

Book of James

Title:

James, like all the general epistles except Hebrews, is named after its author (verse 1).

Authorship:

The author is identified only as James, and there are four men so named in the New Testament.

Yet the evidence unquestionably favors one candidate.

Two that were insignificant in the early church were James the son of Alphaeus, called “the less” (Mark 3:18; 15:40), and a virtually unknown James (Luke 6:16).

James the son of Zebedee and brother of John, though better known, also lacked prominence in the early church and was martyred at the early date of A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2).

The Epistle of James was probably written by the half-brother of Jesus.

I say half-brother, because Jesus' mother was Mary and His Father was God.

James' mother was Mary and his father was Joseph.

Paul called him the Lord's brother in Galatians 1:19 "But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother."

James, the half-brother of Christ, possessed all the qualities of the author.

First, he was the one James referred to by his name alone (compare Gal. 1:19 with 2:9, 12; Acts 12:2; with 12:17; and see Acts 15:13; 21:18; Jude 1), so was obviously well known to the scattered believers.

Second, the language of this epistle echoes the speech of this James in Acts 15.

Third, as a leader of the Jerusalem church, this James was a prominent figure among the dispersed Jewish Christians.

The Jews regard him as “*the* James”.

As a half-brother of Jesus, James grew up in a carpenter's home in Nazareth (Matt. 13:55), and later moved to Capernaum when Jesus began His public ministry (John 2:12).

Like his brothers, he did not believe in Jesus as Lord until the end of Christ's earthly ministry (John 7:1-5).

But after the resurrection of Jesus, James received a special, post-resurrection appearance of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7), experienced Pentecost (Acts 1:14), and was a leader of the Jerusalem church throughout most of the history of Acts (15:13; 21:18).

Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, records that James was martyred about A.D. 62.

Everything about the Epistle of James suggests that it was one of the first New Testament books that was written:

- (1) Addressed to the 12 scattered tribes, it was written when the church was still primarily Jewish;
- (2) Its many allusions to Christ's teachings, but independence from the Gospels, favor a very early date;
- (3) Its emphasis on the Lord's return (while omitting other doctrines concerning Christ), also implies an early date.
- (4) The simple church structure described in James supports its probable antiquity. For example, bishops and deacons are not mentioned, only elders, who were part of the pre-church, Jewish structure. The Greek word for synagogue is used for the assembling of the church (2:2);
- (5) There is no hint of a Jew-Gentile controversy, so James was probably written before (A.D. 49). A date in the early forties is commonly accepted.

Background – setting:

The recipients of this book were Jewish believers who had been dispersed (1:1), possibly as a result of Stephen's martyrdom (Acts chapter 7; A.D. 31-34), but more likely due to the persecution under Herod Agrippa I (Acts chapter 12; ca. A.D. 44).

The author refers to his audience as "brethren" 15 times (1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19), which was a common epithet among the first century Jews.

Not surprisingly, then, James is Jewish in its content.

For example, the Greek word translated "assembly" (2:2), is the word for "synagogue".

Further, James contains more than 40 allusions to the Old Testament; and more than 20 to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt chapters 5-7).

James, the half-brother of Jesus was not known to Christianity, until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He became the head of the church in Jerusalem, possibly because he was the brother of Jesus.

Paul and James had a different view of Christianity.

Paul looked at it from the mystical view, and James looked at it from the standpoint of the law.

The primary difference was; Paul preached justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and James taught that we will show good works in our daily walk, if we are saved.

In truth, there was no difference at all.

James was just ministering to Jewish Christians, and Paul was ministering to Gentiles.

James would have been trained in the Jewish religion, because his parents were Hebrews.

He would have been perfect to lead the Jews who had accepted Jesus as their Savior.

The letter was actually written to Jewish Christians, which is still in character for this to be the half-brother of Jesus.

The letter is even addressed to the twelve tribes of Israel.

It is, however, useful to all Christians, as well as Jews.

It was written before 62 A.D. which is the year believed to be the year of death for James.

Historical – Theological Themes:

The themes of faith and works surface repeatedly.

And James presents these subjects not as conflicting values, but as complementary.

For James, “faith” may be either saving faith or profession of faith (much like the usage today).

For Paul, faith is faith; for James faith may be genuine or spurious (compare notes at 2:14-26).

Hence, James demands that faith must demonstrate itself as real.

Therefore, the theme of James is not merely faith and works, but faith that works.

James, with its devotion to direct, pungent statements on wise living, is reminiscent of the book of Proverbs.

It has a practical emphasis, stressing not theoretical knowledge, but godly behavior.

James wrote with a passionate desire for his readers to be uncompromisingly obedient to the Word of God.

He used at least 30 references to nature (e.g., “surf of the sea” (1:6); “reptile” (3:7); and “sky poured rain” (5:18); as befits one who spent a great deal of time outdoors.

He complements Paul’s emphasis on justification by faith with his own emphasis on spiritual fruitfulness demonstrating true faith.

Characteristics:

The approach of James is practical rather than theoretical.

It is the Proverbs of the New Testament, and the most Jewish of all New Testament books, containing little that is distinctively Christian.

Even such basic doctrines as redemption through the death of Christ or His resurrection are hereby absent.

It seems like a commentary on the teachings of Jesus, incorporating many ideas and phrases from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. Chapters 5-7).

There are many obvious parallel references to the Gospels.

Even James’ frequent illustrations from nature correspond to Christ’s parabolic teaching.