

James

The letter by James was written to the scattered Christians (James 1:1, Acts 8:1, 4) who took the gospel with them when persecution drove them out of Jerusalem. By the time James wrote there were congregations organized in other locations (2:2) with elders (5:14), but the language and style of James suggests the church was still substantially Jewish in its membership. Consequently, James is generally regarded as the first or second of the first New Testament writings, with Matthew as another likely possibility for first. Most of the teachings in James have a close affinity with the teachings of Jesus in Matthew. James, for example, teaches from the Law for kingdom life and applies it in the same way Jesus did in Matthew 5-7.

James the author (whose name is actually Jacob, despite the rendering in English Bibles) was that brother of Jesus mentioned in Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3, Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:17-18, Galatians 1:19, 2:9-12, 1 Corinthians 15:7. He is also included in John 7:3-5, Acts 1:14, and 1 Corinthians 9:5 among the brothers of Jesus, who resisted faith during Jesus' ministry but became ardent followers and witnesses after his death, burial and resurrection. In those verses we learn that Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection, that James was active in traveling to share the gospel, and that James was an elder and highly respected leader in the Jerusalem church. From Josephus we can add that James died for his faith in Jesus at the hands of a rogue high priest in Jerusalem in 62 AD after governor Festus died and before his replacement arrived in Judea.

James initially describes himself as servant/slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. He claimed no "credit" for his flesh relationship with Jesus. He was bound to Jesus as divine master.

The "twelve tribes in the dispersion" references Christians among the nations, the New Covenant nation of God.

The Greek word for congregation or assembly or meeting in James 2:2 is synagogue, the typical Jewish word for their congregations and meeting places. The word teacher (master) in 3:1 was often used as a respectful title applied to Jesus in the gospels, and denoted the elders/leaders of the

church in Acts 13:1 and Ephesians 4:11. Again, James's terminology hints at an early date for his writing, and a substantially Jewish audience of believers.

Considering that the dispersion of Christians from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4) had been because of persecution, we can reckon that the original recipients of this letter were personally acquainted with hostility for their faith, James 1:2-4, and that as the Lord Jesus had foretold it was going to be a feature of serving Him who is hated by the world.

James repeatedly urges an egalitarian attitude, brother to brother, in the church, as in the teachings of Jesus. No superiority of the rich, no favoritism, but rather embracing the poor, helping the powerless and needy, following the divine law of loving our neighbor as ourself (1:9-11, 1:27, 2:1-8, 2:15-16, 3:17, 4:1-2, 5:1-6). A recurrent theme is learning what the Lord says and putting it into practice (1:19, 22-25, 2:8-13, 4:5, 4:11, 5:10). He assures us that God gives good gifts and answers prayers (1:5-6, 17, 5:4, 5:13-18). Steadfastness is urged repeatedly (1:6, 12, 25, 5:7-11).

Note the 7 attributes of divine wisdom in 3:17 – 1) pure, 2) peaceable, 3) gentle, 4) reasonable, 5) full of mercy and good fruits, 6) impartial, 7) sincere. The wisdom Christians should seek from God (1:5).

The importance of what believers say is likewise stressed repeatedly, especially in 3:1-12.

James references the believers future divine reward and punishment as motivation in hope in 1:12, 2:13, 4:12, 5:8-9.