

Message #1**James 1:1**

There is one book of the New Testament that has given people fits almost ever since it was written—the book is **James**. In fact, if you would have checked the Marcion canon listing of N.T. books in AD 140, or the Muratorian canon listing in AD 170 or the Cheltenham canon listing of AD 360, you would not have even found the book because it was not accepted as even belonging in Scripture. Had you gone to the council meetings of Nicea in AD 325-340, you would have discovered that those church leaders classified it as a disputed book. It was not readily accepted.

If you would have been in a church service before 1539 and someone would have suggested that you turn to this book of James in your Bibles, you would have had a hard time finding it because it was hidden away in the back of the Bible. As one commentator said it was kind of the “junk mail” of the New Testament.

Martin Luther, in his preface to his 1522 German Bible said that this book was a “right strawy epistle” that had “no quality of the gospel.” In fact, Luther said I refuse to allow this book to be in my Bible as a prominent book, but he also said he would not forbid anyone to place and exalt it as he pleases because there were many good sayings in it.

The main reason why this book has been so called into question is because there appears to be some kind of contradiction between James and Paul in their teaching on the doctrine of justification. This was Luther’s argument. Luther felt James taught something contrary to Paul’s justification by faith alone gospel. But as we will see, it actually doesn’t.

In the next few weeks, we would like to take a journey through this controversial book known as the Epistle of James. To begin this journey, we would like to ask and answer certain questions:

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of James?

Well let us give some reasons:

Reason #1 - Because James is one of only 66 inspired books that God has given to man.

In spite of the controversy, James did end up in the Bible. This fact right here is proof that it is inspired. The fact that it was an inspired book was really put to the test, but in the end it passed the test. When a book of the Bible is so scrutinized as this one has been, we may assume that it does belong in the Bible.

This book was cited as a book of the Bible by Clement of Rome (AD 95-97); Hermas (AD 115-140). It was specifically said to have been an authentic book by Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 315); Jerome (AD 340-420) and Augustine (AD 400).

James also did end up being voted in as an inspired book in the Apostolic canon listing (AD 300) and the Athanasius canon listing (AD367). Also at the council meetings of Hippo (AD 393); and both meetings at Carthage (AD 397, 419), James was established as an inspired book of God.

All of the major uncial Greek manuscripts (Greek in capital letters) of the third and fourth centuries contain the book of James. Also there are passages from James found in manuscript p20 of the third century (James 2:19-3:9) and p23 of the third century (James 1:10-12, 15-18). Manuscript p74 of the seventh century contains 70 verses from James. Also there are other Greek manuscripts that contain James, so clearly James is one of the preserved and inspired and God-breathed books of God.

Furthermore, ever since the fourth century, James has been classified as a Catholic or General Epistle, because it was not written to a specific church (James, I & II Peter, I, II, & III John, Jude). Clearly James belongs in the Bible; one of only 66 inspired books.

Reason #2 - Because James is a book misunderstood by most people.

Now one big reason for this misunderstanding is the fact that many works-oriented religions teach the people that based on James 2:24 you must have works with justification or you are not saved. The Roman Catholic Church appeals to this very verse and book to convince people that they must in part work their way to heaven. Many different cults refer to this verse as a proof-text for their works system.

But I want us to pause for a moment and realize something. James taught that no one could be justified by keeping the law. In fact, in a verse in the very same chapter, he taught that if one broke just one law one was guilty of breaking them all (James 2:10).

It would be good for us to remember that when James wrote this, he was writing it to the most rigid and religious people alive. These were very religious people who were steeped in their works. The Jews were zealous for works religion. So James is not promoting a works salvation or a law-keeping salvation.

When James wrote, he believed that a man was justified by faith alone in Christ alone apart from any works (James 2:1). James taught one was saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. James was in Jerusalem where all of these religious law keepers and works promoters were operating and James encourages the believers that these people do not manifest the kind of attitudes and actions that indicates they have been born again and have experienced the saving grace of God.

H. A. Ironside said most people do not grasp the fact that **there is a big difference between justification before God and justification before man.**

Reason #3 - Because James is a book that exposes Phariseeism.

James is a book that makes legalistic Pharisees squirm. This is a book that takes straight aim at those who are saying they are right with God but have never experienced grace. In fact, this really is the key to figuring out James 2:14ff.

Religious Pharisees were saying they were right with God, but they had never experienced God's grace and James uses an example to prove the point. The religious frauds had high regard for the rich people, but if a poor person came to church who needed some clothing or food, they never demonstrated grace to them in any way.

Those Pharisees were not saved; they didn't grasp anything about grace. James is a book that makes legalistic Pharisees squirm. You will like this book unless you are a Pharisee.

QUESTION #2 – Who is James and who wrote James?

Obviously from the opening verse and opening word we learn that James was written by a man whose name was James.

Now there are five guys named James in the N.T.:

- 1) James, the son of Alphaeus, one of the twelve (Matt. 10:3, 27, 58; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).
- 2) James, the father of Judas, the Apostle (not Iscariot). (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13)
- 3) James the less (the younger). His mother at crucifixion of Christ. (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 24:10).
- 4) James, the son of Zebedee, brother of John, who was one of the twelve disciples, who was Executed by Herod in AD 44 (Acts 12:2). This James is the one named the most in the Bible (Matt. 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mark 10:35; 13:3; Luke 9:54; Acts 1:13; 12:2).
- 5) James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ. He was the second oldest of Mary's five sons: Jesus, James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Acts 15).

Now of this list there are only two who have been suggested for writing James:

- 1) James, the son of Zebedee
- 2) James, the half-brother of the Lord.

There are several facts we may glean about this James:

Fact #1 - James was a servant of God. **1:1a**

This means he viewed himself as a servant of God the Father.

Fact #2 - James was a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. **1:1b**

By using these proper nouns we know that James believed Jesus Christ was God (Lord); He was the Savior (Jesus) and He was the Jewish Messiah (Christ). The coordinating conjunction “and” indicates He also believed that Jesus was co-equal with God the Father.

Fact #3 - James was Jewish. **1:1c**

It is clear that James is Jewish and primarily is writing to the Jews at a time when there was some kind of tribal distinction. What this means is this is written in the very early stages or infant days of Christianity because Christianity was first launched in a Jewish context (Acts 1:8; 2:5).

Fact #4 - James was a Jewish brother. **1:2**

James was a Jewish Christian brother who could empathize with scattered Jews. He could relate physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Fact #5 - James had a proper theological grasp of the Holiness and Sovereignty of God. **1:13, 17**

James knew the truth about God and he certainly knew the truth about man.

Fact #6 - James had a proper theological grasp of the sinfulness of man. **1:14-15**

James knew the truth about “each” person. He knew what it was like to be tempted and fail. He also was well aware of the fact that no man could be saved by his sinful works.

Fact #7 - James had a proper theological grasp of Biblical salvation. **1:18**

It is clear from **verse 18** that James does not contradict Paul. He did not believe that one was born again by his works or his will. He knew that salvation was rooted in the sovereignty of God and God brought about salvation through His Word.

Fact #8 - James had a deep burden for dejected people. **1:27; 2:15-16**

James had a heart for those who were down and out. It would appear that he came from a poor background. He had come from a home that did not have a lot of money. When he saw someone who was poor, he never forgot it.

Fact #9 - James had an intense passion for prayer. **1:5; 5:13-18**

James emphasizes the necessity to pray.

Fact #10 - James had a deep burden to restore sinful fallen believers. **5:19-20**

James had a great burden to restore fallen believers, which proves he does not believe you are saved by works. He saw part of the responsibility of ministry to try to turn believers back to God.

Fact #11 - James was a well-recognized man to other Christians. **1:1**

All he had to say in beginning this epistle is “James.” By just saying that name, those scattered Jewish believers would immediately recognize who he was.

Now James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, was executed in AD 44 (Acts 12:2). So we conclude that **this book of James was written by James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ**. The early church clearly supports this (Eusebius, Origen, Jerome, Augustine, Council of Carthage).

Now this James was very important to the development of Christianity (Gal. 1:19; 2:7-9). He was one of the big three names of early Christianity—Peter, James and John. James was very important to the development of grace doctrine in Jerusalem—Gal. 1:18-19; Acts 15:13; 21:17-18. **James became fully supportive of Pauline Grace (Acts 15:11, 15).**

According to John 7:5, when Jesus Christ was here on earth His own brothers did not believe in Him. This was true throughout most of his ministry. They initially did not believe He was God and they did not believe He was the Messiah. But after Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and He specifically appeared to James (I Cor. 15:7), who was an apostle (Gal. 1:19). In fact, according to Josephus, James was so dedicated to Jesus Christ that he was stoned for his faith in AD 62.

It is interesting that James does not even identify himself as an Apostle, even though he was one. This man who was so against his own brother ended up being one of the giants of the faith. **Do not ever underestimate the transforming power of the sovereignty of God.**

QUESTION #3 – When was James written?

There are five observations we may make:

Observation #1 - It was written at a time when Christianity was basically Jewish. **1:1**

Certainly when we read “twelve tribes” that point is obvious. Jewish Christianity dominated the Christian world from AD 30-47. The Apostle Paul was the agent to take Christianity to the Gentiles; but his major mission did not start until AD 49-50.

Observation #2 - It was written at a time when Christianity was somewhat unstable. **1:1**

The Jews had been “dispersed” or “scattered.” Believing Jews had been chased out of their homes, which fits the time frame of AD 30-47.

Observation #3 - It was written at a time when Jewish believers were meeting in synagogues.
2:2

Jewish believers were regularly meeting and often they were meeting in synagogues, which fit well the time frame of AD 30-47. The word “assembly” is the Greek word “synagogue.”

Observation #4 - It was written at a time of great prophetic expectancy. **5:8**

We know that the early believing Jews had an expectant hope that the Lord would immediately return. Many of them sold their property and possessions, which was a very unusual mark of faith (Acts 2:44-47).

Observation #5 - It was written without mention of the Jerusalem council meeting that occurred with the Apostle Paul in Acts 15.

That council meeting occurred around AD 49, which means it is possible that James was written before that meeting.

Taking all of these things into consideration, we believe a good date for this book is AD 45. It fits well with all of the historical observations we just made.

QUESTION #4 – Why was James written?

There are at least seven reasons that James wrote this book:

Reason #1 - To combat Pharisaical religious hypocrisy.

Jews were listening to Pharisaical legalists say they were right with God, when in fact they were not.

Reason #2 - To encourage believers who were undergoing trials. **1:2**

God has a purpose for those trials.

Reason #3 - To teach believers true theology about God. **1:13-14**

God is not the problem when it comes to sin, we are. God is Holy always.

Reason #4 - God warns Christians about the use of their tongue. **1:19, 26; 3:1-2; 4:11**

Real spirituality controls the mouth and controls the speech.

Reason #5 - To warn Christians not to trust in their wealth. **1:9-10; 2:5; 5:1-3**

In the first century the Pharisees held to a prosperity gospel. Financial wealth meant spiritual wealth. This was a Jewish concept.

Reason #6 - To instruct believers about philanthropic responsibility.
1:27; 2:15-16; 5:14-15, 19-20

There are two ways James says we do this:

- 1) By caring for physical needs.
- 2) By caring for spiritual needs.

Reason #7 - To prevent believers from showing partiality. **2:1-5**

There is no place for prejudice in the life of the believer or in the life of the church. There is no place for social, racial, ethical or moral prejudice. All people who come to church who are believers are in the family of God and they are important. God's people need to know that.

QUESTION #5 – To whom did James write?

There are four observations we may make that determine this:

Observation #1 - They were Jewish=twelve tribes. **1:1**

Observation #2 - They were believers - “brethren.” **1:2**

Observation #3 - They had been scattered - “dispersed.” **1:1**

A quick through Acts gives us the history of this:

- 1) Many had been jailed. Acts 4:1-3
- 2) Many had been threatened. Acts 4:17, 21
- 3) Many had given up everything. Acts 4:33-37 (very dedicated Jewish believers)
- 4) Many had seen their leaders beaten. Acts 5:40–Apostles
- 5) Many had seen their leaders executed. Acts 7:58-59–Stephen
- 6) Many had been hunted. Acts 8:1-4 (Saul of Tarsus)

These believers were the real deal. They laid it all on the line for God.

Observation #4 - They needed this instruction.

It is clear that these believers needed the instruction that is in this book. They were committed, but they needed the knowledge of God in the commitment.

QUESTION #6 – What is the theme of James?

The practical theme of the book of James is this: **True faith that has experienced the grace of God will demonstrate that grace faith by grace words and grace works.**

Religious works are not the same as grace works and one who has been saved by God's grace through faith, manifests grace works, not religious works.

People of grace faith will be people who demonstrate grace works.

They are not rigid. They are not legalistic. They are not just talkers. They understand what God has done for them and they demonstrate that grace in regard to others.