

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
Study Guide
Lesson One – Introduction/James 1:1-8

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Who Wrote the Epistle of James?

There are four men named James in the New Testament: 1) The first was James, one of the 12 disciples, the son of Zebedee, and the brother of the apostle John (Mark 1:19, 5:37, 9:2, 10:35, Acts 12:2). James was part of Jesus' "inner circle" along with John and Peter. He was the first disciple who was martyred for his faith. Herod put him to death around A.D. 44. Acts 12:1-3a tells of his death, "Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also." (NASU) Most scholars believe that the letter was written in the mid-40s, probably before the apostolic council mentioned in Acts 15 (A.D. 48-49). There is not sufficient evidence to support this James as being the author.

2) James, the son of Alphaeus was also one of the twelve disciples (Mark 3:18). Very little is known about this James. It is doubtful that he carried enough authority and recognition among the Christian Jews to write such a strong letter.

3) Another James is found in Luke 6:16. He is the father of Judas (not Iscariot) who was also one of the twelve disciples. Judas is referred to as "Judas, son of James" to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ. It is unlikely that the father of one of the disciples would have written this epistle.

4) Finally, we have James, the brother (half-brother, of course) of our Lord. Jesus and James had the same mother and were raised in the same family. James (often referred to as James the Just) became an influential leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem. Early church history generally supported James, the Lord's brother, as the author of the book of James.

What do you learn about James, the Lord's brother, from the following passages?

1) *Before the resurrection*

a) Mark 6:3-4

b) John 7:3-5

2) *After the resurrection*

a) 1 Corinthians 15:7-8

b) Acts 1:14

c) Galatians 2:9-10

Note: *“Hegesippus, who lived immediately after the apostles, gives the most accurate account in the fifth book of his Memoirs. He writes as follows: ‘James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles. He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Saviour to the present day; for there were many that bore the name of James. He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath. He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place; for he wore not woolen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people.’”* (THE CHURCH HISTORY OF EUSEBIUS\Book Two\Chapter 23 - The Martyrdom of James, Who Was Called the Brother of the Lord\section 3\ section 6\from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

James died a martyr. Early church history records that Ananus, the High-Priest, and the Scribes and Pharisees so hated James because of his powerful testimony of Christ that they threw him off of the pinnacle of the temple. When they saw that he was still alive, they beat him with clubs. He was killed around A.D. 62.

Theme of James

The book of James is written by a Jewish Christian to Jewish Christians. While the date it was written is unsure, it was probably written before most (if not all) of Paul's books. While Paul's ministry was to the gentiles, James oversaw the church in Jerusalem and ministered to Jewish believers dispersed outside of Palestine.

- 1) Some have difficulty reconciling the book of James with Paul's writing on faith and works. Look up the following verses. What do they say about faith and works? (Yes, this is tricky!☺)
 - a) Eph 2:8-9
 - b) Rom 3:28
 - c) James 2:17-24

Note: *“With these passages before him Luther said, ‘Many have toiled to reconcile Paul with James but to no purpose, for they are contrary, ‘Faith justifies’; ‘Faith does not justify’; I will pledge my life that no one can reconcile those propositions; and if he succeeds he may call me a fool.’*

*It would be difficult to prove Luther a fool if Paul and James were using these words, faith, works, and justification, in the same sense, or even if each were writing with full consciousness of what the other had written. They both use Abraham for an example, James of justification by works, and Paul of justification by faith. How can that be possible? The faith meant by James is the faith of a dead orthodoxy, an intellectual assent to the dogmas of the church which does not result in any practical righteousness in life, such a faith as the demons have when they believe in the being of God and simply tremble before Him. The faith meant by Paul is intellectual and moral and spiritual, affects the whole man, and leads him into conscious and vital union and communion with God. It is not the faith of demons; it is the faith that redeems. Again, the works meant by Paul are the works of a dead legalism, the works done under a sense of compulsion or from a feeling of duty, the works done in obedience to a law which is a taskmaster, the works of a slave and not of a son. These dead works, he declares, can never give life. The works meant by James are the works of a believer, the fruit of the faith and love born in every believer's heart and manifest in every believer's life. **Paul is looking at the root; James is looking at the fruit. Paul is talking about the beginning of the Christian life; James is talking about its continuance and consummation.**” [emphasis mine] (From International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)*

- 2) Look at the Grace and Legalism Chart. Read Galatians 5:16-24.
 - a) How do we not carry out the lusts (or desires) of the flesh?
 - b) Re-read verse 18. After looking at the chart, explain in your own words what it means to be “led by the Spirit” versus being “under the Law.”
 - c) What does it mean that we have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (verse 24)?

Note: It is very important as we begin the Epistle of James that we view it as our response to Christ’s love rather than a distorted view of “I need to be better.” James focuses on sanctification and sanctification can only happen when we know we are 100% forgiven. If you are a true Christian, then when God looks at you He sees you as righteous as His Son Jesus Christ because of the cross!

James 1:1-8

- 1) In James 1:1, how does James describe himself?
 - a) Assuming that this was probably written by a man who grew up with Jesus and may have played with Him as a boy, why do you think he called himself a bond-servant?
 - b) To whom was this letter written?
 - i) The word dispersed means “scattered.” Read Acts 8:1 and Acts 11:19. Why were the believers scattered? What areas are mentioned in these passages?

Note: The Greek word for dispersed is “diaspora” and referred back to when Assyria and Babylon took the twelve tribes of Israel captive and dispersed them to other lands. Babylon utterly destroyed Jerusalem. During the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews were allowed to go back to Israel but many did not return. The “diaspora” was a monumental event in Jewish history. James’ address of this letter to the “twelve tribes in the diaspora” would have had significant meaning to the Jews, reminding them of their past.

- 2) In James 1:2-4, why should we consider it all joy when we face trials?
 - a) The book of James draws heavily on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Read John 15:18-19 and Matthew 5:11-12. Why are Christians persecuted and what should be our response?

- b) Look up Romans 5:3-5. List the “steps” to finding hope. (Hope in the Bible is an absolute certainty).
- i) Why does hope not disappoint?
- c) In James 1:3-4, having endurance (steadfastness) and being perfect (mature) and complete in our faith means that we trust in God’s love so much that we act upon it. Do you trust in the love of God in the midst of whatever trial you face today? How are you acting on it?
- 3) Read James 1:5-8. When we are in the middle of a trial, emotions often take over which leave us anxious and confused. In those times, foolish decisions can be easily made! From verse 5, what are we to do when we are confused? Also look at Hebrews 4:15-16.
- a) The up and down emotions of a trial cause us to have faith one moment and hopelessly be in tears the next. From verse 6, what is it that makes us “like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind?”
- b) Look at Peter’s example of being tossed in the sea in Matthew 14:26-33. What emotion caused him to start to sink?
- i) Jesus asked him why he doubted. Fear leads to doubt and is the opposite of faith. An acronym for FEAR is False Evidence Appearing Real. When we have “little faith” we are usually worried and fearful over things that will probably not ever happen. Evaluate the last time you were anxious. What fear preceded your doubt in God?
- c) When we doubt God we really don’t expect Him to do anything. We throw up “help me, help me” prayers but we don’t really wait for an answer. That type of prayer is not a prayer of faith. Going back to James 1:5, how does God give?

Note: If you face a trial this week evaluate your fear, confess your fear to the Lord, surrender the matter to Him, and trust in His love. Hebrews 11:1 - Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.