

Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain, and not a single drop fell for three years and six months.

And if any believer stops believing, the rest of the community can try to win him back.

After all, scooping up lost sheep is one of God's favorite pastimes.

On that note—bye-bye! Just a little Nsync!

Hey, hey
Bye bye bye, bye bye
Bye bye

I'm doing this tonight
You're probably gonna start a fight
I know this can't be right
Hey baby come on
I loved you endlessly
When you weren't there for me
So now it's time to leave and make it alone

I know that I can't take no more
It ain't no lie
I want to see you out that door
Baby bye bye bye

Don't want to be a fool for you
Just another player in your game for two
You may hate me but it ain't no lie
Baby bye bye bye
Bye bye

Don't really want to make it tough
I just want to tell you that I've had enough
It might sound crazy but it ain't no lie
Baby bye bye bye

You just hit me with the truth
Now girl you're more than welcome to
So give me one good reason
Baby come on
I've lived for you and me
And now I really come to see
That life would be much better once you're gone

I know that I can't take no more
It ain't no lie
I want to see you out that door
Baby bye bye bye

Don't want to be a fool for you
Just another player in your game for two
You may hate me but it ain't no lie
Baby bye bye bye
Bye bye

Don't really want to make it tough
I just want to tell you that I've had enough
Might sound crazy but it ain't no lie
Baby bye bye bye

I'm giving up I know for sure
I don't want to be the reason for your love no more
Bye bye
I'm checking out, I'm signing off
I don't want to be the loser, and I've had enough

I don't want to be your fool in this game for two
So I'm leaving you behind
(Bye bye bye)
I don't want to make it tough
(Make it tough)
But I've had enough
And it ain't no lie

Don't want to be a fool for you
Just another player in your game for two
I don't want to be your fool
But it ain't no lie
Baby bye bye bye
Bye bye

Don't really want to make it tough
I just want to tell you that I've had enough
It might sound crazy but it ain't no lie
Bye bye

See you on the flip side! That's how James ends his epistle or letter, just like that!

Later dudes!

Out!

And he drops the mic and exits stage left...

**So, Blessed Martin
Of recent memory
Had his take on the book
What are some other takes, you ask?**

Oh, you didn't ask? That's ok, I am going to pursue what others say about the Book of James, any ways...

I owe it to you...

Or I owe it to me...

Or, Maybe, I owe it to James!

This is going to be WAY MORE INFORMATION than you want or need, but I am going to give it a shot...because it is my job to do so! ☐

The author identifies himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" who is writing to "the twelve tribes scattered abroad" (James 1:1).

Twelve tribes...wait.

Huh?

Twelve Tribes???? What you talking about Willis?

The epistle is traditionally attributed to James the brother of Jesus (James the Just), and the audience is generally considered to be "JEWISH CHRISTIANS," who were dispersed outside Israel.

Framing his letter within an overall theme of "patient perseverance" during trials and temptations, James writes in order to "encourage his readers" to live consistently with what they have learned "in Christ."

IN CHRIST...not FROM CHRIST...and CHRIST, not Jesus! Umm isn't that just a title...he has a name, you name.

SAY HIS NAME!

SAY HIS NAME!

SAY HIS NAME!

You know, old – what's his name....

He condemns various sins, including pride, hypocrisy, favoritism, and slander.

He encourages and implores believers to humbly live by godly, rather than worldly wisdom and to pray in all situations.

For the most part, until the late 20th century, the epistle of James was relegated to benign disregard – though it was SHUNNED by many early theologians and scholars due to its advocacy of **TORAH OBSERVANCE AND GOOD WORKS!!!!**

Famously, MARTIN LUTHER at one time considered the epistle to be among the **DISPUTED BOOKS**, and sidelined it to an appendix, although in his Large Catechism he treated it as the authoritative word of God.

The epistle aims to reach a wide Jewish audience? OR, A WIDE JEWISH/CHRISTIAN AUDIENCE...

During the last decades, the epistle of James has attracted increasing scholarly interest due to a surge in the quest for **THE HISTORICAL JAMES**, his role within the Jesus movement, his beliefs, and his relationships and views.

This James REVIVAL is also associated with an increasing level of awareness of the Jewish grounding of both the epistle and the early Jesus movement

The DEBATE about the authorship of James is INCONCLUSIVE and shadows debates about Christology, and about historical accuracy.

According to Robert J. Foster, "there is LITTLE CONSENSUS as to the genre, structure, dating, and authorship of the book of James."

Which says we REALLY know nothing about it...at all.... ☐

There are four "commonly espoused" views concerning authorship and dating of the Epistle of James:

- 1. the letter was written by James before the Pauline epistles,**
- 2. the letter was written by James after the Pauline epistles,**
- 3. the letter is pseudonymous,**
- 4. the letter comprises material originally from James but reworked by a later editor.**

The writer refers to himself only as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ". This could have been written by ANYONE!

Jesus had two apostles named James...THAT WE KNOW OF: James, the son of Zebedee and James, the son of Alphaeus, but it is unlikely that either of these wrote the letter. AND NOTE, NEITHER OF THESE ARE THE SON OF JOSEPH!

According to the Book of Acts, James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod Agrippa I.

James, the son of Alphaeus is a more viable candidate for authorship, although he is not prominent in the scriptural record, and relatively little is known about him.

Hippolytus, (an early church father) writing in the early third century, asserted in his work *On the 12 Apostles*:

And James the son of Alphaeus, when preaching in Jerusalem was stoned to death by the Jews and was buried there beside the temple.

The similarity of his alleged martyrdom to the stoning of James the Just has led some scholars, such as Robert Eisenman and James Tabor, to assume that these "two James'" were one and the same. UMMM SURE, AN ASSUMPTION THAT ANYONE WOULD MAKE...

This identification of James of Alphaeus with James the Just (as well as James the Less) has long been asserted, as evidenced by their conflation in Jacobus de Voragine's medieval hagiography the *Golden Legend*.

But is this view accurate?

MAYBE JAMES WAS BESIDES HIMSELF?

DUO PERSONALITY?

Some have said the authorship of this epistle points to James, the brother of Jesus, to whom Jesus evidently had made a special appearance after his resurrection described in the New Testament as this James was prominent among the disciples.

HE IS A JOHNNY-COME-LATELY! AND JUST WHERE WERE YOU DURING THE PAST THREE YEARS, MISTER?

James the brother of Jesus was not a follower of Jesus before Jesus died according to John 7:2-5, which states that during Jesus' life "not even his brothers believed in him".

Yikes, just saying...

BUT THEN HE SHOWS UP LATER??? WHAT A LEAKER!

From the middle of the 3rd century, patristic authors cited the epistle as written by James, the brother of Jesus and a leader of the Jerusalem church.

If the letter is of pseudonymous authorship (i.e. not written by an apostle but by someone else), this implies that the person named "James" is respected and doubtless well known.

Moreover, this James, brother of Jesus, is honored by the epistle written and distributed after the lifetime of James, the brother of Jesus.

Indeed, while not numbered among the Twelve Apostles unless he is identified as James the Less, James was nonetheless a very important figure: Paul the Apostle described him as "the brother of the Lord" in Galatians 1:19 and as one of the three "pillars of the Church" in 2:9.

"There is no doubt that James became a much more important person in the early Christian movement than a casual reader of the Early Christian Writings is likely to imagine."

The James believers are acquainted with, emerges out of Galatians 1-2; 1 Corinthians 15-17 and Acts 12,15,21.

We also have accounts about James in Josephus, Eusebius, Origen, the Gospel of Thomas, the Apocalypses of James, the Gospel of the Hebrews, and the Pseudo-Clementine literature – most of whom cast him as righteous and as the undisputed leader of the Jewish camp.

"His influence is central and palpable in Jerusalem and in Antioch, despite the fact that he did not minister at Antioch. Although we are dependent on sources dominated by the Pauline perspective... the role and influence of James overshadow all others at Antioch."

There is A MAJORITY VIEW that it is pseudonymous.

"Most scholars" consider the epistle to be pseudepigrapha because of these factors:

The author introduces himself merely as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" without invoking any special family relationship to Jesus or even mentioning Jesus widely in the book. (James 1:1)

The cultured Greek language of the Epistle, it is contended, could NOT have been written by a Jerusalem Jew.

Some scholars argue for a primitive version of the letter composed by James and then later polished by another writer.

Some see parallels between James and 1 Peter, 1 Clement, and the Shepherd of Hermas and take this to reflect the socio-economic situation Christians were dealing with in the late 1st or early 2nd century.

It thus could have been written anywhere in the Empire that Christians spoke Greek. There are some scholars who argued for Syria.

Scholars, such as Luke Timothy Johnson, suggest an early dating for the Epistle of James:

The Letter of James also, according to the majority of scholars who have carefully worked through its text in the past two centuries, is among the earliest of the Early Christian compositions.

It contains no reference to the events in Jesus' life, but it bears striking testimony to Jesus' words.

Jesus' sayings are embedded in James' exhortations in a form that is clearly not dependent on the written Gospels.

IF written by James the brother of Jesus, it would have been written sometime before AD 69 (or AD 62), when he was martyred.

The earliest extant manuscripts of James usually date to the mid-to-late 3rd century.

Dated consensually c. 65–85 CE. The traditional author is James the Just, "a servant of God and brother of the Lord Jesus Christ".

Like Hebrews, James is not so much a letter as an exhortation; the style of the Greek language-text makes it unlikely that it was actually written by James, the brother of Jesus.

Most scholars regard all the letters in this group as pseudonymous.

James is considered New Testament WISDOM LITERATURE: "like Proverbs and Sirach, it consists largely of moral exhortations and precepts of a traditional and eclectic nature."

The content of James is directly parallel, in many instances, to sayings of Jesus which are found in the gospels of Luke and Matthew, i.e., those attributed to the hypothetical Q source, in the two-source hypothesis.

Compare, for example, "Do not swear at all, either by heaven ... or by the earth ... Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one"^[40] and " ... do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'Yes' be yes and your 'No' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation" (James 5:12).

According to James Tabor, the epistle of James contains "no fewer than thirty direct references, echoes, and allusions to the teachings of Jesus found in the Q source."

Koester H. (1965) and Kloppenborg J. (1987) are widely recognized for bringing about the pivot from the above (traditional) emphasis on James as wisdom and ethics literature, to focus on the apocalyptic and pre-Gentile (Jewish) context of James

Later studies strengthened this recent appreciation for the pre-Gentile foundations of Q, M, and James.

In addition to James, traces of the Jewish followers of Jesus are to be found in the extra-canonical Jewish Gospels (Nazoraeans, Ebionites), in the Didache and the Pseudo-Clementine literature, texts which are not focused on Jesus' death and resurrection and neither advocate, nor do they seem to advocate, Torah observance.

Some view the epistle as having no overarching outline: "James may have simply grouped together small 'thematic essays' without having more linear, Greco-Roman structures in mind."

That view is generally supported by those who believe that the epistle may not be a true piece of correspondence between specific parties but an example of wisdom literature, formulated as a letter for circulation.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says, "the subjects treated of in the Epistle are many and various; moreover, St. James not infrequently, whilst elucidating a certain point, passes abruptly to another, and presently resumes once more his former argument."

Others view the letter as having only broad topical or thematic structure.

They generally organize James under three (Ralph Martin) to seven (Luke Johnson) general key themes or segments.

A third group believes that James was more purposeful in structuring his letter, linking each paragraph theologically and thematically:

James, like the gospel writers, can be seen as a purposeful theologian, carefully weaving his smaller units together into larger fabrics of thought and using his overall structure to prioritize his key themes.

The third view of the structuring of James is a historical approach that is supported by scholars who are not content with leaving the book as "New Testament wisdom literature, like a small book of proverbs" or "like a loose collection of random pearls dropped in no particular order onto a piece of string."

A fourth group uses modern discourse analysis or Greco-Roman rhetorical structures to describe the structure of James.

The United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* divides the letter into the following sections:

- *Salutation* (1:1)
- *Faith and Wisdom* (1:2–8)
- *Poverty and Riches* (1:9–11)
- *Trial and Temptation* (1:12–18)
- *Hearing and Doing the Word* (1:19–27)
- *Warning against Partiality* (2:1–13)
- *Faith and Works* (2:14–26)
- *The Tongue* (3:1–12)
- *The Wisdom from Above* (3:13–18)
- *Friendship with the World* (4:1–10)
- *Judging a Brother* (4:11–12)
- *Warning against Boasting* (4:13–17)
- *Warning to the Rich* (5:1–6)
- *Patience and Prayer* (5:7–20)

A 2013 article in the *Evangelical Quarterly* explores a violent historical background behind the epistle and offers the suggestion that it was indeed written by James, the brother of Jesus, and it was written before AD 62, the year he was killed.

The 50s saw the growth of turmoil and violence in Roman Judea, as Jews became more and more frustrated with corruption, injustice, and poverty.

It continued into the 60s, four years before James was killed. War broke out with Rome and would lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the people.

The epistle is renowned for exhortations on fighting poverty and caring for the poor in practical ways (1:26–27; 2:1–4; 2:14–19; 5:1–6), standing up for the oppressed (2:1–4; 5:1–6) and not being "like the world" in the way one responds to evil in the world (1:26–27; 2:11; 3:13–18; 4:1–10).

Worldly wisdom is rejected, and people are exhorted to embrace heavenly wisdom, which includes peacemaking and pursuing righteousness and justice (3:13–18).

This approach sees the epistle as a real letter with a real immediate purpose: to encourage Christian Jews not to revert to violence in their response to injustice and poverty but to stay focused on doing good, staying holy and to embrace the wisdom of heaven, not that of the world.

The epistle contains the following famous passage concerning salvation and justification:

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? **17** So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. **18** But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! **20** Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. **24** You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. **25** And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **26** For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

This passage has been contrasted with the teachings of Paul the Apostle on justification.

Some scholars even believe that the passage is a response to Paul.

One issue in the debate is the meaning of the Greek word δικαιώω (*dikaiōō*) 'render righteous or such as he ought to be', with some among the participants taking the view that James is responding to a misunderstanding of Paul.

Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy have historically argued that the passage disproves the doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).

The early (and many modern) Protestants resolve the apparent conflict between James and Paul regarding faith and works in alternate ways from the Catholics and Orthodox:

Paul was dealing with one kind of error while James was dealing with a different error. The errorists Paul was dealing with were people who said that works of the law were needed to be added to faith in order to help earn God's favor.

Paul countered this error by pointing out that salvation was by faith alone apart from deeds of the law (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:21–22).

Paul also taught that saving faith is not dead but alive, showing thanks to God in deeds of love (Galatians 5:6 [...since in Christ Jesus it is not being circumcised

or being uncircumcised that can effect anything – only faith working through love.']).

James was dealing with errorists who said that if they had faith they didn't need to show love by a life of faith (James 2:14–17).

James countered this error by teaching that faith is alive, showing itself to be so by deeds of love (James 2:18,26).

James and Paul both teach that salvation is by faith alone and also that faith is never alone but shows itself to be alive by deeds of love that express a believers thanks to God for the free gift of salvation by faith in Jesus.

According to Ben Witherington III, differences exist between the Apostle Paul and James, but both used the law of Moses, the teachings of Jesus and other Jewish and non-Jewish sources, and "Paul was not anti-law any more than James was a legalist".

A more recent article suggests that the current confusion regarding the Epistle of James about faith and works resulted from Augustine of Hippo's anti-Donatist polemic in the early fifth century. Gotta blame it on someone...

This approach reconciles the views of Paul and James on faith and works! IF that is even possible...hehehehe

Anointing of the Sick

The epistle is also the chief biblical text for the Anointing of the Sick. James wrote:

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

G. A. Wells suggested that the passage was evidence of late authorship of the epistle, on the grounds that the healing of the sick being done through an official body of presbyters (elders) indicated a considerable development of ecclesiastical organization "whereas in Paul's day to heal and work miracles pertained to believers indiscriminately (I Corinthians, XII:9)."

Works, deeds, and care for the poor

James and the M Source material in Matthew are unique in the canon in their stand against the rejection of works and deeds.

According to Sanders, traditional Christian theology wrongly divested the term "works" of its ethical grounding, part of the effort to characterize Judaism as legalistic.

However, for James and for all Jews, faith is alive only through Torah observance. In other words, belief demonstrates itself through practice and manifestation.

For James, claims about belief are empty, unless they are alive in action, works and deeds.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says.

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it-not forgetting what they have heard but doing it-they will be blessed in what they do."

— James 1:22–25

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

— James 1:27^l

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

— James 2:12–13

Torah Observance!

James is unique in the canon by its explicit and wholehearted support of Torah-observance (the Law).

According to Bibliowicz, not only is this text a unique view into the milieu of the Jewish founders – its inclusion in the canon signals that as canonization began (fourth century onward) Torah observance among believers in Jesus was still authoritative.

According to modern scholarship James, Q, Matthew, the Didache, and the pseudo-Clementine literature reflect a similar ethos, ethical perspective, and

stand on, or assume, Torah observance. James call to Torah observance (1:22-27) insures salvation (2:12–13, 14–26).

Hartin is supportive of the focus on Torah observance and concludes that these texts support faith through action and sees them as reflecting the milieu of the Jewish followers of Jesus (2008).

Hub van de Sandt sees Matthew's and James' Torah observance reflected in a similar use of the Jewish Two Ways theme which is detectable in the Didache too (3:1–6). McKnight thinks that Torah observance is at the heart of James's ethics.

A strong message against those advocating the rejection of Torah observance characterizes, and emanates from, this tradition: "Some have attempted while I am still alive, to transform my words by certain various interpretations, in order to teach the dissolution of the law; as though I myself were of such a mind, but did not freely proclaim it, which God forbid!

For such a thing were to act in opposition to the law of God, which was spoken by Moses, and was borne witness to by our Lord in respect of its eternal continuance; for thus he spoke: 'The heavens and the earth shall pass away, but one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law.'"

James seems to propose a more radical and demanding interpretation of the law than mainstream Judaism. According to Painter, there is nothing in James to suggest any relaxation of the demands of the law.

"No doubt James takes for granted his readers' observance of the whole law, while focusing his attention on its moral demands."

The Epistle of James was first explicitly referred to and quoted by Origen of Alexandria, and possibly a bit earlier by Irenaeus of Lyons, although it was not mentioned by Tertullian, who was writing at the end of the Second century.

The Epistle of James was included among the twenty-seven Early Christian books first listed by Athanasius of Alexandria in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Epistle* (AD 367) and was confirmed as a canonical epistle of the Early Christian Writings by a series of councils in the fourth century.

In the first centuries of the Church the authenticity of the Epistle was doubted by some, including Theodore of Mopsuestia in the mid-fifth century.

Because of the silence of several of the western churches regarding it, Eusebius classes it among the Antilegomena or contested writings (*Historia ecclesiae*, 3.25; 2.23).

Gaius Marius Victorinus, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, openly questioned whether the teachings of James were heretical.

Its late recognition in the Church, especially in the West, may be explained by the fact that it was written for or by Jewish Christians, and therefore not widely circulated among the Gentile Churches.

There is some indication that a few groups distrusted the book because of its doctrine.

In Reformation times a few theologians, most notably Martin Luther in his early ministry, argued that this epistle should not be part of the canonical New Testament.

Martin Luther's description of the Epistle of James varies. In some cases, Luther argues that it was not written by an apostle; but in other cases, he describes James as the work of an apostle.

He even cites it as authoritative teaching from God and describes James as "a good book, because it sets up no doctrines of men but *vigorously promulgates the law of God.*"

Lutherans hold that the Epistle is rightly part of the New Testament, citing its authority in the Book of Concord.

I know, sorry, it was a lot of blah, blah, blah...

But at least you are in the know, now...

