

# Studies in James

## Lesson 1

### A Case For Practical Christianity

#### INTRODUCTION:

- I. At 2:10 P.M. on Wednesday afternoon, December 5th, 1945, five Grumman Avenger torpedo bombers lifted off the runway at the Navel Air Station at Fort Lauderdale, Florida. All the planes, except for one, carried a three-man crew – the pilot, a radioman, and a gunner. It was a routine practice mission for the squadron of four student pilots and their crews, each of whom had only about 300 hours flying time. But their Flight Commander, who flew the fifth Avenger that day, was U.S. Navy Lieutenant Charles Taylor, who had more than 2,000 hours experience.
  - A. The mission, known to history as Flight 19, called for Taylor and his group of 13 officers and crewmen to fly due east across the ocean to a shoal some 56 miles away and conduct practice bombing runs.
    1. Once they finished that part of the exercise, they were to fly east for an additional 67 miles, then turn northwest for another 73 miles, and finally southwest for a distance of 120 miles, which would bring them back to the Naval Air Station.

2. About an hour and a half after Flight 19 took off, Lieutenant Robert Cox, a senior flight instructor flying near the Naval Air Station with another training squadron, picked up a transmission from Lieutenant Taylor, in which Taylor said his compasses were not working, and that he believed he was somewhere over the Florida Keys (that long chain of islands south of the Florida mainland).
3. Lieutenant Cox told Taylor that if his squadron was in fact over the Florida Keys, then he needed to fly north in order to reach Miami. Cox then turned his own plane south to meet up with Flight 19, but the further south Cox flew, the weaker the radio signals from Flight 19 became, until he lost them altogether.
4. Although Taylor was an experienced pilot, it's believed that he may have overshot his target because of a 30-mile an hour tail wind, and then became completely disoriented.
  - a. Taylor apparently believed his squadron was actually flying over the waters of the Gulf of Mexico rather than the Atlantic. Most believe Taylor was actually flying over a small chain of Islands near the Bahamas that he mistook for the Florida Keys.
  - b. So, believing he was actually over the Gulf of Mexico, and in an effort to take Flight 19 back to the Florida mainland,

Lieutenant Taylor turned to the northeast, hoping to spot land soon.

- c. What Taylor didn't realize was that his compasses were correct all along, and he was actually over the Atlantic, about 100 miles off the eastern coast of Florida. But the further he flew in a northeasterly direction, the further he was leading Flight 19 out to sea.
5. As time went on, faint transmissions were picked up on the mainland indicating the other pilots of Flight 19 were trying to get Taylor to change course. One student was heard to telling another, "If we'd just fly west, we'd get home." He was right.
6. By 4:45 P.M. it was obvious to everyone on the ground that Taylor was hopelessly lost. He was urged to turn control of the flight over to one of his students, but he apparently refused.
7. As darkness approached, communications deteriorated. From the few words that did get through it was apparent that Taylor was still flying in a northeasterly direction.
8. At 5:50 P.M. radio communication experts were finally able to get a fix on Flight 19's position, but by that time the squadron was so far out in the Atlantic that all efforts to reach them by radio failed.

9. Not only were the Avengers running low on fuel, weather conditions were deteriorating rapidly as Flight 19 was flying directly into the path of a storm. An aircraft carrier in the area was reporting waves as high as 50 feet.
  10. The last transmission from Flight 19 was heard at 7:04 P.M.
- B. Search and rescue ships and planes searched more than 200,000 square miles of sea through the night and over the next few days, but there was no sign of the 5 Avenger torpedo bombers of Flight 19 – nor did the authorities really expect to find anything.
1. Everyone knew the Avengers had a maximum range of 1,100 miles, and were obviously forced to ditch into the Atlantic when they fuel ran out. And sadly, the planes would have sunk within seconds in the 50-foot waves – especially since the Grumman Avenger weighed more than 10,000 pounds empty. They were affectionately known as "Iron Birds."
  2. Lieutenant Charles Taylor and the 13 other members of Flight 19 all perished at sea.
- II. There are two very important points to this story.
- A. In 1945, planes didn't have sophisticated navigation equipment, and so it was absolutely essential for pilots to trust their compasses and

airspeed indicators to know which direction they were flying, and how far they had gone.

1. Lieutenant Taylor made his first mistake at the very beginning of Flight 19's mission – he thought his compasses were malfunctioning, and so he relied on his own sense of direction – which, unfortunately, led him in the wrong direction.
  2. His second mistake was in refusing to listen to the young pilots in his flight whose compasses all told them they were flying further out to sea. Lieutenant Taylor was apparently too proud to admit he was wrong.
- B. When it comes to following the spiritual truths that are given by the inspiration of God in Scripture – truths that will eventually lead us to heaven – some people make the same mistakes Taylor made with Flight 19.
1. First, they choose to ignore the inspired precepts, principles and guidelines contained in Scripture that are designed to give them direction, and so, they begin relying on their own sense of what's right and wrong.
  2. And second, they become filled with pride and won't listen to others who are trying to tell them that they're going in the wrong

direction – taking a path that is leading them further and further away from God and from a home in heaven.

- C. In second Timothy, the apostle Paul wrote to the young evangelist, telling him real value of Scripture.
1. **2 Tim 3:16-17** – *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*
  2. The Scriptures are our compass – a compass that works every time because they're given by God through inspiration – given by the Creator Himself. He's the one that made the compass.
  3. Furthermore, this compass supplies us with all the information we need to be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.
  4. But if we disregard this compass, we'll become just as lost spiritually as Lieutenant Taylor and Flight 19 was lost over the Atlantic on that cold and stormy December day.

**BODY:**

- I. When we pick up our Bibles, the first thing that should impress us is the fact that the Word of God deals with two prominent themes that are vital to the life of every person.
  - A. Interestingly enough, these two themes are found all the way through the Scriptures – cover to cover, through all 66 books.
    1. The first theme is what we might call, “The way TO God.”
      - a. This theme is directed specifically to the LOST – to those who are dead in their sins.
      - b. This theme provides the lost with direction – it shows them the direction they need to take and the changes in the course of their life they need to make to come TO God.
    2. The second theme is what we might call “The walk WITH God.”
      - a. This theme is directed specifically to Christians – telling us the things we need to do to keep on course in our daily walk with God.
  - B. So, when we pick up our Bibles and begin a sincere study of the Word, we need to ask ourselves this question:
    1. “Is this telling me the way TO God, or is this telling me the way to walk WITH God?”

2. And as you continue to study, you'll soon discover that most of the Bible is NOT directed to those who need to come TO God, but rather is directed to those who need to know how they should walk WITH God in their daily lives.
  3. And one of those books in the Bible that helps us know how we should walk WITH God is the epistle of James.
- II. When we begin looking at the letter of James, the first thing we notice is that James is dealing with this latter theme – our walk WITH God.
- A. In fact, this book talks about our walk with God like no other book in the Bible, except perhaps for the book of Proverbs.
1. This is one of the reasons why some call this book, “The Proverbs of the New Testament.”
    - a. Both are filled with short, to-the-point teachings, maxims (proverbs) that talk about how to live before God.
  2. Therefore, the letter of James is NOT a great doctrinal masterpiece or treatise like Romans or Hebrews, but rather simple, practical teachings for daily living.
- B. But what troubles some people about the letter of James is what the epistle does NOT emphasize.
1. For example:



- a. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ appears only twice in the book.
  - b. The cross of Christ is never mentioned once.
  - c. Neither does the letter of James say anything about the death, burial or resurrection of Christ.
2. This is one of the reasons why Luther and a few other early scholars rejected the book of James, and why Luther called it a “book of straw.”
  3. But they all missed the point.
    - a. The book of James was NOT written to establish great doctrines of our faith, nor was it intended to be a defense of the truth.
    - b. James was written to those who already KNEW the truth, but needed help with living it.
      - (1). Now you see why the book of James is written for US as well – we ALL have room for improvement in that area.
- III. Before we begin digging into the rich wealth of this great epistle, let’s first step back and get a general overview.
- A. If I had to give a title to the main theme of the book, I would entitle the main theme: “Real faith produces genuine works.”

1. In other words, the person who has really found THE WAY will WALK IN IT.
  2. James is saying if you say you have FAITH in Jesus Christ then your WORKS will DEMONSTRATE and VALIDATE that faith.
- B. Therefore, the main SECTION of the book would be **James 2:14-26**.
1. In this section James emphasizes the inseparable connection between our FAITH and our WORKS.
    - a. This is another reason why Luther rejected the book. He felt James' teaching regarding works was in direct contradiction to Paul's teaching in Ephesians chapter two.
      - (1). **Eph 2:8-9** – *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.*
    - b. But once again, Luther completely misunderstood the message of James.
  2. James was NOT teaching we are saved by our WORKS or by the LAW.
    - a. What he WAS teaching is that we are saved by grace through a real and genuine faith that is AUTHENTICATED, or VALIDATED by our works.

- b. He is teaching that we are saved by an OBEDIENT, VIBRANT, LIVING, WORKING faith!
  - c. The Christian is able to DEMONSTRATE or SHOW the GENUINNESS of his faith by the WORKS he does – by His faithful, obedient walk WITH God.
3. That's why James says, . . . *faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:17)*, and then concludes this main section by saying, *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:26)*
4. It's not a question of BELIEVING right, it's a question of DOING right because you believe right. That's how faith and works are linked together.
- C. In fact, through all five chapters, James constantly shows the inseparable relationship between faith and works.
- 1. In chapter one:
    - a. When our faith is stretched, it doesn't break. We'll see that our faith is stretched by:
      - (1). Facing life's trials (vs. 1-12)
      - (2). Standing against temptations (vs. 13-16)
      - (3). Being confronted with Scripture (vs. 19-27)

- b. Therefore, when our faith is stretched, it produces works of genuine stability.
2. In chapter two:
- a. When our faith is pressed, it doesn't fail. We'll find that our faith is pressed by:
    - (1). Temptation of being partial and prejudicial (vs. 2-13)
    - (2). Temptation of being indifferent (vs. 14-26)
  - b. Therefore, when our faith is pressed, it produces works of GENUINE love.
3. In chapters three and four:
- a. When our faith is expressed, it doesn't become abusive. The expressions of our faith will be demonstrated by:
    - (1). Our words (3:1-12)
    - (2). Our source of wisdom (3:13-18)
    - (3). Our attitude toward others and self (4:1-17)
  - b. Therefore, when our faith is expressed, it's true quality will be demonstrated by works of control and humility.
4. Finally, in chapter 5:
- a. When our faith is in distress, it doesn't simply sit idle. Our faith will be tested by:
    - (1). The conduct of the rich (vs. 1-6)

- (2). Doing right when someone has treated us wrongly (vs. 7-12)
- (3). Reaching out when WE are suffering, sick, or in sin (vs. 13-16)
- (4). Seeking prayer for ourselves and praying for others (vs. 13-18)
- (5). Handling straying saints (vs. 19-20)

b. Therefore, when our faith is in distress, the genuineness of our faith will be demonstrated by exercising itself through works of patience, humility, and compassion.

IV. With all this in mind, let's briefly consider a few things about the writer of the book and his perception of himself, and then try to learn a few things about those to whom the book was written.

A. In chapter 1 verse 1, the writer identifies himself as James. But there were several prominent men in the New Testament who were named James. So, which one is this?

1. Most biblical scholars believe the writer of this epistle was the brother, or more correctly, the half-brother, of Jesus Christ.

2. There is a myth that has been perpetrated which says Mary had no other children after the birth of Jesus Christ – that she remained a virgin all her life.
3. The New Testament clearly shows that is NOT the truth.
  - a. **Matt 13:53-57** – *Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. 54 When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? 55 Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? 56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" 57 So they were offended at Him.*
  - b. In verse 55, we have mention of at least four brothers of Jesus, and verse 56 suggests there were at the very least two sisters.
  - c. Some argue that these are not His brothers in the flesh, but the Lord's brothers and sisters in a spiritual sense.
  - d. But a closer look at verses 55 and 56 show Matthew was talking about the family of Jesus – the son of the carpenter

(Joseph), His mother (Mary), and his brothers and sisters – all  
FAMILY!

4. To His brother's and sisters, Jesus was simply their older brother.
  - a. So imagine how they reacted when the brother they had grown up with all their lives came back home, claiming to be the Messiah!
  - b. In **Mark chapter 3**, when Jesus was healing people and casting out demons in His hometown region of Galilee, even some of the unclean spirits were saying of Him, "*You are the Son of God.*" (**v. 11**) But Jesus warned His disciples to tell no one about these things.
  - c. **Mark 3:21** – *But when His own people [His brothers and sisters] heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."*
  - d. In fact, they wanted to take Him home for His own good.
  - e. **Mark 3:31-35** – *Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. 32 And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." 33 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" 34 And He looked around in a circle at*

*those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."*

5. Later we're told, the brothers of Jesus even mocked His claim of being the Messiah who performed signs and miracles.
  - a. In John chapter 7, we learn that Jesus had chosen to remain in the region of Galilee because the religious leaders in Judea were hunting for Him to put Him to death.
  - b. His own brothers, including James, were so offended by His claims that they mockingly challenged Jesus to go to Judea and do all these miracles He claims He can perform – to show Himself openly, and quit hiding out in Galilee.
  - c. **John 7:2-5** – *Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. 3 His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." 5 For even His brothers did not believe in Him.*



6. All that was BEFORE His death, burial and resurrection from the dead. But immediately AFTER the Lord's resurrection, He paid a visit James.

- a. **1 Cor 15:3-7** – *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.*
- b. Most commentators believe the James mentioned here was the Lord's brother.
- c. Why? Because AFTER the resurrection of Jesus we find the brother's of the Lord listed among the DISCIPLES.
  - (1). After Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles returned to Jerusalem.
  - (2). **Acts 1:12-14** – *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were*

*staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

- d. Years later, when the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said after the Lord appeared him, and he was baptized into Christ, he eventually returned to Jerusalem – three years later – and met with only Peter and James, the Lord’s brother, whom Paul includes with the other apostles.

(1). **Gal 1:18-20** – Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

- e. Paul even said that Peter, James, and John "*seemed to be pillars*" in the church in Jerusalem – seemed to be men of great influence and authority. (**Gal 2:9**)

- B. So, what does all this tell us about James? Throughout the better part of his life, James was a cynic and a skeptic – one who had absolutely no faith in Jesus, and actually believed our Lord was out of His mind.

1. He was not only an unbeliever, he actually grew up with a certain amount of hostility toward Jesus.
  2. But all that was BEFORE the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
  3. AFTER the Lord's resurrection, James came to FULLY and COMPLETELY believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the very Son of God.
  4. He was swept by his new-found convictions, and was so filled with faith that he wrote a letter to fellow believers everywhere to live their lives in such a way as to openly show the genuineness of their faith to others – to live by a faith that would make them worthy of being a disciple of Christ.
- C. But what's so unique about this letter is that James never identifies himself as the Lord's brother – there is no "name dropping" here.
1. James simply called himself, "*a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (**Jas 1:1**)
    - a. Even though he could have laid claim to being "James, the Lord's brother!" he chose rather to humbly call himself a bond-servant of God and of Jesus Christ, who he now calls his Lord.

- b. At one time in his life, he saw himself as the angry, disbelieving, cynical brother of Jesus, but now he sees himself as the bond-servant of Jesus his Lord and his Savior.

(1). WHAT A CHANGE!

- D. Keep this in mind as we study this letter. As we get into this study, you'll see that James boldly and pointedly attacks hypocrisy and superficiality among those calling themselves disciples of Christ.

- 1. Notice in verse 1 that James is writing to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:" (Jas 1:1)

- a. Fifteen times throughout this letter James refers to these people as "brethren."
- b. They were not only his Jewish brethren, but more importantly, they were his Jewish brethren who – like himself – had now become his brothers and sisters in Christ – disciples of Christ.
- c. But these brethren were "scattered" – scattered as a result of intense persecution upon both Jews and Christians under the reign of Claudius Caesar.

- 2. And that brings us to the purpose for the writing of this letter by James.

- a. Unfortunately, some of his brethren were beginning to compromise – they were living ONE WAY around their brothers and sisters in Christ, and ANOTHER WAY around their friends and business associates, simply because they wanted to avoid the stigma or the persecution that came with being a Christian.
- b. And so, James sets out to encourage those who are struggling to maintain their faith in the midst of trials and temptations, but at the SAME TIME, James delivers a strong rebuke to those who compromise; those who are shallow, superficial, “Chameleon Christians” – those who would rather blend in with the world so no one would suspect who they really are.
- c. James, the Lord’s brother, had made such a tremendous change in his own thinking about Jesus – going from an unbeliever to one who would lay down his life for his faith in Jesus Christ – that he has little tolerance for those who are not serious about THEIR faith in Christ.

**CONCLUSION:**

- I. Therefore, the study of the book of James will do one of two things for you.

- A. This study will either HELP you or HURT you.
1. If you're struggling to maintain a strong, vital faith, and you need help and encouragement because of all the trials and temptations you're facing, this study will definitely HELP you.
  2. But if you're trying to blend in with the world like a Chameleon, and your faith in Christ is only shallow and superficial at best, then this study will definitely HURT you.
    - a. The book of James is blunt and to-the-point.
  3. There will be times when EVERY ONE OF US will have to confront areas of our life that need to change.
  4. But hopefully, in the end, we will ALL see this wonderful book for what it really is – a set of spiritual guidelines – a spiritual compass we can follow to keep us from becoming lost in the storms of life, and eventually lead us safely home to heaven.
- C. Are you on the right course?
1. If you've obeyed the gospel of Christ, and you're trying to the best of your ability to faithfully serve the Lord, then you're on the RIGHT course.
  2. But if you've never come to Christ, or if you've abandoned your faith in Christ, you're headed in the WRONG direction – toward sure and certain destruction.