

"THE EPISTLE OF JAMES"

"Talk the Talk but Walk the Walk"

I. Introduction

A. Who is The Author?

1. Internal Evidence

In 1:1 the author identifies himself as "James, the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." No other identification is given. The NT mentions four men bearing the name of James.¹ It is probable, though not certain, that the writer of this epistle is to be identified with one of them.² The four who are called James in the NT are listed here, as candidates for author of this epistle, in ascending order of probability.

a. James the father of Judas (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13), "possibly otherwise identified with Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus, to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot (Mark 3:18; Matt. 10:3)." Apart from the fact that he is the father of an obscure apostle, nothing else is known about this James, rendering him a rather unlikely candidate as the author of a work to "the twelve tribes" in which his simple self-description is assumed to be understood by all.

b. James the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; 15:40 [here called James the Younger]; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) is an unlikely candidate for similar reasons: he is an obscure apostle, mentioned only in lists of apostles and disciples.

c. James the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matt. 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mark 1:19, 29; 3:17; 10:35; 13:3; Luke 9:28; Acts 1:13; 12:2) is an important figure in the Gospels, less so in Acts due to his early death as a martyr under Herod Agrippa I no later than the spring of 44 CE (Acts 12:2). It is precisely this early martyrdom which argues against identification of this James with the author of our letter. Although it must be admitted that he could possibly be the author of the letter, he "probably died too early to leave any literary remains . . ."

d. James the Lord's brother (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal. 1:19; called simply James in Acts: 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; and in 1 Cor. 15:7), mentioned only twice by name in the Gospels (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), he rises to prominence after Pentecost. Arguably, James became the *de facto* leader of the Jerusalem church sometime before A.D. 44,7 and was one of two leaders Paul met with in Jerusalem three years after Paul's conversion (Gal. 1:19). The assignment of this James (also known in later church traditions, starting with Hegesippus, as "James the Just") as author of the letter has been the traditional view. Guthrie⁸ summarizes six reasons as to why this James is the most likely candidate:

2. External Evidence

a. The epistle of James is first mentioned by name by Origen, who apparently regards it as scripture.

b. Eusebius and Jerome also cite it as scripture, and apparently accept it as from the hand of James, the Lord's brother. Eusebius, however, classes it among the antilegomena and Jerome seems to imply that another wrote in James' name or later edited the work.

c. Before Origen, however, there does seem to be a definite strain of allusions to James in early Christian writers, especially Clement and Hermas. Whether these writers allude to James or whether all three borrow from a common pool of wisdom motifs cannot be demonstrated either way. But the generally negligible attestation for James may well be due to a cause other than inauthenticity: "While the evidence certainly allows for theories which entail late, nonapostolic authorship, a theory of limited interest in and circulation of the epistle would also explain the evidence."

In sum, in light of the fact that there is no good reason to consider the work pseudonymous, its limited recognition must be due to reasons other than inauthenticity. The traditional view, that James the Just, the brother of our Lord, is the author, stands as most probable over against any other James and over against

any claim of pseudonymity.

B. What does He Do?

the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” James 1:1

1. He is The Servant of God and The Lord Yeshua

INTRODUCTION

Possibly, the greatest picture of the word(*avad*=**To Serve**) is found in a noun that comes from this verb. It is the word (*eved*.= **“servant.”**) Beloved, *eved* [servant] describes a person who *avad*-s [serves] God, not the other way around. To be known as a “servant [*eved*] of the Living God,” comes from the fact that one actually serves [*avad*] God. Let’s look at some people to whom God gives the name, “My servant” [*eved*]. In the chart that follows, note what these people did (or will do) in relationship to Him calling them His servant.

Abraham / Genesis 26:24

Moses / Numbers 12:7

Caleb / Numbers 14:24

David / 1 Kings 14:8

Job / Job 1:8

Messiah – Yeshua / Isaiah 42:1-4 (cross-reference Matthew 12:18-21)

Messiah – Yeshua / Isaiah 52:13-15

Yeshua is the perfect example of the servant. That is to say that His actions and ministry describe for us what *avad* [serve] means. Read Isaiah 52:13 through Isaiah 53:12 and make note of what the Perfect Servant has done and ask yourself if indeed He has called you to follow in His footsteps...

The Greek word used in place of the Hebrew word *avad*, is *latreuo* (Pronounced: lat- **ryoo**-o). It means a “hired menial.”

Serving God is one purpose for which He has made us. We serve Him in a variety of ways, but not the least of which is obeying His commands. To serve God is an act of worship. It is our responsibility to serve God, but beloved it is our great honor as well. One day, those who love God will serve Him forever. Until that day, what will you **do**, to serve God?

*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and **His servants shall serve Him**. Revelation 22:1-4*

Are you a servant of God?

1. In our introductory study, we concluded that James, the Lord's brother, was most likely the author
2. If this is so, then it is interesting that James does not identify himself as such, but rather as simply
"a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1)
3. Perhaps it was a case of humility; yet, calling himself a "servant" was not peculiar to James
 - a. Paul described himself as such as well - [Ro 1:1](#); [Php 1:1](#)
 - b. So did Peter ([2Pe 1:1](#)) and Jude ([Jude 1](#))

4. Why did these men refer to themselves as "servants"?
 - a. The Greek term (DOULOS) literally means "a slave"
 - b. Why use such a term to describe themselves?
 - c. And why should WE think of ourselves as "servants"?
5. In this lesson, I shall explain why, and make some other observations concerning the idea of being a servant

C. To Whom Was The Letter Written?

'to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad' (1:1)

"Twelve tribes"-Obviously, James is writing to Jewish Believers. Some take this expression 'twelve tribes' to be taken figuratively to apply to the Church, the new Israel (Galatians 3:28-29; 6:16; Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-12), **However, when the Scriptures speak of the 12 tribes, it always point to the Jews**

WRITTEN TO: "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1)

1. The letter is filled with extensive Hebrew symbolism and was written to those Jewish Believers who had been dispersed from their homeland in Israel.

a. The term "scattered" comes from the Greek word, "diaspora" and refers to the Jews who were scattered among the Gentiles as their ancestors had been during the days of Captivity (only used two other times in the New Testament: John 7:35; 1 Peter 1:1).

b. The twelve tribes were scattered but never lost, as some claim (see listing in Rev.7:5-8).

c. Peter may have wrote to the Jewish Beleivers scattered to the West (1 Peter 1:1), while James wrote to the scattered Christians to the East in Babylon and Mesopotamia.

2. Some have claimed that the "12 tribes" is to be taken metaphorically as the Gentile church scattered around the Roman Empire, but is not consistent with a literal translation (the normal sense).

3. This epistle exhibits a strong Jewish background, which refutes the notion that James structured his letter after the Greek diatribe. The diatribe was not geared to speak to a particular historical situation.

a. The setting must have been in Israel because it was only there that farmers employed labor, rather than slaves (5:4).

b. James alluded to participation in worship in Jewish synagogue (2:2) which suits the first generation of the church.

c. The letter contains a compilation of Jewish Christian teachings, that was deeply influenced by the moral teachings of Jesus.

D. Why was the letter written?

'to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad' (1:1)

"Dispersion" - the word is used of Jews who had been scattered among the Gentiles (John 7:5), Jews who lived outside of Jerusalem. Since James lived in Jerusalem, he is writing to those who had been expelled by the Romans. Therefore it would seem that this letter is addressed to Believers who have been scattered due to persecution (Acts 8:4) and other factors. Thus the letter is written to keep those alive in the faith. □

E. Where was it Written?

Woods notes, that James mentions the "early and latter rain" (5:7), which is a characteristic of Israel. In addition, all the references to James in the latter half of the book of Acts place him in Jerusalem (Acts 15:21). The years during which James was a prominent voice for Believers in Israel

F. When was it written?

TIME PERIOD:

1. It is widely accepted that the book of James was written between A.D. 45 and 48.
 - a. James was killed in A.D. 62, so the epistle had to be written before this date.
 - b. Also there is no mention of the decisions made at the Jerusalem Council held around A.D. 48 to 49, that James presided over (Acts 15). So this means the epistle had to be written prior to this date.
2. The book of James is probably the earliest of the New Testament writings.

G. What is the Literary STYLE?

The book of James is more of a lecture than a letter, and was obviously prepared for public reading as a sermon to the scattered congregations. The tone of the book is authoritative and includes 54 imperatives (volitional mood of command in the Greek, "do it now!") in 108 verses, this is on average one call for action in every other verse. James' used more figures of speech, analogies, and imagery from nature than all of Paul's epistles together. James conveyed profound concepts with well-chosen words. His sentences are short, simple, and direct. The epistle of James has been called a literary masterpiece that is both picturesque and passionate, and combines the beauty of Greek with the stern intensity (earthiness) of Hebrew.

H. WHY ARE WE STUDYING IT?

1. This isn't a FAITH which is practiced in the comfort of a study or with the perks of tenure and a successful book tour (1:2-4).
2. God isn't impressed by the skeptic (1:6-8).
3. There is a wisdom that cannot be obtained apart from God and submitting to His will (James 1:5).
4. This book gets down to the nitty-gritty of temptation (1:14-16), and removes all the human explanations, excuses and rationalizations for why people do bad things. The teaching on why people give into evil clearly goes against modern political correctness and what often passes for "science".
5. Often, religious or secular scholarship doesn't like to hear that lip-profession means nothing

(1:22-27). Being a Christian means getting your hands dirty, getting into uncomfortable situations, changing your attitude, controlling your tongue and so on.

6. The teaching concerning personal favoritism (2:1-9) goes against the preferences of those who see themselves as belonging to an elite class.

7. A faith that works upsets the Calvinist or the elitist, who wants their salvation locked in, so they can concentrate on more important matters (2:14-26). The book is so practical that some have called it "the gospel of common sense". Or as the writers of the ISBE stated, "The sentence construction is simple and straightforward. There is usually no good reason for misunderstanding anything James says.' One writer noted, "There are those who talk holiness and are hypocrites; those who make profession of perfect love and yet cannot live peaceably with their brethren; those who are full of pious phraseology but fail in practical philanthropy. The epistle was written for them. It may not give them much comfort, but it ought to give them much profit. All who are long on theory and short on practice ought to steep themselves in the spirit of James; and since there are such people in every community and in every age, the message of the epistle will never grow old.' (ISBE p. 1567)

I. What are the Themes In The Book?

1. The Responses to Life
2. The Realities of Life
3. The Responsibilities of Life

J. Is there Parrellism with other Documents?

1. Sermon on the Mount

a) *Similarities with the teaching of Jesus*: "there are more parallels in this Epistle than in any other New Testament book to the teaching of our Lord in the Gospels."The parallels to the Sermon on the Mount are especially acute:

1:2	Joy in the midst of trials	Matt. 5:10-12
1:4	Exhortation to perfection	Matt. 5:48
1:5	Asking for good gifts	Matt. 7:7ff.
1:20	Against anger	Matt. 5:22
1:22	Hearers and doers of the Word	Matt. 7:24ff.
2:10	The whole law to be kept	Matt. 5:19
2:13	Blessings of mercifulness	Matt. 5:7
3:18	Blessings of peacemakers	Matt. 5:9
4:4	Friendship of the world as enmity against God	Matt. 6:24

4:11	Against judging others	Matt. 7:1-5
5:2ff.	Moth and rust spoiling riches	Matt. 6:19
5:10	The prophets as examples	Matt. 5:12
5:12	Against oaths	Matt. 5:33-37

2. Ethics of the Fathers/Pirkei Avot

Sixty-two of the sixty-three short books that make up the [Mishna](#) are legal texts. For example, *Brakhot* (*Blessings*), the Mishna's opening tractate, delineates the appropriate blessings for various occasions. The tractate Shabbat specifies, as one would expect, the laws of the [Sabbath](#). The only tractate of the sixty-three that does not deal with laws is called *Pirkei Avot* (usually translated as *Ethics of the Fathers*) and it is the "Bartlett's" of [Judaism](#). *Pirkei Avot* transmits the favorite moral advice and insights of the leading rabbinic scholars of different generations.

The quotes found in *Pirkei Avot* generally are spiritual and edifying, but they can also be practical. Two thousand years ago, Ben Zoma rendered what remains, in my opinion, the best definition of happiness. "**Who is rich? He who is happy with what he has**" (4:1). [Hillel](#) is frequently cited in *Pirkei Avot*. He is best known for "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?" (1:14). The last sentence should logically read *who* am I? But as Professor Louis Kaplan taught: "If you are only for yourself, you cease to be a real human being, and you become no longer a who, but a what." Hillel concludes the sentence with a thought that was borrowed two millennia later by President Ronald Reagan, who cited the sage's words while trying to push through urgently needed economic reforms: "And if not now, when?"

Jewish tradition encourages the study of one chapter of *Ethics of the Fathers* each Sabbath afternoon in the spring and summer months. As a result, religious Jews have been deeply influenced by the book, since they review it several times each year.

Because its reasoning is direct, and largely based on human experience, *Pirkei Avot* is the most accessible of the books making up the [Oral Law](#). It certainly is the handiest guide to Jewish ethics. In recent years, a three-volume English commentary on *Pirkei Avot*, Irving Bunim's *Ethics from Sinai*, has helped revive and deepen study of the book among traditional Jews. But Bunim's is only one of many commentaries that have been published on *Pirkei Avot*. In this century alone, R. Travers Herford, a Christian religious scholar, published one that was intended in large measure to demonstrate to other Christians that the rabbis of the Talmud were deeply concerned with ethical questions. The late Chief Rabbi of England, Joseph Hertz, published another commentary in a prayerbook he translated. More recently, Reuven Bulka, a Canadian rabbi and a recognized scholar on psychology, has produced a commentary, *As a Tree by the Waters*, in which psychological insights are used to deepen the reader's understanding of the text.

The text of *Pirkei Avot* can be found in most prayerbooks, following the Sabbath afternoon service.

The following are some characteristic teachings of *Pirkei Avot*:

Shammai taught: "Say little and do much" (1:15).

Hillel taught: "Don't judge your fellowman until you are in his place . . . and don't say I will study when I have time, lest you never find the time" (2:4).

Hillel taught: "A person who is [too] shy [to ask questions] will never learn, and a teacher who is too strict cannot teach . . . and in a place where there are no men, strive to be a man" (2:5).

Rabbi Tarfon taught: "It is not your responsibility to finish the work [of perfecting the world], but you are not free to desist from it either" (2:16).

Rabbi Chanina taught: "Pray for the welfare of the government, for without fear of governmental authorities people would swallow each other alive" (3:2).

Ben Zoma taught: "Who is wise? He who learns from every man.... Who is a hero? He who controls his passions" (4:1).

K. What is the OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JAMES
WHAT JAMES LEARNED FROM LIVING WITH HIS BROTHER JESUS

I. There are certain **realities** of life common to all believers — 1:2-1:18.

A. Trials and testing will come and can be overcome -- 1:2-8.

1. Be joyful -- 1:2.
2. Persevere -- 1:3-4.
3. Ask for wisdom -- 1:5.
4. Eliminate doubt -- 1:6-8.

B. Riches are attractive but transient -- 1:9-11.

1. The poor should glory in their humble position -- 1:10.
2. Pursuit of money will pass away -- 1:11.

C. Trials of life are the basis for eternal rewards now and later -- 1:12.

D. Temptation is inevitable, yet not from God.

1. Understand the process -- 1:16
2. Only good comes from God, including salvation -- 1:17-18

II. Each believer should develop certain **responses** to the **realities** of life -- 1:19-2:13.

A. Anger does not promote God's purpose -- 1:19-20.

B. Moral cleansing is critical -- 1:21

C. Doing and not just listening to the word of God -- 1:22-25

1. Care for widows and orphans, for instance -- 1:26.
2. Eliminate favoritism for rich over poor -- 2:1-4.
 - a. Rich are a source of problems and not worth the special treatment -- 2:5-7
 - b. The royal law requires that all be treated equally -- 2:8-9.
 - c. Break this command to treat all as yourself and all the law is

broken -- 2:10-11

2. Be a source of mercy and not judgment -- 2:12-13.
- 3.

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III. There are certain **requirements** to be met if a believer is to have the proper response to the **realities** of life -- 2:14-3:18.

A. **Faith** demands proof -- 2:14-26.

1. Faith is more than adherence to doctrine -- 2:18-24.
2. Faith without appropriate works is dead -- 2:25-26.

- B. The **tongue** must be ruled -- 3:1-12.
 - 1. Not many should desire to be teachers -- 3:1-2.
 - 2. The tongue, though small, is powerful -- 3:3-8.
 - 3. The tongue can be used for both good and evil -- 3:9-12.
- C. **Wisdom** must be sought -- 3:13-18.
 - 1. Wisdom, like faith, must be shown in deeds -- 3:13.
 - 2. There is an earthly wisdom that must be rejected -- 3:14-16.
 - 3. Godly wisdom brings harmony and peace -- 3:17-18.

IV. Lessons on how to **rule** the basic **relationships** of life -- 4:1-5:6.

- A. Rule lust and pleasure-seeking, which are the basic causes for disputes with others -- 4:1-3.
- B. Rule pride, which is a major reason why the Lord will resist you in your relationship with Him -- 4:4-6.
 - 1. Overcome pride by drawing near to God in humility and resisting the devil -- 4:7-10.
 - 2. Do not be proud and slander others -- 4:11-12.
 - 3. Do not be proud and boast about tomorrow -- 4:13-17.
 - 4. Do not be proud and trust in riches -- 5:1-6.

V. Other **resources** necessary for a blessed life -- 5:7-20.

- A. Patience -- 5:7-11.
- B. Simplicity of speech -- 5:12.
- C. Prayer -- 5:13-18.
- D. Reaching out to others -- 5:19-20.