

CHAPTER 1

JAMES

Introduction to James

Authorship of James

Identified in 1:1 as “James, the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”

Greek Ἰάκωβος *Iakobos*, “Jacob” (a Hebrew name)

Which James?

- James son of Zebedee

One of three main apostles, brother of John (Matt 4:21); not the author, because killed very early in NT history (A.D. 44) by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2)

- James the Less, son of Alphaeus

One of the apostles (Matt 10:3); but author does not claim to be an apostle (Jas 1:1); not suggested

- James father of Apostle Judas, not Iscariot

Mentioned in Luke 6:16; cf. Acts 1:13; probably not author: obscure, never suggested

- James the brother of Jesus

Mentioned in Matt 13:55 = Mark 6:3; Gal 1:19; very prominent in early church (Acts 12:17; 15:13); mentioned as the author from Origen on; the universal choice (for further internal confirmation, cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the NT*, pp. 387-89)

Short biography of James

- One of four brothers of Jesus (Matt 13:55 = Mark 6:3; James is listed first in both lists)
- Tried, along with mother and brothers, to “rescue” Jesus (Mark 3:21, 31)
- At first an unbeliever (John 7:5)
- Saw Jesus after his resurrection (1 Cor 15:7)
- With the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 1:14)
- Was visited by Paul (Gal 1:18-19, Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem after is conversion)
- Became leader of the Christians in Jerusalem after A.D. 44 (Acts 12:17)
- Presided over the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 49 (Acts 15:13, 19; probably Gal 2:9)
- Continued as leader in the church (Gal 2:12; Jude 1)
- Received Paul’s Jerusalem offering, and encouraged Paul to be loyal to Jewish customs (Acts 21:17-25)
- Was killed by hostile Sanhedrin by stoning, after death of procurator Festus, before arrival of procurator Albinus, A.D. 62/63 (Josephus *Ant.* 20:9:1)
 - And now Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus. Now the report goes that this eldest Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and who had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests. But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation

against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrin without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.

- Other traditions of James' martyrdom are found in Hegesippus (A.D. 110-180; *History of the Church* 2:23:4-18), and Eusebius quoting Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215; *Hist eccl* 2:1:3-4). They have varying details, including being thrown down from the top of the temple, being stoned, and being killed by a blow to the head from a fuller's club, or combinations of these things.

Date of James

Similarities or contrasts between James and other NT books (as the Synoptics, 1 Peter, Galatians) need not imply a later date for James. There was a common fund of doctrines and sayings which would account for these phenomena.

Assuming James the brother of Jesus to be the author, the book must have been written before his death in A.D. 62. An early date is indicated also by the following:

- 1) The distinctively Jewish Christian tone of the letter
- 2) The Christians' use of the synagogue (2:2; Greek συναγωγή)
- 3) The great difference between the poor and rich Christians in or around Jerusalem

The persecution in Jerusalem scattered the Christians from the city (Acts 8:1-2; Peter in Acts 12:17)

- 4) Lack of verbal agreement between statements in James and similar ones in the Synoptic Gospels

It seems likely that the tone, doctrine, and emphases of James place it in the time before the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49.

Suggested date: ca. A.D. 45-48

Recipients and purpose

1:1, To dispersed twelve tribes, yet also definitely Christian

Therefore, to Hebrew Christians who were dispersed from Jerusalem

Cf. the more immediate dispersion from Jerusalem in Acts 8:1, “And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered (διασπείρω *diaspeiro*) throughout Judea and Samaria”; Acts 11:19, “Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews”; and Acts 12:1-2, 17, “It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. . . . Peter . . . described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. ‘Tell James and the brothers about this,’ he said, and then he left for another place.”

Cf. also the greeting in 1 Peter, to the elect among the more traditional Jewish dispersion

As the a primary leader of the church in Jerusalem, James would have also exercised his responsibility to exhort the Jewish Christians living elsewhere, especially to his own scattered congregation in the early days of the church. Of course, Gentile believers would be included in the contents of the letter.

James was written as a pastoral letter, authoritatively setting forth the expected way of life for the Christians. James was aware that many Christians needed a well-rounded guide to practical life, based on biblical principles and the teachings of Jesus.

Points of interest in James

- James has been called the “most Jewish” NT book. The name of Jesus is mentioned only twice (1:1; 2:1).
- As a pastoral letter, James is full of imperatives: over 50 imperative verbs in only 108 verses (Adamson, *NICNT*, p. 19).
- James contains many allusions to the teachings of Jesus, which were later recorded in the gospels. Some examples:

James

Gospels

Saying

1:2	Matt 5:11	Joy in persecution
2:5	Matt 5:3	Poor in spirit
3:12	Matt 7:16	Figs from thistles
4:6	Matt 18:4	Humble to great
5:1	Luke 6:24	Woe to rich
5:12	Matt 5:34-37	Yes = yes; no = no

[See additional examples in Donald Guthrie, *NT Introduction*, p. 743.]

- James abounds with figures from nature, and with proverb-like sayings:

Nature figures

1:6, Wave of the sea, tossed by the wind

1:10-11, Flower drying out from the sun

3:3, Bits in horses mouths

3:5, Forest fires

3:7, Animals tamed by man

3:11, Spring water

3:12, Fig trees and grape vines

5:4, Workers mow the fields

5:7, Farmer waits for rain for his crops

Proverb-like sayings

1:8, Double-minded, unstable man

1:20, Man's anger does not bring righteous life

3:1, Teachers judged more strictly
3:4, Ships steered by small rudder
4:4, Friendship with world is hatred toward God
4:7, Resist devil and he will flee
4:15, If it is the Lord's will
5:11a, The patience of Job
5:11b, The Lord is full of compassion and mercy

Commentaries

John Calvin

F. J. A. Hort (on James 1 - 4:7; 1909)

J. B. Mayor (3rd ed., 1910)

J. H. Ropes (*ICC*, 1916)

James Adamson (*NICNT*, 1976)

Peter Davids (*NIGTC*, 1982)

Douglas J. Moo (*TNTC*, 1985)

Ralph P. Martin (*WBC*, 1988)

James B. Adamson, *James, The Man and His Message* (1989)

Douglas J. Moo (*Pillar NT Commentary*, 2000)

Daniel M. Doriani (*Reformed Expository Commentary*, 2007)

Outline of James

It is difficult to outline the book of James. Most published outlines contain many different points, without a clear pattern or connection (e.g., Mayor, pp. cxxviii-cxxxi; Guthrie, pp. 767-70; Adamson, pp. 44-45; Adamson would maintain that there is a clear connection). Following is the outline supplied in the NIV Study Bible, which will suffice for our purposes.

1. Greetings, 1:1

Title James uses for himself

Recipients: dispersed members of the 12 tribes, James' "congregation in exile"

2. Trials and temptations, 1:2-18

a. The testing of faith, 1:2-12

v. 2, joy *χαράν charan*; similar to v. 1 "greetings," *χαίρειν chairien*

"Trials" is the theme of this section.

πειρασμός peirasmos, trial, temptation, testing

Cf. Job 5:7, Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

vv. 2-4, Importance of trials in development of perseverance and wisdom; cf. Heb 5:14, exercise brings discernment (testing of faith – *δοκίμιον dokimion*)

vv. 5-8, Wisdom necessary to withstand trials (cf. book of Proverbs)

vv. 9-11, Trials to come to the rich, harder to overcome; cf. words to the rich who are proud in 5:1-6

v. 12, Reward for persevering under trial

πειρασμός peirasmos, trial, temptation, testing; same word as in v. 2

Moral temptation vs. testing; both

Contra vv. 13-15, verb *πειράζω peirazo* (there meaning "tempt to sin")

"Crown of life" – a genitive of apposition (crown = life)

b. The source of temptation, 1:13-18

v. 13, God and temptation (cf. Gen 22, etc.)

vv. 14-15, Root of temptation and sin

Own evil desire

Dragged away & enticed (fishing term, “lure”)

Sin

Sin becomes full-grown

Death

vv. 16-18, The good gifts of God

God’s unchangeableness (as opposed to idols, pagan gods)

God’s sovereignty

Christians the “first-fruits” of God’s creative and redemptive power

3. *Listening and doing, 1:19-27*

vv. 19-21, Incompatibility of personal anger, and receiving God’s Word

Why subject of anger brought up?

Stress brings anger

Perhaps because of class struggles in church (vv. 9-10)

vv. 22-25, True listening to the Word must result in obedience

Illustration of mirror

v. 25, The law gives freedom

True Christian liberty

vv. 26-27, Three areas of obedience to the Word

(1) Control of the tongue (cf. 3:2-12)

(2) Care for the orphans and widows

“Pure and faultless religion” – θρησκός *threskos* (adj.), θρησκεία *threskeia* (noun)

(3) Being unpolluted by the world

4. Favoritism forbidden, 2:1-13

vv. 1-4, Unkindly treatment of the poor in the synagogue

v. 1, Jesus “the Lord of glory”

Cf. book by B. B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory*
(<https://archive.org/details/lordofglorystud00warf/page/n7>)

“Synagogue,” shows early time; not break yet

v. 4, Judges with evil thoughts (cf. Ps 82, unjust judges)

vv. 5-7, Real character of the rich and the poor

Poor:

Rich in faith, love God

Inherit the promises

Rich:

Exploit the Christians

Drag you into court

Slandering the name of Christ

This section depicts a time when the Jewish Christians were being persecuted by the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem. The leaders of the opposition often were the chief

priests and their followers, the richest Jews in Palestine at the time. The Jerusalem church often is described as poor (Acts 11:28-29; Gal 2:10).

vv. 8-11, Favoritism forbidden by the law

v. 8, The royal law: love neighbor as yourself

Lev 19:18; quoted by Jesus (Matt 22:38, etc.)

Lev 19:18, Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

“Really keep,” true interpretation of the law

v. 10, The law a unity; one point breaks all

v. 11, Ten commandments stand together

vv. 12-13, Favoritism judged at the final judgment

Those who have been merciful will find mercy (Matt 5:7)

5. Faith and deeds, 2:14-26

[Cf. John A. Battle, “‘Justified by Faith’ . . . ‘Justified by Works’; Abraham’s Justification, As Viewed by Paul and by James,” *WRS Journal* 13:1 (February 2006) 10-21.]

vv. 14-20, False faith useless

“Faith” = false faith; hypocritical, superficial claim to faith

As demons have, v. 19

v. 14, Question expects a negative answer (μή *me* + indicative)

“The faith” refers to the same “faith” mentioned at the beginning of the verse; NIV translates “such faith,” ESV “that faith”

False faith shown by lack of works, vv. 15-17

vv. 15-16, Same sin as emphasized elsewhere in James (rich, not help poor)

—1:10; 2:6-7; 5:1-6

v. 17, Dead faith (non-saving faith)

Beza & other Reformers: “Man is saved by faith alone, but faith that saves is never alone.”

WCF 9:2, “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.”

v. 18, Difficult to fit short quotation in v. 18a into context

Some suggest an objector in 18a (e.g., NIV, NKJV, ESV have quotes for v. 18a; NASB has all of v. 18 in quotes); but difficult, since he agrees with James (views #1, 2 below).

(1) Some (e.g., Moo) take the statement to be by an objector who holds that either faith or works is acceptable, not necessarily both. A difficulty is that this objector would be placing James on the side of faith without works, the opposite position from what he actually teaches.

(2) Some try to extend or change the quotation of the objector (as Z. Hodges, *Dead Faith, What Is It?*, pp. 16-17; he supports an inferior textual variant “by” instead of “without” in v. 18, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 27), but that does not solve the problem, as sooner or later in the passage James must again be the speaker (Hodges’s interpretation seems very forced).

(3) Perhaps the best solution is that provided by J. B. Mayor, who translates ἀλλ’ἔρεϊ τις *all’erei tis* (lit. “but will say someone”) as “Nay it may be said,” or “Someone might even say” (*alla* would have the force of the Latin *immo*, a strengthening force; cf. Rom 3:31, where ἀλλά means “indeed”; Dana and Mantey say “in fact,” emphatic, pp. 240-241; cf. KJV, “yea”). He has the quotation agreeing with James, who modestly does not himself claim to be the one spoken of (Mayor, pp. 99-100; cf. NASB).

This is a similar use of ἀλλά to that found in Rom 3:31, “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather (or ‘Indeed,’ ἀλλά) we uphold the law.”

v. 19, The theoretical, partial faith of the demons

Cf. Matt 8:29; Acts 16:17-18

v. 20, Useless faith, or dead faith

ἀργός *argos*, useless (v. 20; UBS {B})

νεκρός *nekros*, dead (v. 17)

κενός *kenos*, empty (v. 20, “O vain man”)

But “dead” is used elsewhere (vv. 17, 26)

vv. 21-24, Example of Abraham

v. 21, “Justified by works,” NIV “considered righteous for what he did”

Offered Isaac, Gen 22

οὐ + indicative = question expecting positive answer

Caused by faith in God’s promise, therefore in the resurrection, Heb 11:17-19 (cf. Gen 22:5)

Cf. justified by faith, not works (Gal 2:16; 3:6-9; Rom 4:2-5, 9, 13)

v. 22, Close union of works with true faith in Abraham

This shows that Abraham’s works were not only evidence of his faith, but that they were the very expression of his faith. Faith is exercised in obedience (impf. tense).

v. 23, Scripture proof of Abraham’s way of salvation

Verse taken from earlier in life, Gen 15:6

Abraham God’s friend, 2 Chr 20:7; Isa 41:8

v. 24, Works required for true faith

“Faith alone” means “faith which is alone,” that is, not true justifying faith

v. 25, Example of Rahab

—Josh 2 (esp. vv. 9-11)

Heb 11:31 – example of faith

Considered righteous in God’s eyes = justified

v. 26, Illustration of dead body

This illustration does not prove that James is talking of a faith that was originally truly alive (theory of Zane C. Hodges).

This verse also is a good text to support the doctrine of dichotomy—humans consist of two major parts, body and soul/spirit.

6. *Taming the tongue, 3:1-12*

v. 1, Double responsibility of teachers

v. 2a, Universal sin

v. 2b, The best mark of a mature Christian: control of the tongue

vv. 3-8, Illustrations of tongue’s power

v. 3, Bits in horses mouths

v. 4, Small rudders on ships

vv. 5-6, Small fires in forests (see variant translations of v. 6 in Moo, pp. 124-25)

vv. 7-8, More untamable than wild animals

vv. 9-12, Improper use of the tongue

vv. 9-10, Speaking with two types of speech

v. 9, Note: man in likeness of God

vv. 11-12, Illustrations

One spring: fresh and salt water

Olives from fig trees

Figs from grapevine

Fresh water from salt spring

7. Two kinds of wisdom, 3:13-18

False wisdom:

v. 14, Envy and selfish ambition

v. 15, Source from the devil

v. 16, Leads to disorder and every foul practice

ἀκαταστασία *akatastasia* (also 1:8; 3:8), disorder, insurrection (as in Luke 21:9),
mob violence (as in 2 Cor 6:5)

Associated with demagoguery

True wisdom:

v. 13, Shown by good life and humility

vv. 17-18, Leads to peace; produces righteous deeds

8. Warning against worldliness, ch. 4

a. Quarrelsomeness, 4:1-3

For translation differences of v. 2 between RSV and NIV, see Moo p. 140

RSV—2 sentences; violent result of envy and covetousness (Moo prefers, “frustrated desire leads to violence”)

“You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war.” (also NASB, NLT, NRSV, ESV)

NIV—3 sentences; list of sins: envy, covetousness, violence

“You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.” (also KJV, ASV, NKJV)

Note progression:

- Selfish desires
- Fights and quarrels
- Coveting and killing

The “killing” here (φονεύω *phoneuo*, “murder”) probably is spiritual or mental in nature.

- Refusal of God to hear prayers

b. Pride, 4:4-10

v. 4, Spiritual unfaithfulness; love of the world lead to quarrels; spiritual adultery: choosing the world over God

Cf. Jesus, cannot be friend of God and friend of Money (Matt 6:19-24)

v. 5, Difficult verse to translate:

Textual variant ὃ *ho* can be either nominative (“who”) or accusative (“whom”):

κατώκισεν *katokisen*, from κατοικίζω *katoikizo*, put or place (UBS {B}),
“whom he put in us”

κατώκησεν *katokesen*, from κατοικέω *katoikeo*, live or live in, “who lives in us”

Assuming the UBS reading, also a variety of translations are possible:

- (1) The spirit (of man) lusts to envy
- (2) The (Holy) Spirit lusts to envy
- (3) (God) lusts to envy for the spirit (of man); i.e., God is jealous for our spirit

—The first may seem to fit the context best if the terms “lust, envy” do not seem appropriate for God; otherwise #3 fits well

v. 6, More grace given

Especially to the humble

Quote from Prov 3:34

v. 7, Opposite attitudes:

God—submit

Devil—resist (he will flee)

vv. 8-10, Signs of true repentance and humility

c. Slander, 4:11-12

Slander of neighbor results in judging the law, which forbids slander

Lev 19:16, Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD.

d. Boasting, 4:13-17

Importance of recognizing “if it is the Lord’s will”

Reasons:

We are ignorant of the future

Our life is short and uncertain

Expressions of certainty are boastful

v. 17, Puts emphasis on present actions: do now what you know is right

9. Warning to rich oppressors, 5:1-6

Cf. 1:9-11 (pride in rich & poor); 2:1-13 (favoritism to rich)

vv. 1-3, The judgment coming on the rich oppressors

They will have misery

Wealth will rot

Moths, corrosion

Their ill-gotten wealth will testify against them in the judgment

“The whole purpose of James’s words is to bring out the great gulf in the society of that day and place, and the general callous failure of the rich to do anything serious for the poor: in the Judgment their wealth will not be an asset but *evidence against* them” (Adamson, p. 185); Moo: laying up treasure in the last days, futile, since it will be taken away soon

vv. 4-6, Reasons for this coming judgment

Failure to pay workers their just wages

Lev 19:13, Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.

Unpaid wages (still in rich man’s possession) cry out

Workers themselves cry out

Deut 24:14-15, Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

Life of luxury and self-indulgence

For good material, see Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 8-9, 87-99

Murder by false and corrupt justice

The righteous poor unable to resist

10. Miscellaneous exhortations, 5:7-20

a. Concerning patience in suffering, 5:7-11

Moo: cf. this section with Ps 37

Examples of patience:

v. 7, The farmer waiting for rain

v. 10, The prophets suffering

v. 11, “Those who have persevered” (perhaps earlier Christians)

v. 11, Job waiting for vindication from God

Object of patience, the coming of the Lord, vv. 7, 9

Qualities required:

Patience, vv. 7, 8

Hearts stand firm, v. 8

No grumbling or hostility, v. 9

ESV: “patience” – μακροθυμία *makrothumia* (vv. 7, 8, 10)
“steadfastness” – ὑπομονή *hupomone* (v. 11)

Encouragement to patience: Lord is compassionate and merciful, v. 11

b. Concerning oaths, 5:12

Repetition of teaching of Jesus (Matt 5:34-37)

c. Concerning the prayer of faith, 5:13-18

“Prayer” mentioned in every verse, vv. 13-18

Required prayers:

Prayer in trouble, v. 13

Praise in happiness, v. 13

Prayer for the sick, vv. 14-16

Elders, office of elder, included the apostles (1 Pet 5:1), had miraculous gifts (Acts 5:12-16)

“Church,” early organization, cf. Acts 5:11

Anointing with oil for sickness (ἀλείφω ἐλαίω *aleipho elaiō*)

In NT here and Mark 6:13

See H. Schlier in *TDNT* 1:230-32; anointing in the NT is viewed as either medicinal (Luke 10:34, Good Samaritan), or as an accompaniment to prayer for the sick (as in Mark 6:13 and here)

“Prayer of faith,” the prayer of the elders

Exercising the gift of healing (1 Cor 12:9)

Requirement of confession of sin, v. 16

Healing both physical and spiritual

This passage is the portion used by the Roman Catholic Church to support its sacrament of extreme unction (now called anointing of the sick). The doctrine was officially sanctioned by the pope in the Council of Florence in 1439 (Schlier, p. 232).

Example of prayer, Elijah, vv. 17-18

Example of righteous man, v. 16b

Elijah of similar passions as we, v. 17a

Elijah’s prayers concerning the rain, vv. 17b-18

1 Kgs 17:1 (does not mention prayer for no rain)

1 Kgs 17:1, Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

For discussion of 3½ years, see Adamson, pp. 200-02; the OT mentions “next few years,” “in the third year” (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:1); Jesus said “three and a half years” (Luke 4:25). Adamson suggests that the number 3½, as half of 7, could be an approximate number, like “half a dozen.”

1 Kgs 18:41-46 (does not specifically mention prayer for rain, but does mention posture of prayer)

This passage shows us that the prophets prayed that God would fulfill the threats or promises that he revealed through them.

d. Concerning those who wander from the truth, 5:19-20

Warning against wandering away

Encouragement for other Christians to seek and restore the wanderer