

## "THE EPISTLE OF ST. JAMES"

### Introduction

**AUTHOR:** James, who identifies himself as "a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). There are four men who bear this name in the New Testament:

**James, son of Zebedee and brother of John** - A fisherman called by Christ (Mt 4:17-22) who later became an apostle (Mt 10:2). Together with John, they were nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" because of their impulsiveness (cf. Mk 3:17 with Lk 9:51-56). He was killed by Herod in 44 A.D. (Ac 12:1-2).

**James, son of Alphaeus** - Another one of the apostles (Mt 10:3; Ac 1:12), about whom very little is known. He may be "James the younger," whose mother, Mary, was among the women at Jesus' crucifixion and tomb (Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40; 16:1; Lk 24:10). In Jn 19: 25, this Mary is called the wife of Cleophas, perhaps to be identified with Alphaeus.

**James, father of Judas the apostle** - Even more obscure, one of the few references to him is Lk 6:16.

**James, the brother of our Lord** - A step-brother (or other relative) of our Lord (Mt 13:55), who did not believe in his brother at first (Jn 7:5). He became a disciple following the resurrection (1 Co 15:7; Ac 1:14) and gained prominence in the church at Jerusalem (Ga 2:9). As evidence of his prominence, Peter sent him a special message following his own release from prison (Ac 12:17). James also played an important role in the conference at Jerusalem (Ac 15:13-33), and Paul brought him greetings upon arriving at Jerusalem (Ac 21:18-19).

"**James, the Lord's brother**" (Ga 1:19) is most likely the author of this epistle. Tradition describes James as a man of prayer, which may explain the emphasis on prayer in his letter. It was said that he prayed so much, his knees were as hard as those on a camel. He was martyred in 62 A.D., either by being cast down from the temple, or beaten to death with clubs. It is reported that as he died, he prayed as did Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

**RECIPIENTS:** The epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1). This naturally leads one to think of Jews (Ac 26:6-7) living outside the land of Palestine. Since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, many Jews were scattered throughout different nations (Ac 2:5-11). While Jews, the epistle makes it clear that they were also brethren in the Lord, i.e., they were **Jewish Christians**. Nineteen times James calls them "brethren" and at least one time he definitely means those who were brethren "in the Lord" (2:1).

It appears many of these Jewish Christians were poor and oppressed. Being Jews, they would often be rejected by the Gentiles. As Jewish Christians, they would also be rejected by many of their own countrymen. The letter indicates that most were poor, and some were

being oppressed by the rich (2:6-7). Because it was not addressed to a single church or individual, it has been categorized a "General" or "Catholic" (universal) epistle along with 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude.

**TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING:** With no mention of the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts 15 (A.D. 49), and the use of the word "synagogue" (assembly, 2:2), **A.D. 48-50** is the date commonly given for this epistle. This would make it the first book of the New Testament written. If James, the Lord's brother, is the author, then he probably wrote it in **Jerusalem**.

**PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE:** The epistle deals with a variety of themes, with an emphasis upon practical aspects of the Christian life. Some of the subjects include handling trials and temptations, practicing pure religion, understanding the relation between faith and works, the proper use of the tongue and display of true wisdom, being a friend of God rather than a friend of the world, and the value of humility, patience and prayer.

While these may appear unrelated, they are crucial to the growth and development of the Christian. For this reason, I suggest that James' purpose was: **TO INSTRUCT CHRISTIANS CONCERNING TRUE AND PRACTICAL RELIGION**

In this epistle is a call to be doers of the Word, manifesting a living faith through one's works. In 108 verses, there are 54 imperatives (commands), prompting some to call James "the Amos of the New Testament."

**KEY VERSE: James 1:22**

**"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."**

## **BRIEF OUTLINE:**

SALUTATION (1:1)

I. TRUE RELIGION ENDURES TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS (1:2-18)

A. WITH JOY AND PATIENCE (1:2-4)

B. WITH WISDOM FROM GOD (1:5-8)

C. WITH A PROPER PERSPECTIVE (1:9-11)

D. WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF TEMPTATION (1:12-15)

E. WITH AN AWARENESS OF THE FATHER'S GOODNESS (1:16-18)

II. TRUE RELIGION CONSISTS OF DOING, NOT JUST HEARING (1:19-2:26)

A. ONE SHOULD BE SWIFT TO HEAR (1:19-20)

B. ONE SHOULD NOT BE HEARERS ONLY, BUT DOERS (1:21-27)

C. ONE SHOULD NOT SHOW PERSONAL FAVORITISM (2:1-13)

D. ONE SHOULD SHOW THEIR FAITH BY THEIR WORKS (2:14-26)

III. TRUE RELIGION DISPLAYS WISDOM, NOT JUST SPEAKING (3:1-18)

A. THE DANGER OF THE TONGUE (3:1-12)

B. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY WISDOM (3:13-18)

IV. TRUE RELIGION BEFRIENDS GOD THROUGH HUMILITY (4:1-17)

A. HOW TO BE AN ENEMY OF GOD (4:1-6)

B. HOW TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD (4:7-17)

V. TRUE RELIGION BLESSED THROUGH PATIENCE, PRAYER AND LOVE (5:1-20)

A. THE CURSE OF RICH OPPRESSORS (5:1-6)

B. THE BLESSING OF PATIENCE (5:7-12)

C. THE BLESSING OF PRAYER (5:13-18)

D. THE BLESSING OF LOVE FOR THE ERRING (5:19-20)

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION**

- 1) What four men bore the name of James in the New Testament?**
  
- 2) Which one is most likely the author of the epistle?**
  
- 3) To whom was this epistle addressed? (1:1)**
  
- 4) From the epistle itself, who were the original recipients? (cf. 2:1) -**
  
- 5) What is this epistle commonly called, along with 1 & 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude? Why? –**
  
- 6) When was this epistle likely written? From where?**
  
- 7) As suggested in the introduction, what is the purpose of this epistle?**
  
- 8) What might serve as the "key verse" of this epistle?**
  
- 9) According to the outline above, what are the main points in this epistle?**