

Introduction To James' Epistle

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22).

'The connection between faith and works lies at the very heart of the letter of James. The author of this short epistle is concerned not only with what we as followers of Christ *believe*, but also with how those beliefs shape our *behaviours* and *actions*. James understood that a confession of faith in Christ must be reflected in our daily works – influencing the choices we make, the things we say, the priorities we pursue, the people with whom we align ourselves, and the way we respond to temptation. James' words read like a collection of wisdom instructions, much like those found in the literature of the Old Testament, and includes practical advice for putting our faith into action. He writes with the heart of a pastor-leader who wants us to demonstrate actions that will prove – to ourselves and to a watching world – that our faith is genuine and sincere.' - Dr David Jeremiah

Author and Date

The writer of this epistle is identified in 1:1 as "James, a bond servant of God". The New Testament identifies four men by this name, therefore, there are four potential authors of this epistle.

- 1) James the son of Zebedee (one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, the brother of John)
- 2) James the half brother of Jesus (the son of Joseph and Mary and one of the key leaders of the church in Jerusalem)
- 3) James the son of Alphaeus (one of the 12 disciples of Jesus)
- 4) James the Father of Judas (Thaddaeus)

Due to the low profile that both James the son of Alphaeus and James the father of Judas have in the New Testament scriptures it is thought unlikely one of these two wrote this epistle. The two major contenders for authorship are James the son of Zebedee and James the half brother of Jesus. Although, we can not be certain which James wrote this epistle, early church fathers attribute the letter to James the half brother of Jesus for two reasons:

- 1) The disciple James was martyred in AD 44, supposedly before certain issues addressed in the letter became matters of concern in the Christian community.
- 2) The wording of the letter is consistent with the speech given by James (the half brother of Jesus) at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13-21).

Given many scholars (although not all) attribute authorship to James the half brother of Jesus, the date of this letter has been placed around AD 45-50. This places the epistle

after James the son of Zebedee martyrdom in AD 44 but before the council of Jerusalem in AD 50 (Acts 15).

Some scholars suggest an even earlier date of around AD 35. Those that suggest an earlier date attribute authorship to James the son of Zebedee.

One thing is apparent, this epistle was written early on in the church's history due to: the Jewish orientation of the epistle, the structure of the Christian churches it addresses, the lack of references to the Gentile communities and according to the Jewish historian Josephus, James died in AD 62. This makes James' letter the earliest New Testament book written.

Recipients of James' Epistle

James is classified as a "general" or "catholic" (universal) letter because it is not addressed to a specific church, but, to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). This refers to the Jewish Christians who were dispersed throughout the regions of Mesopotamia and Mediterranean as far back as the eighth century BC as a result of conquest (Assyria 722BC), exile (Babylon 605-586BC) and those more recently scattered due to the intense persecution of Christians living in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

Content

This epistle is concerned with the practical aspects of Christian conduct as a result of true faith in Christ Jesus. Unlike the Pauline letters, James contains much less formal theology, though the letter is not without theological statements (1:12; 2:1, 10-12, 19; 3:9; 5:7-9, 12, 14). In the 108 verses there are 22 references or allusions to the Old Testament and at least 15 allusions to the teachings of Jesus from His Sermon on the Mount. This letter reads like 5 separate sermons preached one after the other.

Several key themes are prominent in James' letter:

- Perseverance through trials (1:2-4; 5:7-12).
- Loving fellow believers equally and without partiality (1:9-11; 2:1-13; 5:1-6)
- The relationship between faith and works (1:21-25, 27; 2:14-26)
- The power of believer's speech (1:26; 3:1-12)

Outline of the Epistle

I. Introduction 1:1

II. Trials and true religion 1:2-27

A. The value of trials 1:2-11

1. The proper attitude toward trials 1:2

2. The end product of trials 1:3-4

3. Help in adopting this attitude 1:5-8

4. The larger view of circumstances 1:9-11

B. The options in trials 1:12-18

1. The ultimate end of trials 1:12

2. The source of temptation 1:13-14
3. The progress of temptation 1:15
4. The goodness of God 1:16-18

C. The proper response to trials 1:19-27

1. The improper response 1:19-20
2. The essential response 1:21
3. The complete response 1:22-25
4. The external behaviour 1:26-27

III. Partiality and vital faith ch. 2

A. The problem of favouritism 2:1-13

1. The negative command 2:1
2. The present improper practice 2:2-4
3. The inconsistency of favouritism 2:5-7
4. The Christian's duty 2:8-9
5. The importance of partiality 2:10-11
6. The implication of our own judgment 2:12-13

B. The importance of vital faith 2:14-26

1. James' assertion 2:14
2. James' illustration 2:15-16
3. James' restatement of his point 2:17
4. An objection 2:18
5. James' rebuttal 2:19-23
6. James' final argument 2:24-26

IV. Speech and divine wisdom ch. 3

A. Controlling the tongue 3:1-12

1. The negative warning 3:1
2. The reason for the warning 3:2
3. Examples of the danger 3:3-8
4. The uncontrollable nature of the tongue 3:7-8
5. The inconsistency of the tongue 3:9-12

B. Controlling the mind 3:13-18

1. The importance of humility 3:13
2. The importance of graciousness 3:14-16
3. The importance of loving peace 3:17-18

V. Conflicts and humble submission ch. 4

A. Interpersonal and inner personal tensions 4:1-10

1. The source of conflict 4:1
2. The explanation of the conflict 4:2-3
3. The nature of the choice 4:4-5
4. The resources to choose right 4:6-10

B. Self-exaltation 4:11-12

C. Self-reliance 4:13-17

1. The self-centered person 4:13-16
2. The concluding exhortation 4:17

VI. Money and patient endurance 5:1-18

A. Warnings for the rich 5:1-6

1. The introduction of the problem 5:1
2. The corrosive effect of wealth 5:2-3
3. The misuse of wealth 5:4-6

B. The proper attitude 5:7-12

1. The exhortation to be patient 5:7-9
2. Examples of endurance 5:10-11
3. The evidence of patience 5:12

C. The proper action 5:13-18

1. The way of release 5:13
2. The prescription for help 5:14-16
3. The power of prayer 5:17-18

VII. The way back to living by faith 5:19-20