

A LOOK AT THE BOOK JAMES LIVING FAITH PRODUCES FRUIT

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AUTHOR AND DATE

The book claims to have been written by James but fails to identify which James he means.

There are three main candidates:

James the son of Zebedee and brother of John might have been a likely possibility were it not for his martyrdom in A.D. 44, which makes it unlikely.

James the son of Alphaeus was another disciple, but otherwise unknown. He is not likely to have written this authoritative note.

The most prominent candidate is the half brother of our Lord.

He was considered a key figure in the church at Jerusalem and was an author of the authoritative letter sent at the conclusion of the Jerusalem council.

This opinion is supported by tradition, as well as parallels to the letter in Acts 15. He was martyred about A.D. 62.

James may be the earliest book in the New Testament.

It was written to Jews within a Jewish context.

There is no reference to Gentile Christians, nor to distinctive Christian doctrines, much less to Paul's developed theology.

These evidences argue for a date of about A.D. 40-50.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

James was written to Jewish believers, about ten to twenty years after the death of Christ.

They were probably scattered because of the Jewish persecution (cf. Acts 8:1-4).

Their Scriptures are the Old Testament, plus perhaps some records of Christ's life.

The readers are suffering severe persecution.

They have been expelled from their synagogues.

Some have been "buried" and cut off from their families.

Many have lost their jobs or had their businesses boycotted.

Persecution produces a self-centered interest in self-preservation.

Thus they are trying to watch out for themselves and not helping one another.

James, as a pastor of the Jerusalem church, felt a pastoral responsibility toward those who had gone out from his church.

PURPOSE AND THEME

James' purpose for writing was **to encourage them in their affliction.**

He wanted **to correct some errors** which existed among them and **to demonstrate how God's people ought to live during a time of discouragement and affliction.**

**To accomplish his purpose, James presents a call to faith in the midst of persecution.
The faith he wishes to see is a living faith which works.
A living faith will produce fruit, even in the midst of suffering.**

ORGANIZATION

Following a brief introduction (1:1), . . .
James introduces his theme by noting that **a living faith endures tribulation (1:2-12)** and that **a living faith overcomes temptation (1:13-27)**.
The majority of the book relates **a living faith to four specific problems arising out of their affliction (2:1-5:6)**.
He concludes with exhortations in light of their affliction (5:7-20).

LIVING FAITH ENDURES TRIBULATION 1:1-12

INTRODUCTION 1:1

After his introduction, James summarizes the content of the book (1:2-27).
The rest of the book applies these general principles to specific problem situations.

James describes seven factors which when properly understood will help the one suffering to endure suffering.

JOYFUL ATTITUDE 1:2

He begins by describing the situation of those who, like Job, find themselves overwhelmed by all kinds of trials.

The first aid to victory in the midst of affliction is a positive attitude.

This is not the result of looking for trouble nor of denying the reality of the problem.

The ability to rejoice is based on the recognition of God's purpose for our lives.

DIVINE PERSPECTIVE 1:3-4

The second factor necessary for enduring trials is recognizing God's perspective.

God permits problems in our lives to produce maturity.

We can rejoice because we understand His good purpose for our life.

He sends trials to produce patience, the patience then produces perfection.

This fact introduces 3rd factor necessary for enduring affliction: patience.

PATIENT ENDURANCE 1:4

We always seek the easiest and quickest way out of problems.

God wants them to continue their work until we receive the full benefit.

Thus we will be complete, not lacking anything.

DISCERNMENT 1:5

4th factor needed is wisdom or discernment.

When we don't understand what God is trying to accomplish, or how we ought to respond to difficult circumstances, we can ask for wisdom.

He will generously give wisdom without finding fault.

TRUST IN GOD 1:6-8

As we ask for wisdom, our request should be accompanied by faith.

It's too easy to doubt and debate.

We struggle along, trying to find our own solution.

This struggle produces confusion and insecurity.

If we trust God and wait for His solution, there is peace, security and stability.

CONTENTMENT 1:9-11

6th factor which enables the afflicted to endure suffering is contentment.

The response to trials doesn't depend on what we have.

The poor can take pride in God's work in his life.

The rich had better realize the temporality of material wealth.

If he places his confidence in his possessions, he could lose everything.

Both have an equal basis for rejoicing in the things God has given us.

REWARD 1:12

Finally, 7th factor that will help to endure affliction is the promise of reward.

God has promised abundant life to those who trust Him.

LIVING FAITH CONQUERS TEMPTATION 1:13-27

In contrast to the desirable traits already described, when a person begins to suffer, **he begins to think about himself and his problems.**

He forgets about God's love and care.

He forgets about others who may be suffering similarly.

He begins to defend himself and to abandon everyone else.

This was happening to James' readers also.

They were passing through serious problems.

Since God sent problems, He understands our need to defend ourselves.

James returns to our presuppositions to correct this kind of rationalization.

TEMPTATION DOES NOT COME FROM GOD 1:13

While it's true He allowed the affliction,
that's for our good;
not to justify our incorrect attitudes.

God has nothing to do with the temptation to do wrong.

TEMPTATION COMES FROM OUR OWN DESIRES 1:14-15

WE bring evil into the picture, on account of our own evil desires.

Neither God, nor the affliction, nor Satan himself, is responsible for our self-centered attitudes.

WE are the guilty ones!

The affliction gives us an opportunity.

Satan tempts us.

Sin attracts us.

But WE make our own decision on the basis of OUR desires.

GOOD GIFTS COME FROM GOD 1:16-18

What we fail to recognize is God's good purpose in our suffering.

God is the source of all *good* gifts and this is no exception.

We recognize that what God is doing is part of His plan to do good in our lives.

PRACTICAL RESULTS OF LIVING FAITH 1:19-27

When we trust Him and recognize His good purpose for our life, **our living faith will produce practical results in our life.**

It will be notable in our use of the tongue--

We will become willing to listen and be taught, both by God's word and by others.

We will be slow to speak; not argumentative and complaining.

We will be slow to become angry, recognizing that **anger doesn't produce righteousness (1:19-20).**

Our living faith will cause us to receive with humility the teaching of God's word and to put off every kind of evil and impurity (1:21).

We will become not just hearers but doers of God's word, especially as it relates to this affliction (1:22-25).

We will examine ourselves in the mirror provided by God's word and make the changes necessary for our correction.

Living faith will cause us to practice true and faultless religion (1:26-27).

We will control our tongue.

We will become more concerned about problems of others than of ourselves.

We will separate ourselves from evil lifestyle that characterizes the world.

By putting these teachings into practice, we will conquer the temptations which have been controlling our lives in the midst of our suffering.

LIVING FAITH FACES THE PROBLEMS OF SUFFERING 2:1-5:6

Having presented the basic theological issues related to their suffering and attempts at self-preservation, James turns to the four major specific problems which have developed because of their suffering.

LIVING FAITH SHOWS NO PARTIALITY FOR THE RICH 2:1-13

The first such problem is that of the preferential treatment of the rich.

James argues that **living faith will not show partiality toward the wealthy.**

Exhortation 2:1

James warns us not to fall into the trap of favoritism.

Problem 2:2-4

He illustrates what might happen in a theoretical case.

Explanation 2:5-11

He then explains the problem.

Election of the poor 2:5

God has normally chosen those who are poor by the world's standards, and made them rich in faith and heirs of a wealthy kingdom.

Mistreatment by the rich 2:6-7

By contrast, God's children honor the wealthy, at the expense of the poor.

We turn everything around.

We honor those who abuse us.

We reject those God has chosen.

Teaching of the law 2:8-11

The real problem is that we are seeking benefit for ourselves rather than for others.

They are offending the royal law of liberty: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*"

They know we have been abused by the wealthy.

However, they hope to change that.

We think that if we honor the rich, the rich will honor us in return and treat us better.

When we seek personal benefits this way, we are not showing love for our neighbor.

Therefore, we become lawbreakers and are condemned.

Conclusion 2:12-13

James urges us to change our attitude and action.

To avoid condemnation, we should seek our neighbor's best interests.

This will put a stop to the favoritism for the rich.

When we show mercy to others like this, we will receive mercy and escape condemnation.

LIVING FAITH PRODUCES WORKS 2:14-26

2nd problem which develops from suffering is the claim to have faith, without a practical demonstration in daily life.

Illustrations used imply that the works which demonstrate the faith they have failed to show are those concerned with helping others in their affliction.

They claim to trust God but when food is scarce, they hoard it, rather than share it in a way that is consistent with the faith they claim to possess.

James insists that a living faith will produce works.

Although the passage is based on doctrinal truth and clearly teaches sound doctrine, the emphasis is practical.

The point is that our faith must be a living faith.

Living faith always produces fruit.

Therefore, the faith that doesn't produce works is a dead faith.

It is useless.

The basic principle is illustrated by the demons.

They believe in God, but their belief hasn't affected their life.

They do what they want to do, refusing to submit to God's authority.

On the other hand, Abraham and Rahab demonstrated living faith.

They trusted God and were willing to risk personal loss in order to obey Him.

This is what James asks us to do in the midst of suffering.

We demonstrate trust in God by risking personal loss to help one another.

Problem presented 2:14

Practical application 2:15-16

Doctrinal explanation 2:17-19

Living illustrations 2:20-25

Abraham 2:20-24

Rahab 2:25

Conclusion 2:26

LIVING FAITH CONTROLS THE TONGUE 3:1-12

3rd problem in midst of suffering concerns the use of the tongue.

A living faith manifests itself by controlling the tongue.

Danger of teaching others 3:1-2

James warns us that it is dangerous to be a teacher since the teacher is judged by his own message.

No one perfectly fulfills even his own standards, especially in his speech.

Big results from little things 3:3-5

The problem of controlling the tongue is a serious one.

It is a small part of the body, but its effects are powerful.

Bits for horses 3:3

Rudders for ships 3:4

Tongues for bodies 3:5a

Sparks for forests 3:5b

Destructive work of the tongue 3:6

It can be used by Satan to cause great harm.

Difficult control of the tongue 3:7-8

Since the tongue is the most difficult thing to control, . . .

Inconsistent use of the tongue 3:9-12

. . . it is also one of the best measures of true spirituality.

Repeated use of the tongue for destructive purposes is one of the surest evidences that the source is contaminated.

The tongue reveals what is in the heart.

Rather than accuse and complain in the midst of suffering,
a living faith will cause us to praise God when we suffer for Him.

LIVING FAITH PRODUCES PEACE 3:13-5:6

4th problem area in the midst of persecution is that of conflicts and quarrels.

This is a specific application of more general reference to use of the tongue.

A living faith will produce peace.

Among these suffering Christians there has not been peace, but rather conflicts and quarrels.

Source of peace 3:13-18

James focuses on the issue by contrasting **two kinds of wisdom**:

Man's wisdom, which comes from man's way of seeing things, produces conflict. It is not from God. 13-16

God's wisdom, which is based on God's way of seeing things, produces peace. 17-18

This kind of wisdom produces consideration for others, submission, mercy, good works, impartiality, and sincerity.

Source of fighting 4:1-6

The reality for those who were suffering was far from that which God's peace produces.

They were quarreling and fighting.

In spite of all the struggle, they were never satisfied.

They don't find what they're looking for.

James explains **four reasons we aren't satisfied:**

Seeking without God 4:1-2

First, we aren't looking to God for what we need.

We would rather fight than ask God for it.

Seeking personal pleasure 4:3

When we do ask God, we don't receive what we ask for, because our motives are wrong.

We are seeking our own desires, instead of seeking God's will for us.

Seeking world's friendship 4:4

We don't get what we want because it involves friendship with the world, or personal benefit and exaltation.

God opposes both of these and therefore doesn't give us what we want.

Seeking personal benefit 4:5-6

Rather than seek what God wants us to have, we're after our own desires and privileges.

We're trying to improve our own situation.

Therefore, we're frustrated.

God wants to give us peace, humility, concern for others, and similar benefits.

Solution for fighting 4:7-5:6

Submission to the Lord 4:7-10

The solution to our frustration begins with submission to the Lord and to His desire for us.

Rather than seek personal gain, we should submit to Him and seek His desire for us. 7a

Rather than submit to Satan's plan for us, we should resist him 7b

We should seek God first and turn from the erroneous path we're following 8-10

When we do this, God lifts us up and we find the satisfaction we seek.

Respect for our brother 4:11-12

2nd step to resolve our conflicts and quarreling is to demonstrate respect for each other.

We should stop criticizing and judging one another.

God is the only true Judge.

He will evaluate fairly and repay each one what we deserve.

Dependence on the Lord 4:13-5:6

The final solution for conflict and quarreling in the midst of suffering is to depend on the Lord.

Not our plans 4:13-17

Our dependence on the Lord is first related to our plans.

Their plan to go to another town to earn money probably reflects a wish to get a fresh start, where they can hide in the crowd.

Then they will be able to earn some money again.

Rather than trust our own self-centered plans, which easily fail, we need to trust the Lord for a solution to such problems.

Not our funds 5:1-6

Their dependence on the Lord is related to their search for more wealth.

Those who are suffering have noticed the lifestyle of the wealthy.

They have become jealous, wishing the same for themselves.

James warns us of the danger of seeking to imitate them.

Their wealth is temporary and perishable; it won't last.

The injustice they have committed to get rich will bring judgment.

It would be better to forget this pursuit and seek God.

This thought leads into the final section of the book.

LIVING FAITH RECEIVES PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS FOR SUFFERING 5:7-20

James concludes with practical exhortations for Christians in the midst of suffering.

EXHORTATION TO PATIENCE 5:7-11

1st exhortation: *wait patiently!*

This is the opposite of what they've been doing.

They've been struggling to survive, trying everything to improve their situation and meet their needs.

We should wait for the harvest, until the early rains and the late rains have produced an abundant return.

With hope 5:7-8

Then Christ will come and we will reap the benefits of our patient wait.

Without complaint 5:9

As we wait, we should stop complaining and criticizing one another.

Imitating examples 5:10-11

We would be wise to study carefully the example of the O.T. prophets who suffered while taking a stand for God.

They have left an example to follow.

Likewise Job suffered and left us an example of patient endurance to imitate.

EXHORTATION AGAINST OATHS 5:12

The exhortation not to swear by anything is primarily a call to establish a reputation for honesty.

Pagans in a dishonest society use oaths as a guarantee that their word is true.

Jewish philosophers rejected oaths because of our inability to control tomorrow, and because of the indirect testimony to man's dishonesty.

It's better to establish testimony for straight answers so people trust you.

Then the oath is unnecessary.

This seems to be James' idea also.

EXHORTATION TO PRAYER AND MUTUAL SUPPORT 5:13-20

Final exhortation to God's suffering people is that we pray and help one another.

When afflicted, rather than complain, we should pray about it.

When joyful, rather than boast, we should praise God 13

The one who is weakened by discouragement in the midst of suffering (cf. Heb. 12:3), should call in the elders.

Their prayer and identification with him, by anointing him with oil, will bring about his restoration. 14-16

Elijah's experience demonstrates this.

He was suffering from a similar affliction.

When he prayed fervently, God used him to turn a whole nation back from the wrong path 17-20

We may expect God to use us too, to correct those who are afflicted, and help restore them, before God has to judge them because of their sins.

If God could use an Elijah, He can use others who are discouraged and afflicted, if we will trust Him.

In brief, the message of this letter is crucial for suffering Christians.

We need to get our eyes off ourselves and our problems, and on to God.

We should stop defending ourselves and start depending on God.

We must seek His purposes for our lives and praise Him for them.

We need to pray to Him and ask Him for guidance, and for strength to endure until He comes.

We must seek first His purposes and His glory.

WHAT LESSONS DOES JAMES TEACH US FOR OUR LIFE TODAY?