

Book of the Bible: James

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Background:

James was possibly written by the half brother of Jesus who became the key leader in the Jerusalem church. His audience is “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” which would suggest it was Jewish Christians. His theme is: Faith Works.

The Challenge of James:

Paul wrote:

“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves – it is the gift of God, by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

Ephesians 2:8-10

James wrote:

“A person is considered righteous by what they do, and not by faith alone.”

Ephesians 2:24

“Faith without deeds is useless.” Ephesians 2:20

The resolution? James believes faith is what ultimately saves:

“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.” 1:18

“humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” 1:21

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

James 2:23

“Whoever keeps the law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” James 2:9

“We all stumble in many ways.” James 3:2

*“Works that **follow** the forgiveness of sins...confirm [our] calling.”*

Apology of the Augsburg Confession – Article XX

A Great Reformation Saying

“We are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone.” (Meaning: Good works always follow faith)

Luther said that as thunder follows lightning, good works follow faith. It is essential we do not get the cart before the horse.

Smoke and fire go together but smoke follows fire – is the product of it.

Below are good works James calls for:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” James 2:8

“Get rid of moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.” James 1:21

“Religion [is] to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” 1:27

“Don’t show favoritism.” James 2:1

“Don’t slander one another.” James 4:11

James writes in the tradition of Old Testament Wisdom Literature.

His book is similar to Proverbs. He throws out wise words in themes that are repeated.

1. The helpless/poor/the rich: 2:1-7, 5:1-6
2. Responsible use of our tongue: 1:19; 1:26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:9
3. The benefit of trials: 1:2-4, 1:12; 5:10-11
4. Prayer advise: 2:5; 5:13-18
5. Shortness of life: 1:10-11
6. Being rich: 1:9-11
7. Good works must follow faith: 2:14-26

“Who is wise and understanding among you. Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” James 3:13.