

JAMES

Introduction

Author. There are four men named James in the New Testament. Of these four, only two could be regarded as the author of this epistle, James, the apostle (Matt 4:21), the brother of John and son of Zebedee who was martyred in 44 A. D. and James, the half-brother of Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph (Matt 13:55; Gal 1:19; Acts 21:18-25; 1 Cor 15:7). Although this epistle was written early, the death of James, the apostle, in 44 A. D. would suggest James the brother of Jesus as the author. Other indications also support this conclusion. Similarities between this letter and the one sent from the Jerusalem council such as: "greeting" (Acts 15:23; James 1:1), nowhere else in the NT; "visit" in the sense of "bless, care for" (Acts 15:14; James 1:27); "Listen to me" (Acts 15:3; James 2:5) and the phrase "name by which we are called" (Acts 15:17; James 2:7). In addition, the words and themes of the epistle seem to echo the teachings of the Lord (especially the Sermon on the Mount) in a natural way as if the author had learned them as a youth.

Date. Nearly everyone agrees that the book was written very early. It is probably the first book of the New Testament to have been written. Some of the reasons for this are: 1) The distinctively Jewish nature of the book suggests that it was composed while the church was still predominantly Jewish; 2) the strong spirit of any-minute expectancy of the Lord's return; 3) the terms used in reference to the leaders of the church "teachers" and "elders" (3:1; 5:14) rather than "bishops" and "deacons" as in the Pauline epistles reflect a simple church order; 4) the absence of references to the great doctrinal issues that so consumed the attention of believers in later decades (e.g., the controversy over Gentile circumcision, the oneness of the body of Christ); 5) the Greek term συναγωγή is used to designate the meeting or meeting place of the church. Thus a date of before 50 A. D. is likely.

Occasion. The recipients are identified only as "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1). The term most naturally and probably applies to Jewish Christians. It is likely that James is writing to those Christians which were scattered from Jerusalem after Stephen's death (Acts 8:1; 11:19) as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch. This would account for James' references to trials and oppression. As their former pastor and as still the leader of the Jerusalem Church, James wrote to instruct and encourage his dispersed flock in the face of new difficulties.

Message Statement. *The acceptance of the Word of God in trials will deliver one from a useless Christian life.*

Argument

- 1A INTRODUCTION: EXHORTATION TO BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE 1:1-27
James immediately addresses a portion of his theme in the second verse, namely, trials. He then moves on to the theme of overcoming temptation and concludes by providing the solution of receiving the implanted Word of God. In the second section of the book James will move on to applying his three basic concerns as they are outlined in the last verses of this section.
- 1B Right Response to Testings as a Christian 1:1-12
When one encounters trials, as James' readers had, the proper response was joy. The reason was that with proper responses to the trials, growth in faith was the promised result. Of course, God promised to give wisdom in the midst of trials which would give the believer direction in his difficult time. Although James does not specify the source of that wisdom, it is ultimately to be found through prayer and a humble reception of the word of God (1:21). The ultimate reward for enduring trials is the crown of life.
- 2B Victory in Temptation 1:13-18
James is very clear in identifying the source of temptation. Temptation occurs when one is dragged away by his own evil desire. A solution does exist, however, the perfect gift which has come down from God (1:17). Whether this gift is the salvation spoken of in the next verse or the means by which it was given, namely the Word of God, or a combination, is difficult to tell. Probably the latter is correct: the regenerated believer who depends upon the implanted word will have success.
- 3B Obedience to the Written Word 1:19-27
At the conclusion to this section James specifies his emphasis. He desires that all be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry and to accept the implanted Word of God. If one will actually obey the Word as it is written on the tablets of his heart, then he will be blessed in what he does (1:25). At this point, then, with the solution given, James throws down the gauntlet, so to speak, issuing the challenge for believers to: 1) control their tongues, (1:26); 2) have a genuine concern for the needy and helpless, (1:27a); and 3) to live a life of moral and ethical purity (1:27b). This then outlines the remaining, major portion of the book.
- 1B THE APPLICATION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER 2:1--5:6
The outline for this section, just given in 1:26-27, is now expanded and applied to the readers. James' first concern is the readers' treatment of the needy and helpless (2:1-26). He then moves to the area of the tongue (3:1-18) and concludes with moral and ethical purity (4:1--5:6).
- 1B A Genuine Concern for the Needy and Helpless 2:1-26
James' concern here is twofold. He desires that the believers first of all *not show* favoritism to the rich and secondly that they *do show* love to the poor.
- 1C The command to accept all men 2:1-13
The temptation to show favoritism toward the rich for the ultimate benefit of oneself is exposed by James here. He first gives the practical illustration of how such errors occur and then explains the error. The irony involved is that God has *chosen* the poor (whom the believers often *reject*) and the rich are the ones who *reject* and persecute the believers! The implication of the error is that those who break this one command have broken the whole law. This exhortation concludes James' first concern.
- 2C The command to help those in need 2:14-26
The pastor's second concern was that the believers tangibly help those in need. He was not content with affirmations of faith or words. He wanted actions. His basic point seems to be that affirmation without action is worthless. Those who would pretend to keep the whole law ought to demonstrate their faith with concrete action.
- 2B A Controlled Tongue 3:1-18
Being slow to speak and bridling the tongue were themes hinted at in the introduction. Now James expands on the Christian's control of his tongue, relating it to the general area of self control. Jesus' words found in Matthew 15:11 *What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean'* seem to be very close to the author's mind.
- 1C The warning: Speech is critical 3:1-2
The truth is that our speech is very critical. It is important not only because we will be judged by what we say but also because the tongue is an indicator of a man's total ability to control himself.

- 2C The difficulty: Impossible to control apart from God's strength 3:3-12
The problem is that apart from God's strength, the tongue is impossible to control. James describes the power of the tongue, and then gives examples from everyday life proving that the tongue is often uncontrolled.
- 3C The divine provision: Wisdom from above 3:13-18
Fortunately, by thinking the thoughts which come from above there is control over a man's innermost thoughts which his tongue eventually and inevitably betrays. Those who will submit themselves to God's thoughts will gain control over their tongues.
- 3B A Life of Moral and Ethical Purity 4:1--5:6
Hatred, self-sufficiency and greed are James' concerns here. In the transitional statement of 1:27 he stated the goal of this section in these words "to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."
- 1C The answer to self-centeredness: God's grace 4:1-12
The self-centeredness of a Christian demonstrates itself in at least two ways in this section: quarrels and fights with others, and worldliness. With both of these God is not pleased, but there is hope if one will humble himself before God and men (4:6-10).
- 2C The answer to self-sufficiency: Dependency 4:13-17
An evidence of self-sufficiency was the boasting about tomorrow. James counsels one to realize that his life is but a vapor and to cast himself upon the mercy of God.
- 3C The answer to greed: Eternal perspective 5:1-6
Whether this section is a rebuke of the rich, unsaved oppressors of the people which is meant to comfort the believers or is a rebuke of a worldly and temporal attitude toward wealth on the part of the believer is difficult to determine. The latter would be more in keeping with the theme of promoting ethical purity among those who have the Word of God planted within them.
- 1C CONTINUING CHRISTIAN CONCERNS 5:7-20
James concludes with several concerns in every time frame. He counsels patient endurance in suffering and loving care of, and prayer for, other believers.
- 1B Patient Endurance of Suffering 5:7-12
James' counsel of endurance is illustrated by the patience of the farmer and of Job. The readers are encouraged to stand firm and not to grumble against one another in light of the Lord's return or at least his omnipresence.
- 2B Prayer for One Another 5:13-18
The introduction, command and illustration in this section all concern prayer. The prayer of the righteous ones offered in faith will meet the needs of the one who is sick. It appears to this writer that the sickness of the one in question is more emotional and spiritual than physical. He is probably the example of one who has not been able to endure the trials which have come his way and he is in desperate need of encouragement and spiritual support which the elders of the church can provide.
- 3B Being a Brother's Keeper 5:19-20
Finally, the believers are exhorted to keep a watchful eye out for one another. Whether the reference to the erring one is a warning to keep a watch out for discouraged brothers such as were the subject of 5:13-18 or of those who are deliberately sinning, the point is still that the believer care for others.

