

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES: *A Living Faith in the Face of Trials*

Authorship: There are four James mentioned in the NT. The author is likely one of the four.¹

- **James father of Judas** (Not Iscariot) (Lk 6:16; Acts 1:13) and **James son of Alphaeus** (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18)
 - No evidence points to either of these little-known men being the author.
- **James son of Zebedee** (brother of John) (Mt 4:21; 17:1; Mk 1:19, 29; Lk 9:28; Acts 1:13; 12:2)
 - James played a prominent role in the Gospels and was part of Jesus' inner circle with Peter and John. The epistle echoes Jesus' teaching, which could be evidence the author spent significant time with Jesus as he toured and taught in Israel.
 - Herod Agrippa I executed James no later than the spring of 44 AD (Acts 12:2). James's martyrdom sparked severe persecution, likely creating the background and occasion for the epistle.
- **James, the half-brother of Jesus, aka. James the Just** (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3; Acts 15:13; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19)
 - He was raised with Jesus but did not initially believe he was the Messiah until after His resurrection (Mk. 3:21; Jn. 7:5)
 - After Pentecost, James rose to prominence in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15; Gal. 1:19). The epistle of James and James' speech in Acts 15 share similar language.² The earliest traditions hold this James to be the epistle's author.
- **Conclusion:** The most likely author of the Epistle of James is James the half brother of Jesus.

Date: If the author is James the Just, then the date of authorship must be before 64AD.³

- The letter is likely written in response to the persecution, during which James of Zebedee was put to death (Acts 12:2; 44AD). This means the letter would not have been written before this time.
- The inclusion of Gentiles in worship (Acts 15; 49AD) and the fall of Jerusalem (70AD) were major issues affecting the practical life of Jewish believers. Their omission in the epistle points to them not occurring yet.
- **Conclusion:** The epistle was likely written no earlier than 44AD and no later than 49AD. A proposed date of 44-46AD seems likely. This makes James the earliest writing in the NT canon.

Audience / Occasion: The epistle was written to Jewish Christians enduring persecution for aligning with Jesus as Messiah.

- The references to "the 12 tribes" (1:1) and synagogue worship (2:2) lead us to conclude the audience was Jewish.
- The persecutions of Saul in 34AD (Acts 7-8) and Herod in 44AD (Acts 12) dispersed these believers from Judea (Acts 8:1) to Antioch (Acts 11:19), and beyond. This left the church struggling with poverty (Jms. 2:1-13) and oppression (Jms. 5:1-6).
- To make matters even more difficult, a world-wide famine spreading during this time (Acts 11:27-30).

Redemptive History:

- The promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, had come to Israel just a few decades prior to this letter.
- Jesus taught the Word of God rightly, was rejected by Israel, died for the forgiveness of sins, rose again, ascended into heaven, and commissioned his apostles to start the church.
- That church, still primarily composed of Jews, now needs instruction on how to live as Christ's people, and Christ is sending that instruction through His apostles. Hence, the letter from James.

¹ Much of the information contained in this summary is from Daniel Wallace. http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1361

² To review these similarities read Dan Wallace article mentioned above

³ According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.9.1) this is the date of James' death.

AN OUTLINE OF JAMES

1:1 – Introduction: Author and Audience

1:2-18 – True Faith is Tested

1:2-8 - Tested Faith

1:9-12 - True Riches

1:13-18 – Trustworthy God

1:19-27 – Truth Must be Obeyed

1:19-21 – Listen to God’s Word

1:22-27 – Live out God’s Word

2:1-13 – True Love Resists Partiality

2:1-7 – Presentation of Partiality

2:8-13 – Condemnation of Partiality

2:14-3:12 – True Faith Has Works

2:14-19 – True Faith Works

2:20-26 – Works Justify Faith

3:1-12 – Tame Your Tongue

3:13-4:17 – True Wisdom Produces Humility

3:13-18 – Heavenly Wisdom

4:1-12 – Harmful Conflict

4:13-17 – Humble Planning

5:1-12 – True Hope in the Lord

5:1-6 – Prosperous Oppressors

5:7-12 – Promised Parousia

5:13-20 – Powerful Prayer

Unique to the Epistle: James has more direct parallels to the teaching of Jesus than any other NT epistle.

Similarities between James and the Sermon on the Mount

- James 1:2 / Mt 5:10-12 – Rejoice in Trials
- James 1:4 / Mt 5:48 – Pursue to perfection
- James 1:5 / Mt 7:7-11 – Ask for Good Gifts
- James 1:20 / Mt 5:22 – Resist anger
- James 1:22 / Mt 7:24 – Be doers of the word
- James 2:10 / Mt 5:19 – Keep the whole law
- James 2:13 / Mt 5:7 – Be Merciful, Receive Mercy
- James 3:18 / Mt 5:9 – Make peace
- James 4:4 / Mt 6:24 – Can’t serve two masters
- James 4:11-12 / Mt 7:1-5 – Don’t judge
- James 5:2 / Mt 6:19 – Don’t trust temporary riches
- James 5:10 / Mt 5:12 – Follow the prophets
- James 5:12 / Mt 5:33-37 – Don’t make oaths
- “Blessed” x5 (1:12, 1:25, 3:9, 3:10, 5:11)

Unique to the Epistle: James uses illustrations throughout his epistle to help communicate his points.

Illustrations Used by James

- 1:6 – Doubting Person / Waves of the Sea
- 1:10-11 – Rich person / Flowers of the Grass
- 1:23-24 – Hearer of the Word / Man in Mirror
- 2:2-3 – Partiality / Rich & Poor Man in Assembly
- 2:15-16 – Dead Faith / Brother lacking necessities
- 2:19 – Insufficient Belief / Demons
- 2:21-25 – Justifying Faith / Abraham and Rahab
- 2:26 – Dead Faith / Spiritless Body
- 3:3-5 – Power of Tongue / Horse, Ship, Spark
- 3:10-12 – Double-Tongued / Spring, Tree, Pond
- 3:18 – Relational righteousness / Sowing, Harvest
- 4:14 – Briefness of Life / Mist
- 5:7, 11 – Patient Waiting / Farmer and Job
- 5:17 – Fervent Prayer / Elijah