

# Week One

Introduction and James 1:1

## Introduction



### I. Author and Date

A. **Author:** James, like all of the general epistles except Hebrews, is named after its \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 1).

1. Of the four men named James in the New Testament, only two are candidates for authorship of this epistle.
  - a) James the \_\_\_\_\_, the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3; Acts 1:13) is not an option.
  - b) James the father of \_\_\_\_\_ (not Iscariot) (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13) is also not an option.
  - c) James the son of Zebedee and brother of \_\_\_\_\_ (Matt. 4:21) might be the author, but according to Acts 12:2 he was martyred too early to have written it.
  - d) That leaves only James, the oldest half-brother of \_\_\_\_\_ (Mark 6:3) and brother of Jude (the same Jude who wrote the letter bearing his name) (Matt. 13:55).
    - (1) In John 7:5 we learn that James had at first rejected Jesus as Messiah, but — according to I Corinthians 15:7 — we learn he later believed.
    - (2) Acts and Galatians tell us that he became the key leader in the Jerusalem church (cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:12), being called one of the “pillars” of that church in Galatians 2:9 along with Peter and John.
    - (3) He’s also known as “James the \_\_\_\_\_” because of his devotion to righteousness. He was martyred around AD 62, according to Josephus, the first century Jewish historian.
    - (4) Scholars have compared James’ vocabulary in the letter he wrote — which is recorded in Acts 15 — with that in the epistle of James to further corroborate his authorship.
2. Why is this so important?
  - a) James \_\_\_\_\_ with Jesus as an older brother.
  - b) James \_\_\_\_\_ his brother’s claims to be the Messiah.
  - c) But something happened to change James’ mind. We know that his resurrected brother appeared to him, and we see that he wrote with the authority of one who had personally seen the resurrected Christ.
  - d) Unless James was crazy, or he was a blatant liar, James is one of the most \_\_\_\_\_ sources from which to receive admonishment.
    - (1) He knew the reasons he rejected Jesus.
    - (2) He knew what changed his heart.
    - (3) His personal experiences that are not discussed in this book still play into everything James writes. For example, James was recognized as an associate of the apostles (Gal. 1:19), and the leader of the Jerusalem church.
  - e) Of course, it really doesn’t matter how uniquely equipped James was to write this book, we know the \_\_\_\_\_ oversaw its creation.
  - f) Still, James’ life experiences are beneficial for us in that they mirror so many of our own.

- B. **Date:** James most likely wrote this epistle to believers scattered (1:1) as a result of the unrest recorded in Acts 12 (ca. AD 44). There is no mention of the Council of Jerusalem described in Acts 15 (ca. AD 49), which would be expected if that Council had not yet taken place. Therefore, James can be reliably dated somewhere between AD 44 and 49, ***which makes it the written book of the New Testament canon.***
1. This is the first inspired letter from the Holy Spirit to the Church.
  2. The Messiah had finally come and created a way by which man's relationship with God could be restored. He also invited the Gentiles to the party, and we see the church being created.
  3. And in the freshness and newness of God's most exciting work on the face of the earth to that point, and in fulfillment of the promise that the Holy Spirit would come and teach us everything Jesus taught His disciples and more, these are the first words He gives us.
  4. Other than the Old Testament, these were the first things God wanted the new Church to know.

## II. Background and Setting

- A. The recipients of this book were \_\_\_\_\_ believers who had been dispersed (1:1), possibly as a result of Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7, A.D. 31–34), but more likely due to the persecution under Herod Agrippa I which we learn about in Acts 12, which took place around AD 44.
- B. James refers to his audience as "brethren" 15 times (1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 4:11; 5:7,9,10,12,19), which was a common salutation among the first century Jews. Not surprisingly, then, the book of James is Jewish in its content. For example, the Greek word translated "assembly" (2:2) is the word for "synagogue." Further, James contains more than 40 allusions to the OT (and more than 20 to the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5–7).

## III. Historical and Theological Themes

- A. James has a lot in common with the book of Proverbs. It has a practical emphasis, stressing not merely theoretical knowledge, but godly behavior. James wrote with a passionate desire for his readers to be uncompromisingly \_\_\_\_\_ to the Word of God.
1. One of the first things God wanted His newly-formed church to know was that mere \_\_\_\_\_ of God and the Bible is not enough.
  2. James hits so hard on the importance of sanctified, holy behavior that some people mistook his meaning and have suggested that it doesn't belong as part of the Bible. They were wrong, and we'll find out why later.
  3. The Holy Spirit doesn't believe in Christians who don't live like Christ . . . and that was one of the first things He wanted to communicate to us.
- B. It's also interesting to note that James used at least 30 references to nature. This makes sense coming from someone who spent a great deal of time outdoors.

## James 1:1

### I. From James to Us

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

- A. James is the author.
- B. He refers to himself as a \_\_\_\_\_. “Servant” is a common title used by the authors of the Epistles.
1. What is a servant? Jesus defines the servant’s role quite well in Luke 17:7-10. He says, *“7 Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? 8 Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? 9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*
  2. A servant has only one purpose, to fulfill his master’s \_\_\_\_\_. And yet He goes even further to say that we are unworthy — the word means “good for nothing” — if we only do what is expected.
  3. James is proclaiming Himself a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. These two titles for Jesus mean supreme \_\_\_\_\_ and Messiah. James proclaims that Jesus is both our Master and our only means of salvation.
  4. What about you? Instead of introducing yourself as a Christian, would you feel comfortable telling people that you’re a \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ?
    - a) Most people today don’t even know what it means to be a Christian, but they each have their own ideas.
    - b) If you introduce yourself as a Follower of Christ or a Servant of Christ, they will likely have no idea what that means and will be interested in your explanation.
    - c) “Christian” is not a bad title. The church in Antioch were the first to be called Christians, and Agrippa told Paul that he was almost persuaded to become a Christian. However, the word “Christian” was originally intended as an insult.
    - d) Peter is the only person in the Bible to use the term “Christian.” In I Peter 4:16 he writes, *“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”* Peter as well attaches the name “Christian” with suffering.
    - e) It’s totally fine to call yourself a Christian, but when you really look at what the first century followers of Christ called *themselves*, and how the Holy Spirit refers to believers, you’ll notice that those titles are far more descriptive.
      - (1) We’re called Abraham’s children, seed, and the promise.
      - (2) We’re called chosen and holy people, the elect, and predestined.
      - (3) We’re also called the temple of God, and living stones in the building that is the church.
      - (4) We’re called a holy and royal priesthood, a kingdom of priests, and priests of God and Christ.
      - (5) We’re called living sacrifices, slaves, servants, follower of Christs, and referred to as being in Christ.

- (6) We're called believers, doers of the Word, and the righteousness of God.
- (7) We're called witnesses, lights, and salt.
- (8) We're heirs of God, brothers, sisters, the household of God, the bride of Christ, and friends.
- (9) We're also called blameless, holy, instruments for noble purposes, obedient children, righteous, and saints.
- (10) And there're also the many and sundry terms that include soldiers and sheep and many, many more.

C. James is writing to the Jews who believe in Jesus and who have been dispersed abroad.

- 1. The first thing that happen after the church is established is that people try to \_\_\_\_\_ it apart.
- 2. There is much pain and suffering and persecution in the lives of the first generation of believers.
- 3. Believers have been driven from their homes by people who want to destroy them.
- 4. In America we enjoy so many religions freedoms that it's almost impossible to truly understand their situation.
- 5. Yet, this book is written for us. Suffering is a major theme of this letter, and we all experience it in different ways.

D. James sends his greetings.

- 1. This is a cheerful salutation. This Greek word has been translated "rejoice," "be glad," "\_\_\_\_\_", "God speed," and "joyfully."
- 2. That may not sound out of place just yet, but in the context of what James just said about the dispersion and the Truths he's about to teach us about suffering, it would seem strange to anyone who isn't a servant of Christ to hear such a happy word used in such dire circumstances.
- 3. But that is the divine and glorious paradox of the believer.

E. **Conclusion** — be encouraged by the fact that the same God that revolutionized James' life and gave him joyful rejoicing in pain and suffering wants to be your God. He wants to have the same relationship with you that he had with James. He wants to bless you the same way.