

James

A. Author

The author identifies himself as James (1:1). This James was almost certainly the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). There are four men named James in the New Testament. The author of this letter could not have been the apostle James (James & John, sons of thunder). He died about 44 A.D. This date is too late for him to have been the author. The remaining two men named James lacked the influence and reputation that is evident in this letter.

James was one of several brothers of Jesus. James was likely the oldest since he is at the top of the list of Jesus' brothers in Matthew 13:55. Based on John 7:2-5 it is easy to conclude that James did not believe Jesus to be the Son of God. Furthermore, these verses show us James did not understand Jesus' mission on earth. James later became a prominent leader in the early Church. Notice how James is referred to other New Testament passages:

1. He was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after his resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:7).
2. Paul called James a *pillar* of the church (Galatians 2:9).
3. After Paul's conversion, he visited James in Jerusalem (see Galatians 1:19).
4. Paul also visited James on his last visit to Jerusalem (see Acts 21:18).
5. After Peter's miraculous prison rescue, he sent word to James (see Acts 12:17).
6. James was a leader in the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13).
7. Jude identified himself very simply: *a brother of James* (see Jude 1:1). This shows us how well James was known. Additionally, James was martyred around 62 A.D.

B. Date

Some date the letter in the early 60s. Other scholars believe it was written as early as 50 A.D. or slightly before.

1. The letter has a decidedly Jewish nature. This supports the early dating because the infant Church had a predominantly Jewish membership.
2. The Church structure (governance/roles) is very simple in James. This, too, supports dating the letter early in New Testament history. James refers to Church leaders simply as called *elders* (5:14) and *teachers* (3:1).
3. There is no mention of the controversy about Gentile circumcision.
4. The meeting place of the Church is the synagogue (see 2:2).

If the early dating of James is correct, then this letter is the earliest of all the New Testament books. The only possible exception would be Galatians.

C. Audience

The audience for James' letter is specifically named in 1:1 as: *the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*. Some scholars take this expression as a reference to Christians *in general*. However, the term *twelve tribes* would be an obvious fit with the mindset and history of Jewish Christians. Further evidence of an intended Jewish audience is the obvious Jewish nature of the letter. In 5:4, James used the Hebrew name for God (see Strong's Concordance – *kyrios Sabaoth*) which means *Lord of the armies of Israel*. The English translation of this name is *Lord Almighty*. We see in 2:1 and 5:7-8 that those receiving James' letter were believers – Christians. They may well have been members of the early Jerusalem church who were scattered in light of the persecution that followed the stoning of Stephen (see Acts 8:1 and 11:19). Support of this thought is provided by references James made to their trials and oppression, his very familiar knowledge of the readers and the authoritative nature of his letter. As leader of the Jerusalem church, James wrote as a pastor to instruct and encourage his scattered congregation as they faced many difficulties.

D. Distinctive Features

Distinctive features of James' letter to his readers include:

1. A decidedly Jewish nature
2. Excellent Greek – grammar, etc.
3. James' emphasis on practical, everyday Christianity which James connected to good deeds and a faith that bears fruit (works)
4. Simple organization and structure
5. A deep familiarity with the teachings of Jesus – very notable in comparison to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount
 - a. Compare 2:5 and Matthew 5:3
 - b. Compare 3:10–12 with Matthew 7:15–20
 - c. Compare 3:18 with Matthew 5:9
 - d. Compare 5:2–3 with Matthew 6:19–20
 - e. Compare 5:12 with Matthew 5:33–37
6. A similarity to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Proverbs, etc.)

E. Contribution

The writer of Hebrews teaches us a great deal about faith. In light of that, one should note that James was a controversial book in the minds of many. It was one of the last letters to be added to the New Testament. And when it was included it was placed right after Hebrews due to faith theme contained in James. Further, this letter is unique because it was written by a person who grew up in the same home and family as Jesus. It has particular significance due to the great amount of time James spent with Jesus – more than any other New Testament writer! The epistle gives no detail of those years, but we do see the resulting thoughts of a man who spent much of his life in close proximity to

Jesus. Even so, James was joined by his three other brothers (Joseph, Simon, and Judas) in opposing Jesus' early ministry. They even thought Jesus had gone mad. James was finally converted after Jesus' resurrection. The apostle Paul tells us the Lord appeared to James after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7).

That background gives added weight to James' introduction of his epistle, *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...* (James 1:1a). That is an amazing testimony to the deity of Jesus! The one who was Jesus' half-brother addressed Him as the *Lord Jesus Christ*. James' entire letter shows a reverence and respect for Jesus.

Eusebius recorded around A.D. 66 that James, the brother of Jesus, was pushed off the pinnacle of the Temple wall by the Jews. They were angered by his Christian witness and ministry. Eusebius says the fall did not kill him. After the fall, James managed to get on his knees and pray for those who intended his death. Their response was to stone James to death. This is how we include James among the Christian martyrs.

It is almost impossible to read James without noticing a striking similarity to the teachings of Jesus. A side-by-side comparison of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and the book of James reveals several very close parallels. It seems evident that James had heard Jesus preach, even though Scripture lets us know James struggled with the things he heard Jesus teach. Like Jesus' teachings, James' letter is marked by figures of speech taken from nature. We read about the waves of the sea, the animal kingdom, the forests, the fish, and other things. James employed these terms as word pictures or object lessons, as Jesus often did.

James' theme is *faith*. One will receive nothing from God without faith. *Without faith it is impossible to please God...* (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is the vehicle by which God's blessings come to believers, and without faith, all that is done is sin. Paul says, *Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin*, (Romans 14:23). If Christians are not acting out of Godly faith, then what is being done is sinful and not pleasing to God.

In chapter one, James shows his readers, and us, what makes our faith grow. Jesus said much could be accomplished even with faith the size of a mustard seed. James puts forth two things that make faith grow: trials and the Word. James wrote, *Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness (patience) have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*, (1:2-4). James' instructions tell believers that trials are inevitable, they can be endured, and that God rewards those who faithfully endure (1:12).

Second, James says it is the Word of God that makes our faith grow. This is expressed in our actions. The Apostle Paul wrote: ***Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God***, (Romans 10:17). Faith comes by the Word, but the work of the Word doesn't stop with budding faith. Discipleship, becoming spiritually mature, is also the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. The only way to know the deep things of God is to study the Word in which He reveals Himself. Believers should encourage each other to grow in their faith as James did:

1. Rejoicing in trials and temptations
2. Know the Word
3. Do the Word (be doers, not hearers only)

Outline

- Greetings from James (1:1)
- Rejoice in trials and temptations (1:2–18)
 - Faith is to be tested (1:2–12)
 - Source of temptation (1:13–18)
- Listening vs. Doing (1:19–27)
- Do not show favoritism (2:1–13)
- Faith that's real has deeds [actions] (2:14–26)
- Taming the Tongue (3:1–12)
- Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:13–18)
- Do not be worldly (ch. 4)
 - Quarreling in the Church (4:1–3)
 - Being spiritually unfaithfulness (4:4)
 - Avoid pride (4:5–10)
 - Do not slander (4:11–12)
 - No boasting (4:13–17)
- Warning to the rich (5:1–6)
- Various Instructions (5:7–20)
 - About patience in suffering (5:7–11)
 - About oaths (5:12)
 - About the prayer of faith (5:13–18)
 - About believers who stray from the truth (5:19–20)