James

Who, When, Where

Written by Yaakov (James). This Yaakov was one of Yeshua's brothers and was the leader of the early church in Jerusalem.
We think Yaakov was martyred in 69AD, so before then.
Probably after the persecution which broke out against the Jewish Christians in Acts 8. (around 31AD)
But being more precise than that is speculation.
Yaakov most likely wrote this letter from Jerusalem where he, and the other ambassadors, remained when the persecution broke out (Acts 8:1 in fulfillment of Acts 1:8)

Summary

Even 2,000 years ago Jews had lived around the world for a long time. They still do.
They're usually called the "dispersion" or the "diaspora".
In Isaiah 11, Yahweh said that one day he will gather them again from the four corners of the world, to be his people, and live in his land (Israel).
Perhaps that started in 1948 when the land of Israel was returned to them following World War II?

Yaakov (James), wrote this short letter to be read by those Jews who had been scattered throughout the world.

Before You Read

Do you think your good works build your faith?
Or does your faith enable you to do good works?

What's your 5 year goal?
Have you detailed that out by making specific plans on how to achieve it?

What are you like to be around when you're sick?

What's the biggest thing you ever prayed for?

If your people were scattered around the world for some reason, and your homeland was occupied by another nation who was suppressing them at home. What would you like to write to your fellow countrymen who were scattered?

Key Verses

James 1:2

Assume it to be all kinds of joy my brothers, whenever you fall into various trials.

Well that's a powerful start! If you were a Jew reading this would you have stopped at verse 2?

But Yaakov does explain. *"perceiving that the discernment of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have its perfect work, so that you might be perfect and completed, not lacking in anything."*
Trials are an opportunity to build your character. And that's something worth doing.
What are you willing to do to build yours?
There's not much else you can take with you when you die, right?

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let them request it from God, from the one who gives generously to all, and who doesn't reproach — and it'll be given to them.

Whenever you have a big decision to make… that's the time to ask for wisdom.
But sometimes you don't know in advance when you'll need it. Ask regularly for wisdom to deal with your day, your life.

James 1:8

A double minded man is unsettled in all his ways.

If you ask God for something, … don't doubt. Believe that he'll give it to you.
If you don't believe that… you're better off not asking for it.

James 1:11

The sun rises up, together with a scorching heat, and dries the grass, and its flower falls, and the attractiveness of its appearance is destroyed. In the same way the rich person will also be made to fade away in his comings and goings.

Imagine a flower, proud of its own beauty. Imaging a gnarled old tree watching it bloom. Imagine that scene a month later. How is the flower looking now? How about after a year?
Riches are fleeting. Life is fleeting! They aren't something to be proud of. You only have them because God gave them to you, and very soon, he will take them away again.

James 1:13-14

Don't let anyone who's being tested say, "I'm being tested by God", for God is untried by evil things, and himself doesn't test anybody. But each one is being tested by their own desire, being drawn away and enticed.

God doesn't test us. He doesn't need to. Our own sinful desires test us all the time.
How are you doing? Passing?

James 1:19-20, Proverbs 15:1

Let every person be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man doesn't produce the righteousness of God.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

That old adage that you have two ears and one mouth, so listen twice as much as you talk… is a bit corny, but good advice. There are so many proverbs about the dangers of being quick tempered. And if you're one of them, then you know that it doesn't work. It

doesn't bring about what you wanted anyway. Our wrath just escalates, it brings hatred and broken relationships.
Calm yourself down. Listen first. Speak gently. It will work out a whole lot better than your usual quick tempered response.

James 1:22

Become doers of the message, and not only listeners, beguiling yourselves.

It's great that you read the Bible every day, listen to podcasts, watch The Bible Project animations… all good things. But if all you do is listen and nothing changes in your life… you're wasting your time. When you are exposed to something from the Bible you need to ask yourself, "So what?"… what do you need to **do**? What needs to change?

Do you fancy yourself as religious? So what? What do you **do**? Do you visit orphans? Do you look after widows? Do you keep yourself from sin?
Or, as the saying goes, are you "so heavenly minded you're no earthly use"?

James 2:1

Don't have the faith of our lord Yeshua the Anointed of glory with partiality.

That's so hard to do. We're so much more attracted towards rich people, cool people, pretty people. We need to be proactively spending time with the out crowd, the ugly, the poor. Yeshua did. Imagine if he had said to Yahweh, I'm not going down there! They're ugly, smelly horrible people. I'm just going to do "ministry" with Mikhael and Gabriel.

Where would you be if Yeshua had the same attitude you have?

James 2:10

Anyone who keeps the whole law, but who trips up in one thing, has become liable for all of it.

Christians are **not** under the law. Read this article if you're not sure.
So when legalistic righteous types try to impose the Law onto other Christians, (thinking that they themselves will be OK because *they* keep it), they are cursing themselves because they don't. They don't keep the sabbath, they eat pork, and probably other unclean things, they lie, they get angry, they hate.

Don't go down that road. The Law brings death. It condemns everyone who tries to live by it.
Embrace the freedom of Yeshua. Be 100% righteous in Yahweh's sight, not by your own effort, but as a free gift.

And don't make up new rules for yourself. They will fail. Live by the spirit, not by the law.

James 2:14

What's the benefit my brothers, if someone says they have faith, but they don't have works?

Saying "I love you", and showing someone you love them by your actions are worlds apart. Saying it without doing it is meaningless and in fact proves that you don't.

Saying you have faith in Yeshua and living like you have faith in Yeshua are two different things.

Do it. Love others with your action, not just your tongue. Prove it.
Not to save yourself, but to show the world that your faith is genuine, and that Yeshua really does change people from the inside out.

James 2:36

For just as the body apart from a spirit is dead, in the same way also faith apart from works is dead.

Faith and works are intertwined. We need both, working together. Either without the other is dead.

James 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers my brothers, knowing that we'll receive a greater condemnation.

That makes me nervous every time I read it.
If you read the gospels you will find Yeshua hardly ever says bad things about anyone. Even adulterers, tax collectors, beggars, … His only bad words are for … teachers. People who claim to know better, but whose actions prove that they don't. Be humble. Recognise that even if you've studied the Bible every day, you will have misunderstood something. You will be teaching something which isn't correct.

James 3:7-8

All kinds of both wild beasts and birds, both reptiles and sea-creatures are tamed, and have been tamed, by human kind. But nobody among people is able to tame the tongue. It's an unruly evil, filled full of deadly poison.

Do you have something in your past which you wish you hadn't said?
If you're anything like me you probably have something like that almost every day 😟 .
Sometimes I think I would probably be better off mute. But then I would probably just learn to say the wrong thing in sign language instead.

James 3:14-15

If you have bitter rivalry and self interest in your heart, don't boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom isn't coming down from above, but earthly, soulish, demonic.

The works show the faith. Or in this case, the lack of it. The fruit shows the quality of the tree.
Bitterness, ambition, rivalry, self interest. Bad fruit. The person might even sound wise, but they're not. It's worldly wisdom. Very different from heavenly wisdom, from the spirit. *"Wisdom from above is first pure, and then peaceful, fair, obedient, filled full of mercy, and of good fruits, undoubting, and genuine."*

James 4:1

Where do battles and fighting among you come from? Aren't they from your pleasures, warring in your body parts?

Your arguments come from you not getting what you want. It's not about what you need. It's about something you want. And you're willing to kill to get it. Well, hopefully not, but Yeshua said if you yell in anger at someone you're murdering in your heart. Maybe you even asked Yahweh for it. But now you're angry because he's not answering. If you're only asking for your own pleasure or comfort then you shouldn't expect to receive it. It

won't happen. So check your motives. Ask Yahweh to reveal them to you. Your own heart will deceive you if you try to look by yourself.

James 4:4

Fondness of the world is enmity with God? So whoever intends to be a friend of the world is appointed as an enemy of God.

How about you? How friendly would you say you are with the world? You want to be accepted by them? You want to have what they have? A house, a cool car, the latest phone, holidays? Yaakov is saying that you have a choice - you can be friends with the world, or friends with God. You can't be both.

James 4:7-8

Stand opposed to Diabolos and he'll flee from you. Draw near to God and he'll draw near to you.

It's up to you. If God is far away it's because you moved. Resist Satan. Draw near to God.

James 4:9-10

Suffer hardship, and mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and joy into dejection. Be humbled in the sight of the lord, and he'll exalt you.

Welcome suffering. Yeah, sounds like some kind of masochistic thing, but it's more like, "allow suffering". Some people will do everything they can to avoid anything difficult happening in their lives. Some will complain to God if it does. But that's just pride. Be humble, accept that it's totally OK if God allows suffering to come your way.

James 4:13, Proverbs 16:9

Come now those who say, "Today and tomorrow we should go into such and such a city, and we should spend one year there, and do business, and make a profit."

A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps.

We all make plans. We all have goals.
But we must accept that those plans are subject to God, and he has the final say on everything.
It's OK to make plans. But it's arrogance and pride to speak of them without acknowledging that every step, every heartbeat of your future is dependent on Yahweh.

James 4:17

To the one who has perceived to do good, but who doesn't do it, to them it's sin.

An annoying verse! The spirit reminds me of this verse whenever I see something good that I should do, but I just can't be bothered to do it. It's made me go back for hitchhikers, pick up trash, clean up other people's mess. It's funny though, every time this happens, I always feel really good about doing it afterwards. So I was only robbing myself really.

James 5:3

You've stored treasure in the last days.

Is that you? Is it me?
Got money stored away to last for years?
Got a million dollar house?

This really is the last days. We may even have only a year or two left on the planet. Hardly seems like a time for building up wealth does it?

It reminds me of Yahweh's question in Haggai. "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses, while this (my) house lies waste?"

How much do you spend on your house?
How much do you spend on Yahweh's house? (The church, not the building).

James 5:12

Above all my brothers, don't swear, not by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath. But let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No", no, so that you shouldn't fall into hypocrisy.

How binding is your word on your actions?
If you say you'll do something, do you do it?
If you say you won't, do you do it anyway?

Would I be foolish to risk my life on something you said you would or wouldn't do?

James 5:14

Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the lord.

Maybe Yaakov didn't understand about doctors?
If you're ill, call the elders.
Probably a bit annoying if you just have a cold. But if you're seriously ill. Call them. Let them pray for you.

James 5:16

Confess transgressions to one another

This is taken different ways by different churches. In my view, he means to confess them to the person you have wronged. Go to them, don't try to conceal it. Don't hope they won't find out. Go and discuss it, and maybe you can be reconciled.

James 5:17

Eliyah was a person with similar feelings to us. And he prayed a prayer that it wouldn't rain. And it didn't rain on the land for three years and six months.

In one sense, there was nothing special about Eliyah. He was just a man. He had the holy spirit poured out on him, but just a man. And yet, what a powerful prayer.
Yaakov's point is that you can pray this kind of prayer too. Not for your own pleasure, but if Yahweh leads you to it. And it will come to be.
The power of prayer comes from God, not from you, so there is nothing limiting your

prayers. Your righteousness comes from Yeshua. There is nothing stopping you praying a prayer even bigger than no rain for 3½ years.

After You Read

What verses really stood out to you?

How would you summarize this book in a sentence or two? What is it about? What is God trying to say to us?

Do you choose God? Or the world?

What's your 5 year goal now?
Has it changed?

What is God's goal for you?

Are you willing to suffer for God?
Are you willing to be poor?

What's the biggest thing you can possibly pray for?
What's stopping you?

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