

James - Introduction

A. Author (READ James 1:1a)

1. There are four men with the name James mentioned in the NT
 - a. James, son of Zebedee, brother of John (Matt 4:21)
 - b. James, son of Alphaeus, also called James the Less (Matthew 10:13)
 - c. James, father of Judas (not Iscariot; Luke 6:16)
 - d. James, the half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3)
2. The consensus throughout Church history is that the author is Jesus' half-brother James – both Josephus (1st century) and Eusebius (3rd century) attribute the letter to this James
3. What do we know about James?
 - a. James was the oldest of Jesus' four half-brothers along with Joseph, Simon and Judas (Matthew 13:55)
 - b. Prior to Jesus's death, he refused to believe Jesus and even mocked him along with his brothers (READ John 7:1-5; Mark 3:20-21)
 - c. However, later he became not only a believer but one of the leaders of the early Church:
 - 1) In 1 Corinthians 15:6, Paul lists James as one of the people to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection (even before the apostles)—might this have been when he became a believer?
 - 2) He was with the disciples in the upper room (Acts 1:14)
 - 3) After Peter was miraculously led out of prison by an angel, he told the believers at Jerusalem to report what happened to James (Acts 12:17)
 - 4) When Paul sought advice from the Apostles and church leaders in Jerusalem regarding what to expect of gentile believers, James is the one who issued the judgment and instructions (Acts 15:13-21)
 - 5) A few years later, Paul sought out James and the elders at Jerusalem to report to them what God was doing among the gentiles (Acts 21:15-18)
 - 6) We get further evidence of James' leadership role in the early Church from Paul's letters:

- a) In Galatians 1:19, he refers to James as one of the apostles at Jerusalem
- b) In Galatians 2:9, he referred to James, along with Peter and John, as being "pillars" of the church

- d. According to history he earned the nick name James the Just due to his devotion to righteousness
- e. He was martyred in AD 62:
 - 1) According to multiple 1st, 2nd, and 3rd century historians, James was summoned by the Pharisees at the request of the high priest, Ananus, accused of breaking the Jewish law, taken to the pinnacle of the temple, and told to renounce his faith in Jesus
 - 2) When he refused, they pushed him off the pinnacle, but he miraculously survived and began to pray, asking God to forgive them and repeating Jesus' words, "forgive them because they know not what they do."
 - 3) They then proceeded to stone him to death, with one historian saying that a man who did laundry for a living used a club normally used to beat clothes to deliver the final blow to James's head
4. So, if the author is James the Lord's brother why not simply say, "James, brother of Jesus Christ"?
 - a. It was likely a sign of humility
 - b. He referred to himself as a "**bondservant**" of both God and Jesus
 - c. He even referred to Jesus as "**Lord**"

B. Recipients (READ 1:1b)

1. One thing we know about the recipients is that they were Jews because he refers to them as "**the twelve tribes**" (Matthew 19:28; Acts 26:7, Revelation 7:4)
2. We also know they were located outside Israel because he wrote they were "**dispersed abroad**":
 - a) The more literal rendering is "**those who are in the diaspora**" which referred to the area outside of Israel

- b) Peter wrote to the same group and listed the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1; John 7:35)
 - c) There were a lot of Jews living outside of Jerusalem because many were carried away by the Assyrians and Babylonians and never returned
 - d) However, James's readers may have also been scattered due to the Christian persecution recorded in Acts 9 (Saul) and Acts 12 (Herod)
3. We know James considered them Christians:
 - a. He refers to them as "**brethren**" in v. 2, but that was a common term used among Jews (i.e. when Peter addressed the Jews at Pentecost in Acts 2)
 - b. Better evidence is found in 2:1 when he refers to their faith in Jesus (READ)
 - c. He also reminds them to be patient for the second coming of Jesus (READ 5:7-8)
 4. One final thing we know about the recipients is that they were struggling with trials, probably of their own making:
 - a. There were divisions, especially between the rich and the poor
 - b. There was envy and greed, infighting, quarrels and conflicts, and even a possible murder
 - c. We see this in the list of topics James addresses

C. Topics

1. Trials and temptations (1:2-18)
 1. Becoming doers of the word (1:19-25)
 2. Orphans and widows (1:26-27)
 3. Partiality (2:1-13)
 4. Faith vs. works (2:14-26)
 5. Teachers and the abuse of the tongue (3:1-12)
 6. Wisdom (3:13-18)
 7. Quarrels and conflicts (4:1-12)
 8. Greed and Riches (4:13-5:6)
 9. Patience (5:7-12)
 10. Suffering and sickness (5:13-20)

D. Outline

1. Most often, commentaries and study bibles suggest that there's not much structure to the letter, and it's just a hodge podge of topic like the book of Proverbs
2. However, nothing could be further from the truth because this letter is highly structured and designed to address the very issues his readers faced:
 - a) He greets his readers his readers (1:1)
 - b) He then teaches them about the nature of trials and temptations and how to handle them (1:2-18)—this is the theology portion much like Paul does; theology first, application second
 - c) He then gives them three overarching commands in 1:19 to govern their behavior and this also serves as the outline for the rest of his letter: "**be quick to listen (obey), slow to speak and slow to anger**":
 - 1) Be quick to listen/obey: He challenges his readers to become doers of the Word and exercise impartial and genuine faith (1:19-2:26)
 - 2) Be slow to speak: He challenges his readers to not all become teachers and to watch their own tongues (3:1-18)
 - 3) Be slow to anger: He challenges his readers to avoid quarrels and conflict and deal with such things appropriately (4:1-5:20)

E. Controversies

1. The supposed contradiction between James' teaching on faith and Paul's teaching on faith:
 - a) James: James 2:14-26
 - b) Paul: Ephesians 2:8-9
2. Martin Luther was extremely critical of James's letter, wondered whether it belonged in the Bible, and referred to it as an "epistle of straw" – but, he never formally proposed removing it and even included it in his German translation of the Bible
3. However, there is no conflict between what Paul wrote and what James wrote when both are properly interpreted and understood