

James

Authorship: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...” (James 1:1). The write calls himself James. The problem of authorship is a major one because there are at least 4 men by the name of James in the New Testament. At least 3 are clearly identified:

- James, brother of John, son of Zebedee, called by our Lord “son of thunder.” He was slain by Herod (Acts 12:1-2).
- James, son of Alphaeus, called “James the less.” He is mentioned in the list of apostles, but very little is known concerning him.
- James, the Lord’s brother (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3), in reality a half brother according to the flesh. He became head of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). Most scholars adhere that it was this James that was the writer of this epistle (Galatians 2:9).

Date: Because this letter makes no clear mention of Gentiles and the writer uses the word “synagogue” for “meeting,” we may assume a very early date, around A.D. 45-50.

Unique Features: Faith vs. Works? The seeming contradiction between James and Paul can be easily explained when the message of James is considered. James takes the position, as does Paul, that we are justified by faith, but that the faith which justifies produces good works. Calvin said, “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.” Justification is shown by works – not justified by, but for good works. James and Paul present the two aspects of justification by faith. Paul emphasizes both phases:

Faith – not justified by works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

Works – Justified for works (Titus 3:8; Ephesians 2:10).

Faith is the root of salvation – works are the fruit of salvation.

Faith is the cause of salvation – works are the result of salvation.

Purpose: The book contains many subjects, indicating that James was writing for several reasons, including the following: First, to encourage Christians who were facing persecution. Second, to correct wrong doctrine about faith and works. Third, to instruct on proper Christian behavior.

Theme: Genuine faith produces good works. Ethics of Christianity, not doctrine. The epistle of James has been compared to the book Proverbs in the Old Testament. Both emphasize the practical. In both there is the learning experience for the child of God.

Key Passage: “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26).

Outline:

- I. Address and Greeting (1:1)**
- II. Trials and Temptation (1:2-18)**
 - A. Overcoming Trials (1:2-13)
 - B. The Source of Temptation (1:13-18)
- III. Putting the Word into Practice (1:19-2:26)**
 - A. Anger and the Tongue (1:19-20)
 - B. “Be doers of the Word” (1:21-27)
 - C. The Sin of Favoritism (2:1-13)
 - D. True Christian Faith Seen in Its Works (2:14-26)
- IV. Worldliness in the Church (3:1-4:12)**
 - A. The Taming of the Tongue (3:1-12)
 - B. Peaceable Relations among Christians (3:13-4:3)
 - C. A Call for Repentance (4:4-10)
 - D. Arrogance and the Critical Tongue (4:11-12)
- V. Looking at Life from a Christian Perspective (4:13-5:11)**
 - A. Recognizing Who We Are before God (4:13-17)
 - B. The Dangers of Wealth (5:1-6)
 - C. Waiting on the Lord (5:7-11)
- VI. Concluding Exhortations (5:12-20)**
 - A. Oaths (5:12)
 - B. Prayer (5:13-18)
 - C. Being Our Brother’s Keeper (5:19-20)

Sources:

Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).
Jensen, Irving L. *Simply Understanding the Bible*. (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1990).
Willmington, Harold L. *Wilmington’s Bible Handbook*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1997).