

I. Introduction, Background, Purpose, Greeting – James 1.1

(NASB) 1 ¹ James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

- a. Author – God by the hand of James - the Lord's brother
 - i. Detail of who this James was, family, circumstances
 1. Of the 4 men with the name James in the NT, only 2 are likely – James son of Zebedee, brother of John, martyred by Herod in 44_{AD} ([Acts 12.2](#)) which would rule out his authorship; and James the half-brother of Jesus.
 2. Some have speculated that the Greek in the epistle was 'too' good to have come from someone like James; which reminds us of [John 1:46](#) *Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* As a Galilean from Nazareth, James knew Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew well and he would have certainly been able to compose this letter. We also see the Greek in this epistle resembles the speech of James at the Council of Jerusalem ([Acts 15](#)). We do not need to know Greek to see the similarities found there and yes many good things have come out of Nazareth – Jesus, Jude, and James.
 3. His given name was Iakōb - Jacob, who was also the son of Isaac, and of the father of Joseph, Mary's husband. We translate his name as 'James', which is how he introduces himself
 4. [Matthew 13:55-56](#) ⁵⁵ *Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?* ⁵⁶ *And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"* AND [Mark 6:3](#) ³ *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?"* And they took offense at Him. We see Jesus had 4 brothers – James is listed first so most likely he was the first child born of Mary and Joseph, and that they had sisters.
 - ii. What he knew and believed
 1. James had been taught well by his father Joseph and he knew the scriptures from the Old Testament. In the 108 verses of this epistle, there are references or allusion from 22 books of the Old Testament, and 17 references to the teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount as found in the book of Matthew. He also must have also been listening closely to Jesus teachings as well.
 2. Scriptures referencing Jesus' brothers:

- a. Matthew 12:46-47 ⁴⁶ While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him.⁴⁷ Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.”
 - b. John 2:12 ¹² After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days. John 2:21-22 ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²² So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.
 - c. John 7:3-9 ³ Therefore His brothers said to Him, “Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. ⁴ For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.” ⁵ For not even His brothers were believing in Him. ⁶ So Jesus *said to them, “My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. ⁸ Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come.” ⁹ Having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee.
3. James and the other brothers apparently did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah during His earthly ministry (Mark 3:31-35; John 7:1-5). But remember that Jesus was James’ “big brother”, he was there during Jesus walk on this earth, and he was paying attention, he was watching, he was learning.
 4. We also find that our Lord’s brothers in the upper room praying with the disciples in Acts 1:14 ¹⁴ These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

iii. How he came to believe

1. According to Paul’s letter in 1 Corinthians 15:6-8 ⁶ ‘After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also’.
2. Jesus singled out His younger half-brother James after His resurrection! This convinced James that Jesus truly was the Savior, and he, in turn, shared this knowledge about Jesus with the other brothers.

iv. Positions that he held

1. James became a key leader of the church in Jerusalem – one of the three leaders of the church, where he served until he was martyred in 62^{AD}. The scholar Eusebius was cited by Hegesippus (180^{AD}) and said that James was often found kneeling in prayer (leading to the moniker of camel-knees), and because of his ‘unsurpassable righteousness’ James was called ‘James the Just’.
 2. During the Jewish uprising after the death of Festus in 6^{AD}, James was continually confessing Christ before the Jewish leadership, until one day he was thrown from a temple parapet, stoned, and finally killed by a blow from a club – all the while praying for his murderers, “**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do**”, as did his brother Jesus.
 3. Paul called him a pillar of the church in [Galatians 2:9 \(NASB\)](#) and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. It was James who moderated the church conference – the Council of Jerusalem, described in Acts 15.
 - a. The Council of Jerusalem met to consider terms of admission of Gentiles into the Christian Church. It formulated the decree that was approved by James colleagues and circulated to the churches of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia
 4. When Peter was delivered from prison, he sent a special message to James [Acts 12:17](#) ⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, “Report these things to James and the brethren.” Then he left and went to another place.
 5. When Paul visited Jerusalem, it was to James that he brought greetings and the special “love offering” from the Gentiles. [Acts 21:18-19](#) ¹⁸ And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.
- b. Date Written – 45-49^{AD} prior to the Council of Jerusalem. This would make the book of James the first written book of the New Testament.
- c. Audience –The twelve dispersed Jewish tribes scattered abroad... It was written to the Jewish Christians of the early church.

- i. We read that after the death of Stephen, many disciples fled into the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 7:54-8:3)

(Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary) In Acts 11:19 the narrator notes, “Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.” James may have written this letter to instruct and comfort those scattered believers, as he addressed his letter to “the twelve tribes dispersed abroad” (1:1 NET). These Jewish Christians no longer had direct contact with the apostles in Jerusalem and needed to be instructed and admonished in their tribulations. Apparently, the rich were taking advantage of them (2:6; 5:1-6), and their trials had led to worldliness, rash words, and strained relationships (2:1; 4:1, 11; 5:9). In view of persecution, some may have been tempted to hide their faith (5:10-11). James exhorted them to demonstrate a lifestyle that would reflect their faith.

- ii. It is important to remember that James was writing to a body of Jewish believers that had been gathering in the synagogue. There were no churches yet of a group of mixed believers with gentiles... and now they were dispersed, displaced. He addresses them as ‘brethren’ at least 19 times in this letter indicating that they were not only brothers in the flesh (fellow Jews) but also brothers in the Lord.
 - iii. He writes in order to teach and encourage the saved Jews that he was writing to but also to us, nearly 2000 years later. We too are displaced believers, waiting our heavenly home.
 - iv. This was most likely the first ‘book’ written in the New Testament scriptures.
- d. Place – written in Jerusalem from the leader of the church, James
- e. Purpose –
- i. Correct the faith that was being corrupted in the church then and now
 - ii. Change meaningless profession-only to meaningful possession of the Living Lord
 - iii. Present the true faith of Christ – faith of the heart that produces fruit
- f. Features –
- i. General Epistle, not written to a specific church but primarily to Jewish converts
 - ii. Royal Law – loving one’s neighbor as oneself
 - iii. Sermon Notes – collection of rabbinical sermon notes – including Jesus’ – centered around theme of trials and temptations

iv. Practical Living – the life of the believer after becoming a Christian and assured of salvation – Christian growth.

g. Theme – The central theme of this book is maturity. God wanted the dispersed believers and us to grow up in our faith; without spiritual birth, there can be no spiritual maturity. About half of the verses in James contain ‘verbs in the imperative form’ – that means commands, not options, suggestions, or even good ideas, but requirements for our Christlike living in this world.

James shows us in amazing detail and intensity the need for faith to express itself in works. The epistle of James is for the practical person. It shows that if we are spiritually maturing, we take responsibility to read and follow God’s commands – not claiming lack of knowledge or ignorance, not waiting to be spoon fed like babies, not blaming others for our failures – but truly taking responsibility for our spiritual growth.

While most of Paul’s Epistles have a theological and practical section, there isn’t much theoretical or systematic theology in this book – not because James didn’t know it because he certainly did; but because God wanted James to deal with the subject matters and issues that they faced as do we face daily if not hourly. How do we respond to trials and temptation? What are we doing with our money? Do we keep our tongues under control? Are we acting on our faith? What are we doing with our prayer lives? The main point of all these questions, that God through James raises is that saving faith needs to result in changed behavior.

h. Key – James 1.22 ²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

~cb note – as mothers, sisters, daughters we should be so very thankful for what God has shown us in this intro to James. James didn’t believe in Jesus as his messiah, his redeemer until he had a face-to-face encounter with The Lord. We all have those in our families who are ‘non-believers’ – as were we all at one time. James watched, listened, learned, and followed his big Brother for a long-time before believing... Yet he did come to true belief and by the hand of God was put into a position of authority in humility.

James knew Jesus as his older brother. James physically followed Jesus. James heard Jesus’ teachings. James studied and knew scripture. Yet James needed the physical encounter with the Lord before he was truly a believer.