

#19. THE LETTER FROM JAMES

1. **James** was written to extend encouragement to Jewish Believers scattered throughout the Empire, many whom were once part of the Jerusalem Assembly. It appears they had fled Jerusalem to avoid persecution (James 1:1; Acts 7, 12) and had settled in various Gentile communities. They had solid theology, but sloppy living was sending a contradictory message into their communities.

2. **Author and date**
 - There has been some dispute over the identity of James.
 - There are four men named James in the New Testament.
 - James the father of Judas (not Iscariot - Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13).
 - James the Lesser, who was the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Acts 1:13).
 - James the son of Zebedee and brother of John (4:21).
 - James, the half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3) and the brother of Jude (Matthew 13:55; Jude 1).
 - The weight of evidence supports James, the brother of Jesus.
 - There is no support for James, the father of Judas. His only connection is that of sharing the same name.
 - There is no early support for James, the son of Alphaeus.
 - James, the brother of John, died as a martyr too early to be the likely author (Acts 12:2).
 - James, the brother of Jesus, had become a strong leader in the Jerusalem Church by the time of the great Council of Acts 15. James had initially doubted the Messiahship of Jesus (John 7:5), but later believed (1 Corinthians 15:7). The strength of his leadership in the Jerusalem congregation is seen in Acts 12:17, 15:13; 21:18 and Galatians 2:12. He was considered by Paul to be one of the true *pillars* of the Jerusalem Church (Galatians 2:9). He was often called *James the Just* by friends and enemies alike because of his personal integrity and holiness. He was martyred in about 62AD.
 - The date of the writing is almost certainly between the years 44-49AD. It may be that

James is the first book written in the New Testament.

3. **James emphasis** is to provide a collection of New Testament lessons helping Believers to fully embrace the community life of Christianity.

4. Key Verse

- James is a collection of wisdom sayings and observations that make it difficult to define a series of key verses. Fifteen Bible students might select fifteen different key verses. That gives you the opportunity to select your own key verse. Here's mine from J.B. Phillips New Testament:

"When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character with the right sort of independence. And if, in the process, any of you does not know how to meet any particular problem he has only to ask God—who gives generously to all men without making them feel foolish or guilty—and he may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him. But he must ask in sincere faith without secret doubts as to whether he really wants God's help or not. The man who trusts God, but with inward reservations, is like a wave of the sea, carried forward by the wind one moment and driven back the next. That sort of man cannot hope to receive anything from God, and the life of a man of divided loyalty will reveal instability at every turn."

5. Key People

- **James, the brother of Jesus** - leader of the Church in Jerusalem.
- **Jewish refugees who were described as The Twelve Tribes** - those Jews living in Gentile villages and cities who fled under the persecution of Herod and the Jews.

6. Key Place

- **Diaspora sites** - the cities throughout the Roman Empire to which many Jews fled under the Jerusalem Persecution decreased in Acts 7 and 12.

7. Key Themes

- **Holy living with integrity** - so much of James' letter is about living Christ-honoring lives that are testimonies to the power of Christ, as well as comfort to Fellow Believers.
- **Wise Words** - this connection goes back to James' Old Testament roots. Just as Proverbs has much to say about wise speech, James addresses the same theme to these early Believers.

8. The Contents of James

- Greetings and Introduction (1:1-18)
- Put your Faith into Practice (1:19-2:26)
- Dealing with Trouble in Church (3:1-4:12)
- Understanding Cultural Differences (4:13-5:11)
- Closing Thoughts on Caring for the Family (5:12-20)
- ***Another way to arrange James is by observing examinations by which a person's faith can be evaluated.***
 - Are you enduring suffering successfully? (1:2-12)
 - Are you overcoming temptation? (1:13-18)
 - Are you growing in respect to Scripture? (1:19-27)
 - Are you showing genuine, impartial love? (2:1-13)
 - Are you producing righteous works? (2:14-26)
 - Are you controlling your speech? (3:1-12)

- Are you asking God for wisdom? (3:13-18)
- Are you resisting the system of the World? (4:1-12)
- Are you trusting God to direct your steps? (4:13-17)
- Are you patiently enduring the times of testing? (5:1-11)
- Are you speaking with integrity? (5:12)
- Are you praying well? (5:13-18)
- Are you serving others? (5:19, 20)

Worth noting about the Letter of James

- James writes as a man accustomed to nature. The following references are a sampling of over 30 references indicating this tendency of James.
 - James 1:6, 10, 11, 17, 18
 - James 3:3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 18
 - James 4:14
 - James 5:2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 17, 18
- James may have been the first piece of literature in the New Testament.

When reading James:

- Bible professors Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart observe: “James is the New Testament counterpart of the Jewish wisdom tradition, now in light of the teachings of Jesus. Although James is sometimes read in contrast to Paul, both James and Paul are, in fact, absolutely together at the crucial point made by James throughout his letter, namely, that the first thing

one does with one's faith is to live by it (cf. Gal. 5:6)." (From *How To Read The Bible Book by Book*; Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart; Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids; 2002, page 401)

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- James is written within the context of the broader community. View James as an etiquette guide for *when you come together*.