1 James

EXHORTATIONS TO PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

2 A contested book

- ►The Muratorian fragment of the 2nd century does not include Hebrews, James, or the epistles of Peter
- ▶ James is consistently included in the canon since the 4th and 5th centuries.
- ► Martin Luther erroneously thought the book taught salvation by works rather than grace, so he opposed the book.

3 A general epistle

- ▶This letter was meant to be circulated among Christians in the early church
- ▶It is well known that Martin Luther had problems with this book. He called it a "right strawy epistle."
 - ▶ "There are enough needles in this haystack to prick the conscience of every dull, defeated, and degenerated Christian in the world.
 - ▶ Here is a "right stirring epistle" designed to exhort and encourage, to challenge and convict, to rebuke and revive, to describe practical holiness and drive believers toward the goal of a faith that works. James is severely ethical and refreshingly practical." Ronald Blue

4 Who is the author?

- ▶The New Testament mentions at least four men named James:
 - ▶ the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Mark 1:19) martyred under Herod Agrippa I before the epistle was written (Acts 12:2)
 - ▶ the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18) Roman Catholics suggest that this man was a "cousin" of Jesus in order to perpetuate Mary's virginity, but this violates a literal interpretation of Scripture
 - ▶ the father of Judas (not Iscariot; Luke 6:16) of no importance elsewhere in Scripture or in the early church
 - ▶ the half brother of the Lord (Gal. 1:19) & leader of Jerusalem church
 - ► but I did not see any others of the apostles except James, the brother of the Lord. (Galatians 1:19, LEB)

▶

5 Probably the earliest book of the NT

- ► Flavius Josephus, first-century historian, records that James was martyred in A.D. 62, so the epistle must have been written prior to that date. Since no mention is made of the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49) in which James took so active a role, it is likely that the letter was written between A.D. 45 and 48.
- ▶ James is probably the earliest of the writings of the New Testament and therefore can hardly be seen as a polemic against Paul's letter to the Romans, which was written later.

6 To whom was James written?

- ► Clearly addressed to "the 12 tribes scattered among the nations" (James 1:1), this letter has a marked Jewish flavor.
 - ► The book has the substance and authority of the Prophets and the style and beauty of the Psalms.
 - ► He refers to "firstfruits" (1:18; cf. Lev. 23:10), the synagogue or "meeting" (James 2:2), "our ancestor Abraham" (2:21), Gehenna or "hell" (3:6), "the Lord Almighty" (5:4; cf. Gen. 17:1), and

to the early and latter or "fall and spring rains" (James 5:7; cf. Deut. 11:14).

▶The letter is written to a Jewish constituency. Though the letter demonstrates careful Greek diction, it is nonetheless filled with extensive Hebrew symbolism.

7 James vs. Paul?

- ▶It is apparent from Paul's relationship with James (Acts 15:13; 21:18) and his recognition of James (Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12) that Paul held James in high respect.
 - ▶ Paul wrote about inner saving faith from God's perspective. God sees our hearts.
 - ▶ James wrote about outward serving faith from man's perspective. Men see our faith by our works.
 - ▶The true seed of saving faith is verified by the tangible fruit of serving faith. James' point is that biblical faith works.

▶

8 A book of imperatives

- ▶The Book of James is as much a lecture as it is a letter.
 - ▶Though it opens with the customary salutation of an epistle, it lacks personal references common in a letter and it has no concluding benediction.
- ▶This so-called "epistle" was obviously prepared for public reading as a sermon to the congregations addressed. The tone is clearly authoritative but not autocratic.
- ▶ James included 54 imperatives in his 108 verses—an average of one call for action in every other verse!

9 A book of images

- ▶ James' style is both energetic and vivid, conveying profound concepts with crisp, well-chosen words. The sentences are short, simple, and direct. He used many metaphors and similes with a touch of poetic imagination.
- ▶In fact, the Book of James probably has more figures of speech, analogies, and imagery from nature (see the chart) than all Paul's epistles together.
- Exhortations, rhetorical questions, and illustrations from everyday life give spice to this little book.

10 A book of structure

- ▶ A striking literary technique employed by James is the practice of linking together clauses and sentences by the repetition of a leading word or one of its cognates.
- ► For example, "perseverance" (1:3) and "perseverance" (v. 4); "not lacking anything" (v. 4) and "if any of you lacks" (v. 5); "he should ask" (v. 5) and "when he asks" (v. 6); "he must ... not doubt" (v. 6) and "he who doubts" (v. 6).

11 A book rich in Old Testament truths

- ▶ He makes reference to Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah, to the Law and the Ten Commandments
- ► He includes allusions to passages in 21 Old Testament books: Genesis through Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and 7 of the 12 Minor Prophets.

12	Α	bool	k ric	h in	nature

13 A book rich in the Sermon on the Mount

14 The theme of the book

- ▶ Real, saving faith must be evident to others by our conduct in daily living
- ► Love for Jesus Christ must be expressed in practical ways
- ► Achieve spiritual maturity through a confident stand, compassionate service, careful speech, contrite submission, and concerned sharing

15 A story James would have liked

- ▶ Francis of Assisi once invited an apprentice to go with him to a nearby village to preach. The young monk quickly agreed, seizing an opportunity to hear his teacher speak. When they arrived in the village, St. Francis began to visit with the people.
 - ▶ First he stopped in on the butcher. Next a visit with the cobbler. Then a short walk to the home of a woman who'd recently buried her husband. After that a stop at the school to chat with the teacher. This continued throughout the morning. After some time, Francis told his disciple that it was time to return to the abbey.
 - ▶The student didn't understand. "But we came to preach," he reminded. "We haven't preached a sermon."
 - ► "Haven't we?" questioned the elder. "People have watched us, listened to us, responded to us. Every word we have spoken, every deed we have done has been a sermon. We have preached all morning."

16 Max Lucado on James

- As far as he [James] was concerned, Christianity was more action on Monday than worship on Sunday. "My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them?" (2:14).
- ► His message is bare-knuckled; his style is bare-boned. Talk is cheap, he argues. Service is invaluable.
- ▶It's not that works save the Christian, but that works mark the Christian.
 - ▶In James's book of logic, it only makes sense that we who have been given much should give much. Not just with words. But with our lives.
- ▶Or as St. Francis is noted as saying, "Preach without ceasing. If you must, use words."

17 Faith tested by the "thumps"

- ▶ "When a potter bakes a pot, he checks its solidity by pulling it out of the oven and thumping it. If it "sings," it's ready. If it "thuds," it's placed back in the oven. The character of a person is also checked by thumping.
- ▶ Been thumped lately?

18 Thump, thump, thump

▶ "Late-night phone calls. Grouchy teacher. Grumpy moms. Burnt meals. Flat tires. "You've got to be kidding" deadlines. Those are thumps. Thumps are those irritating inconveniences that trigger the worst in us. They catch us off guard. Flat footed. They aren't big enough to be crises, but if you get enough of them, watch out! Traffic jams. Long lines. Empty mailboxes. Dirty clothes on the floor ... Thump. Thump. Thump.

19 Do I sing? Or do I thud?

- ► "How do I respond? Do I sing? Or do I thud?
- ▶ Jesus said that out of the nature of the heart a man speaks (Luke 6:45).
- ▶ There's nothing like a good thump to reveal the nature of a heart.
 - ► The true character of a person is seen not in momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day-to-day living." Max Lucado

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20	To the 12 tribes scattered abroad DIVERSIFICATION WITH A PURPOSE
21	 The Diaspora ▶ The Diaspora (or dispersion) is a technical term for Jews living outside Palestine ▶ The dispersal of Jews was important for the spread of Christianity because where there were Jews, there were synagogues – a place from which Christian preachers could make a beginning. ▶ Where there were Jews, there was a foundational knowledge of God in the OT.
22	 Assyrians carried away the people of the Northern Kingdom (10 tribes) into Assyria (2 Kings 17:23; 1 Chronicles 5:26). Babylonians conquered Southern Kingdom (Judah and Benjamin) in 580 B.C. but Jews refuse assimilation and Jewish scholarship thrives. Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and took many Jews back to Rome, but they were difficult slaves wo stuck rigidly to ceremonial law. Many were freed. Many Jews left Palestine of free will for more profitable lands – usually for Egypt (Alexandria, Leontopolis) or Syria (Antioch and Damascus), North Africa, Asia Minor.
23	And it continued
24	 Jews were everywhere Strabo, the Greek geographer, writes: 'It is hard to find a spot in the whole world which is not occupied and dominated by Jews.' ▶ Josephus, the Jewish historian, writes: 'There is no city, no tribe, whether Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish customs have not taken root.' ▶ The Sibylline Oracles, written around 140 BC, say that every land and every sea is filled with the Jews.
25	 So who are the recipients? ▶ Jews outside Palestine – too wide for distribution of such a letter ▶ The Christian church ▶ Many early church fathers in an attempt to answer criticisms of why the OT did not seem to support Christianity spiritualized the meaning of Israel to be the church. ▶ This led to allegorical preaching and theological errors of Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches ▶ Christian Jews outside Palestine – If anyone would write these people, it would be James, the acknowledged Jewish leader of the early church.
26	Stand with Confidence (Part 1) KNOW WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST
27	James 1:1 ► JAMES, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. (James 1:1, KJV 1900) ► James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. Greetings!

(James 1:1, LEB)

- ► Only NT writers James and Jude (both half-brothers of Jesus) describe themselves by the term doulos without any qualification.
 - ► (Paul uses the term for himself but adds "and an apostle.")

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28 Jesus is God

- ► Make no mistake. This JEWISH author is stating unequivocally that the Jesus that he grew up with in his home is God!
- ▶ "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"
 - ▶ He is putting God and the Lord Jesus Christ on the same level
 - ▶This would have been blasphemy for most Jews, but James states it without apology.
 - ▶This is a bold statement for the earliest book in the NT distributed to a Jewish audience to make.

29 A modest introduction

- ▶ James does not state his qualifications or credentials.
- ► He is the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ but does not mention that here. Surely that would have been something to brag about but James simply refers to himself as a slave.
- ▶ James was the head of the church in Jerusalem so he would have been well known and had little need to introduce himself.

30 Really, Jacob

- ▶ Ἰάκωβος θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος
 - ► Literally, "Jacob, of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, a slave."
 - Some have suggested that King James of England wanted to see his name in the Bible translation that he funded and authorized.
 - ► So Jesus' half-brother's name is Jacob but James has become the common "nickname" given to this author.

31 Slow to believe, but firm to the end

- ▶The author is James, the half brother of the Lord, who became the recognized leader in the Jerusalem church.
 - ▶This conclusion is supported by the authoritative tone of the letter and by the marked similarities in Greek between this epistle and the speech by James recorded in Acts 15.
- ▶Though James was reared in the same home with the Lord Jesus, he apparently did not become a believer until after Christ's resurrection.
 - ▶ John wrote, "For even His own brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5).
- ▶ James' encounter with the risen Lord may have brought him to saving faith. Christ "appeared to James, then to all the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:7).
- ▶ Paul later listed James, Peter, and John as "those reputed to be pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9).

32 What does it mean to be a slave for Christ?

ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE ABSOLUTE HUMILITY

ABSOLUTE LOYALTY

A CERTAIN PRIDE IN BELONGING TO JESUS

33 1. Absolute obedience

- ► Slaves know no law but their master's word.
- ▶They have no rights of their own.
- ▶They are the absolute possessions of their master.
- ▶They are bound to give their master unquestioning obedience.
- ► How would it change our behavior to see ourselves as slaves to Jesus who must give Him absolute obedience?

34 Slavery due to debt

- ► An entire family could be sold because of debt.
 - A certain woman from the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead. Now you know that your servant was a fearer of Yahweh, but the creditor came to take two of my children for himself as slaves. (2 Kings 4:1, LEB)
- ►Nehemiah 5:5-8
- Such slavery was limited to 6 years under Hebrew law. It shall not be hard in your eyes when you send him forth free, because for six years he has served you worth twice the wage of a hired worker; and Yahweh your God will bless you in whatever you will do. (Deuteronomy 15:18, LEB)

35 Voluntary slavery

- ► A way to escape abject poverty
- ► And if the alien or the temporary resident who are with you prosper, but your countryman who is with him becomes poor and he is sold to an alien, a temporary resident who is with you, or to a descendant of an alien's clan, after he is sold redemption shall be for him; one of his brothers may redeem him, (Leviticus 25:47–48, LEB)

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36 Love for a master

▶ But if the slave explicitly says, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free," his master will present him to God and bring him to the door or to the doorpost, and his master will pierce his ear with an awl, and he will serve him forever. (Exodus 21:5–6, LEB)

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37 Should Christians be slaves to Christ?

- ▶ Jesus paid a debt for us that we could not pay (slavery due to debt)
- ► We are in abject spiritual poverty with NOTHING to offer to God, but Jesus redeems us and provides with rich spiritual blessings and a place in heaven
- ▶We have a Master in Christ whom we have every reason to love because He first loved us.
- ► How can we not want to give Jesus our obedience?

38 **2. Absolute humility**

- ▶The word doulos (bondslave) is the word of someone who thinks not of privileges but of duties, not of rights but of obligations.
- ▶It is the word of someone who has lost all sense of self in the service of God.
- A slave's only "bragging rights" are if he has a good master. We take pride in our Master but have absolute humility in our relationship toward Him.

39 3. Absolute loyalty

- ▶It is the word of someone who has no self-interest, because whatever is done is done for God.
- ▶ Personal gain and preference do not enter into the calculations; all loyalty is to God.
- A slave only takes orders from one Master. He would not do anything to show disloyalty or a lack of fidelity to that master.

40 4. A certain pride of belonging to Jesus

- ▶To be a slave to Christ is a title of honor.
- ► Greats of the OT were known as slaves:
 - ► Moses 1 Kings 8:53, Daniel 9:11, Malachi 4:4
 - ▶ Joshua and Caleb
 - ► After these things Joshua son of Nun servant of Yahweh died; he was one hundred and ten years old. (Joshua 24:29, LEB)
 - ▶But my servant Caleb, because another spirit was with him, he remained true after me, and I will bring him into the land that he entered, and his offspring will take possession of it. (Numbers 14:24, LEB)
 - ►Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Isaiah, Amos, Zechariah, Jeremiah

41 A certain pride of belonging to God (2)

- ▶ James sets himself in the great succession of those who found their freedom and their peace and their glory in perfect submission to the will of God.
- ▶The only greatness to which the Christian can ever aspire is that of being the slave of God.
- ► So why do we sometimes cower from letting people know that we are servants to the Most High God?

42 How is our servant attitude?

- ► How do we respond to the "thumps" of life?
- ► Are our lives marked by:
 - ▶ Absolute obedience to Jesus Christ and to the imperatives of Scripture?
 - ▶ Absolute humility in our prayers, our worship, and our service to others?
 - ► Absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ in all circumstances?
 - ► Extolling the virtues of our master to others?