

# James - Introduction & Background

## Authorship

There are *four NT figures* bearing the name James. Which of these four is responsible for writing the letter? Some believe it was the father of Judas (not Iscariot), who was an apostle (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). However, this James is obscure and unknown elsewhere in Scripture. Because the salutation implies that the author was well known by his audience, he is an unlikely candidate for the author of the letter. Others believe the writer was James the Son of Alphaeus (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). This James is probably also "James the Less" who is referred to elsewhere in Scripture (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 24:10). However, he is also too obscure to be well recognized by the Jews in the Diaspora. Also, he surely would have made reference to his apostleship to add credence to his letter. Yet the author of the letter never refers to himself as an apostle.

Still others believe that the writer is James the Son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matt 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mark 1:19; 3:17; 10:35; 13:3; Luke 9:54; Acts 1:13). This James is considered a candidate because of his apostolic status. However, the writer never makes mention of his apostleship or the fact that John was his brother. Also, had an apostle written the letter, it probably would have been accepted much earlier in church history. Furthermore, his early martyrdom at the hands of Herod Agrippa in 44 AD (Acts 12:2) would demand that the letter was written very early. The best option is to attribute the letter to James the half brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal 1:19). James shared the same mother as Jesus but not the same father. Joseph was James' father and Christ's stepfather.

*Internal* evidence favors James the brother of Christ as the book's author. The salutation implies that the author was already well known to his audience. James the brother of Christ certainly fits this qualification since he was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal 2:9,12). Because James was such a popular name in the New Testament world, only a popular person could have used it with little other clarification and still be recognized. Also, his authoritative tone demonstrated in the letter is understandable given his role as the pastor of the Jerusalem church. The notion that James the brother of Christ wrote the letter also receives support upon comparing the content of James' speech in Acts 15 with the material presented in the letter. Similarities include the words "greetings" (1:1; Acts 15:23), "visit" (1:27; 15:14), "listen" (2:5; 15:13), "turn" (5:19-20; Acts 15:19) as well as the notion of being called by God's name (2:7; 15:17). "The Jewish character of the epistle with its stress upon the Law, along with

the evident influence by the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., 4:11-12; 5:12), complement what we know about James 'the Just' from Scripture and early tradition."

Some believe that the evidence does not favor James the brother of Christ as the letter's author because he never identifies himself as such. However, perhaps he identified himself as only a bondservant rather than the brother of Christ out of humility since he initially rejected Christ's messiahship (John 7:5). Interestingly, Paul neglects to mention his apostleship in several of his letters (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phil 1:1). John also neglects to mention his apostleship in his three epistles. Others believe that the evidence does not favor James the brother of Christ as the author because the Greek is supposedly too good for a Galilean. However, because of a mixed population, many Israelites were bilingual (Acts 22:2). Also, because James was a prominent church leader, it is expected that he would have become fluent in Koine Greek, which was the universal language of the Roman Empire. It is also worth noting that a common cobbler named John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is considered an English classic.

Although the *external* evidence is not nearly as strong as the internal evidence, it ultimately favors James the brother of Christ as the book's author. Early on, the book struggled to achieve canonical status. For example, the book is not mentioned in the second century Muratorian fragment. Also, the Western church was slow in accepting the letter. Moreover, the book did not achieve general recognition until the Council of Carthage in 397 AD. However, many fathers from the Eastern Church accepted the letter before it was accepted by the Western Church. Among them are Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Augustine. Eusebius also seems to testify to the fact that it was genuine. It is also included in the Old Syriac Version. Allusions to the letter can also be found in the works of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp. Moreover, there are several logical reasons for the Western church's reluctance to unanimously accept the letter. Such reasons include the letter's alleged contradiction with Paul, the fact that James was not well known outside of Israel, uncertainty regarding James' identity, the Gentiles' reluctance to accept a book written exclusively to Jewish believers, its limited doctrinal emphasis in comparison to other epistles, its brevity, and the fact that the letter's target audience consisted of those in the East.

### **Who Was James?**

A brief *biographical sketch* of James is helpful in order to gain a better perspective of him as the book's author. Many contend that James was either the cousin or the stepbrother of Jesus. Some contend he was the child of Mary of Cleophas, who was the virgin Mary's sister. Others argue that he was the child of Joseph from a previous marriage. They claim that not viewing James as the natural brother of Jesus would explain his initial unbelief (John 7:3-5) as well as Christ's entrustment of Mary to John rather than to James (John

19:25-27). However, several reasons make it more likely that James was one of the children begotten by Joseph and Mary after Jesus' birth.

First, Scripture makes several references to Christ's brothers (Matt 12:46-50; 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 2:12; 7:3,10). There is no reason for not giving the word "brother" in these verses a normal interpretation. The names of Christ's brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Second, Scripture is silent regarding Christ's supposed cousins and stepbrothers. Third, Scripture elsewhere refers to James as the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19). Fourth, Scripture refers to Jesus as Mary's first born son (Luke 2:7). Such a designation implies that Mary had other children. Fifth, according to Matt 1:25, Mary and Joseph did not have physical relations "until" (*heōs*) after Christ was born. Such phraseology indicates that they experienced a normal sexual relationship after Jesus' birth. Sixth, the primary motive in arguing against the idea that Christ had natural brothers seems to be a desire to protect the Roman Catholic notion of Mary's perpetual virginity.

James seems to have been the eldest of Christ's brothers since he is listed first on the lists that enumerate all the brothers (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3). James' spiritual odyssey was first marked by unbelief at Jesus' messianic claims (Mark 3:21-23; John 7:5). Such unbelief may explain his absence at the crucifixion. However, he was one of the first to receive the message that Jesus had risen from the dead (John 20:17). Luke also notes James' presence during Christ's post resurrection ministry (Acts 1:14). It seems that James became a believer after the Resurrection (1 Cor 15:7).

After his conversion, James rose to a position of responsibility within the church. Not only did Paul visit James in Jerusalem (Gal 1:18-19), but also Peter wanted James to know about his miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12:17). Eventually, James became known as an apostle (Gal 1:19). There seem to have been two categories of apostleship. One category represented those that were eyewitnesses to Christ's earthly ministry from the beginning (Acts 1:21-22) while a second category represented those who had seen the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 9:1). Apparently, James became an apostle in this latter sense.

He was also known as a pillar in the early church (Gal 2:9). James' prominence is also seen in how the Judaizers attempted to use his name in order to furnish credibility for their doctrine (Gal 2:12). He became the pastor of the Jerusalem church. He approved of Paul's credentials (Gal 2:9). During the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), he served as the final spokesman, delivered the verdict, recommended that the verdict be sent to the other churches, and issued the proclamation regarding what the Gentiles were free to participate in and what they were to abstain from. He also suggested that Paul keep the Law so as not to offend those who were zealous for the Law (Acts 21:18-26). Jude also referred to himself as James' brother in order to furnish support for his writings (Jude 1).

Apparently, James was married (1 Cor 9:5). He also developed "camel's knees" on account of his devotion to prayer. He was highly respected by the early Christians. Both believing

and unbelieving Jews also knew him as "James the Just." Because his death is not mentioned in Acts, one must take into consideration extra biblical tradition in order to ascertain how James died.

Eusebius records Heggesippus as indicating that Paul's enemies eventually threw James off the roof of the temple. Apparently, the high priest Ananus presented James with the opportunity to avoid stoning through a public renunciation of the faith. When taken to the top of the walls of Jerusalem for the purpose of issuing the renunciation, James instead preached the gospel. An angry Ananus proceeded to push him off the temple. Although James survived the fall, those beneath the temple wall stoned him to death.

According to Josephus, James died in the interim months in between the death of Festus (61 AD), who was the Roman procurator of Judea, and the arrival of the new governor Albinus (62 AD). During this time there was an insurrection. Ananus accused James of violating the Law and thus ordered him to be stoned. Josephus not only recorded the stoning but also cited it as one of the reasons why God allowed the 70 AD judgment. In sum, both Eusebius and Josephus taken together indicate that James suffered death through martyrdom and died in 62–63 AD.

### **Recipients**

*First*, James' audience was Jewish. Several internal clues make this conclusion obvious. They are referred to as the twelve tribes scattered abroad (1:1), which refers to Jews in the Diaspora. The book also contains several unexplained allusions that would be self-evident to a Jewish mind. Among them are first fruits (1:18; Lev 23:10), Gehenna (3:6), Lord Almighty (5:4), early and latter rains (5:7; Deut 11:14), oath taking (5:12), Elijah (5:17), Abraham "our ancestor" (2:24), Rahab (2:25), Job (5:11), synagogue (2:2), Law (1:25; 2:12), monotheism (2:19), and adulteresses (4:4). Other Jewish ideas found in the letter include proverbial wisdom, the preaching of the prophets, and the fact that there are at least 11 allusions to the Sermon on the Mount (see below). Moreover, the book contains 4 OT quotes and 41 OT allusions from 22 OT books. Notably absent from the book are Gentile concepts of slavery, idolatry, and well developed Christian theology.

There are at least 11 allusions to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James:

- James 1:2 and Matt 5:10-12
- James 1:4 and Matt 5:48
- James 1:5 and Matt 7:7
- James 1:22 and Matt 7:24,26
- James 2:14 and Matt 7:21-23
- James 3:12 and Matt 7:16-20
- James 3:17-18 and Matt 5:9
- James 4:4 and Matt 6:24
- James 4:11-12 and Matt 7:1

- James 5:10 and Matt 5:12
- James 5:12 and Matt 5:34-37

*Second*, James wrote to a persecuted audience. They were probably driven out of the land as a result of persecution of the Jews in Jerusalem, which was prompted by Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19). Because Peter would later write to the scattered Jews in the west (1 Peter 1:1), it is likely that James addressed the scattered Jews in the East. Thus, they may have been located in Babylon and Mesopotamia.

*Third*, James' audience consisted of believers. This fact is evident simply from the letter's opening verses where James explains that the trials that his audience was facing were necessary in order to mature their faith (1:2-4). How could their faith be perfected if they did not yet possess it? The repetition of the phrase "brethren" throughout the letter (1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10; 5:12,19) also adds strength to the argument that James was addressing a believing audience. In addition, the fact that 54 of the letter's 108 verses are imperatives also testifies to the recipients' believing status. Why issue a command to an unbeliever who has no capacity for understanding spiritual truth (1 Cor 2:14)? In sum, James wrote to a believing, persecuted, Jewish audience.

James is one of five Messianic Jewish Epistles that were written especially to deal with the needs and specific issues Jewish believers faced. While these needs and issues are applicable to all believers, they deal with unique issues among Jewish believers. These Messianic Jewish Epistles are: Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude. These were written to instruct believers by letter rather than by personal instruction and were meant to be circulated among the congregations.

In the wider historical background, the first century Messianic Jewish community was faced with two major problems: persecution and false doctrine. Persecution of Jewish Christians took place both in the Land of Israel and also among the believers of the Diaspora.

To deal with the problem of persecution in the Land of Israel, the Book of Hebrews was written by someone (anonymous) in the Dispersion to Jewish believers in the Land. To deal with persecution in the Dispersion, James and 1 Peter were written. The Book of James was written by someone in the Land to Jewish believers in the Dispersion. The Book of 1 Peter was written by someone in one part of the Dispersion to Jewish believers in another part of the Dispersion.

To deal with the problem of false doctrine, two other epistles were written: 2 Peter and Jude. The Book of 2 Peter was written from one part of the Dispersion to Jewish believers in another part of the Dispersion. The Book of Jude was written from the Land to those living in the Dispersion.

### **Place of Writing**

Several suggestions have been made regarding where the book was written. Among them are Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria. However, it seems most likely that the letter was written from Jerusalem. In Scripture, James is always located in Jerusalem subsequent to his conversion. In fact, James became the pastor of the Jerusalem church. James lived in the midst of Jerusalem throughout his entire adult life. Thus, Jerusalem is the most likely place for the origin of the epistle.

### **Date of Writing**

James was the earliest NT book. The antiquity of James becomes evident upon noting several factors:

*First*, the book had to have been written prior to 70 AD, since it makes no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Such information would have been of great interest to a Jewish reader. Thus, James would have made some sort of reference to these events had the book been written subsequent to them.

*Second*, only in Israel was there an agrarian economy spoken of in 5:4, where hired workers rather than slaves were used. Thus, the book was written prior to Israel's total occupation in 70 AD.

*Third*, because the gap between the Jewish rich and poor (5:1-6) was eliminated with the war of 66–70 AD, the Book of James had to have been written prior to that time.

*Fourth*, the letter had to have been written prior to 62–63 AD since that is the date of James' martyrdom according to tradition.

*Fifth*, the letter fails to mention any of the basic doctrines developed in the Pauline epistles. Examples include reference to the church as the body of Christ, the coming apostasy, the union of Jew and Gentile into one new spiritual organism, and Israel no longer seen as a distinct entity from the church in this age. Because of these notable absences, James' letter must have been written prior to the Pauline letters.

*Sixth*, the letter contains no developed Christology or theology. Thus, James must have been written prior to the development of these doctrines in the Christian age.

*Seventh*, there is no mention of the issue of Gentile circumcision that was dealt with during the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). Because James played such a prominent role in this council, it seems strange that he would fail to mention any of the issues it dealt with in his letter had it been written after the council had transpired. Because this council occurred around 49 AD, James must have been written prior to this time.

*Eighth*, the letter fails to mention Gentile inclusion in the church. Because the first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) took place in 48–49 AD, the letter must have been written prior to this point in time.

*Ninth*, James contains multiple allusions to the Sermon on the Mount. Yet James never quotes this sermon verbatim. Thus, James must have been written prior to the recording of the Sermon on the Mount in written form.

*Tenth*, because James' references to Christ have little linguistic concord with the synoptic Gospels, the composition of the epistle of James must have preceded the composition of the Synoptic Gospels.

*Eleventh*, the letter refers to a primitive form of congregational worship. For example, meetings took place in a synagogue (2:2). Moreover, church leaders are referred to as teachers, masters, and elders (3:1; 5:14) rather than bishops and deacons. Thus, the book was written before the church experienced these later ecclesiastical developments.

*Twelfth*, because the letter is addressed to the 12 tribes in the Diaspora (1:1), the time of the letter seems consistent with the dispersion of the Jews as recorded in the early chapters of the Book of Acts. These early chapters record how the early Jewish church transitioned from unity (2:41-47; 4:32-35) toward dispersion (Acts 8:1; 11:19-20). Because James was written during the general time period when this dispersion occurred, an early date seems appropriate.

Based upon these preceding reasons, a date of 44–47 AD for the composition of the letter would not be far from wrong. James was likely the very first book of the NT and Galatians was the second book. Because James was written prior to the Pauline letters, it is impossible to see James as a polemic against Paul's writings. Conversely, because of the close relationship that Paul had with James (Acts 15:13; 21:18; Gal 1:19; 2:9,12), it is equally unlikely that Paul's writings should be construed as a polemic against James' letter.

### **Occasion, Purpose, Message, Theme**

The *occasion* of the letter is that the believing Jews scattered in the Diaspora (1:1; Acts 8:1-4) were without the supervision of an apostle. They knew from their own national history that practical righteousness was a prerequisite for daily fellowship with God. The Law told them how such righteousness could be obtained. However, since they were part of the new dispensation of the church and outside of Jerusalem, they were without the Law. Thus, issues involving practical righteousness were paramount in their thinking. Therefore, James wrote for the *purpose* of explaining to them how living by faith could produce a practical righteousness that would please God in every area of life. James had the authority to address them. As the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, he had spiritual oversight over them and knew many of them personally. The *message* of the book is that believers can experience a practical righteousness that is pleasing to God when they live by faith and walk by wisdom. The dominant *theme* of the letter is not to be hearers of the word only but also doers of it (James 1:22). In other words, hearers should be doers, belief should translate into behavior, and doctrine should become deed. It is fair to say that Paul emphasized faith, Peter emphasized hope, John emphasized love, Jude emphasized doctrinal fidelity, and James emphasized conduct.

### **Sub Purposes**

In addition to this overarching purpose, James wrote in order to accomplish several sub-purposes:

*First*, James wrote to explain why God allows trials into the life of the believer (1:2-18).

*Second*, he wrote to explain the type of religion that pleases God (1:19-27).

*Third*, he wrote to confront favoritism within the assembly (2:1-13).

*Fourth*, he wrote to show Christians how living by faith will naturally manifest itself in good deeds (2:14-26).

*Fifth*, he wrote to confront misuses of the tongue (3:1-12).

*Sixth*, he wrote to describe heavenly wisdom (3:13-18).

*Seventh*, he wrote to contrast worldly wisdom and spiritual wisdom (4:1-12).

*Eighth*, he wrote to explain the necessity for depending upon God in commercial planning (4:13-17).

*Ninth*, he wrote to warn wealthy abusers (5:1-6).

*Tenth*, he wrote to encourage patience in light of the Lord's imminent return (5:7-11).

*Eleventh*, he wrote to explain the numerous kinds of prayer (5:12-18).

*Twelfth*, he wrote to explain the necessity of retrieving the errant brother (5:19-20).

### **Unique Characteristics**

James' epistle boasts several outstanding characteristics:

*First*, it contains numerous similarities to the Sermon on the Mount.

*Second*, it makes extensive use of OT books, characters, figures, and illustrations.

*Third*, the letter may be the most Jewish of all the New Testament books.

*Fourth*, the letter employs multiple illustrations from nature and every day life.

*Fifth*, the letter utilizes numerous verbs involving proper and improper use of the tongue.

*Sixth*, the letter contains only scant references to Christ (1:1; 2:1; 5:7-8). Thus, the letter's Christology is undeveloped. There are no references to Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, or atonement.

*Seventh*, the letter does not emphasize the doctrinal, theological, or apologetic but rather the practical. Paul's developed theology is absent from the letter. However, this is not to say that the letter is devoid of all doctrinal statements (1:12-13,17-18; 2:1,10-13,19; 3:9; 4:5; 5:7-9). Those areas of systematic theology that seem to receive the most treatment are hamartiology, theology, and eschatology. Other than Philemon, some have referred to it as the least theological book in the entire NT.

*Eighth*, the letter contains many similarities to the ministry of John the Baptist (1:22, 27 and Matt 3:8; 2:15-16 and Matt 3:11; 2:19-20 and Matt 3:9; 5:1-6 and Matt 3:10-12).

*Ninth*, the letter employs numerous literary devices including figures of speech, illustrations, rhetorical questions and hook words.

*Tenth*, James' writing style is concise and pithy.

*Eleventh*, the letter represents a high quality of Greek.



*Twelfth*, because of its employment of the writing style found in wisdom literature, it has been referred to as the "proverbs of the NT."

*Thirteenth*, because the letter deals with social justice in its treatment of the rich oppressing the poor (1:10; 2:1-7,15-16; 5:1-6), some have referred to it as the "Amos of the NT."

*Fourteenth*, the letter seems to make several references to the approaching 70 AD judgment.

*Fifteenth*, James is an authoritative book since half of its verses contain imperatives. However, such authoritativeness is tempered by love as James uses the phrase "my brethren" eleven times and the phrase "my beloved brethren" three times.

*Sixteenth*, the letter is arguably the oldest in the entire NT.

*Seventeenth*, although the book allegedly contradicts Paul, it is actually harmonious with his teaching. On the basis of such an alleged contradiction, Luther referred to it as an epistle made of straw and categorized it at the end of his translation.

*Eighteenth*, unlike Paul's pattern, James says virtually nothing about his own personal circumstances.

*Nineteenth*, the letter's numerous subjects make organizing and outlining it a difficult task.

*Twentieth*, the letter names no specific individual.

*Twenty-first*, it lacks a customary benediction and conclusion.

*Twenty-second*, like Hebrews, the letter is sermonic.

## **Structure**

As previously mentioned, the book is difficult to outline. One possible way of dividing the book is between faith (1:1—3:12) and wisdom (3:13—5:20). The first section is introduced with the phrase "the proving of your faith" (1:3) and the second section is introduced with the distinction between heavenly and earthly wisdom (3:13-18). The topics in the letter might be divided further by noting the repetition of the word "brethren" (1:2,19; 2:1,14; 3:1,10; 5:12,19). Thus, the first half of the book can be divided as pertaining to trials (1:2-18), obedience to God's Word (1:19-27), favoritism (2:1-13), faith manifesting itself through works (2:14-26), and taming the tongue (3:1-12). The second half of the letter can be divided along the lines of wisdom in the areas of spirituality, commerce, the use of wealth, and waiting upon the Lord's imminent return (4:1—5:12) as well as prayer (5:13-18), and the restoration of the errant brother (5:19-20).

## **Outline**

### **I. Faith (James 1:1—3:12)**

#### **(1) Salutation (1:1)**

(A) Writer: James (1:1a)

(B) Recipients: Believing Jews in the Diaspora (1:1b)

(C) Greeting (1:1c)

- (2) Faith is developed through trials (1:2-12)
  - (A) What trials produce (1:2-4)
    - (a) Joy (1:2)
    - (b) Patience (1:3)
    - (c) Maturity (1:4)
  - (B) Prayer of wisdom (1:5-8)
    - (a) Necessity of asking (1:5)
    - (b) Necessity of faith (1:6-8)
  - (C) What trials produce (1:9-12)
    - (a) Humility (1:9-11)
    - (b) Expectancy (1:12)
- (3) Faith does not attribute evil to God (1:13-18)
  - (A) Command stated (1:13a)
  - (B) Reasons stated (1:13b-18)
    - (a) Sin is contrary to God's nature (1:13b)
    - (b) Sin emanates from man's nature (1:14-15)
    - (c) God can only give good gifts (1:16-18)
      - (i) Command not to be deceived (1:16)
      - (ii) God gives good gifts (1:17a)
      - (iii) God's character demands He give good gifts (1:17b)
      - (iv) Believers' regeneration as an example of God's good gifts (1:18)
- (4) Faith obeys God (1:19-27)
  - (A) The need for slowness in speaking and anger (1:19-20)
  - (B) The need for obedience to the Word (1:21-25)
  - (C) The need for true religion (1:26-27)
    - (a) What true religion is not: unbridled speech (1:26)
    - (b) What true religion is (1:27)
      - (i) Compassionate acts (1:27a)
      - (ii) Moral purity (1:27b)
- (5) Faith does not show favoritism (2:1-13)
  - (A) Exhortation not to show favoritism (2:1)
  - (B) Concept applied to a church service (2:2-4)
  - (C) God does not show favoritism in election (2:5)
  - (D) The rich oppress the poor (2:6-7)
  - (E) Favoritism violates the Law (2:8-11)
  - (F) God will judge favoritism (2:12-13)
- (6) Useful faith manifests itself in works (2:14-26)
  - (A) Works accompany useful faith (2:14)

(B) Illustrations (2:15-26)

- (a) Brother in need (2:15-17)
- (b) Demonic monotheism (2:18-19)
- (c) Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (2:20-24)
- (d) Rahab and the spies (2:25)
- (e) Body and its spirit (2:26)

(7) Faith controls the tongue (3:1-12)

(A) The tongue's influence (3:1-5)

- (a) In relation to teaching (3:1)
- (b) In relation to all of life (3:2)
- (c) Illustrations of the tongue's influence (3:3-5)
  - (i) Bit in a horse's mouth (3:3)
  - (ii) Rudder of the ship (3:4)
  - (iii) Spark and a forest fire (3:5)

(B) The tongue's propensity for evil (3:6-12)

- (a) The tongue's Satanic potential (3:6)
- (b) The tongue is untamable (3:7-8)
- (c) The tongue's inconsistency (3:9-12)
  - (i) The tongue praises God and curses men (3:9-10)
  - (ii) Illustrations of the inconsistency (3:11-12)
    - (a) Fresh and bitter water from a fountain (3:11)
    - (b) Olives from a fig tree (3:12a)
    - (c) Fresh water from salt water (3:12b)

II. Wisdom (James 3:13—5:20)

(1) Wisdom defined (3:13-18)

- (A) Wisdom demonstrated by works (3:13)
- (B) Wisdom from below (3:14-16)
- (C) Wisdom from above (3:17-18)

(2) Wisdom in spiritual life (4:1-12)

- (A) Wrangling (4:1-3)
- (B) Worldliness (4:4-6)
  - (a) Worldliness makes one an enemy of God (4:4)
  - (b) Causes of worldliness (4:5-6)
    - (i) Not the Holy Spirit (4:5)
    - (ii) Pride (4:6)
- (C) Essence of spiritual wisdom (4:7-12)
  - (a) Submission (4:7)
  - (b) Drawing near to God (4:8a)

- (c) Repentance (4:8b-9)
    - (d) Humility (4:10)
    - (e) Foregoing judgment (4:11-12)
  - (3) Wisdom in commercial life (4:13-17)
    - (A) Necessity of planning one's life while depending upon God (4:13-15)
    - (B) Problem of planning without consulting God (4:16-17)
      - (a) Arrogance (4:16)
      - (b) Sin (4:17)
  - (4) Wisdom in the use of wealth (5:1-6)
    - (A) Predicted judgment upon rich oppressors (5:1-3)
    - (B) For reasons for coming judgment (5:4-6)
      - (a) Unpaid wages (5:4)
      - (b) Wanton luxury (5:5)
      - (c) Condemnation of the innocent (5:6)
  - (5) Wisdom in waiting for the Lord (5:7-12)
    - (A) Example of the farmer (5:7)
    - (B) Impact of imminency (5:8-9)
      - (a) Strength (5:8)
      - (b) Abstention from complaining (5:9)
    - (C) Old Testament examples of patience (5:10-12)
      - (a) Prophets (5:10)
      - (b) Job (5:11-12)
  - (6) Wisdom in prayer (5:13-18)
    - (A) Types of prayer (5:13-16a)
      - (a) Afflicted: prayer of dependence (5:13a)
      - (b) Happy: prayer of praise (5:13b)
      - (c) Sick: prayer by the elders (5:14-15)
      - (d) Sinful: prayer of mutual confession (5:16a)
    - (B) Power of prayer (5:16b-18)
      - (a) General statement (5:16b)
      - (b) Example of Elijah (5:17-18)
  - (7) Wisdom in restoring an erring brother (5:19-20)
    - (A) Necessity of warning an erring brother (5:19)
    - (B) Blessings of warning an erring brother (5:20)
      - (a) Salvation from a premature death (5:20a)
      - (b) Covering a multitude of sins (5:20b)
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## Introduction

An epistle written by James, addressed to the descendants of Israel. It is a in a section of the NT called the "Hebrew Christian Epistles." James is not a doctrinal book like Romans or Galatians. Jesus Christ is only mentioned 2x, and there's no mention of the cross, the resurrection or the Holy Spirit. It is a practical book about maturing as a Christian. James is written to people who know this stuff already...and he says, "it's great that you know it, now you have to do it."

### (1) Authorship

There are four James mentioned in the NT:

Acts 1:13-14:

13 When they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and **James** and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, **James the son of Alphaeus**, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son of James*.

- "...James" - the son of Zebedee, brother of Apostle John; one of the "sons of thunder" (Cf. Luke 9)

— If this James was the author, he likely would've mentioned his relation to his brother John, who wrote five NT books

— Called to be a follower early (Mark 1:19). Became, with his brother John and Peter, one of the insiders. (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 10:35; 14:33). Slain by Herod very soon after Pentecost.

— He was martyred very early (Cf. Acts 12:2), likely the second martyrdom of the Church Age

- "...James *the son of Alphaeus*" - sometimes referred to as "James the Less" (Cf. Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40)

— He was one of the twelve Apostles, which he would have likely mentioned in his greeting if he was the author

— A very obscure figure in Scripture; probably not the author due to the fact that it's clear that the author likely was familiar to his original readers.

- "...James" - father of Judas (not Iscariot) (Cf. John 14:22)

— Identified as one of the twelve in Luke 6:16 (and in Acts 1:13) and is probably to be identified with Thaddaeus in Matt 10:3 and Mark 3:18).

— A very obscure figure in Scripture; probably not the author due to the fact that it's clear that the author was familiar to his original readers

14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with **His brothers**.

- "...His brothers" - one of whom was James, the half-brother of Christ (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3); this is the James that most scholars believe wrote this epistle

- Considered by the early church as a son of Mary and Joseph (Cf. Matt 12:46-47; 13:55; Mark 3:31-32; Luke 8:19-20; 1 Cor 9:5)

- He was an unbeliever before the resurrection (John 7:5); he said Jesus was out of His mind (Mark 3:21)

- The Lord appeared to James after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:7; thus Gal 1:19); he was one of the first to receive word of Christ's resurrection (John 20:17; 1 Cor 15:7)

- James was in the Upper Room after Christ's ascension (Acts 1:14)

- Prominent as outstanding leader in the Jerusalem Church (Gal 2:19; Acts 15); those going to other churches founded by Paul are said to have come from James (Gal 2:12).

- He became the pastor of the church at Jerusalem; this would fit the opening greeting, in which it's clear that James was familiar with his original audience, and vice-versa

- It also fits the authoritative nature of this book, since James was a prominent pastor of Jewish believers shortly after Christ's ascension

- He was married (1 Cor 9:5)

- For additional arguments for and against James the brother of Christ as the author, see [James 01 Introduction - Part 1](#).

## **(2) Biography**

Once you establish who the author is, you look closer at their biography. The more you can understand about the biography of the author, the more you understand about why they bring out certain things in their writings.

- Half-brother of Christ

- Mother was Mary, father was Joseph

- Mary & Joseph had children after Jesus' birth; believed that James was the oldest half-brother

- Initial unbelief (John 7:5)

- One of the first to receive word of Christ's resurrection (John 20:17; 1 Cor 15:7)

- James is clearly involved in the post-resurrection, pre-ascension ministry of Christ

- Post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:14)

- Leader of Jerusalem church (Acts 15)

- A prominent leader in the early church; called out by brother Jude (Jude 1)

- Married (1 Cor 9:5)
- Paul had the right to marry just like James and Peter did
- Nicknamed “camel knees” because he spent so much time in prayer (from extra-biblical literature)
- Also nicknamed “James the Just” because he had a reputation for treating everyone fairly
- Martyrdom
- No biblical record of his martyrdom, but recorded by Eusebius and others

### **(3) Audience**

James was written by a Jewish believer in the Land to Jewish believers in the *diaspora* (outside the Land). This is the most important thing to know about the book of James: his original readers were *believers*. Understanding this fact is critical to understanding James, because this epistle has been hijacked by the Calvinists and the Arminians. Among the other Hebrew-Christian epistles, Hebrews was written by a Jewish believer in the Dispersion to Jewish believers in the Land. This is the most important thing to know about the book of James: his original readers were believers. Understanding this fact is critical to understanding James, because this epistle has been hijacked by the Calvinists and the Arminians.

The Calvinists believe that you must persevere in good works to the end of your life to prove that you’re saved. There is the “P” in TULIP: perseverance of the saints. The Bible doesn’t teach the *perseverance* of the saints, but rather the *preservation* of the saints.

Calvinists use the verse “faith without works is dead” (James 2:10) to argue this, but that is a complete misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the context.

The Arminians believe that if you’re a Christian, you’re on probation. At any moment you could commit the unpardonable sin, but they don’t tell you what that sin is. But if you commit it, God will rip salvation away from you.

The problem with both views is that you really don’t know if you’re saved or not. The problem with that is that it changes your motivation for service. Now you’re serving God out of fear: I either need to serve God to prove I’m one of the elect (Calvinism), or I have to serve God to keep my salvation (Arminianism). We shouldn’t serve God out of insecurity or fear, but because that is the reasonable thing to do because of what Christ has done for us (Rom 12:2).

People get confused in James 2 because it appears to contradict what Paul said about salvation, however James is not sitting in judgment of his audience...he assumes that they are already saved (James 1:2-4). James doesn’t assume that some

of his readers are saved and some are not, and that some are going to prove their salvation through the way they handle trials. If you make James deal with this issue, then you're forcing the text to deal with an issue that the author is not setup to deal with. Rather, James is encouraging all of his believing readers to persevere through the trials that they are enduring.

Other passages as evidence that James wrote to believers:

James 1:18: In the exercise of His will He brought **us** forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

James 4:5: Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit **which He has made to dwell in us**"?

James calls his readers "brethren" 10x in this epistle. There are 54 commands (imperatives) in 108 verses. This proves that he is writing to believers because there is only one command that God gives unbelievers: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Acts 16:30-31).

Acts 16:30-31:

30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

**31** They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

James doesn't give a single command for his readers to trust Christ or be saved. There isn't a single salvation message in this epistle. Instead, James is giving them commands to follow in their walk of sanctification because they have the Holy Spirit indwelling them.

If you don't understand that James was written to believers, someone will come along and pull out James 2, which makes it look like maybe you're a Christian but maybe you're not. This is how false doctrine starts and perpetuates, as people cherry-pick verses to match their preconceived theology, without understanding or communicating the proper context and background.

James' audience had been and was under severe persecution. This began with Paul after Stephen put the Jewish nation (and religion) on notice about Jesus (Acts 7; 8:1-4; 11:19). This angered Saul, who then began ravaging the church, which resulted in believers scattering from Jerusalem.

When the Jews were scattered, they went to Babylon-Mesopotamia or North-Central Turkey. Why would these scattered Jews flee to Babylon? Because many of their family remained in Babylon after the exile, and remained there over the centuries. Babylon maintained a large Jewish community from the end of the Babylonian



Captivity, through the first century. Ezra documented that only a small portion of the Jews exiled there ever returned to Israel. It is likely that James addressed the Jews who resided in Babylon because Peter addressed the scattered Jews in North-Central Turkey.

#### **(4) Place of writing**

The epistle was written from Jerusalem, since James was the pastor of the Jerusalem church. James lived his entire life in Jerusalem, and was martyred in Jerusalem.

James wrote this epistle to his congregation/flock, many of whom had been scattered when persecution began by Saul in Acts 8.

#### **(5) Date Written (44-47 AD)**

It's widely believed that James was the first NT book written. At this point, believers only had the OT Scriptures. The mostly likely date of writing is 44-47 AD. Here is the evidence used to come up with that date:

- There is no reference to the destruction of the temple, so it's assumed that James wrote prior to 70 AD.
- James was martyred in 62-63 AD
- There is no mention of basic Christian doctrines: last days apostasy, the makeup of the church, etc.
- James doesn't give us much in the way of Christology, like Philippians
- James was the key spokesperson/judge at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), which took place in 49 AD, but doesn't mention this event in his epistle
- No reference to Gentile salvation (48-49 AD) in James, so likely written earlier
- James refers to the Sermon on the Mount
- James 2:2; 3:1; 5:14 refers to primitive congregational worship by showing favoritism to the rich; "assembly" = synagogue
- James clearly wrote to a dispersed Jewish audience; when you cross reference this scattering historically in Acts (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19), it points to a mid-40s AD writing. No Gentile converts yet.

#### **Order of Paul's Epistles**

- (1) Galatians (49 AD)
- (2) 1-2 Thessalonians (51 AD)
- (3) 1-2 Corinthians (56 AD)
- (4) Romans (57 AD)
- (5) Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians (60-62 AD)
- (6) 1 Timothy, Titus (62-66 AD)

(7) 2 Timothy (67 AD)

Some say that James wrote to refute Paul, but the evidence points to James' writing before Paul ever wrote a single book. In fact, we see James and Paul working together (Acts 15:12-13; 21:18; Gal 1:19; 2:9,12), so they were not adversaries at all.

## **(6) Occasion**

(A) *Diaspora* (James 1:1; Acts 8:1-4; 11:19)

(B) Outside of Jerusalem, outside of Israel (likely in Babylon/Mesopotamia)

(C) Without the supervision of an apostle (or pastor)

(D) Without the Law — they are now in the Church Age (Acts 15)

(E) National history — they knew from the OT that God cares about how we live (practical righteousness)

— They knew from the Mosaic Law that practical righteousness was a prerequisite to having fellowship with God

— They also knew from the Mosaic Law that there were blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience

Deut 28:49-50:

49 "The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand,

50 a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

## **Israel's Judgments**

(1) Division of the Kingdom - 931 BC (1 Kings 12)

(2) Assyrian Judgment - 722 BC (2 Kings 17)

(3) Babylonian Captivity - 586 BC (2 Kings 25)

(4) Destruction of Jerusalem - 70 AD

James' readers knew that God would bring blessings for their obedience, and curses for their disobedience. They knew their OT history, and the previous judgments God meted out against Israel for disobedience. So the dominant issue on their minds, as believers and since they were no longer under the Mosaic Law, were issues of practical righteousness. What did they have to do to ensure blessing, and avoid the curses? How should they act in this new age?

So the audience's "situation in life" is what we try to figure out when studying any book of the Bible. What is the "situation in life" that gave rise to the writing of this book. Every book of the Bible has this "behind the scenes" reason for its writing.

## **(7) Purpose**

James wrote in order to show his Jewish-Christian readers living in the *Diaspora* how to achieve practical righteousness that pleases God. How these scattered Jewish believers should order their lives in the Church Age so that their outward conduct is consistent with their position in Christ.

James had the authority to address them because he was their pastor. He probably knew most of them by name, personally, before they were scattered.

As Jacob/James is writing his letter, his primary concern is seen in 1:22: doers of the word, not hearers only; how to be "doing" the Word, not merely "hearing" it. The focus of James is not creed, but conduct; not belief, but behavior; not doctrine, but deed. His primary concern is practical living.

## **(8) Message**

***Practical righteousness is attainable when believers live by faith and walk by wisdom.***

The faith that saves us originally should be leveraged throughout our life, during our sanctification process. We shouldn't try to handle problems in our own power. We can't be saved by the Spirit then perfected by the flesh (Cf. Galatians).

So what the book of James is about is that the faith that saved us is the same faith we need to have as we walk through the potholes of life. As we do that, we are achieving a daily righteousness that pleases God. And as we grow in this daily righteousness, God no longer needs to put us under divine discipline. If we become unrighteous in daily life, we don't forfeit our salvation, but we can be placed under the rod of chastisement. James' readers knew all about chastisement from their national history.

This practical righteousness is attainable when we live by faith, and walk by wisdom.

Wisdom is knowledge applied to daily life. Wisdom is taking the knowledge and truths that we learn through Bible study, and apply them in our daily life.

So if we trust God through trials and applying knowledge on a moment-by-moment basis, that is the practical righteousness that pleases God.

It's important to understand the three tenses of our salvation:

- Justification - saved from the penalty of sin (past tense)
  - Takes place immediately at the point of faith alone in Christ alone
  - Move from being a single nature entity to a dual nature entity, meaning that God gives us a new nature
  - The old nature doesn't die or disappear, it's still there, but it has been rendered powerless because we now have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to control it
- Sanctification - saved from the power of sin (present tense)

- Gradually delivered from sin's power as we learn to appropriate divine resources that God gives us for daily life
- Doesn't mean we become sinless, but that we're sinning less
- The goal is to yield moment by moment to the new nature, and to reckon as dead the old nature (the yearnings and desires of the old nature).
- Glorification - saved from the presence of sin (future tense)
  - Occurs at death or the Rapture
  - We become single natured entities again, as the flesh (old nature)

The book of James pertains to our Sanctification...it doesn't talk about how to become a Christian, but how to progress in our sanctification. It's purpose is to help the Christian grow in maturity in the middle (present) tense of our salvation. That's why the message of the book is practical righteousness, not positional righteousness. Positional righteousness is a justification issue; practical righteousness is a sanctification issue—how our practice catches up with our position in daily life. Practical righteousness is attainable when believers live by faith and walk by wisdom.

## **(9) Theme**

Transition from begin a Hearer —> Doer (James 1:22), Belief —> Behavior, Doctrine —> Deed

- It's great to come to a Bible study and learn, take notes, but not great when that notebook gets left on the shelf and what you learned has no practical influence over your life and behavior.
- This is knowledge that has not been translated into wisdom
- When we do this, James tells us that we're deluding ourselves...why? Because the goal of knowledge is for it to become wisdom. God didn't give knowledge for the sake of knowledge; knowledge is not the end game. Knowledge must be translated into practice, otherwise that knowledge does not have much value.
- What happens to people is that they get fooled into believing that going to church, hearing a sermon, understanding Scripture, all leads to "spirituality." But if that knowledge is not practiced or applied, if *gnosis* doesn't become *sophia*, then we fool ourselves because we demonstrate that we don't understand why God gave knowledge in the first place.
- What if a believer doesn't ever move from "hearer" to "doer," or from belief to behavior, or from doctrine to deed? Then they become candidates for divine discipline. James initial readers knew from their own (Jewish) history that frequently brought divine discipline upon the nation of Israel based on what God stated at the time of Moses (Deut 28).

- If we want to avoid divine discipline in the practical sense, we must pursue practical righteousness

You can take most of the NT authors and summarize their primary theme in one word:

- Paul - Faith
- Peter - Hope
- John - Love
- Jude - Truth
- James - Conduct

### (10) Unique characteristics

There are some things that we find in the book of James that we find nowhere else in Scripture:

<b>UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS</b>	
• Sermon on Mt	• Concise
• OT	• High quality GK
• Illustrations from nature and daily living	• Proverbs and Amos of the NT
• Undeveloped Christology	• Imperatives
• Practical	• Oldest book in NT
• Many literary devices	• Difficult to outline

- Sermon on the Mount - James alludes to the Sermon on the Mount at least twice, but doesn't give any type of reference; thus, likely written after Jesus gave Sermon on the Mount, but before Matthew recorded it in written form
- OT - numerous references to the OT (as you would imagine) since there was no other Scripture available to these early Church believers
- Illustrations from nature and daily living - our life as a "mist"
- Undeveloped Christology - we need to wait until Eph, Rom, Phil before the Holy Spirit reveals insight about Christ

- Practical - probably the least theological book we have (except maybe Philemon); there is good theology in James, but it's not prominent
- Many literary devices - James uses many literary devices such as figures of speech and rhetorical questions
- Concise - James has a concise and pithy writing style
- The Greek is very good
- James has been called the Amos and the Proverbs of the NT
  - Amos didn't like it when he saw common people being cheated by the powerful; James doesn't like it either, and speaks very aggressively against it
  - James' wisdom rivals Proverbs with pithy, concise sayings that force one to think
- Imperatives - James has 108 verses, and 54 commands; unbelievers do not have any commands from God other than Acts 16:30-31 ("believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved"). Proof that James was written to believers.

## **(11) Structure**

### **I. Faith (James 1:1–3:12)**

- (1) Trials (1:2-18)
  - (A) Rejoicing through trials (v2-12)
  - (B) Command to not charge God with temptation (v13-18)
- (2) Obedience to the Word (1:19-27)
  - (A) Be slow to speak and become angry (v19-20)
    - (a) Slowness in speech (v19a)
    - (b) Slowness in anger (v19b-20)
  - (B) To obey God's Word (v21-25)
  - (C) True religion (piety) (v26-27)
- (3) Favoritism (2:1-13)
  - (A) Command: don't show favoritism (v1)
  - (B) Situation: favoritism in the assembly (v2-3)
  - (C) Reasoning: favoritism is contrary to God's character and purposes (v4-13)
- (4) Faith manifesting works (2:14-26)
  - (A) Needy brother (v15-17)
  - (B) Demonic monotheist (v18-19)
  - (C) Abraham (v20-24)
  - (D) Rahab (v25)
  - (E) Lifeless corpse (v26)
- (5) Tongue (3:1-12)
  - (A) The Tongue's Influence (James 3:1-5)
    - (1) Teaching (v1)

- (2) All of life (v2)
- (3) Illustrations (v3-5)
- (B) The Tongue's Evil Potential (James 3:6-12)
  - (1) Satanic potential (v6)
  - (2) Untamable (v7-8)
  - (3) Inconsistency (v9-12)
    - (a) Praises God & Curses Man (v9-10)
    - (b) Three Illustrations (v11-12)
      - (i) Fresh & bitter water (v11)
      - (ii) Olives from a fig tree (v12a)
      - (iii) Salt water from fresh water (v12b)

## II. Wisdom (James 3:13—5:20)

- (1) Wisdom defined (3:13-18)
  - (A) Wisdom is demonstrated by her actions (3:13)
  - (B) Human or earthly wisdom (3:14-16)
  - (C) Heavenly wisdom (3:17-18)
- (2) Spiritual life (4:1-12)
  - (A) Avoid wrangling (v1-3)
  - (B) Avoid worldliness (v4-6)
    - (a) The Consequences (v4-5)
      - (i) Enmity against God (v4)
      - (ii) Alienation of the Holy Spirit (v5)
    - (b) The Cause (v6)
  - (C) Essence of spiritual wisdom (v7-12)
    - (1) Submission to God (v7a)
    - (2) Resist Satan (v7b)
    - (3) Draw near to God (v8a)
    - (4) Repent (v8b-9)
    - (5) Humility (v10)
    - (6) Forego judgment (v11-12)
- (3) Commerce (4:13-17)
  - (A) The need to plan while depending upon God (v13-15)
  - (B) The problem of planning without depending upon God (v16-17)
- (4) Use of wealth (5:1-6)
  - (A) Predicted judgment coming on rich oppressors (v1-3)
  - (B) Reasons for coming judgment (v4-6)
    - (1) Unpaid wages (v4)
    - (2) Wanton luxury (v5)

- (3) Condemnation for the innocent (v6)
- (5) Waiting for the Lord's Return (5:7-12)
  - (A) The example of the farmer (v7)
  - (B) The impact of imminency (v8-9)
  - (C) OT examples of patience (v10-12)
- (6) Prayer (5:13-18)
  - (A) Types of prayer (v13-16b)
    - (1) Afflicted: prayer of dependence (v13a)
    - (2) Happy: prayer of praise (v13b)
    - (3) Sick: elder's prayer (v14-15)
    - (4) Sinful: prayer of confession (v16a)
    - (5) Sick: intercessory prayer (v16b)
  - (B) Power of prayer (v16c-18)
    - (1) General statement (v16b)
    - (2) Example of Elijah (v17-18)
- (7) Restoration of the erring brother (5:19-20)
  - (A) The necessity of warning the erring brother (v19)
  - (B) Blessings of warning an erring brother (v20)
    - (1) Salvation from premature death (v20a)
    - (2) Covering a multitude of sins (v20b)

James 1:1–3:12 is an explanation of how our *saving* faith can be transferred into our *serving* faith as we keep trusting God through:

- Trials (1:2-18)
- Obeying His Word (1:19-27)
- Not showing favoritism (2:1-13)
- Allowing our saving faith to become serving faith, it begins to manifest itself in good works (2:14-26)
  - If our saving faith never becomes our serving faith, then our serving faith is...dead.
- “[Serving] faith without works is dead.”
  - We’re still going to heaven, but we’re useless to God on earth because we don’t trust Him through different issues of life, just like the Exodus generation
- Control of our tongue (3:1-12)
  - How do we know if we’re doing well in transitioning our saving faith into serving faith? I’m allowing my faith to produce good works, that God will use to bless others, but I’m actually gaining success in the ultimate good work, which is to control our tongue.
  - The tongue is similar to our sex drive...if we learn to control our tongue, we can do anything in our life. Controlling our tongue, like controlling our sex drive, is the hardest



thing to do as a human being. Everything else in life is easy.