

I. Introduction

A. Who wrote the book of James?

1. There are five different men in the New Testament identified as James but only two would have possessed the authority to be the author of this epistle.
 - a. James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John, was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. He was the first apostle to be martyred and was executed by Herod Agrippa around 44 AD. The epistle of James was written after the death of Herod Agrippa, who also died in 44 AD. So, this James was probably not the author of the epistle. I don't believe this epistle was written until after the Jerusalem council in 48 AD.
 - b. James, the half-brother of Jesus, is the author of this epistle.
 - 1) His assumed name alone would carry the authority to teach and to lead. James was the leader of the Messianic mother church in Jerusalem, which he led for about 20 years as it went through very challenging times.
 - 2) This epistle is the legacy of James' wisdom.
 - 3) There are three works that quote from the epistle lending weight to the argument for James' authorship:
 - a) First Epistle of Clement (96 AD)
 - b) Shepherd of Hermas (140 AD)
 - c) Origen's Commentary on Romans (254 AD). Origen identified the author of the epistle as "James the brother of the Lord."
 - c. There are objections to James' authorship:
 - 1) In the epistle, there is no mention of the author's relation to Jesus. However, Jude never mentions that he is a brother of Jesus in his epistle. Also, James chose to and wanted to identify himself as a bondservant (slave) of Jesus Christ, and not in any way His equal.
 - 2) The author seems to be aware of Hellenistic culture and James was a Jew from Palestine. But he was also leader of the new church in Jerusalem and would have received information from both believers scattered in Gentile lands and from those conducting missionary activity among the Gentiles which would give him familiarity with that culture. And I believe it was due to information he received at the Jerusalem council that he was motivated to write his epistle.
 - 3) There are inconsistencies with the theology attributed to James in Acts 21:17-25. However, this passage is not an explanation of James' theology, but an effort to maintain unity within the Jewish community. The Jerusalem leadership had no problem with Paul's missionary success among the Gentiles but wanted him to do something that would let the Jewish community in Jerusalem see that Paul was not telling Jews to forget their traditions.
2. Who was James?
 - a. Matthew 13:55 identifies James as a son of Mary and one of Jesus' half-brothers
 - b. John 7:5 explains that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him when they were young

- c. Galatians 2:9 states that James is a pillar of the church
 - d. 1 Corinthians 15:7 reveals that Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection
 - e. In Acts 15 James is a spokesman for the apostolic council
 - f. There are two main influences on James' thought and teaching:
 - 1) The teaching of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount
 - b. The wisdom literature, especially the book of Proverbs, chapters 1 through 9 (the poems)
 - g. James was executed by stoning in 62 AD by order of the High Priest Ananus and there are references to this:
 - 1) Josephus: Antiquities book 20, chapter 9, section 1
 - 2) Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History book 2, chapter 23
3. Who was the original audience?
- a. "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (James 1:1)
 - b. "Believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (James 2:1)
 - c. This is a letter to fellow Hebrews who are followers of Jesus Christ (Messianic Jews) and were forced to leave Jerusalem due to persecution
 - d. These fellow believers have scattered among the nations and are no longer living in Palestine
 - e. James does not address specific problems occurring in one local church but is summarizing wisdom applicable to all followers of Jesus Christ.
 - f. James wrote to challenge the followers of Jesus in how they are living among the various pagan nations. His challenge is to live wisely.
4. What was the occasion of the epistle?
- a. Location: James lived in Jerusalem and wrote the epistle from there
 - b. Date:
 - 1) Earliest date would be 44 AD when James took on the leadership role in the church
 - 2) Latest date would be 62 AD when he was executed by stoning
 - 3) I believe James wrote his epistle after the Jerusalem Council in 48 AD, perhaps between 48 AD and 50 AD. At the council, he received information regarding the acceptance of the gospel of Christ among Gentiles and how it was creating controversy among Jewish believers. There were Jews going out to the communities where Messianic Jews lived telling them that they still needed to follow the Mosaic Law and questioning whether the new Gentile believers needed to follow the Law as well. After debate, James and the leaders of the Messianic church decided that the Gentiles did not need to follow the Mosaic Law to be saved. I believe James also became concerned over what he was hearing about the believing Jewish community, that there were arguments and disagreements causing disunity. I believe he took that opportunity to send his epistle out to the Jewish believers who had scattered from Jerusalem to instruct them on proper living and behavior as followers of Christ and to promote unity among them.
 - 4) The use of the Greek *synagogue* in 2:2 when referring to place of meeting instead of *ekklesia* supports an earlier date when the

believers were meeting there before they began meeting in homes.

The scattered believers would not be meeting in homes yet.

5. What was the purpose of the epistle?
 - a. James 1:22-24 "But prove yourselves doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."
 - b. James 2:17 "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."
 - c. James 1:2-4 "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
 - d. James 1:5 "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."
 - e. James wrote the epistle to instruct Jewish believers on proper behavior as followers of Christ and to promote unity among the scattered believers.

II. II. Structure of the Epistle

- A. The epistle has been referred to as the wisdom literature of the New Testament. Early Jewish wisdom literature had an influence on James and what he wrote in his epistle.
- B. The epistle instructs and teaches thematically which often seems unstructured and chaotic. In this it resembles wisdom literature. The epistle does not develop one idea in a linear way but offers wisdom through short speeches, one-liners and anecdotes
- C. Chapter one serves as the introduction and sums up the main ideas and key words used throughout the epistle.
 1. Verse 1: Being a bondservant of Christ and humility
 2. Verses 2-4: Endurance under testing and becoming complete
 - a. 1) James repeats the word "perfect" 7 times throughout the epistle
 - b. 2) Perfection means wholeness and integrity vs. being fractured and inconsistent
 3. Verses 5-8: Wisdom
 4. Verses 9-11: Poverty vs Wealth
 5. Verses 12-18: Endurance under testing and proper attitude
 6. Verses 19-25: Being a doer of the Word and not merely a hearer
 7. Verses 26-27: True religion
- D. 4. The main body of the book contains six main topics that address James' view of what authentic Christianity, or what a follower of Jesus, should look like
 1. a. Bond-servant
 - a. James 1:1
 - b. James 4:6-10
 - c. James 4:13-17
 2. b. Endurance
 - a. James 1:2-4
 - b. James 1:12-18
 - c. James 5:7-12
 - d. James 5:13-18
 - e. James 5:19-20

3. c. Wisdom
 - a. James 1:5-8
 - b. James 3:13-18
 - c. James 5:19-20
4. d. Poverty vs Wealth and Favoritism
 - a. James 1:9-11
 - b. James 2:1-4
 - c. James 5:1-6
5. e. Doer vs Hearer of the Word and Faith vs Works
 - a. James 1:19-25
 - b. James 2:14-17
 - c. James 2:18-26
6. f. True Religion and Controlling the Tongue
 - a. James 1:26-27
 - b. James 3:1-5a
 - c. James 3:5b-12
 - d. James 4:1-10
 - e. James 4:11-12