



James

(Introduction & background information provided is from the ESV study Bible)

Author and Title

The title of this book derives from the name of its author, James the Just (as he was called), the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55) and leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15). There is general consensus regarding his authorship, though some have challenged this on the grounds that: (1) the Greek is too polished and the rhetoric too Hellenistic for someone who never left Palestine; (2) the author never calls himself Jesus' brother; and (3) the author seems to be interacting with Pauline issues on faith and works, justification, and liberty and so had to write much later than James could have written, since he was executed in A.D. 62.

There is no good reason, however, to deny that James the Just is the author. As scholars now recognize, there was substantial contact between Jews and Gentiles, especially in Galilee where James grew up. Moreover, James is not reacting to Pauline issues but rather addressing similar themes in his own church; it is possible he is addressing a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching, but that could have been quite early since Paul wrote Galatians in A.D. 48. It is also possible that James is writing so early that he has no knowledge of any of Paul's letters.

The historicity of James the Just is well confirmed in historical literature (e.g., Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 20.200-201; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2.23).

Theme

James's primary theme is living out one's faith, being a doer and not just a hearer of the word. This theme is developed in view of the social conflict between rich and poor and the spiritual conflict between factions in the church. James rebukes his readers for their worldliness and challenges them to seek divine wisdom in working out these problems and getting right with God.

Timeline

	A.D.	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80
Death, resurrection of Christ (A.D. 33 [or 30]) [†]		■										
James, brother of Jesus, becomes a believer (30/33)		■										
James sees Paul in Jerusalem (36/37*)			●									
James writes his letter (40–45*)				■	■							
Paul writes letter to the Galatians (48*)						●						
Apostolic council in Jerusalem (48–49*)					■	■						
Paul visits James in Jerusalem (57*)								●				
James martyred (62)									●			

* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

The audience for James's letter is almost certainly Jewish Christians, as evidenced by the designations "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (1:1) and "assembly" (Gk. *synagōgē*, 2:2), the Jewish reasoning throughout, and James's frequent reflection on the Torah (Mosaic law). If "Dispersion" is literal as well as metaphorical (see note on 1:1; cf. Acts 2:9–11), then these are a group of Jewish Christian house churches outside Palestine, which fits the situation of persecution and poverty in the letter. More than that cannot be said, but the social situation can be gleaned from the letter. As a result of the troubles, conflict has entered the churches, and they have splintered into fighting factions. Moreover, some have fallen into a worldly lifestyle (James 1:27; 4:4) and have failed to put their faith into practice (1:19–26), with the result that they have become "double-minded," wavering between God and the world (1:8; 4:8).

History of Salvation Summary

Christians are to live with the wisdom (Prov. 1:2, 7) that befits followers of Christ.

Key Themes

1. God is seen as a gracious giver, the unchanging Creator, merciful and compassionate, a Judge, the one and only God, a jealous God, a gracious God, and a healing God.	1:5, 17-18; 2:5, 13, 19; 4:5-6; 5:1-3, 9, 15
2. Wisdom comes "from above" and enables one both to withstand trials and to bring peace rather than discord.	1:5; 3:13, 17
3. God allows tests and trials (1:2-4), but temptation comes not from God but from self and Satan. The required response is patient endurance.	1:3, 13-14; 4:7; 5:7-8
4. The primary trial is poverty and oppression from the rich. The poor are the special focus of God's care and must be cared for by his people and not shown prejudice or ignored. The wealthy are condemned for presumptuous pride and for stealing from the poor.	1:9, 27; 2:1-5, 15-16; 4:13-17; 5:1-6
5. Apocalyptic themes are prevalent in terms of both future judgment and reward.	1:12; 2:5, 12-13; 3:1; 4:12; 5:1-7, 9, 20
6. The power of the tongue to destroy or to bring peace dominates the middle section.	3:1-4:12
7. The ethical mandate to go beyond hearing the word to living it out in daily conduct is made explicit early on and is implicit throughout the letter.	1:19-27; 2:14-26
8. Prayer is the proper response to trials, but it must not be self-seeking. It is to be central in life not only when afflicted or sick but also when cheerful. God has great power to heal, both physically and spiritually.	1:5-7; 4:2-3; 5:13-18
9. Faith, in its relationship to both works and justification, does not contradict but supplements Paul's teaching. James and Paul are united in teaching that justification comes only by the grace of God through faith but will of necessity result in works. If there are no resultant works, there was no justification in the first place.	2:14-26

The Setting of James

(c. A.D. 40-45)

The epistle of James was likely written to predominantly Jewish Christian house churches outside of Palestine, based on its mention of the "twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (1:1), its distinctly Jewish content, and its focus on persecution and poverty. This would mean it was sent throughout most of the ancient Mediterranean world. The author has traditionally been believed to be James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus and an early leader of the church in Jerusalem.



Outline

- I. Greeting ([1:1](#))
- II. The Testing of Faith ([1:2-18](#))
 - A. Joy in trials ([1:2-4](#))
 - B. Wisdom from God for trials ([1:5-8](#))
 - C. The place of rich and poor before God ([1:9-11](#))
 - D. Reward for those who endure ([1:12](#))
 - E. The process of temptation ([1:13-18](#))
- III. Hearing and Doing the Word ([1:19-27](#))
 - A. Hearers of the word ([1:19-21](#))
 - B. Doers of the word ([1:22-25](#))
 - C. True, practical religion ([1:26-27](#))
- IV. The Sin of Partiality ([2:1-13](#))
 - A. Preferring the wealthy over the poor in the assembly ([2:1-7](#))
 - B. The royal law of love ([2:8-11](#))

- C. Acting in light of judgment ([2:12-13](#))
- V. Faith without Works Is Dead ([2:14-26](#))
 - A. Faith without works ([2:14-17](#))
 - B. Response of a critic ([2:18-20](#))
 - C. Examples of Abraham and Rahab ([2:21-26](#))
- VI. The Sin of Dissension in the Community ([3:1-4:12](#))
 - A. Taming the tongue ([3:1-12](#))
 - B. The solution: wisdom from above ([3:13-18](#))
 - C. Warning against worldliness ([4:1-12](#))
- VII. The Sins of the Wealthy ([4:13-5:12](#))
 - A. Boasting about tomorrow ([4:13-17](#))
 - B. Warning to the rich ([5:1-6](#))
 - C. Patience in suffering ([5:7-12](#))
- VIII. The Prayer of Faith ([5:13-18](#))
- IX. Concluding Admonition ([5:19-20](#))

FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

BIBLE STUDY FOCUS - "Advent Peace"

MAIN TEXT: James 3:13-18

Instructions for Small Group Time:

Option 1: Send the main text to small group members so they can read it ahead of time.

Option 2: Read the text together when you meet

Basic Bible Study Practices:

1. As people read the text, ask them to pay attention to key words
2. As people read the text have them highlight key words, people, and places
3. As people read the text have them pay attention to repetition of key terms, ideas, and people

4. If people are given the opportunity to read the text ahead of small group time, have them read it at least twice so they become familiar with its contents.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read James 3:13-18 (also feel free to read more verses to gain a deeper understanding of context).
2. What are some specific questions or themes that stick out to you about this passage? Take a few minutes and discuss them as a group.
3. Define "peace" in your own words.
4. Define "peace" according to God's word.
5. Is there a difference between the peace that we see in Scripture versus the peace (or lack of peace) that we see promoted within the world? If so, what is the difference?
6. How do we focus on (or operate in) God's peace when everything around us is chaotic? How can we begin to apply that to our lives as we enter a new year?
7. What are some verses in the Bible that speak specifically about peace? Share them with each other as a group.
8. What are some examples of moments when God has given you His peace? How do explain that kind of peace to others?

Extra Resources

The Bible Project - "Overview of James": <https://youtu.be/qn-hLHWwRYY>

The Bible Project - "Peace": <https://youtu.be/oLYORLZOaZE>