

I. Author – “James”

A. James – but which one?

1. James, son of Zebedee, John’s brother
2. James, the less (or James the younger) – Mark 15:40 [who could be the same person as James, the son of Alphaeus – Mark 3:18]
3. James, brother of Jesus – Mt. 13:55, Gal. 1:19 (likely also the brother of Jude – Jude 1, Mk. 6:3)

B. What do we know of James?

1. He wasn’t always a believer – Jn. 7:5
2. He was the 120 in the upper room, waiting for Pentecost – Acts 1:14
3. He was first “pastor” of the Church at Jerusalem – Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18, Gal. 1:19, 2:9, 2:12
4. He was remembered as “James the Just”
5. He was martyred in AD. 62

II. Audience & Occasion – “to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion”

1. Jewish believers or churches (of mostly Jewish Christians)
2. The Dispersion (Greek: diaspora – means “scattering”)
3. James speaks to his flock & to the growing number of churches springing up around the Eastern Roman Empire.

III. Genre – “the letter of James”

1. A letter, not a point-by-point argument. (Repetitive, circular)
2. Similar to Wisdom literature, the Proverbs of the NT (examples: 1:10-11, 19-20, 2:1, 3:2)
3. Similar to Prophetic literature with bold denunciations of sin (example: 5:1-6 cf. Amos 5:11-12)
4. Strikingly similar to sayings of Jesus, especially with the Sermon on the Mount.* Examples:
 - Rejoice in trials – James 1:2, Matt. 5:11-12*
 - Keep the whole law – James 2:10, Matt. 5:19*
 - Take no oaths – James 5:12, Matt. 5:33-37*
 - Goal is maturity/perfection – James 1:4, Matt. 5:48*
 - Moth & rust destroy riches – James 5:2, Matt. 6:19*
 - Do not judge – James 4:11-12, Matt. 7:1-5*
 - We ask God for good gifts – James 1:5, Matt. 7:7*
 - Doers, not hearers, of Word – Jam. 1:22, Matt. 7:24-27*
 - Possibility of false faith – Jam. 2:14-26, Matt. 7:21-23*
 - Blessed Peacemakers– James 3:17-18, Matt. 5:9*
 - Don’t serve two masters – James 4:4, Matt. 6:24*
 - Love of neighbor– James 2:8, Matt. 22:39
 - The Lord is “at the door” – James 5:8-9, Matt. 24:33
 - Danger of Self-exaltation– James 4:6-10, Matt. 23:12
 - Accountable for every word – James 3:2, Matt. 12:36-37

--list derived from *James (Reformed Expository Commentary)*, Daniel Doriani, pg. 11

IV. Characteristics of the Book of James

1. Many challenging pronouncements and pithy statements throughout the letter. Examples:
 - Count it all joy when you encounter many kinds of trials
 - Faith without works is dead
 - Let not many of you become teachers because you know you will incur stricter judgment
 - You adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?
 - Come now, you rich, weep and wail for the miseries coming over you!
 - The prayer of faith will heal the sick person. –from ZECNT
--list from *James (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*, Craig Blomberg, Mariam Kamell, pg. 21
2. 59 commands in 108 verses (5 short chapters)
3. Only 2 explicit mentions of Jesus (James 1:1, 2:1), and few mentions of the Gospel or salvation by faith.
 - This led Martin Luther to doubt its canonicity – although he later warmed to the book.
4. Despite this controversial character, the book has been warmly embraced and loved by average Christians for thousands of years. It is incredibly practical, helpful, and memorable.
5. The Gospel does shine through this book in hidden ways. Here we want to just show some of this element of James:
 - The commands in James do not give us confidence that we can keep them – the bar is raised very high – 2:10, 4:17, 1:22
 - There are paradoxes presented too:
 - we must control our tongue 1:26, but no one can 3:8
 - we must avoid the world's pollution 1:27, but our envy and quarrels prove we are worldly 4:1-4
 - Furthermore, we are all in peril since within us are desires leading to sin & ultimately death – 1:14-15
 - But we are not left to ourselves, God birthed us anew, of his own will, leading to life – 1:18, 21
 - Indeed "mercy triumphs over judgment" 2:13, since "the Lord is full of compassion and mercy" 5:11.
 - God gives "grace to the humble" 4:6.
6. The book of James is not just a haphazard list of commands, but addresses the needs of the young (at this time in history) Jewish church.

V. Primary Themes of the Book of James

1. Trials and Temptations
 - introduced in 1:1-4 • restated in 1:12-18 • developed in 4:13-5:18
2. Wisdom and Speech
 - introduced in 1:5-8 • restated in 1:19-26, • developed in 3:1-4:12
3. Riches and Poverty
 - introduced in 1:9-11 • restated in 1:27 • developed in 2:1-26