

# THE BOOK OF JAMES

## INTRODUCTION

### I. AUTHORSHIP

A. Book identifies the author—as James

**1:1**—James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

B. James in the New Testament

1. James is mentioned 38 times in NT

2. There are four possibilities who this author may have been—if he is one already mentioned in NT

C. Four James's identified in the New Testament

1. James the Son of Alphaeus—**Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13**

a. One of the Apostles—but little is known about him

b. Possibly brother of Matthew/Levi

1. Matthew was also called 'son of Alphaeus'—**Mk 2:14**

2. But nothing is said in NT of their being brothers—like James/John and Peter/Andrew

c. Possibly 'James the Less'

1. Mentioned three times in NT—**Mk 15:40; 16:1; Mt 27:56**

2. If so—His mother was Mary

a. Who was mother also of Jesus/Joseph

b. Who was almost certainly Mary wife of Clopas/Cleophas—**Jn 19:25**

c. For this James to be her son—Clopas also would have been named Alphaeus

d. Church tradition: martyred by crucifixion in Lower Egypt (at Ostrakine), then sawn to pieces

e. He is a minor figure—not likely to have been this author

2. James who was the father of Judas—**Lk 6:16** and **Acts 1:13**

a. This Judas was not Iscariot—but identified as another Apostle in **Jn 14:22**

b. In Luke's list of apostles, his name appears instead of Thaddeus—**Lk 6:16**

c. This other Apostle Judas is listed in **Lk 6:16** and **Acts 1:13** as 'Judas of James'

1. The KJV in Lk 6:16 and Acts 1:13 says 'brother of James'

2. But a better translation is 'son' of James—as in more modern translations

3. The construction is a genitive without a noun (brother or son)—‘Judas of James’

d. Nothing else is known of him

3. James, Son of Zebedee and brother of John

a. Was martyred by Herod Agrippa I in 44 AD—**Acts 12:2**

b. His death was almost certainly too early for him to have been the author of this book

4. James, brother of Jesus—the most likely candidate

a. Was a doubter of Jesus’ ministry at first

1. **Jn 7:2-5**—says that his brothers doubted him

2. The brothers are listed in **Mt 13:55** and **Mk 6:3**—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas

b. But Jesus’ appearances convinced him to become a believer—**I Cor 15:7; Acts 1:14**

c. Quickly became a leader of the Jerusalem church

1. Paul called him a ‘pillar’ with Cephas and John—**Gal 2:9**

2. After Peter was released from prison—**Acts 12:17**

Peter told those at the prayer meeting in the home of John Mark’s mother—to report his release to ‘James and the brethren’

3. Leader at the Jerusalem Council—**Acts 15:13**—he issued the decree

4. When Paul returned from the 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey—**Acts 21:18**—he met with James and the elders

d. He was regarded as an Apostle—though not one of the original 12—**Gal 1:19**

e. He continued to have strong Jewish ties and sympathies

1. Led Jerusalem Council compromise—**Acts 15**—accommodating mostly to Jewish concerns

2. Was concerned about Jewish Christians’ feelings in Jerusalem—**Acts 21:17-26**

- When Paul returned from mission to Gentiles
- Rumors were rampant that he was telling Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses and the Law
- James and the elders urged Paul to take action to dispel these rumors
- He urged Paul to join 4 others already under a Nazarite to purify himself and make a Temple sacrifice

f. Called James ‘the Just’

1. Because of his austere lifestyle and strict adherence to the Law

2. According to testimony of Hegesippus (c. 180)

g. Traditionally the first bishop of Jerusalem—succeeded by Simeon

h. Martyred about 62 AD in Jerusalem (Eusebius says 63)

1. After Festus's death—no governor present at the time—temporary void of leadership
2. Probably at the command of the High Priest Ananus—or possibly at the instigation of a mob of Pharisees and Scribes
3. Falsely accused of breaking the Law—he was stoned to death

i. Internal evidence suggesting he was the author of James

1. Two passages are reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount

- **1:22**—*But prove yourselves to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*
- **5:12**—*But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.*

2. James was a sincere and devout man of prayer—like the person described in **Ja 5:16-18**

- **5:16-18**—*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.*
- According to Eusebius—James was so devout and devoted to prayer that his knees became as hard as those of a camel.

## II. DATE OF WRITING

A. Early dating is most likely

Before early 60s—maybe even before mid-50s

B. Evidence for early dating

1. Economic distress suggested in letter

- a. Most early Christians were still poor
- b. A division between them and a few rich Christians was developing
- c. After the Jewish rebellion 66-73—most Jews were poor—and this distinction disappeared

2. Primitive leadership structure of the church

- a. No hierarchy of offices had yet developed
- b. Only elders are mentioned—**5:14**

3. Imminent view of the parousia—see **5:7-8**

**5:7-8**—*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.*

- a. They expected the Lord to come immediately
- b. In such a way—that this suggests it was the first generation of believers

#### 4. Content

- a. It is filled with content of Jesus’ teachings—some quoted directly, but mostly paraphrased
- b. Probably written by someone who actually heard Jesus teach—like His brother James
- c. More than any other NT epistle—this book uses and applies Jesus’ teaching to the church

#### 5. Apparent conflict with Paul’s views

- a. Especially Romans 4 and Galatians 4—*apparent* conflict between works and faith
- b. James was probably written before Romans and Galatians
  - 1. Because James does not really disagree with Paul
  - 2. If he *had* read Romans and Galatians—he probably would have quoted them to *support* his points in James
  - 3. Romans was written about 56-7 from Corinth
  - 4. Galatians was written before the mid-50s (maybe as early as 48-49)

### III. RECIPIENTS

A. To Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Mediterranean basin

B. Evidence

#### 1. Explicit reference in salutation

**1:1**—*James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes who are **dispersed abroad**: Greetings.*

- a. The term ‘dispersed abroad’ (NASB)
  - 1. KJV = ‘scattered abroad’—NIV = ‘scattered among the nations’
  - 2. Greek word is **διασπορα**—diaspora = scattering—as scattering of seeds
    - a. First applied to Greek emigrants—who moved away to settle colonies away from Greece
    - b. Later—it became a technical term for the dispersion of Jews among Gentiles
- b. Used elsewhere in history and Scripture
  - 1. Term used for Jews displaced throughout OT and inter-biblical times to other nations

a. Idea is first mentioned in **Dt 28:25**

*The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be {an example of} terror to all the kingdoms of the earth*

b. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was dispersed after the invasion of the Assyrians

1. Under Shalmaneser they were deported in 722 BC

2. They were sent to Khorasan—Iranian word for ‘eastern lands’

3. Scattered to Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan

c. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity in 587 BC

1. This occurred under Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC

2. Not all of them returned to Palestine with Ezra, Nehemiah and Zerubbabel

2. **Jn 7:35**— ‘Jews’ asked whether Jesus would go to the ‘dispersion’ among the Gentiles

3. **I Pe 1:1**—Peter wrote to ‘aliens’ **scattered** in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia

c. Verb **διασπειρω**—used to describe scattering of Jewish Christians under persecution

1. Acts 8:1—scattered in Judea and Samaria

2. Acts 8:4—the scattered ones preached—an example of this follows: Philip the Deacon

3. Acts 11:19—further scattered to Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch

a. Phenice—port city on the southern side of the island of Crete

b. Cyprus— island in eastern Mediterranean—south of Turkey and west of Syrian/Lebanon

c. Antioch—major city in ancient northern Syria on the Orontes Rivers

- Paul’s hometown
- Now Antakya, Turkey
- Where believers were first called Christians

2. Further internal evidence—see **2:2**

a. The term ‘meeting’ or ‘assembly’ is the word for synagogue—**συναγωγη**

b. This was the gathering and worship place for Diaspora Jews—not the Temple

#### IV. THEMES AND TONE

1. Strong ethical emphasis

- Personal morality

- Social justice
2. Practical application of the Gospel to everyday situations
  3. Theological integration—faith that lacks works is useless and empty
  4. Patience and perseverance in difficult times—as we wait for the Lord
  5. For use in and by the church—for its unity and health
  6. Imperative tone—like an OT prophet
  7. Advice from a pastor drawn from wise sayings and sermons

## V. STRUCTURE

### I. Greeting (1:1)

### II. The Testing of Faith (1:2-18)

#### A. Trials Produce Perfection (1:2-11)

1. Through the development of perseverance (1:2-4)
2. Through growth in wisdom (1:5-8)
3. Through a right perspective on wealth (1:9-11)

#### B. Perseverance Produces the Reward (1:12-18)

1. The ultimate reward—the crown of life (1:12)
2. The chief impediment: sin—its cause and result (1:13-16)
3. The source of all good—and His gift to us (1:17-18)

### III. Obeying God's Word (1:19-27)

#### A. The right conditions (1:19-21)

1. The right attitude (1:19-20)
2. The right reception (1:21)

#### B. The right behavior: doing and not just hearing (1:22-25)

#### C. The right standards (1:26-27)

1. Empty religion (1:26)
2. True religion (1:27)

### IV. Living Ethically (2:1-13)

#### A. Avoid partiality (2:1-7)

#### B. Follow the 'royal law' and mercy (2:8-13)

### V. Faith Producing Good Works (2:14-26)

### VI. Practicing Personal Discipline (3:1-18)

#### A. The Problem of the Tongue (3:1-12)

#### B. The Proof and Sources of Wisdom (3:13-18)

1. The proof of wisdom (3:13)
2. Worldly wisdom (3:14-16)
3. Wisdom from above (3:17-18)

### VII. Avoiding Evil Behavior (4:1-17)

#### A. The Source of Evil and Division (4:1-4)

#### B. The Cure of Single-mindedness and Humility (4:5-10)

#### C. Judgmental Behavior (4:11-12)

#### D. Worldliness, arrogance and the cure (4:13-16)

E. A definition of sin (4:17)

VIII. Abuse of Stewardship (5:1-6)

IX. Practicing Endurance (5:7-11)

X. Simple and Straightforward Speech (5:12)

X. The Ministry of Prayer (5:13-18)

XI. Restoring Christians Who Have Strayed (5:19-20)

## CHAPTER ONE

I. Greeting (1:1)—see introductory notes

II. The Testing of Faith (1:2-18)

A. Trials Produce Perfection (1:2-11)

- Through the development of perseverance (1:2-4)
- Through growth in wisdom (1:5-8)
- Through a right perspective on wealth (1:9-11)

1. Through the development of perseverance (1:2-4)

**1:2-4—2** Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, **3** knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. **5** And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing. (NASB)

**1:2-4—2** Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3** because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. **5** Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (NIV)

**1:2-4—2—**My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; **3** Knowing [this], that the trying of your faith worketh patience. **4** But let patience have [her] perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (KJV)

a. Main idea

Rejoice when you face trials—because this process will make you what God wants you to be (complete).

b. Train of thought

**Rejoice** when you face **trials**—because **trials** build **perseverance**—and **perseverance** makes you **complete**

c. Key words and phrases

1. consider it all joy

a. ‘consider it’ (hegeomai)

1. Has two meanings: (1) to lead, to rule, to go before; (2) to think, suppose, esteem, consider

2. Here it is the second meaning

3. But it is more than just ‘think’

a. Instead—consider this a matter of first importance

b. Think about this thing as being a first and essential principle

b. ‘all’ (pas)

1. Could mean to have ‘all’ the joy possible—be completely joyful. Hence ‘pure joy’ (NIV)

2. Or it could mean—consider each and every *trial* that you face to be a joy

c. ‘joy’ (chara)

1. This is the basic NT Greek word for ‘joy’—also means ‘gladness’

2. The same word used in

**Lk 2:10**—The angels brought: good tidings of great joy

**Lk 5:10**—There is joy in heaven when one sinner repents

**Jn 15:11**—These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you so that your joy may be made full

**Gal 5:22**—Joy—is part of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace . . .

3. The reason for the joy here is—that we will become complete—as God created us to be

4. Notice the contrast with **4:9**—the only other place ‘joy’ is used in James

a. In **1:2**—one reason for our joy is this: we will grow in wisdom (see vv 5-8)

b. In **1:2-11**—one result of this wisdom is—we will not be double-minded—see **v8**

c. But in chapter 4—James deals with a worldly mindset

1. He tells us to submit to God and resist the devil—come to God with a repentant attitude

2. To those who are sinners and double-minded he says:

**4:9**—*Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom*

2. encounter many/various trials

a. ‘encounter’ (peripipto) = to fall (to the ground) or descend (as from high to low position), to fail, in such a way as to be surrounded



1. Not just to meet or encounter something bad or difficult—not just bumping into it
2. But the trial affects you personally—it brings you down or low—with a sense of being trapped
3. The implication—such ‘encounters’ can hurt you badly or destroy you—two examples:
  - a. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan—the robbed man ‘fell among thieves’—**Lk 10:30**
  - b. When Paul was shipwrecked off Malta—the ship ‘struck’ a reef where the seas met—**Acts 27:41**

b. ‘many/various’ (poikilos) = various colors, various sort, variegated

These trials/temptations come in many different types—a rainbow variety of trials

c. ‘trials/temptations’ (peirasmos) = experiment, attempt, trial to prove something—4 possible meanings

1. Trial—to show the strength of something

For example—when God tried Abraham with His command to sacrifice Isaac—read Ge 22:1

2. Temptation coming from external source

3. Temptation coming from within ones self

4. Adversity, affliction, trouble—coming from or allowed by God—to test/prove character

Probably this is the main meaning here (see 6 below—and verse 3 on ‘testing/trying’)

5. When humans ‘test’ or ‘tempt’ God—in rebellion

For example—Lk 4:13—when the devil had finished tempting Him, he left Him for a season

6. The key to knowing which interpretation: look at ‘**trying/testing** of your faith’ (below—v 3)

3. knowing (ginosko)

- a. To have intimate knowledge—to understand (from experience)—not to have just head knowledge

- b. Sometimes used to show certainty from personal experience—as in John 17

- v3—*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God*
- v7—*[Those you have given me] know that everything You have given Me comes from You*
- v8—*They knew with certainty that I cam from you*
- v23—*I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*
- v25—*Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.*

4. testing/trying (of your faith)

- a. Testing/trying (dokimion) = the proving—the testing of something, as in a furnace or crucible

- b. This is the word used in I Pe 1:7

- The testing (dokimion) of your faith—as gold is melted in the furnace (but perishes)
- Though it is tried (dokimazo) by fire

c. The verb form (dokimazo) is used in the following contexts:

- Let everyone examine/test himself—before taking the Lord’s Supper—**I Cor 11:28**
- Test/prove all things—hold fast to that which is good—**I Th 5:21**
- Deacons should be proved—then found blameless—**I Tim 3:10**
- Do not believe every spirit—test the spirits to make sure they are from God—**I Jn 4:1**

d. This suggests that ‘trials’ in v2 (above)—should be the proving/testing of someone by adversity

5. produces (katergazomai) endurance

a. produces = not just to labor/work (ergazomai)—but to make something of that work

1. To achieve—accomplish
2. Not just activity—but productivity
3. Notice—**v21**—the word is used in opposite context:

- The wrath of man **does not produce** the righteousness of God

4. So trials **do produce** endurance—but wrath **does not produce** righteousness

b. endurance (hupomonā)—sometimes translated patience—but here it means more than this

1. More than just a passive kind of patience
2. Constancy—steadfastness—resilience
  - When a person cannot be diverted from his intended purpose
  - When a person cannot be side-tracked from loyalty to faith and piety
  - Regardless of the trials and sufferings
3. Pivotal step in the development of **hope**—seen in similar passage in Romans 5

*our Rom 5:2b-4—and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance [endurance], and perseverance [endurance], proven character; and proven character, hope.*

6. perfect result—(teleios ergon) = perfect **work**

a. the ‘work’ = ergon—can mean the product of labor—or the deed that accomplishes something

1. The **product** made by art, industry or the mine

a. Like a ‘work’ of art

**Ph 1:6**—He who had begun a good **work** in you will perform it until the day of Christ

b. Like a vocation

**I Tim 3:1**—If a man desires the office of bishop, he desires a good **work**

**II Tim 4:5**—Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill our ministry

2. The **deed** or act that accomplishes something—the thing done

a. For good purposes

1. True disciples who let their light shine

So men may see their good **deeds** and praise the Father—**Mt 5:16**

2. The woman anointing Jesus—at Bethany (Simon the Leper’s house)

She has done a good **work** to Me (Jesus)—**Mk 14:6**

b. For self-serving purposes or evil—Pharisees or the devil

1. Pharisees perform **deeds** to be noticed by men—**Mt 23:5**

2. The Son of Man was revealed in order to destroy the **works** of the devil—**I Jn 3:8**

c. Either good or bad—we have a choice—**John 3**

- Men loved darkness instead of light because their **deeds** were evil—**v 19**
- Men who do evil hate the light and do not want their **deeds** exposed—**v 20**
- Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so it may be seen plainly that **what they have done** has been done through God

3. Parallel passage to this one—what the Scripture produces in us (II Tim 3:16)

[the Bible is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness . . .]

**II Tim 3:17**—So that the man of God may be **perfect**, thoroughly equipped for every good **work**

4. This word—**work**—is used **12 times**—in just 4 chapters

b. “perfect” [work] = teleios—from ‘telos’ (end)—like a telescope

1. Meanings

- To be finished—brought to an end (as in time)
- To be complete—everything necessary is present
- To be perfect—according to design—fully what it is intended to be
- To be mature—full grown

2. Usage in James—5 times

- 1:4—here—twice
- 1:17—every good and **perfect** gift comes from above
- 1:25—whoever looks into the **perfect** law of liberty will be blessed in what he does
- 3:2—whoever does not stumble in what he says is **perfect**, able to bridle the whole body

3. Scriptural examples of completeness

- Be **perfect** as your heavenly Father is **perfect**—**Mt 5:48**
- When the **perfect** has come, that which is in part shall be done away with—**I Cor 13:10**

4. Scriptural parallels to this passage

- Giving of gifts for equipping of the saints to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12)
  - Eph 4:13**—to attain the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **mature** person, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.
- As many of us as are **perfect**, be like-minded (as Christ—humble and set on heavenly not earthly things)—**Eph 4:13**
- [Do not be immature]—Strong meat belongs to those who are mature—those who by reason can exercise their sense to discern good from evil—**Heb 5:14**

c. Perseverance producing a mature work = producing a mature work within us

- Like a great work of art—completely finished according to the artist’s purpose
- Like mature fruit—not green—but ripe

It is one thing to have the fruit of the Spirit—it is another thing for it to be mature fruit!

7. “so that we may be perfect and complete—lacking nothing”

a. Perfect (teleios—again) and complete (holoklēros)

- Complete = ‘holo’ (wholly, entirely) + ‘klēros’ (an allotted portion)
  - Therefore: all the allotted portions put together in a whole
  - Example:** like a jigsaw puzzle without any missing pieces
- It can also mean **without defect**—**without blemish!**

3. Both ideas (all the pieces—and without blemish) come together in the following verse:

[The following verse is the only other place *holoklēros* is used in the NT]

**I Th 5:23**—*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved **complete**, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

b. lacking (leipo) nothing (en mēdeis)

- Lacking—‘leipo’—destitute—failing—being inferior to
- This is used twice elsewhere in James

**Jas 1:5**—If any of you **lacks** wisdom—let him ask God

**Jas 2:15**—If a brother or sister is naked or **destitute** of daily food

8. **Contrast** between being 'perfect' and being 'destitute'

a. See the two accounts of the Rich Young Ruler—**Mt 19** and **Lk 18**

b. In **Lk 18:22**—Jesus emphasized his destitution—what he lacks (leipo)

*Now when Jesus heard these things, he said to him, yet you lack one thing: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*

c. In **Mt 19:21**—Jesus emphasized his potential—the completeness (teleios) he could realize

*Jesus said to him. If you will be perfect, go sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.*