

James the Slave

Suffering, Tests, and Temptation

James 1:1 8-17-2014

Summary: James was written to Jewish believers outside Israel (because it was before the gospel reached the Gentiles) but the message to Jewish believers and Gentile believers is identical, so it all applies to us. James was Jesus' brother, who did not believe during Jesus' life nor when the tomb was empty, but after Jesus appeared to him he believed. That transformation is a powerful proof of the resurrection, and should do away with our doubts.

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James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Introduction: Doubt

How do you know for sure that the Bible is reliable? Or beyond that, the very Word of God? Of all the religions in the world, how do you know for sure that Christianity is right and all the other religions are wrong? Isn't it possible that you are just buying in to what your mom and dad told you – just like most everyone else in the world does? Or that maybe you are just believing it's true because you want it to be true, because not believing it would create a whole lot of problems in your relationships? What if the critics are right, and the Bible is just a human book full of legends and myths just like other religious books? How can I be sure that what I believe is really true?

Today we begin a study of the book of James, which is a letter that was intended to be read to the whole church, and passed along from church to church. Letters like that were called Epistles. And you can tell James was meant to be an Epistle by the opening greeting, where he addresses the letter not to an individual or even to a specific church, but to **the twelve tribes scattered among the nations**.

Another thing you pick up from James' greeting is that he is not the type to beat around the bush. It is one of the shortest opening greetings in the New Testament – he just states who he is, who he is writing to, and then a one-word greeting, and then he immediately dives in to his first point. But as short as verse 1 is, what he says is very important. I want to spend all our time today just on verse 1 because I think if we take a careful look at it, it will really help you deal with doubt in your life. I will explain how that is in a minute, but first we need to look into the question of who this Epistle is written to so that we know how much of this book actually applies to us.

Is James for Us?

The book is addressed to Jewish Christians¹ – **to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations**.

¹ There are three views on what James meant by the phrase **twelve tribes**. Some say it just refers to all Jews – period. Others say it refers specifically to believing Jews. In the Jewish writings in between the Old Testament and New Testament, the phrase

That phrase **scattered among the nations** in the NIV, or literally **to the twelve tribes in the dispersion** – that refers to the Jews living outside Israel. So the book of James is addressed to Jewish Christians who are scattered around the Gentile world.

One Gospel

So what does that mean for us? Why would James address this book specifically to Jewish Christians? Why not all Christians? Is it because God has a different message for Jewish Christians than He does for Gentile Christians? There are some who teach that. One of the big theological debates out there is the debate between Dispensationalism vs. Covenant Theology. The Dispensationalists are the people who tend to emphasize the differences between Israel and the Church. And they see a huge change between Old Testament and New Testament. The other side emphasizes the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church, and they emphasize the similarities between Old Testament and New Testament. So you can see, Dispensationalism is not a very helpful word because there are a thousand different places you could fall on that continuum. The people who are the farthest out in the extremes of Dispensationalism are the ones who teach that there are actually two different gospels – one for the Jew and a different one for the Gentile. People like John Hagee preach this. When they see that Paul was known as the Apostle to the Gentiles and Peter was the Apostle to the Jews, they figure that must mean those two men preached two different messages. So usually what they say is all the hard things, like repentance and obeying God and following Christ – that is for the Jews. And salvation through grace through faith – that is for Gentiles.

There are a couple problems with that view. First, in Galatians 1:8 Paul said that if anyone preaches another gospel other than the one Paul preached, let him be condemned to hell. There are not two gospels. There is the one true gospel, and every other gospel is a false gospel.

Secondly, if you actually read Paul's teaching and the teachings of James and Jesus and Peter and John, you find they all teach the same message. The idea that Paul taught grace and faith (but not repentance or obedience or law), and Jesus and James and Peter taught repentance and law and obedience (but not grace and faith) just does not hold up. Jesus taught salvation through grace alone (Lk.18:12-14). So did James and Peter and John (Jas.2:1, 1 Pe.1:1-5, 1 Jn.5:1). And Paul taught repentance (Acts 17:30) for both Jew and Gentile (Acts 20:21), and that true faith will obey the commands of God (1 Cor.13:2), and that we are not free from the law of Christ (1 Cor.9:21). There is only one message for all believers. Only one message - which means the entire New Testament applies to every believer. It is not just Jewish Christians who need to consider it pure joy when we face trials, and control our tongue and have humility and all the rest of the things he teaches in this book. It is for all of us. And you can tell that because the reasons he gives for all the commands in the book apply to any believer – Jew or Gentile. James gives reasons for his commands, and the logic of those reasons applies to all believers.

So then why does James address his book specifically to Jews? The answer to that is probably very simple – at the time James wrote this Epistle, the gospel had not spread to the Gentile world in any significant numbers yet. James was probably the first book written in the New Testament. Most scholars date it in the early 40's – before Paul went on all those missionary journeys spreading the gospel in the Gentile world. We will see in chapter 2 that the church was still meeting in synagogues when James wrote

twelve tribes was often used to refer specifically to the faithful remnant. So James could be using it that way. A third view is that he is using it in a spiritual way – like Peter. When we studied 1 Peter we saw him taking phrases normally used to describe Israel and applying to the Gentile Church. Paul does that in Romans as well. So some commentators believe James is doing that here – referring to the Church as the true Israel.

So which did James have in mind - all Jews, only believing Jews, or the whole Church? The easiest one to rule out is the first one. As you read through the Epistle it is pretty obvious that James is speaking to believers. For example, in 2:1 James assumes the readers have saving faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. There is no question this Epistle is written to Christians. But is it only to Jewish Christians, or is James using this language like Peter, applying it to Gentiles as well as Jews? I think in Peter there are several indications that he is including Gentiles in his audience. But you don't really see that in James. The whole book has a very Jewish flavor. For example in 2:2 we see that their meetings were taking place in synagogues. Things like that, and the way James speaks about the Law seem to me to point to a more literal understanding of the **twelve tribes**. So my view is that James is addressed to Jewish Christians.

this. The Church was made up mainly of Jews, so that is mainly who James has in mind as he writes. But everything in the book of James applies to all believers.

James the Brother Slave of Jesus

Jesus' Brother

Ok, so we know who the letter is written to – what about the author? James was a very common name. And yet this James just gives his name, without any other description – not James the son of so-and-so, or James from this city or that city – he just says, “I’m James” and expects everyone in all the churches around the Roman Empire to immediately know exactly who he was. That tells us this had to be a James who was very prominent and well known in the early church. It is famous James. Who could that be? There are only two famous James: James the Apostle, and James the brother of Jesus. And we can probably rule out James the Apostle. If it had been the Apostle, we would expect him to identify himself as an Apostle like Paul and Peter do. Plus, James the Apostle died very early on – in Acts 12. So we can say with a high level of certainty that the author is James, the brother of Jesus.

And that’s easy to believe once you start studying the book because he talks just like Jesus. No other writer in Scripture sounds more like Jesus than James. Almost every point James makes can be found clearly stated in Jesus' teachings. His phrasing, the topics He chooses, the way He says things are so similar to the way Jesus spoke that many scholars wonder if a lot of the statements in the book of James are actually quotations from Jesus that just weren’t recorded anywhere else.

Blood Relation not Important

“If this is Jesus’ brother, why doesn’t he introduce himself that way?”

If you are establishing your credentials, and you want the readers to accept your spiritual authority, why not mention that you are Jesus’ brother? You would think that would be front and center, “James, from the blessed womb of Mary, from the household of Jesus, sibling of the Holy One...”

He does not mention being Jesus’ brother because being Jesus’ earthly brother is totally irrelevant in establishing his spiritual authority. Growing up in the same house with Jesus and having the same family blood running through his veins was an interesting claim to fame from an earthly perspective, but spiritually it is no credential at all. It means nothing. It would have no place in the Epistle because it is not a spiritual credential. You could be a brother of Jesus and not even go to heaven, because God’s kingdom is a spiritual thing, not a physical thing. There are people who think if they could just touch a splinter of wood from the cross, or sit down on a stump that Jesus once sat down on, or find a shroud that Jesus was buried in, they could get some kind of spiritual benefit from things like that. Here is a man who grew up in the same house with Jesus. He probably wrestled with Him and ate hundreds of meals with Him. But when he gives his spiritual credentials none of that is even worth mentioning. It is irrelevant.

If you think you are a Christian just because you were born and raised in a Christian home and you went to church all your life, think again.

John 6:63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.

The home you grew up in counts for nothing. Going to church all your life, in itself, counts for nothing. Going to church does not make you a Christian any more than going to MacDonald’s makes you a hamburger.

2 Corinthians 5:16 regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Flesh and blood relationships are not what matter in the kingdom of God.

Matthew 12:46 While Jesus was still talking to the crowd...47 Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." 48 He replied to him, "Who is my

mother, and who are my brothers?" 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Do you realize that placing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ gives you a more significant position in the kingdom of God than if you had given birth to Jesus? Flesh and blood relationships are not what matter.

Jesus' Slave

"Ok, so then what does matter?"

Well, let's look at what James says. He does not think being Jesus' brother is worth mentioning, but notice what he does mention:

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

That is what matters. The word translated **servant** there refers to someone who was purchased and owned by his master. So a better translation is **slave**. The credential that gives James credibility, the thing about him that really matters, is the fact that he considers himself a slave of God and a slave of Jesus, who he refers to as **Christ** (messiah) and **Lord**. Here are my credentials: I believe Jesus to be God's Messiah, and bow to Him as my Lord, and I regard myself as His slave. That is what matters. James went from being just another lost soul on his way to hell, to being someone of significance and importance on the day his identity changed from just being Jesus' brother to being Jesus' slave. The day he traded a mere blood relationship for a spiritual relationship of a subject to his King, and a slave to His Master, and instead of his connection to Jesus being that of blood and family, it became that of loyalty, obedience, and faith. There are only two New Testament authors who give this as their only credential – James and Jude (who was another one of Jesus' brothers). They were not among the 12 Apostles; their human relationship to Jesus was irrelevant, so their only claim to spiritual authority was that they were slaves of Jesus.

James the Leader

I mentioned a minute ago that you could be Jesus' brother and not even be saved. That was actually the case for all of Jesus' brothers during Jesus' earthly life.

John 7:5 even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Matthew 13:55 names four brothers of Jesus: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (or Jude). And when Jesus first chose the 12 Apostles, James and His other brothers thought He had lost His mind.

Mark 3:21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

So they tried to take charge of Jesus. They failed. Jesus remained in charge not only of Himself, but of them. Jesus had a plan for them.

Jesus continued on in His ministry, James and the others continue in their unbelief, until Jesus is crucified. If you are not having success reaching someone in your family with the gospel, don't beat yourself up too much because that happened even to Jesus.

When He was alive Jesus had said, "They will kill me, but on the third day I'll rise from the dead." So they kill Him just like He said, they bury him, and on the third day, lo and behold, the tomb is empty. But even after they verify the empty tomb, they still don't believe. Not even an empty tomb on the third day was enough to convince a guy like James.

I love it that the people in the Bible are real people, don't you? These are real people with real brains who are not easily convinced of religious claims. Yes, they saw the miracles, and maybe they didn't really have any good explanation for how Jesus did all that stuff, but it still wasn't enough to convince them.

But Jesus had a plan for James. And so after He rose from the dead, Jesus appeared to the women, He appeared to Peter and the Apostles, but there's one more person He wanted to pay a visit.

1 Corinthians 15:7 Then he appeared to James

Wouldn't you love to have seen that? James is sitting in his house, "Knock, knock, knock..." he opens the door – it's his big brother.

"I'm back."

"Jesus? No way – is that really You?"

"Take a look. Look at these scars. Touch them if you want."

"Jesus, You know all that stuff I said about You losing Your mind and being insane and everything? I take that back."

I don't know if that's how it went – I don't know what was said. I don't know if James threw his arms around Jesus, or if he dropped to his knees like Thomas, or if it took a few minutes for him to process what he was seeing, or what. What I do know is that James was changed that day. So were Jude and the others. Jesus spent almost a month and a half giving them many convincing proofs that it was really Him. Then in Acts 1:9 Jesus is taken up to heaven right in front of their eyes. Once He is out of their view, they go back to Jerusalem.

14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

The miracles did not convince James and the other brothers, not even the empty tomb convinced them, but now they are convinced. Those "many convincing proofs" must have been awfully convincing!

Slave Leader

So James becomes a Christian. And very quickly he rises to an extremely high level of leadership – in fact, the highest. And I point that out because if we are going to spend a year studying what this man wrote, I would like you to have an idea who he was and what he was like. When he claims to be a slave of Jesus Christ, that is actually a claim to a high office. According to Ephesians 6:6, all believers are slaves of Christ. But when it is used as a title like this, it refers to a high office. In that culture it was a high honor to become the personal slave of a king or dignitary. And if you look through Scripture at the list of people who were called "the slave of God" it is quite the list. The phrase is most often applied to Moses. It is also applied to Joshua, the Patriarchs, Job, Samuel, Isaiah, the Prophets, Jude, Timothy, David, Daniel, Peter, and Paul. And in the book of Isaiah we find that the ultimate slave of the Lord is the Messiah Himself. So *slave of God* is a phrase that refers to select individuals chosen by God to be His spokesmen, and to lead His people in a special way. And if you follow the life of James, that's not hard to see. In Acts 1 he is a brand new believer, and by Acts 15 he had become arguably the most influential and respected leader in the entire worldwide Church.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians, and he was trying to establish his credibility and credentials as a legitimate Apostle, he dropped the three biggest names below Jesus that he could drop.

Galatians 2:9 James, Peter and John, those recognized as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.

That is quite a trio. John was the Apostle whom Jesus loved, Peter was the leader of all the Apostles, and included with those two is James. In fact, James is mentioned first! Much later, even after Paul is established as an Apostle, when he arrives in Jerusalem the first thing he does is to report to James (Acts 21:18).

James was probably the first one to ever write a book of the Bible in the New Testament. Scholars date his in the early to mid-40's, which means it is the earliest, oldest Christian document in existence. James is like the Moses of the New Testament. He writes the very first book – it starts with him, and all the other books are added later. And it is clear that James must have had some significant education, because the book of James is some of the most polished Greek writing in the whole New Testament. He

uses words and phrases that were typically only found in academic circles, and the structure and form show a very high level of proficiency in Greek.

Acts 15 is the minutes from probably the most important church leadership meeting that ever took place. It is known as the Jerusalem Council. Once Paul's ministry among the Gentiles really started taking off, and lots and lots of Gentiles started becoming Christians, some questions started coming up. Christianity was a very Jewish thing. So these Gentiles – do they have to convert to Judaism to become Christians? How far away from Judaism can you get and still be a follower of the God of the Bible? Do Gentile converts need to be circumcised? Do they need to follow the Law of Moses, or just parts of it, or what?

Lots of different answers were coming from all sides of that debate (and they still are by the way), so they appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others to go to Jerusalem for the definitive, final answer from the Apostles. So they have this big council, and some stood up and spoke out forcefully in verse 5: "Yes, circumcision is required!" So the Apostles and elders meet together as a smaller group to hash that question out in verse 6. And various heavy hitters get up and speak. Peter speaks up, Paul and Barnabas speak – the discussion keeps going on, and the question is, who is going to rise up as the leader of all these leaders? There are leaders among leaders. It is interesting to observe the various levels of leadership that different men are equipped for. There are some of you who have some natural leadership ability, and so if you are in your prayer group and the leader doesn't show up for whatever reason, you are the type who will speak up and take leadership and get the thing going. But if you sit in on the prayer group leaders' meeting, you might be content to just sit back and let those men speak. God has equipped me with some leadership ability, and I tend to take leadership even among various leaders at Agape, but if I get into a room full of pastors, I tend to sit in the back and let someone else lead the group. God just equips leaders at various levels. I have seen John MacArthur walk into a room of nationally known, famous evangelical leaders, and as soon as MacArthur walks in, he is the leader.

So in this council, full of Apostles and leaders who, if John MacArthur were there he would be at their feet listening – out of that amazing group, who is the Holy Spirit going to choose to rise and lead?

Acts 15:13 When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me..."

Hey, Paul – listen to me. Peter – listen. Barnabas, John – listen to me. Here is the final verdict:

**19 "It is my judgment that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.
20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols,..."**

My final judgment is that we should write them a letter, and it should say this. And that is exactly what happened. All the Apostles ended up agreeing with James' judgment, and the letter went out saying exactly what James proposed word for word, and all the Apostles signed it.

How did James rise to that level of influence in the church so fast? We know it is God who grants favor in the eyes of men, but what means did the Lord use in James' case? We don't know for sure, but church tradition tells us that James had two nicknames. One was James the Righteous (or James the Just). He was known for his extraordinary personal holiness. They say he was incredibly disciplined, and devout.

The other nickname was camel-knees. He spent so much time in prayer he was known for having calloused knees. Church tradition says he ended up dying as a martyr – beaten to death with clubs because of His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was a godly, faithful man, and that is how he became known in the church, along with Peter and John, as one of the pillars. What is a pillar? A pillar carries the load. A pillar supports the weight of the structure. If you remodel your house and you want to get rid of a wall, the first question is always, "Is it a load-bearing wall?" If you take down a load-bearing wall you might end up taking down the whole house. Other walls are just standing there – they don't hold anything up. Some people in the church are non-load bearing walls. You could remove them from the church and it really would not have much impact on anything. But some are pillars. A lot rests on them. They are strong and steadfast and reliable and faithful. They were there last year, they will be there next year, they don't move, they are solid, they can handle a

serious load. That is the theme of our upcoming men's retreat. We are going to talk about how to become more of a pillar in the church. Various men are capable of bearing different loads. And we will be talking about how to become stronger and more faithful and more like a pillar in the church. But James was the pillar among pillars.

Let me ask you this - if Peter and Paul and the Apostles will sit and listen to James, will you listen to him? If the Apostle Paul would travel to Jerusalem and sit and listen to James and learn from him, are you interested in learning from him? Are you excited about sitting at James' feet to hear him teach about the kinds of things he taught Paul? What an exciting thing this is – especially when you consider the subject matter. Here are the topics in the book of James – see if any of these sound useful to you:

- How to deal with suffering
- How to fight temptation
- How to put what you know from Scripture into practice
- What is the connection between trusting and living the Christian life?
- How to overcome sin through faith
- How to welcome strangers and become more of a stranger-loving church
- How to become humble
- How to become wise
- How to control your tongue
- How to resolve personal conflicts
- How to avoid personal conflicts
- Getting rid of your attraction to the world
- Planning for the future
- Keys to powerful prayer
- Healing

How would you like to get some lessons on those topics from a man like James? How would you like to spend a year hearing about how to live life from a man who personally witnessed the only perfect life ever lived? James knew first-hand exactly what it looks like for an 8-year-old boy to be perfect. He had seen with his own eyes what a perfect 14-year-old looked like. Late teens, early 20's – every age, James got to live in the same house day after day after day, in every different situation what the ideal human being is supposed to look like.

Proof

Why am I spending so much time telling you all about James? Usually I don't do that when I preach through a book of the Bible. But in this case I think it is important because understanding James' life can help you a great deal in putting into practice one of the most central goals of the whole book: namely, perseverance.

In the opening paragraph, in verses 2-4, James says we should consider it pure joy when we suffer because it produces perseverance. That is how valuable perseverance is. Steadfastness – the ability to stand firm and not waver. That virtue is so incredibly valuable that if you can get it from suffering, then suffering is a happy occasion. In verse 4 he says if you have perseverance, it will make you **mature and complete, not lacking anything**. Not only that, but perseverance is necessary for getting your prayers answered. He makes that point in verses 5-8. If instead of perseverance you have instability and doubt, God won't answer your prayers. And the topic of perseverance and standing firm comes up again at the end of the book.

5:8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.

So perseverance and steadfastness is a really big deal. And one of the biggest killers of perseverance is doubt – fading in and out of trusting God.

6 [when someone prays for wisdom] he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

So if one of the main purposes of the book is to help us overcome doubt and become more steadfast in our faith, I think one of the most helpful verses in the whole book for how to do that is 1:1. When you struggle with doubt, and you ask yourself, “Why should I believe this is true?” A very powerful answer to that question is this: you should believe it because James believed it. If anyone was in a position to know if it was true, it was James.

The skeptics do not have any rational explanation for how James and Jesus’ other brothers and the Apostles went from not believing when they saw the empty tomb to believing so steadfastly that they would give their lives for that belief. These are not gullible men. They are not superstitious men. They were hard to convince – especially Jesus’ brothers. They heard Jesus preach! The wisest, most profound teaching ever to come out of a man’s mouth was not enough to convince them. They were so determined in their unbelief that miracles and an empty tomb were not enough to convince them. But then, when the very first little band of believers gathers in Jerusalem, they are among the first to sign up to be followers of Jesus. If Jesus didn’t actually rise from the dead and appear to these men, how could this be explained?

And by the way – even secular, unbelieving scholars admit that transformation happened. They don’t believe Jesus did miracles, and they don’t believe the resurrection happened, but even secular, non-Christian scholars admit that Jesus’ tomb was empty on the third day, and when that was verified the Apostles and Jesus’ brothers still did not believe. But 40 days later they did.

What happened? Could it be that they all got together and colluded to invent a new religion by lying about a resurrection? No. These men were tortured and died for this message of the resurrection of Jesus. People don’t die for something they know to be a lie.

Some skeptics have said, “Maybe they had a hallucination.” A hallucination? At one point Jesus appeared to 500 people at one time. Five hundred people had a simultaneous hallucination? Does that sound like a rational explanation to you? Try that in a court of law sometime.

“Yes, your honor, I realize the officer saw me do this, but what if that was a hallucination? I realize 100% of the evidence that exists all points toward me doing this, and the prosecution has produced 500 credible eye-witnesses who all agree they saw me commit this crime, but you still can’t say you know I’m guilty beyond a reasonable doubt because maybe they all had a giant, simultaneous, mass-hallucination, because we all know how often that happens.”

Good luck with that one.

I don’t know that there is any more powerful, compelling, irrefutable proof of Christianity than the transformation of the Apostles and Jesus’ brothers from a scared group of unbelieving cowards hiding away in a locked room after the tomb was found empty, to being courageous, outspoken zealots who were willing to be tortured and killed rather than stop preaching the resurrection of Jesus. And that is especially true of Jesus’ brothers. Think about it – how hard would it be for you to be persuaded that your brother is God? If an angry mob surrounded you with baseball bats and they said, “We are going to beat you and beat you, and beat you until you are dead. And if you don’t want that to happen all you have to do is stop going around preaching that your brother rose from the dead” – what would it take for you to say, “Go ahead”?

James 1:1 is one of the most powerful proofs of Christianity there is. If you want to beat doubt – you want to have strong faith – read James 1:1, and watch Jesus’ brother call himself a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ and place Jesus in the same category with God. James was a very staunch Jew, and if there is one thing Jews believed it was that there is only one God – period. And Jesus was clear in Matthew 6:24 – no one can serve two masters. So for James to be a slave of God *and* a slave of Jesus, Jesus and God must be one. What would it take to convince you that your brother is God?

The skeptics might have a lot of education, but they are 2000 years away from the situation. James was there. When someone comes along and says, “I don’t know if Jesus actually rose from the dead” I want to ask, “Oh, do you know something James didn’t know? Do you have access to some data that Jesus’ brother, who was there, didn’t have access to? Tell me – what is this amazing historical bit of information you have?”

Jesus Was Sinless

The fact that James was Jesus’ brother was irrelevant for his spiritual credentials, but it is an interesting fact, because it tells us something about Jesus. James devoted his life to worshipping Jesus as the sinless, perfect, spotless Lamb of God. If you were going to pretend to be the Messiah, and try to convince everyone that you are sinlessly perfect, who do you think would be the hardest one to convince? You might pull the wool over the eyes of a few gullible people who only see you in public. It would be a lot harder to convince your friends, who see more of you. But can you imagine trying to convince your brother? Is there anyone here who thinks just maybe your brother that you grew up with might be sinlessly perfect from birth? All that would have been required for anyone to totally discredit Jesus as being who He claimed to be would be to just point out one single sin. One sin, His whole life, and His entire case collapses. And not even Jesus’ brothers could come up with even one example of a sin Jesus committed. James was willing to be beaten to death rather than stop proclaiming that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh, the perfect, sinless, spotless Lamb of God who died to pay the penalty for our sins and rose again on the third day to give forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who place their faith in Him.

Benediction: 2 Peter 3:17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. What is it about Scripture or Christianity that you are most prone to doubt? And how do you handle those doubts when they arise?
2. Everyone looks to something in life as a badge of honor (fame, money, some skill or accomplishment or possession, or, in James’ case, his calling as Jesus’ slave). Which things in life are you prone to think of as badges of honor that determine whether your life is a success or failure?