

The letter that James wrote (The book in the Holy Bible called James) About this letter

James wrote this letter about 2,000 years ago, about 20 years after Jesus went back to heaven, and now it is in the Holy Bible.

James was a young brother of Jesus, and after Jesus went back to heaven, James became a leader in the church in Jerusalem (see Mark 6:2-3; Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19; 2:9, 12-13).

James wrote this letter to the Christians in other churches to tell them how to be good Christians and live properly for Jesus.

These messages are very important for us today, just like they were for the Christians at that time.

¹ I am James. I work for God and for our leader Jesus Christ. I am writing this letter to all God's people that live in lots of places everywhere in the world. I hope you are all good and happy.*

If you get trouble

² Listen, my Christian friends, you might get a lot of trouble sometimes. You might get different sorts of trouble. But don't get upset about it. No, you can be happy about it, ³ because it will make

* **1:1** Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19

you strong for God. You see, if you get trouble, and if you keep on trusting God, then you will become really strong for God, and you will stay strong, even if more trouble comes. ⁴ Then, after you learn to do that properly, you will be really strong. You will not miss out on any of those things that make you a good Christian.

Ask God to help you do the right thing

⁵ So if you want to properly understand what is the right thing to do, and if you want to learn how to be strong when you get trouble, just ask God to help you. He will not be angry with you. He is happy when you ask him for help like that, and he will help you and make you think properly. He will make you think the right way so that you will do the right thing. ⁶ But whenever you ask him, you have to believe that he will answer you. Don't think, "Maybe he will not listen to me." No, don't think like that. Anybody that thinks like that can't stay strong. They are like a bit of dry grass. The wind just blows it around and it goes anywhere. ⁷⁻⁸ If you are like that, it is like you are thinking 2 ways at the same time, and you will not be sure about anything. If you are like that, you can't think that God will help you at all.

Poor people and rich people

⁹ If Christians haven't got much money, or if people don't think they are important, they can be happy, because God thinks they are important. ¹⁰ But the Christians that are rich can be happy too, because they know that they are

not important. They know that they need God, and that he will save them. You see, money can't make people happy, and it can't stop people from dying. People are like flowers that grow in the bush. ¹¹ At first they look good, but later the sun gets hot and those little flowers die, and they don't look good any more. That is a picture of people. Rich people might keep working to get more money, but they will still die, and then they will not have that money any more.*

Keep on believing

¹² If God lets people test you, to see if you trust him properly, don't give up trusting him. After God sees that you keep on trusting him, he will give you new life, so that you will live with him for ever. He promised to do that for everybody that loves him.

What makes us do wrong things?

¹³ Whenever you feel like you want to do something that is wrong, don't blame God and say that he is pushing you to do something wrong. No way. God never pushes anybody to do wrong things, and nobody can trick God to make him do something wrong. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ We do it to ourselves. Whenever we think about things we want for ourselves, and we don't think about things God wants us to do, we just trick ourselves. Then we go ahead and do wrong things. You know, if we keep on doing those bad things, we will die.

* **1:11** Isaiah 40:6-7

God is good to us

¹⁶ Don't let anybody trick you, my Christian friends. ¹⁷ Everything that is really good comes from God in heaven. He made the sun, and the moon, and the stars, up there in the sky that give us light. You know, they move around, and they make shadows that move and change around. But God does not change, like those things. He never changes at all, not even a little bit. He always gives us good things.*

¹⁸ He wanted us to be in his own family, so he sent his true word to us. And when we believed that word it was like we were born all over again. That's how he made us his really special people.

Listen to God and do everything he says

¹⁹ Listen, my Christian friends, you have to be ready to listen to other people, and you have to stop and think before you say anything yourself. Stop and think before you get angry. ²⁰ If you are angry, you can't do the good things that God wants you to do. ²¹ So you have to stop doing all those things that are dirty and wrong. You have to listen properly to the word from God, that he put right inside you, and you have to do what it says. Don't think that you are so good that you don't need God's word. No. You have to do what it says, then that word will save you.

²² And don't just listen to that word from God, but you have to do everything it says too. If you don't do the things it says, you will just trick yourself. ²³⁻²⁴ Don't be like a man that looks at

* **1:17** 1 Samuel 15:29

his face in a mirror, but then he just walks away, and he forgets about it. He doesn't do anything to make himself look any better. Well, if you hear God's word, but you don't do the things it says, you are just like that man, because you forget that word, and you don't do anything to make yourself any better. ²⁵ Don't be like that. You have to listen to God's word and keep on thinking about it. Don't forget it, but do everything it says. That word will make you free, so that you will do everything God wants. And God will make you really happy whenever you do the things he wants you to do.

²⁶ You might go to church and think you are really good, but if you can't stop yourself from saying bad things, you are really just tricking yourself, and going to church for nothing. ²⁷ And God also wants you to look after people that need help. He wants you to look after people that haven't got any money to buy food, like kids that haven't got a mother or a father, or women whose husbands have died. If you do that sort of thing, God will be happy with you. But God will not be happy with you if you just look after yourself, like the people that belong to this world do.

2

Be good to all sorts of people

¹ Listen, my Christian friends, you know that our leader Jesus Christ is really great, and you believe in him. So you have to be good to

everybody. You have to treat everybody the same way. ² Suppose one man comes to your meeting wearing really pretty clothes and gold rings on his fingers, and another poor man comes wearing old rubbish clothes. ³⁻⁴ Maybe you look at the man with pretty clothes and think to yourself, "He has got a lot of money." So you are good to him, and you say to him, "Here is a really good seat for you." But you are hard on the poor man, and you say to him, "You can stand over there," or you say, "You can sit on the ground." If you are like that, you make yourself like a bad judge, and that is wrong. Don't think that way about people. You have to be good to everybody, people that have money, and people that don't have money.

⁵ Listen to me, my good Christian friends. God picks out poor people, and he helps them to trust him properly. He promises to give them a good place in his family. He promises that to everybody that loves him. In the end those poor people will be really rich. ⁶ So, if you rubbish poor people, you are wrong. Think about this. Who is hard on you? What people take you to court? Do poor people do that, or rich people? Rich people do it. ⁷ And they talk against Jesus Christ. You belong to Jesus Christ, but they rubbish him.

⁸ You know, there is a really important law in God's book. It says, "Love other people, just like you love yourself." If you do that, you are doing the right thing.*

* 2:8 Leviticus 19:18

⁹ But if you are good to some people but hard on other people, you are doing the wrong thing. You are not following that law. ¹⁰ Now think about God's laws. If you don't follow all of God's laws, you are guilty. Suppose one man does everything in those laws except that he breaks one law, that man is guilty. Suppose another man breaks all those laws, he is guilty too. They are both guilty.

¹¹ It is like this. One of God's laws is, "Don't sleep with anyone that is not your wife or your husband, as if you are married to them."

And another law is, "Don't kill anybody."

Suppose you didn't sleep with the wrong person, but you did kill somebody, you are guilty anyway, because you didn't follow all of God's laws.*

¹² God will judge us, and he will use the law that tells us to love other people. So before you say anything, and before you do anything, you have to think about that law from God. That is the law that makes us free so that we can do whatever is right. ¹³ Later on, God will judge you. And if you don't feel sorry for other people now, then God will not feel sorry for you. But if you feel sorry for them now, and if you are good to them, God will feel sorry for you later on, when he judges you, and he will be good to you. You see, people that are sorry for other people don't have to worry about God judging them.

Believe in Jesus and do the right things too

* **2:11** Exodus 20:13-14; Deuteronomy 5:17-18

¹⁴ My Christian friends, it is no good for you to say that you believe in Jesus Christ if you don't do the things that he wants you to do. If you reckon you believe, but you don't do the things he wants, you can't think that God will save you.

¹⁵ If there is another Christian that is hungry and needs food, and is cold and needs some clothes, ¹⁶ you can't just talk to them and not give them anything. You can't just say, "Don't worry. I hope you get something to eat, and I hope you get some clothes to wear." You see, if you don't do anything to help them, you don't do any good at all. ¹⁷ So if you reckon that you believe in Jesus Christ, but you don't do the good things that he wants you to do, I reckon your talk isn't true. It is useless. It will get you nowhere.

¹⁸ Maybe you reckon, "Some people can believe in Jesus, and other people can do the good things that Jesus says to do." I answer you like this, "If you don't do the things that Jesus says, you can't show me that you believe in him. But whenever I do the good things he tells me to do, I show you that I do believe in him." ¹⁹ You believe that there is only one God. That's good, but even the bad spirits believe that. They believe that there is only one God, and if they think about him, they get really frightened of him. They get so frightened that they shake.

²⁰⁻²³ If you don't do the things that Jesus says, it is no good to say that you believe in him. If you don't know much, and if you want to argue with me, just think about the story of Abraham, our grand-father that lived a long time ago. God told

Abraham to give him his son Isaac. To do that, Abraham had to kill Isaac, and burn his body on a table made of stones. Abraham believed that somehow God would make it end up all right, so he started to do that hard thing that God said. He was going to kill Isaac. But just then, God told him to stop. You see, God says this in his book, “Abraham believed what God said, so God was really happy with him, and told him, ‘You believe me, so now I’m saying you are properly good, like you never did anything wrong.’”*

And that is how it happened.

In another place it says that Abraham not only believed God, but he also did that hard thing God told him to do, so Abraham was a friend of God. ²⁴ We can learn from that story about Abraham. If people believe God so much that they do whatever he says, like Abraham did, then God will say they are all right. But he will not say that to people that don’t do what he says, even if they reckon they believe in God.

²⁵ And think about that story about Rahab. She was a bad woman that used to sleep with any man that paid her money, like he was her husband. But one day, Israel’s enemies were looking for 2 men from Israel, and those 2 men asked Rahab to help them. So she hid them in her house until their enemies went past, and then she told them which way to run to get away. She helped those 2 men, so God was happy with

* **2:20-23** Genesis 15:6; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8

her. Later on, a lot of Israel soldiers attacked that town, but God saved Rahab, and they didn't kill her.*

²⁶ It is like this. If a person's body doesn't breathe, it is no good. That person is dead. In the same way, if you say you believe in Jesus, but you don't do the things God wants you to do, you are no good as a Christian. It is like you are dead.

3

Teachers need to be careful and teach properly

¹⁻² My Christian friends, don't all of you try to be teachers of God's word. Only the right people can do that. You see, God will judge us all, and if you teach people something that is wrong, God might punish you a lot. It is like this, all of us make mistakes, and we get trouble from those mistakes. But if we teach people, and if we make a mistake so that we teach them something that is wrong, we will get really big trouble from that. It is hard for us to control our tongues so that we say everything properly. If you can control your tongue, you are properly good, and you can control all of your body.

³ Think about the people that ride horses. They put a little bit of iron in the horse's mouth, and they tie ropes to it, then they use that bit of iron to turn the whole horse around, and they steer it wherever they want it to go. ⁴ And think about ships. They are like that too. A ship is very big,

* **2:25** Joshua 2:1-21; Hebrews 11:31

but its driver can use the little rudder at the back to steer it around. Even if strong winds want to blow it one way, that driver can steer it another way using that little rudder. ⁵ Well, those are pictures of our tongues. Our tongues are only little, like that bit of iron and that little rudder. Yes, our tongues are little, but if we use them to talk up big and tell people that we are really good, they will do a lot of damage.

Think about fire. A very little spark can start a fire, and then it can burn up a lot of bush. ⁶ In the same way each of us has a little tongue, and it is like a little spark of fire inside us. It can say really bad things, and tell lies, and then that can make the rest of our bodies bad. Our tongues can make everything in our lives go wrong, like a spark of fire can make a big bush fire. The devil, the boss over the bad spirits from hell, he makes us say those bad things. It is like he uses our tongues to start that fire, and it grows like a bush fire, and it gets us into a lot of trouble. ⁷ People can control all sorts of wild animals, and birds, and snakes, and fish. They can make them quiet and train them to do whatever their boss wants them to do. ⁸ But nobody can control their own tongue properly. It is always saying bad things and hurting people, like it has poison in it, just like a cheeky snake.

⁹ Sometimes we use our tongue to tell God that he is our good father, and sometimes we use it to swear at people. But remember, God made people to be like himself.* ¹⁰ Both good things

* **3:9** Genesis 1:26

and bad things come out of our mouths. But, my Christian friends, that's not right. ¹¹⁻¹² Do you ever find fresh water and salt water coming from the same water-hole? No, it is never like that. And you never find 2 sorts of fruit on one tree. So our mouths shouldn't say 2 sorts of things. We shouldn't say good things and bad things with the same mouth.

Think God's way, not the devil's way

¹³ Do you reckon that you can think properly, and do you reckon that you know if something is right or wrong? If you do, you have to show everybody that you think properly by quietly doing good things for other people. If you do those good things, and if you don't tell anybody about it, you are thinking properly. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ But if you only think about things that are good for yourself, and if you are jealous of other people, and if you hate other people, you are not thinking God's way. That's the devil's way. He is the boss over the bad spirits. You can't hide the way you think by telling lies about it, and by saying that you are really good. ¹⁶ You see, sometimes people get jealous of each other, and sometimes they only do things to make themselves happy, and they don't think about anyone else. Whenever that happens, those people start fighting each other, and they get into all sorts of trouble.

¹⁷ But whenever we think God's way, we are like this,

– We keep away from doing anything bad.

- We want to make other people happy, and we want to help them to be friends with each other.
- We are easy on other people, not hard.
- We listen to people and let them get a fair go.
- We feel sorry for people that have problems, and we do everything we can to help them.
- We are fair to everybody. We don't treat some people good and other people like they are rubbish.
- We don't pretend that we are better than we really are.

¹⁸ Whenever somebody teaches people to live the right way, like that, those other people stop fighting each other, and they start to be good to each other.

4

Let God be your boss, not the devil

¹ Why do you always fight and argue with each other? I'll tell you why. It is because you only think about things that you want for yourself, to make yourself happy, and you don't care about anyone else. So you fight everyone else to get the things you want. ² You think you really want something a lot, and if you can't get it, you argue and fight for it. You try to work out ways to trick people, or maybe even kill people, just to get something you want. But you don't ask God for it, and that's why you don't get it. ³ And even if you do ask God for something, he doesn't listen to you. He knows that you are just thinking about yourself. He knows you just want

to make yourself happy, and you don't care about anybody else, so he doesn't give you that thing you want.

⁴ If you are like that, it shows that you left God. You stopped following him and joined the other people in the world that hate God. They are God's enemies. So if you join up with people like that, you make yourself God's enemy. You ran away from God. You are just like a woman that leaves her husband and runs away with another man.

⁵ God says something important about this in his book. He says that he put his Holy Spirit in us, and he says that if we leave him and follow some other way, his spirit gets really upset. ⁶ And remember that God is really good to us. His book says this too,

“God is against people that think they are great, but he is good to people that know they are not great.”*

⁷ So listen to God, and follow him, and do what he says. Fight back against the devil, the boss over the bad spirits. Whenever he tries to get you to go wrong, just tell him to be quiet, and don't listen to him. Then he will leave you, and he will run away from you. ⁸ But when you trust God, you go close to him, and when you do that, he will come close to you, and he will help you. So you have to stop doing bad things. Don't even think about doing bad things. Don't think that maybe you will go the right way, or maybe the wrong way. No, forget the wrong way, and just go the right way. ⁹ Stop laughing about the bad

* **4:6** Proverbs 3:34

things you did. Cry about them instead. You went wrong, so be sad, not happy. ¹⁰ Tell God that you are sorry. Tell him that you know that you are weak, and that you are not important. If you do that, he will tell you that you are important, and he will make you strong.

Don't make yourself the judge of other people

¹¹ My Christian friends, don't say bad things about each other or rubbish each other. If you rubbish other people, it is like you reckon you are their judge. But God's law says that you have to love other people, so if you rubbish them, you are really saying that you think God's law is wrong. But you are not a judge, so you can't say that God's law is wrong. Your job is to do whatever God's law says. ¹² God made his law, and he is the only judge. He is the only one that can blame anybody. He can save somebody, or he can kill somebody. But you can't do that. You are not God, so you can't make yourself a judge and rubbish other people.

Don't talk up big about something you want to do

¹³ Listen. Some of you talk like this, you say, "Tomorrow we will go to that town over there, and we will buy things for a little bit of money, and then we will sell them for a lot of money. We will keep on doing that for a year. That's how we will get plenty of money to keep for ourselves."

¹⁴ You talk like that. You say, "Tomorrow," but you don't know what will happen tomorrow. Will you still be alive tomorrow? You know, your

life is like a puff of smoke, it doesn't last long. You are alive today, but maybe tomorrow you will die.*

¹⁵⁻¹⁶ So don't talk up big about something you will do tomorrow, but instead you have to talk like this, "If God wants us to, we will keep on living, and we will go and do that thing." It is wrong to forget God and talk up big about something before you do it.

¹⁷ You see, if you know the right thing to do, but you don't do it, it is just the same for you as if you did something wrong.

5

God will punish people that cheat to make themselves rich

¹ Now I'm talking to rich people that cheated people to get money for themselves. You mob listen to me. You are going to get big trouble, so you can start to cry right now, and you can be really sad. ²⁻³ All your money and clothes, and those things you got for yourself, they will all become useless. They will rot away. Or they will rust away. Or white ants will eat them. God will see that rusty rotten mess, and he will say that you are too greedy, and he will punish you with big trouble. It will be like a fire burning up your body. You thought you could keep all that stuff for a long time, but you will not have it for very long.* ⁴ You cheated to get that money. You got men to work on your farm, and they cut

* **4:14** Proverbs 27:1 * **5:2-3** Matthew 6:19

down the food crop that grew there, and they brought all that food to you. But you didn't pay them for that work. You sent them away with no pay. Then they cried about it, and our God heard them. He is very strong, and he can see that you cheated them. God can see their money. It is still in your pocket. So God will make big trouble for you.*

⁵⁻⁶ While you lived here on this earth, you killed good people that couldn't fight back. You lied and said they were guilty, and then you killed them. While you were doing that, you got everything you wanted, and you had plenty to eat. You are fat now, but look out. God will kill you. Think about a farmer and his cow. He feeds that cow a lot of grass and makes it fat, then he kills it to get some meat. Well, that is a picture of you. You are fat now, but God will kill you.

Christians, don't give up

⁷⁻⁸ Now I'm talking to you Christian people. You have to wait for our leader, Jesus, to come back, so don't give up. Think about farmers. They plant their food crops, and then they just wait for the rain to come and make the plants grow, so that in the end, the farmers will get lots of food from those plants. Well, you have to wait, just like they do. Don't give up. Our leader, Jesus, will come back soon.

⁹ My Christian friends, don't complain about each other, or God will judge you and say that

* **5:4** Deuteronomy 24:14-15

you are wrong. He is the big judge, and he is coming soon. He is nearly here already.

¹⁰ My Christian friends, remember the stories from a long time ago. Think about the people that told God's messages to people. They kept going, even if people didn't believe them, and if people gave them a lot of trouble. ¹¹ They didn't give up, so now we respect them, and we say they were good people. Remember the story about Job. He was a good man, but he got a lot of trouble. But he kept on following God, and in the end, God made everything good for him. So we know that God always feels sorry for his people when they get trouble, and he will be very good to them.*

¹² And there is another thing that I want to say, my friends, and it is very important. Whenever you promise something, don't say, "God is the boss over heaven and earth, and if I don't do what I promise, he will punish me." Don't say anything like that. You see, if you say that, and then don't do what you promised, then God will say that you are guilty. So just tell the true story. Say *yes* when that is true, or *no* when that is true, and don't say anything more.*

This is how to pray

¹³ Have any of you got trouble? You have to keep on praying about it. Or are any of you happy? You can sing to God to say *thank you* to him and to tell everybody that God is really

* **5:11** Job 1:21-22; 2:10; Psalm 103:8 * **5:12** Matthew 5:34-37

good. ¹⁴ Are any of you sick? You have to ask the leaders of the church to come to you and pray for you. They can ask for Jesus's power to make you better, and they can put some olive oil on you while they pray.* ¹⁵ Whenever somebody prays and really trusts God to make a sick person better, God will do what they are asking him to do. Jesus, our leader, will make that sick person good again. And if they got sick because they did something wrong, God will not punish them any more for doing that bad thing.

¹⁶ So whenever you go wrong and do bad things, don't try to say that you are still good. No. Tell each other the true story about the bad things that you did. Then you can pray for each other, so that God can make you good again. Whenever a good person prays to God about something, then God uses his power and does whatever that good person asks for. ¹⁷ Think about the story about Elijah. He was just a person, like us, but he prayed and asked God to stop the rain, and God did that. It didn't rain at all for the next 3½ years.* ¹⁸ Then Elijah asked God to send rain again, and God did that. A lot of rain came down, and then the food plants started to grow again.*

¹⁹⁻²⁰ Listen, my Christian friends, suppose a Christian starts to forget about God's true words, and that person goes the wrong way. And suppose somebody else talks to them and gets

* **5:14** Mark 6:13 * **5:17** 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1 * **5:18** 1 Kings 18:42-45

them to come back to the right way. Then God will go easy on the person that went the wrong way. He will not punish them for all the bad things they did, and he will not finish them up for ever. You see, the person that gets them to come back does a lot of good. So that is the sort of thing you have to do.*

From James

* 5:19-20 Proverbs 10:12; 1 Peter 4:8

Plain English Version
Portions of the Holy Bible in the Plain English
Version translation for Australian Aboriginal people
who speak English as a second language

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Dialect: Australian Aboriginal

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2022-11-11

PDF generated using Haiola and XeLaTeX on 11 Nov 2022 from source files dated 11 Nov 2022

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