



James - Notes to give you a bit of background

AUTHOR

3 men called James in the New Testament

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| 1. | The son of Zebedee | Mark 1:19 | |
| 2. | The son of Alphaeus (James the younger) | Mark 3:18 | |
| 3. | The brother of Jesus | Matthew 13:5 | Acts 12:17 |
| | | Acts 15:13ff | 1 Cor.15:7 |
| | | Gal.1:19 | Gal 2:9 |

First one martyred in AD 44

Second one could have been the author but nothing more known about him

Third one appears to be the strong candidate

Close links between style of the book and James' speech to Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13 to 21)

Unlikely to be another using the name "James". He would not have left his identity so open to question. When the letter was written and accepted in the early church as sound and authoritative teaching (as part of the New Testament) the criteria was that each piece of writing needed to have apostolic authority. James had that.

DATE

James (Jesus' brother) was himself martyred in AD 62 but letter could have been written any time before that. There are no pointers in the letter (no events are referred to).

Just a bit of detective work

No mention of the admission of Gentiles to the church (James clearly felt passionately about that in Acts 15)

No other church officers, apart from elders are mentioned

The word synagogue is used

These facts suggest an early date before the church was really established but this is not conclusive.

Most probable date is about AD 60

At the time

- Paul was a prisoner in Rome awaiting trial
- Enthusiasm for mission to the Gentiles was wilting
- Heresies were becoming more common as people tried to "modify" what they thought Jesus had said.
- THE book has a distinctly Jewish flavour implies it was written when the church was mainly Jewish. As the church expanded it acquired a more cosmopolitan feel.

DESTINATION

Given in the opening verse – "to the 12 tribes of the dispersion"

Addresses to the whole Christian church scattered (dispersed) throughout the world.

To James, the church was only what God was gathering to himself for his purposes and a natural development of Jewish history.

In OT God's kingdom is the people of Israel

In NT God's kingdom is all those people who are being obedient followers of Jesus Christ – a much broader definition.

Old and New testaments tell the same story and are seen as continuous so it is not surprising to find Christians in the NEW TESTAMENT talked of as

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| * | Descendants of Abraham | Romans 4:9 to 25 |
| * | Abraham's offspring | Galatians 3:29 |
| * | We are the circumcision | Philippians 3:3 |
| * | The Israel of God | Galatians 6:16 |

James was a key figure in the early church. He often presided at representative gatherings (Acts 15:13ff) and received visiting church leaders (Acts 21:18ff). His words were going to be taken seriously by Christians anywhere.

He appears in the list of Jesus' brothers' in Matthew 13:55; he heads that list so he is probably the oldest. At first, he did not understand Jesus' purpose and challenged it (John 7:2 to 5). We read that Jesus appeared to him post resurrection (1 Cor.15:7) but he is clearly best known as a key figure in the church at Jerusalem.

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| * | Paul called him a pillar of the church | Gal.2: 9 |
| * | Paul visited him in Jerusalem after his conversion | Gal. 1:19 |
| * | Paul did the same on his last visit | Acts 21:18 |
| * | When Peter is rescued from prison he says, "tell James" | Acts 12:17 |
| * | Jude could identify himself as "a brother of James" because James was so well-known | Jude 1:1 |

This guy was A BIG MAN in the early church
So, what is his book all about?

CONTENT

Often seen as "only practical" and lacking in theology.
It feels like a sermon – it is full of arresting one liners

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| * | do not be deceived | 1:16 | |
| * | Do you want to be shown | 2:20 | (look for some more) |

It is full of illustrations known to his hearers - horses, rudders, fires, springs of water, and gardening (shame about that one !!!)

You sense a great warmth and pastoral concern for people – always calling them "(my beloved) brethren". See how many times he uses that word.

Motyer suggest that the central theme of the letter is

BIRTH 1:13 to 19a

The old nature remains active (13 to 16)

The Father has brought us new birth by his word (17 to 19a)

GROWTH 1:19b to 25

We grow by

Hearing (19b to 20) Receiving (21) Obeying (22 to 25)

THE FATHER'S WORD

DEVELOPMENT

1:26 to 5:6

Three characteristics of true Christian growth

The controlled tongue	Introduced in 1:26	Developed in 3:1 to 12
Care for the needy	Introduced in 1:27a	Developed in 2:1 to 26
Personal purity of life	Introduced in 1:27b	Developed in 3:13 to 5:6

THEMES

Conflict

James paints a very realistic picture that although we are God's children by new birth, the old nature is still around. Temptations will still come and cause us to fall short. Growth can be a real struggle, which is why this book is so relevant to those who want to live in a distinctive way. It aims to develop a Christian lifestyle (3:13) but never pretends it will be easy.

The needy

It is clear that James has great concern for the needy - Acts 2:45 laid this principle down very early in the life of the church. We must never "spiritualise" it when James works hard to make it practical. It appears that meeting the needs of people is anything but peripheral to our faith – it is a core teaching

The local church

James is keen to emphasise the true quality of fellowship ("Christians being together around Jesus"). We are therefore grieved if someone walks away or if we offend them by what we say. The quality of our Christian relationships is good for those who are part of the church and it is attractive to those beyond its walls.

There follows an outline designed to develop these themes.

Trials and Temptations

James 1

- Setting the scene - James a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (his own brother)
- The trials of life – what are these like for us
- How do you deal with trials – is it common sense or God sense
- The connection between listening and doing
- You are not justified by works – they are a consequence of Lordship
- How does God's word impact our lives
- Set up the balance of the truth and the practical – they are both what God wants us to be like

True Fellowship

James 2

- What is favoritism in the 1st and 21st centuries
- How does this apply in our churches
- The connection between mercy, law and judgement
- Do we all have to be doing "good deeds all the time"
- What is the motivation for "good deeds"

Speaking wisely

James 3

- facing up to sin
- why the tongue is so important in relation to its size
- the effects of an unbridled tongue
- how it can be used for good or evil
- if the tongue is to be more controlled it's source needs to be pure – we need wisdom
- isn't wisdom for the old – who wants to be more mature anyway
- what is God's wisdom truly like
- go through the virtues of a true believer

Lasting the course

James 4 & 5

- living in the world without submitting to its values
- humble repentance before a holy God – no other way to purity
- another reminder about careful speech – clearly a huge danger which must be controlled
- Be patient – a quick reminder about the hope of the Christ is not that the world will get better but that Jesus is coming again.
- The only way to live is obediently
- Go on praying – help those who wander from the truth. He is coming soon