

The Book Of James: Lesson 1

James, The Lord's Brother

Illustration/Setting The Stage: This quarter's lesson is about the book of James... Before we get into the book, today we're going to be asking (and answering) the "five Ws" – who, what, when, why, and where. Thomas Wilson wrote: "Who, what, and where, by what helpe, and by whose: why, how, and when, doe many things disclose."

The "Five Ws" were memorialized by Rudyard Kipling in his "Just So Stories," in which a poem accompanying the tale of "The Elephant's Child" opens with: "I keep six honest serving-men (they taught me all I knew); their names are What and Why and When; And How and Where and Who." Came to be known as the "Kipling Method."

To inform us about the content of the book of James we'll be exploring over the next several months and to give us an appreciation for the great themes James writes about, we want to discover something about the author, who is he writing to, why he writing, and what is he writing about.

Sunday – James, The Brother Of Jesus (Who)

Mark 3:21; John 7:2-5

James 1:1 – "Iakobos" (ee-ak-a-bos) is the Greek form of the Hebrew Jacob, a Jewish name common in the first century.

There are many references to men named James in the NT (40): 2 disciples – James, the brother of John and the son of Zebedee, and James the son of Alphaeus. Also, a father of one of the disciples (Judas, not Iscariot) was named James (Luke 6:16).

It's reasonable to suppose the author of James is one of these already mentioned, as he was obviously one well known (see James 1:1 – "James, a fellow bondservant").

It can't be the brother of John for he died around A.D. 44, and for the additional fact that Jas. 1:1 implies there was only one prominent James existed in the church at the time the letter was written, not two or more.

Another James is mentioned. He's the first mentioned brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), and Paul mentions that he saw him in Jerusalem after his conversion (Gal. 1:19).

Elsewhere in the NT mention is made of a leader in the church by the name of James, and he comes to prominence right after the death of John's brother James (Acts. 12:2, 17). No other James could have been so prominent! Subsequent references are made of this James, and one is significant in that it shows that this James is very likely the James whose brother is Jesus (see Gal. 2:9; cp. Gal. 1:19).

James was Jesus step-brother (Jesus committed his mothers care to John – John 19:26, 27), the son of Joseph from a previous marriage. Anyone here a step-brother or sister? The youngest? How did it fare for you? How do you think Jesus fared? Read Desire of Ages pp. 86-92 and you'll get a quick picture. They were annoyed by His straight life and non-compliance to the traditions of the religious leaders. John 7 tells us that after He had entered His ministry His family was confused about His mission.

Monday – James, The Believer

1 Corinthians 15:5-7; Acts 1:14

What happened to James? Did he always remain in doubt regarding Jesus mission? Did he always play the older step-brother?

1 Corinthians 15:5-7: “And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.”

*** Acts 1:14:** “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”

James became thoroughly converted. He experienced genuine repentance. He was no longer the older step-brother, but became a believer – a humble servant (he didn’t say brother) of Jesus. What else do we know about James?

1. Peter’s release from prison was to be repeated to James (Acts 12:17)
2. James presided at Jerusalem council and pronounced a decision (Acts 15:13, 19)
3. Paul reported to James concerning his missionary work (Acts 21:18)
4. James gave authority to people (Paul and Barnabas) to visit churches (Gal. 2:9) – “right hand of fellowship”
5. James was referred to as one of the three pillars of the early church (mentioned first - sorry Peter)

Despite starting out in doubt and confusion about Jesus and His mission, James ended up being one of the main leaders of the early Christian church. Never underestimate what God can do in a person’s life!

Tuesday – James & The Gospel

James 1:3; 2:5, 22, 23; 5:15

Epistle of straw? In the Leipzig Debate of 1519, Roman Catholic scholar Johann Eck used the book of James to challenge Martin Luther’s view of justification by faith, insisting that works needed to be added to the equation. Luther eventually denied

the letters inspired authority mainly on the mistaken claim that it taught justification by works.

In the preface to the book of James in Luther's 1522 German translation, he called it an "epistle of straw." Luther's contemporary and closest associate Melancthon believed the writings of Paul and James were not in conflict. But the reformation was to continue on to the end...

What did James teach regarding faith?

James 1:3: "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." – faith endures temptation and will be tried.

James 2:5: "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" – faith overcomes obstacles and sees the eternal.

* **James 2:22, 23:** "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God." – faith obeys and works.

Genuine faith carries certain recognizable credentials (photo ID). True faith will be revealed in the life and character of the believer.

"Is what we believe more important than how we live out that belief? If so, or not, why?" How we live that belief reveals whether I truly believe it or not (Noah, John the Baptist), and that's important. Would a Christian who doesn't take it seriously impress anyone? Would anyone be impressed by a Sabbath-keeper who doesn't take it seriously?

Wednesday – To The Twelve Tribes Scattered Abroad

James 1:1; 1 Peter 2:9, 10

Acts 8:1 tells us that heavy persecution came upon the early believers in Jerusalem and as a result Christians left Jerusalem and took the gospel to other parts of the Roman Empire, and beyond. Acts 11:19-21 tells us the gospel was spread to the Gentiles, beginning in Antioch, so the 12 tribes James is writing to is all the believers.

Soon a conflict arose, spearheaded by Jewish converts to Christianity, who asserted that Gentiles should first get circumcised before they can be Christian. This wasn't received well by many, and soon a council was established in Jerusalem to settle the matter. James took a prominent role in helping the believers reach a Spirit-led conclusion based on the Bible. A scriptural solution preserved a unified church.

“The early believers were scattered throughout the Roman Empire due to persecution and yet very united. We (the Adventist Church) are a scattered church in many respects; what unites us in Christ as a movement?” - John 17 – sanctified by truth.

Thursday – James & Jesus

James 1:22; 3:12; 4:12

Recent studies have shown that the longer we are with someone the more similarities in appearance grow. Our spouses rub off on us (like or not!).

Jesus rubbed off on James. James' letter reflects most closely the teachings of Jesus – imagery from agriculture and finances. There are many allusions to the Sermon on the Mount: Matt. 5:3 – poor in spirit – cp. Jas 2:5; 1:9; Matt. 5:22 – hasty speech – cp. Jas 1:20; Matt. 5:48 – be perfect – cp. Jas. 1:4; Matt. 6:24 – can't serve two masters – cp. Jas. 4:4; Matt. 7:1 – Don't judge – cp. Jas. 3:1; 4:11; Matt. 7:7 – Ask – cp. Jas. 1:5, 17. Are we allowing Jesus to rub off on us?

Appeal: The story of James conversion – from confusion and doubting to clarity and faith - is impressive. We can experience this change too.