

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

- I. Authorship and date of writing:
 - A. The superscription identifies the author as “*James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*”. Jam.1:1a
 - B. Of the 3 or 4 men with this name mentioned in the NT, only two are significant enough to have identified themselves in such generic fashion expecting an automatic recognition by its recipients: (other 2 being James the son of Alphaeus, Mat.10:3 & James the Less?, Mar.15:40)
 - 1. James, the son of Zebedee, brother of John and one of the 12 Apostles. Mar.1:19
 - 2. James, “the Lord’s half-brother” (Gal.1:19), son of Mary and Joseph (Cp.Mat.13:55) and according to canonical tradition surnamed “*The Just*”.
 - C. The general consensus of early Church tradition implicates the latter James as the epistle’s author.
 - D. Further consensus dates the writing of this epistle in ~ 45 - 53 A.D. and no later than the early 60’s.
 - E. While few scholars think the son of Zebedee could be the author, his early martyrdom (44 A.D. cf.Act.12:2) makes him highly suspicious.
 - F. The Lord’s brother James was martyred in 62 A.D. with tradition having him thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and then further clubbed to death.
 - G. The date of writing is significant making the epistle the first written in the NT.
 - H. Internal evidence supports an early authorship in mention of the Jewish synagogue as the primary place of assembly (Jam.2:2) implicating early Jewish conversion in the Church.
 - I. Omission of sharp debates over the place of the Law in Christianity so prevalent in the 50-60’s on supports this view.
 - J. The style of writing omitting reference to systematic Christian doctrine further suggests pre-Pauline writings.
 - K. The style and content of writing is recognized by commentaries as coming from one that was very familiar with the rural life associated with Jesus.
 - L. The author draws upon the same proverbial epigrammatic (short/pithy) statements of truth, same homely figures of speech drawn from everyday country life, same directness of address and same topics of discussion characteristic with Jesus.
 - M. The scantiness of Christological discussion, heavy emphasis on ethics and obvious parallels to Jesus’ teaching indicate that the epistle was written at a time when the church was still within the general circle of Judaism under the Jerusalem Counsel. Cf.Act.15:13ff
 - N. The authoritative presentation of the epistle in telling its readers what or what not to do further attests to one of James’ authority in the early Church. Cf.Act.12:17
 - O. James remained in unbelief (as did his other siblings) during Christ’s ministry (Joh.7:3-5) and undoubtedly came to faith as one of the eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection (1Cor.15:6-7).

- P. He was present in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost (Act.1:14) and became prominent early on in the Church. Cf.Gal.2:9
- II.** Classification and canonicity.
- A. James is classed among the general (universal) Epistles of the NT, along with Peter and Jude, not addressed to specific churches or individuals.
 - B. It was part of the antilegomena (against gathering) books disputed by some in the Church.
 - C. The ancient church historian, Eusebius (~265-340 A.D.) records this for us, although he himself accepted James as canonical.
 - D. The objection was two-fold: relative obscurity and questionable authority in authorship.
 - E. The first was resolved noting the epistle was written to a narrower locale and peoples and later was recognized as reaching a farther audience than initially thought.
 - F. The second was reconciled upon general agreement of author and hence any doubts of authority for writing the epistle removed.
 - G. By the time of the 3rd Council of Carthage (397 A.D.), its canonicity was universally recognized.
 - H. No further problems arose until Martin Luther questioned it on the grounds of supposed theological conflict under the “justification” terms used in contrast to Paul’s writings.
 - I. Luther called James “A right strawy Epistle, having no true evangelical character”.
 - J. Years later, Luther recanted his position and held that James is really the complement of Paul.
 - K. The theological agreement between the two writers is best stated by Dr. A.T. Pierson that “*Paul and James do not conflict. They stand not face to face, beating each other, but back to back beating off common foes*”.
- III.** Recipients and occasion for writing.
- A. The recipients of the epistle are seen in the opening address, “*to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings*”.
 - B. While some consider the dispersing as the Diaspora of 70 A.D., the date of writing and authorship dispel that notion.
 - C. That Jewish believers are addressed implicates the dominant nationality of early Christianity before being widely spread into the Gentile world under the Pauline ministry.
 - D. James is writing to Jewish believers previously associated with the church in Jerusalem and scattered into the Roman Province throughout Judea and into Samaria. Act.8:1
 - E. This primarily as a result of being displaced as part of the early persecution of the Church headed by Saul of Tarsus (35 A.D.). Act.8:3
 - F. This was God’s way of decentralizing the mother church in Jerusalem in fulfillment of the Great Commission. Mat.28:19-20 cp.Act.8:4

- G.** One of the primary purposes for James' writing is to exhort and encourage these believers to maintain the proper approach to the Christian way of life.
 - H.** These believers were facing severe trials, temptations, STA and other cosmic distractions in their newly inhabited niches and could easily divorce their faith through lack of application.
 - I.** They are believers outside the "security blanket" of the inner circle of their Jewish Christian family and faced with the pressure of maintaining the rigors of the CWL on their own volitional momentum.
 - J.** James hammers home the importance of practical application of their belief as the prescription to maintain their spiritual momentum in the witness of the life.
 - K.** Key words in his epistle are "faith" used 16x, "works" used 13x and "doers" used 4x.
 - L.** It is an epistle on holy living and the essential ingredient of application that is the evidence of the faith one possesses.
 - M.** While James' excerpts on the surface seem sporadic and disconnected, there remains an fluid discernable order centering on faith:
 - 1.** Faith tested and shown by our tests. Jam.1:2-21
 - 2.** Faith shown by our works. Jam.1:22 – 2.
 - 3.** Faith shown by our words. Jam.3
 - 4.** Faith shown by lives of unworldliness. Jam.4
 - 5.** Faith shown by our patience under cruel wrong. Jam.5:1-12
 - 6.** Faith shown by our believing and effectual prayers. Jam.5:13-20
- IV.** General outline of the epistle.
- A.** Salutation. Jam.1:1
 - B.** Trials and temptation. Jam.1:2-18
 - 1.** Overcoming trials. Vss.2-12
 - 2.** The source of temptation. Vss.13-18
 - C.** Application of the Word. Jam.1:19-2:26
 - 1.** Anger and the tongue. 1:19-20
 - 2.** Faith + works. 1:21-27
 - 3.** Evidence of faith by works/Ph₂ justification. 2:14-26
 - D.** Worldliness in the Church. Jam.3:1-4:12
 - 1.** Taming the tongue. 3:1-12
 - 2.** Peace within the church ranks. 3:13-4:3
 - 3.** A call for separation. 4:4-10
 - 4.** Arrogant judging and sins of the tongue. 4:11-12
 - E.** The importance of MPR and avoiding cosmic distraction. Jam.4:13-5:11
 - 1.** God's directive will and MPR. 4:13-17
 - 2.** The dangers of wealth. 5:1-6
 - 3.** Patience and acclimation to one's niche. 5:7-11
 - F.** Concluding exhortations. Jam.5:12-20
 - 1.** Oaths. Vs.12
 - 2.** Prayer. Vss.13-18
 - 3.** Proper protocol of dealing with straying believers. Vss.19-20