

# James Part One: Deep Dive

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## **THE EPISTLE OF STRAW OR AN INCREDIBLE JEWISH LETTER | RYAN KERRISON**

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From the theologically honest, yet exegetically erroneous charge by Luther, labelling it the “epistle of straw”, to contemporary scholars relegating it to a secondary status within the canon, the Book of James has far and above survived the critique of many. Filled with direct, no-nonsense statements, exhortations to prayer, saving faith, utterly pragmatic instruction, and my own personal favourite, taming the tongue, James remains one of my favourite epistles in the entire bible. This Deep Dive will be a little different to the usual odyssey into Greco-Roman, or Ancient Jewish culture, rather it will be some of my own reflections, thoughts and observations from within the epistle of James. I hope you enjoy and find something within this book for yourself!

The first thing I noticed, reading James was the book is absolutely Jewish. Sometimes being called the “Proverbs” and “Amos”. Proverbs, due to its harmonisation of practical wisdom and the challenge to work out one’s faith, and Amos due to its uncompromising and often scathing rebuke of hypocrisy and sin. I love what Unger writes, “If the several passages referring to Christ were eliminated, the whole epistle would be as proper in the canon of the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament. In fact, the epistle could be described as an interpretation of the Old Testament law and the Sermon on the Mount in the light of the Gospel of Christ.” Now this is something one would expect from the author, the half-brother of Jesus, being raised in a Jewish context, however, due to the Hellenistic and assorted Pagan influences of the day, the fact that James remains so “Jewish” is astounding, and I think, really reminds present readers of the story of the Jewish nation, and ultimately the story of God.

My second observation, and probably my favourite thing about James, is his inseparable connection of hearing and doing the Word. For James, merely ‘talking the talk’ is not good enough. This challenge, like many others in James, is charged toward the attitudes of the rich and poor of society, manifesting itself as conflict within the church, which is seen often. This is a fantastic, and strong reminder to not just pick up one’s Christianity thirty minutes before church, nurture it, and love it for 90 minutes, then drop it at the door, rather as something to listen to and obey throughout one’s life.

You cannot read James effectively and miss his encouragement, no, command! “Count it all

as joy brothers when you meet trials” and ladies, don’t think that that word ‘brothers’ means you’ve got it made, that’s simply a product of Jewish vernacular. James means EVERYONE when he says to count trials as joy. It’s counter-intuitive, I concede, but the Kingdom of God is like that! This implication serves a double purpose, that even though James is writing to Jewish Christians, he means everyone in the Kingdom of God. It’s little pieces of poorly interpreted language that make a lot of difference when interpreting a text! I love what Tom Wright says in his commentary on the book around this notion, “Those who follow the Messiah are not supposed to just survive. They are supposed to count, to make a difference in the world, whether through the quiet daily witness of a faithful and gentle life or the chance, given to some, to speak or act in a way which reveals the gospel to many others.” It is these reasons amongst many others that I find myself in agreement with New Testament scholar, Douglas Moo, that the epistle of James, should move us as believers today, to realise the eschatology that lies before us, and allow it to affect our present and deal with the sin in our lives and the lives of others, and to seek God and His eternal wisdom for the sake of our salvation process and His everlasting glory.