

THE BIG READ (19)

Jesus in James

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The New Testament contains a number of epistles or letters sent to individual Christians or churches.

These letters address specific situations in the lives of believers and through them we are taught how to live as God’s people.

Thirteen of these letters were written by the apostle Paul. The remaining nine letters were written by other church leaders, including the letter of James.

B. Who wrote James?

1. Which James wrote James?

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (James 1:1)

2. James was the half-brother of Jesus.

“Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.” (Mark 6:3)

“Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord’s brother.” (Galatians 1:18-19)

3. James was the leader of the church based in Jerusalem.

“Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord has brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the brothers about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.” (Acts 12:17)

“The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me.” (Acts 15:12-13)

“When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.” (Acts 21:17-18)

C. Who was James written to?

1. It was written to Jewish Christians.

It is addressed to the twelve tribes.

"To the twelve tribes." (James 1:1)

It quotes the Old Testament and refers to Old Testament characters.

"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker." (James 2:8-11)

"Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" (James 2:21)

"In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?" (James 2:25)

"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops." (James 5:17-18)

2. It was written to Jewish Christians who fled Jerusalem because of the persecution following Stephen's death.

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." (Acts 8:1)

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch." (Acts 11:19)

"To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." (James 1:1)

D. Why was James written?

1. James wrote this letter as loving pastor to his scattered congregation wherever they were found.

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

Although they were far away, they were not forgotten and James has some key things he wanted to pass on to them.

2. James wrote to encourage the faith of these persecuted believers.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." (James 1:2)

"Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." (James 5:10)

3. James wrote to remind these persecuted believers that their faith is to be lived out.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:17)

4. James wrote to address the problem of divisions in some of the Christian communities.

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight." (James 4:1-2)

4. In James 1:19-2:26, James reminds these scattered persecuted Christians that their faith will be seen in actions.

Those with faith are doers of the Word.

“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 a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:22-25)

Those with faith show this by their deeds.

“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:17)

“You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” (James 2:24)

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” (James 2:26)

Those with faith in the Old Testament showed it by what they did.

“Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?” (James 2:21)

“In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?” (James 2:25)

5. Is James contradicting Paul?

Paul says in Romans 3:28 that we are justified by faith alone.

James says in James 2:24 that we are justified by what we do.

They are both right.

Paul is addressing Jews who thought you were saved by your good works to which he replies that we are justified not by our own good works but through faith in Christ alone.

James however is addressing Jews who thought all that mattered was belief without any practical obedience such as caring for the needy, and so he says that good works do not save you but prove that you have faith that saves.

To sum up: We cannot be saved by works, yet neither can we be saved without works.

6. In James 3:1-5:20, James says that our faith will be seen in how we relate to others in the Christian community.

James addresses a number of areas that can cause divisions and have been causing divisions.

Improper speech.

“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.” (James 3:9-10)

Envy and selfish ambition.

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” (James 3:16)

Slander.

“Brothers, do not slander one another.” (James 4:11)

Boasting about the future.

“As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.” (James 4:16)

The rich oppressing the poor.

“Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you.” (James 5:4)

F. Jesus in James

1. James tells us a number of different things about the Lord Jesus.

He is the master (1:1), the glorious Lord (2:1), the coming Lord (5:7), and the Judge at the door (5:9).

He is full of compassion and mercy (5:11) hearing the cries of the oppressed (4:4) and one who is able to save and destroy (4:12).

2. Jesus is the perfect doer of the Word.

His obedience is seen in trials – in the greatest trial of all.

His obedience is seen in actions – in the greatest action of all.

His obedience is seen in community – in the greatest display of love for others.