

JAMES

MORE GRACE

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First published in Great Britain in 2018

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-912373-15-4

Designed by Diane Warnes

Printed in the UK

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**40 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF JAMES**



Some letters are hard to write. Writing hard truths to loved ones can be especially difficult.

The letter we are going to read might well have been a hard letter to write and perhaps an even harder one to receive. It is full of searching challenges and, at times, painful rebukes. Yet, it is also full of love and concern. As we read it, we will need to listen out for the challenges but also for the loving care. Sometimes love has to be tough. We need tough love at times to call us back from danger and to keep us on the right track. This part of God's word is powerful to do both. James wanted those things for his first readers. Let's pray that this letter does those things for us too.

- ***How does James choose to introduce himself (1:1)?***

Early church tradition suggests that the James who wrote this letter was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus himself. This James became the first leader of the church in Jerusalem. It was a senior and influential position.

But James himself doesn't mention any of this. He doesn't mention anything that would make him seem important and special, although he probably could have. James introduces himself as a servant. He is 'a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ'. That could be a description of any Christian.

James will have a lot to say in his letter about being humble. He will call his readers to humble themselves again before their Lord. Here in 1:1 we learn that when James later says, 'Humble yourselves' (4:10), he is asking his readers to do what he himself has already done. He has humbled himself before God and before the Lord Jesus, and become their servant.

James is a servant on his masters' business. His words, painful as they may be to hear at times, are written at his Lord's bidding. He is bringing his readers what God and the Lord Jesus Christ want to say to them, and it is important that his readers and we know that.

PRAY

Ask God to help you respond humbly and obediently to the challenges of James' letter.



James writes as a humble servant of his Lord. But who is he addressing?

As we read on, it seems that James is writing to one particular congregation that he knows well. It is true that James tends to speak truths in pithy general terms – that is his style. But every so often it becomes obvious that James is writing to one specific church family, for he clearly knows all about their particular issues and problems.

For example, ‘... you have dishonoured the poor’ (2:6), James writes. James also knows the details of how rich people are currently oppressing these believers by exploiting them, dragging them into court and blaspheming the name of Christ (2:6–7). James knows too about certain wealthy landowners who are failing to pay the wages of the workers who have mowed their fields (5:4).

Perhaps most revealing of all, James tells this congregation, ‘Not many of you should become teachers’ (3:1). This is not standard New Testament advice to believers. There is something clearly very wrong with this church and James knows about it.

• ***Interestingly, what are the first two things James says about these believers (1:1)?***

In Old Testament times, God chose a nation made up of twelve tribes to be his own people. Now God’s people

are made up of all those who believe in Jesus; every Christian is a member of the ‘twelve tribes’ now. And we are certainly not ‘home’ with Christ yet.

James may just mean that his readers are the people of God, scattered far from their real home. Later he will ask them to remember ‘our father Abraham’ (2:21), so perhaps James is writing to converted Jews who had once lived in Jerusalem but have had to move away.

But possibly these opening words convey something more too. ‘... the twelve tribes scattered’ is a phrase that describes God’s Old Testament people at a particular time of their history. God scattered these tribes among the nations in judgment at the time of the exile. God did this because of his people’s spiritual adultery and sinful behaviour.

We will find that there are a number of similarities between the church James is addressing and Israel back then. James will call these believers spiritual adulterers and he will speak to them about the danger of God’s judgment.

It may just be that this phrase is the first note in James’ spiritual wake-up call to these believers.

PRAY

Thank God for the privilege of being part of his chosen people. Pray you would be faithful to him.