

## James (November 3)

### Reading James

They stood with arms crossed, silent, facing away from each other. “I shouldn’t have said it that way,” the first woman said. “I had not considered how it would make the other people feel to ask them to move and let others take their place.”

“I’m sorry that I snapped at you...and in front of everyone,” said the second woman. “I want to be more patient, more humble, but I just can’t seem to get it right. My heart means well, but my tongue always seems to steer me wrong.”

James addresses practical issues and enduring problems faced by many mature believers: impatience, failure to do what you know is right, favoritism, apathy, and selfishness. He presents wise arguments and God-pleasing solutions, culminating in the confession of sins and prayer for help from God, the “Father of lights” who gives every good and perfect gift.

### Author and Date

The author identifies himself as James, and he was probably the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem council. Four men in the New Testament have this name. The author of this letter could not have been the apostle James, who died too early to have written it. The other two men named James had neither the stature nor the influence that the writer of this letter had. James was one of several brothers of Christ and was probably the oldest since he heads the list in Matthew 13:55. At first he did not believe in Jesus and even challenged him and misunderstood his mission. Later, however, he became very prominent in the church.

The letter was likely written before AD 50 due to its distinctively Jewish nature and its reflection of a simple church order. If this early dating is correct, this letter is the earliest of all New Testament writings – with the possible exception of Galatians.

### Recipients

The recipients are identified explicitly only in James 1:1: “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.” It is clear that the recipients were Christians. It has been plausibly suggested that these were believers from the early Jerusalem church who, after Stephen’s death, were scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch. This would account for James’ references to trials and oppression, his intimate knowledge of the readers, and the authoritative nature of the letter. As leader of the Jerusalem church, James wrote as pastor to instruct and encourage his dispersed people in the face of their difficulties.

### Distinctive Characteristics

Characteristics that make this letter distinctive are: its unmistakably Jewish nature; its emphasis on vital Christianity, characterized by good deeds and a faith that works; its simple organization; its familiarity with Jesus’ teachings preserved in the Sermon on the Mount; its similarity to Old Testament wisdom writings such as Proverbs; and its excellent Greek.

### Blessings for Readers

As you study the epistle of James, pray for wisdom and the will to do what you know is right. Look for practical solutions to the issues that challenge your congregation. Yet realize that God’s people are still sinners and will make mistakes. They will hurt one another, and they will need to confess their faults and forgive one another. When such troubles arise, abide in the love and patience of your heavenly Father, and rejoice in his good gifts and salvation, which can never be taken away.