

The Epistle of James
Introduction to the New Testament
Class 11

I. Good morning!

II. What are the General Epistles?

- A. James is a “General Epistle,” but *what does this mean?*
- B. They are “general” epistles because their audience is “general.” Not specific, like Paul’s epistles to specific places (Rome, Corinth) or people (Timothy, Titus).
- C. Includes Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude
- D. Hebrews and 1-3 John are technically anonymous. Only guesses about Hebrews; 1-3 John by the apostle John.
- E. James, 1–2 Peter, Jude named for their authors who identify themselves in 1:1 of each book.

III. Who and When and to Whom?

- A. Four men named James in the NT: brother of Jesus, two of the Twelve apostles named James (brother of John, Son of Alphaeus), Father of Judas (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13).
- B. Three James’s of the New Testament do not seem to fit as author of the epistle for various reasons:
 - 1. James the son of Zebedee martyred in AD 44 (Acts 12:2), which seems too early for this epistle.
 - 2. Son of Alphaeus too obscure for a man to simply identify himself as “James.”
 - 3. Father of Judas (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13) is even more obscure.
- C. This leaves...James the brother of Jesus:

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. (Mark 6:3)

After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me.” (Acts 15:13)—This is after the death of “James the brother of John” in 12:2.

***Carson/Moo (An Introduction, 2nd ed.) note that the Greek of his speech in Acts 15:13–21 matches the epistle closely (p. 621).*

But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother. (Gal. 1:19)

D. Note how James and Jude identify themselves:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. (James 1:1)

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: (Jude 1:1)

E. Date of AD 46-48

1. Seems to be addressing those who misunderstood Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone.
2. Yet, he doesn't seem to have personal experience with Paul's teaching.
3. If Jerusalem council was in AD 48 or 49 (Acts 15)—where Paul was present in Jerusalem with James and there was much discussion on a salvation by grace through faith—then epistle before this, maybe AD 46-48 and possibly the earliest NT document. Certainly it's one of the earliest (Galatians written almost at this time; also possible the Gospel of Mark and even Matthew this early).

F. To Whom is He Writing?

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. (Jas 1:1)

"The twelve tribes in the Dispersion" can refer to Jews and Gentiles in the true church (e.g., Gal 6:16). The *ESV Study Bible* takes this view.

But perhaps a better alternative is to see James the Jewish leader in Jerusalem writing to Christian Jews who had experienced what is described in Acts 8:2:

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. (Acts 8:2)

This is the perspective of Carson/Moo in *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.). They are persuaded by "the early date and Jewishness of James" and feel he's writing to "Jewish Christians" (628).

See also Peter Davids (NIGTC);

"We conclude...that although the metaphorical sense is attractive, accepting as we do the Jewish Christian origin of this epistle, the most natural way of reading this phrase is as an address to the true Israel (i.e., Jewish Christians) outside of Palestine (i.e., probably in Syria and Asia Minor)" (Peter Davids, The Epistle of James, NIGTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982], 64).

IV. Distinctive Style of James

- A. James lacks typical aspects of an epistle like we have in Paul's writings:
1. Greeting (Author, "grace" from Greeks, "peace" from Jews)
 2. Thanksgiving
 3. Prayer
 4. Body
 5. Personal Greetings
 6. Conclusion
- B. Sometimes James is compared to Proverbs and said to be "the Proverbs of the New Testament." This also has to do with his emphasis on "wisdom" (1:5; 3:13–15; 4:4).
- C. Yet... A better parallel, however, is not Proverbs, but the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). That's because it does not contain couplets like Proverbs, but biting and distinct paragraphs like the Sermon on the Mount.
- "There is not one section of the Sermon on the Mount that James does not reflect, and there is not one section of James that does not reflect the teachings of Jesus" (Morgan, *Theology of James*, 37, cited in Köstenberger/Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 633)
- D. Several passages in James are very close to what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Some examples:
1. Being "perfect" (Matt 5:48; James 1:4)

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:48)

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:4)
 2. Be "doers" of the Law (Matt 7:24; James 1:22)

*24 "Everyone then who **hears** these words of mine and **does** them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who **hears** these words of mine and **does not do them** will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." (Matt 7:24-27)*

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

3. Swearing and “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’” (Matt 5:33–37; James 5:12)

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matt 5:33-37)

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. (James 5:12)

V. Outline – Not your typical outline because not your typical book!

- A. (1:1) Greeting
- B. (1:2-5:20) Faith that Works
 - 1. (1:2-18) Faith in Trials
 - 2. (1:19-27) Be Doers of the Word
 - 3. (2:1-13) Show No Partiality
 - 4. (2:14-26) Faith that Works
 - 5. (3:1-12) Taming the Tongue
 - 6. (3:13-18) Heavenly Wisdom
 - 7. (4:1-12) Grace for the Humble
 - 8. (4:13-17) If the Lord Wills
 - 9. (5:1-6) Rebuke for the Rich Oppressor
 - 10. (5:7-11) The Day of the Lord
 - 11. (5:12) Do Not Swear
 - 12. (5:13-18) Prayers of Faith and Promises of Healing and Forgiveness
 - 13. (5:19-20) Restore the Sinner

VI. Some Key Passages

- A. 1:2–4 on Suffering
- B. 1:13–15 on Sin and Temptation: Desire to Sin to Death
- C. 1:25; 2:8, 12 on “The Law”

The “law” in James is described in very positive ways:

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (Jas 1:25)

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. (Jas 2:8)

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. (Jas 2:12)

- D. 2:14–26 on True Faith

Paul is asking, “What saves you?” And his answer is, “Faith, not works” (Rom 1:16–17; Gal 2:16)

James is asking a different question, “What kind of faith saves you?” His answer is, “A living faith, not a dead faith.”

- E. 4:1–2 and Conflicts

There are “desires” that lie beneath all “quarrels” (4:2); or, *cravings underlie conflicts* (David Powlison).