

Outline of
James



Introduction

Authorship

That “James” need not further specify which James he is in 1:1 probably suggests that he is the most prominent and well-known James of the early church, James the Lord’s brother (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:17-26; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 2:9, 12), as in church tradition. (James was a common name, and when one spoke of a less commonly recognized individual with a common name, one usually added a qualifying title, e.g., “Plato the comic poet,” “James the lesser” in the apostolic list, and many people in ancient business documents.) Who else would have the status in the church to write to the “dispersed twelve tribes” (James 1:1)?

The main objection to this proposal is the polished style of the Greek language of the letter, but this objection does not take account of several factors: (1) the widespread use of rhetoric and more than sufficient time for James, the main spokesperson for the Jerusalem church, to have acquired facility in it; (2) that as the son of a carpenter he had probably had a better education than Galilean peasants; (3) the spread of Greek language and culture in Palestine (e.g., Josephus, Justin Martyr); (4) excavations showing that most of Galilee was not as backward as was once thought; (5) the widespread use of amanuenses (scribes) who might, like Josephus’s editorial scribes, help a writer’s Greek. This last point would be especially appropriate for the leader of the mother church, in the one overwhelmingly Jewish city that also provided advanced education in Greek works (cf. the Greek in Acts 15:23-29).

The situation depicted in the letter best fits a period before A.D. 66 (the Jewish war with Rome), and James was killed about A.D. 62 (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 20.200). It is also possible that James’s followers edited his material relevant to the war and re-released it in collected form after his death, in the wake of the war or tensions leading up to it. This could explain the Diaspora audience of James 1:1 even though the material in the letter is quite relevant to a Judean setting. In any case, the material in the letter probably should be viewed as genuinely from James; pseudepigraphic letters usually circulated long after the death of the person the author claimed to be, and a date between A.D. 62 and 66 would allow insufficient time for this letter to be a pseudepigraphic composition.

James the Just

Josephus and some later Jewish-Christian writers reported the great esteem that fellow Jerusalemites, especially the poor, had for James. Non-Christian as well as Christian Jerusalemites admired his piety, but his denunciations of abuses by the aristocracy (as in 5:1-6) undoubtedly played a large role in the aristocratic priesthood’s opposition to him. About the year A.D. 62, when the procurator Festus died, the high priest Ananus II executed James and some other people. The public outcry was so great, however, that when the new procurator Albinus arrived, Ananus was deposed from the high priesthood over the matter (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 20.200-203).

Situation

Although James’s teaching can apply to a variety of situations (and was probably so applied by the letter’s Diaspora audience), this commentary can provide the most specific background by giving special attention to how the teachings would have applied concretely in James’s immediate environment in Judea. This environment shaped the issues James had to address toward the end of his life. More than a century before this time, the Roman general Pompey had cut Judean territory and made many Jewish peasants landless; the exorbitant taxes of Herod the Great must have driven more small farmers out of business. In the first century, many peasants worked as tenants on larger, feudal estates (as elsewhere in the empire); others became landless day laborers in the marketplaces, finding work only sporadically (more was available in harvest season). Resentment against aristocratic landlords ran high in many parts of the empire, but non-payment of promised goods to them was hardly an option; a few landowners even had their own hit squads of hired assassins to deal with uncooperative tenants. The situation was less extreme in the cities, but even there the divisions were obvious (e.g., the aristocracy in Jerusalem’s Upper City versus the poor living downwind of that city’s sewers). When the aristocratic priests began to withhold tithe income from the poorer priests, their only means of support, economic tensions increased.

In Rome, grain shortages often led to rioting. Social and economic tensions in Palestine were contained longer but eventually yielded to violence. Pursuing peace with Rome through practical politics, the Jerusalem aristocracy became an object of hatred to Zealots and other elements of resistance, who felt that God alone should rule the land. (Josephus, who wished to minimize the anti-Roman sentiment that prevailed in Judea just before the war, tried to marginalize the Zealots as a fringe group; but other evidence in his narrative shows clearly that revolutionary sympathies in general were widespread.) Various outbreaks of violence eventually culminated in a revolt in A.D. 66, followed by a massacre of priests and the Roman garrison on the Temple Mount. Aristocratic and proletarian patriots clashed inside the city as Roman armies surrounded it, and in A.D. 70 Jerusalem fell and its temple was destroyed. The final resistance stronghold at Masada fell in A.D. 73.

Audience

James addresses especially Jewish Christians (and probably any other Jews who would listen) caught up in the sort of social tensions that eventually produced the war of A.D. 66–70 (see comment on Acts 21:20–22). Although the situation most explicitly fits James’s own in Judea, it also addresses the kinds of social tensions that were spreading throughout the Roman world (1:1). During the Judean war of 66–70, Rome violently discarded three emperors in a single year (A.D. 69), and immediately after the Judean war resistance fighters continued to spread their views to Jews in North Africa and Cyprus. But as in the case of some other general epistles, this letter reflects especially the situation of the writer more than that of any potential readership elsewhere.

Source: Keener, Craig S. (2014). *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, Second Edition*. InterVarsity Press.

IMPRESSIONS ~ how practical!
how illogical!

WRITER ~ half-brother of Jesus.
presiding elder in Jerusalem.
"the Just" pillar of the church.

STYLE ~ Greek rhetoric.
Hebrew wisdom.

READERS ~ Jewish believers (in DIASPORA)
i. At home - majority - segregation
Too strict → **PRIDE**
ii. Abroad - minority - assimilation
Too lax → **GREED**

CONTENT:

WEALTH (*godlessness*)

WORDS (*blessing & cursing*)

WORLD (*tests & temptations*)

WISDOM (*above & below*)

PROBLEM:

DEEDS RATHER THAN DOCTRINE.

LAW " " GOSPEL.

WORKS " " FAITH.

But "**WORKS**" = **ACTIONS**

Chapter

1

- Jas 1:1-4** We are to rejoice under the cross;
Jas 1:5-12 to ask patience of God;
Jas 1:13-18 and in our trials not to impute our weakness, or sins, to him,
Jas 1:19-25 but rather to hearken to the word, to meditate on it, and to do thereafter.
Jas 1:26-27 Otherwise men may seem, but never be, truly religious.



EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF THE HEAVENLY LIGHTS, WHO DOES NOT CHANGE LIKE SHIFTING SHADOWS.

- JAMES 1:17 -

Chapter

2

- Jas 2:1-12** It is not agreeable to Christian profession to regard the rich, and to despise the poor brethren;
Jas 2:13 rather we are to be loving and merciful;
Jas 2:14-16 and not to boast of faith where no deeds are;
Jas 2:17-18 which is but a dead faith;
Jas 2:19-20 the faith of the devils;
Jas 2:21-24 not of Abraham;
Jas 2:25-26 nor Rahab.

Chapter

3

- Jas 3:1-4** We are not rashly or arrogantly to reprove others;
Jas 3:5-12 but rather to bridle the tongue, a little member, but a powerful instrument of much good, and great harm.
Jas 3:13-18 They who are truly wise are mild and peaceable without envying and strife.

Chapter

4

- Jas 4:1-3** We are to strive against covetousness;
Jas 4:4 intemperance;
Jas 4:5-10 pride;
Jas 4:11-12 detraction and rash judgment of others;
Jas 4:13-17 and not to be confident in the good success of worldly business, but mindful ever of the uncertainty of this life, to commit ourselves and all our affairs to God's providence.

Chapter

5

- Jas 5:1-6** Wicked rich men are to fear God's vengeance.
Jas 5:7-11 We ought to be patient in afflictions, after the example of the prophets, and Job;
Jas 5:12 to forbear swearing;
Jas 5:13 to pray in adversity, to sing in prosperity;
Jas 5:14-18 to acknowledge mutually our several faults, to pray one for another;
Jas 5:19-20 and to reduce a straying brother to the truth.

Quiz on James

1. What does James say we will receive when we endure temptation?

2. What does James tell us is dead without works?

3. In Chapter 4, what does James tell us we must do before the Lord?

4. A man's religion is worthless if he does not control what part of his body?

5. According to the book of James, when we fall into various trials we should count it as what?

6. In Chapter 1, we should be what of 'the Word', and not hearers only?

7. What does James say no man can tame?

8. Who cannot be tempted with evil, according to James?

9. What does full-grown sin bring forth?

10. In Chapter 3, who does James say will receive stricter judgment?

GENEVA
BIBLE SCHOOL

