

James
“A Pathway to Patience”

- I. Introduction**
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I. Introduction

Beginning a study of a new book of the Bible is like preparing for a trip to a location they haven't visited. It is best done by careful preparation as you study travel books noting the geography, climate, logistics, history and popular places to visit. It is also best done before you travel not after you arrive! It is for this reason that I start every new book study of the Bible with a complete outline. The book of James falls under the category of a letter and under that heading is known as a General Epistle or letter as it was not sent to a specific location but was for a specific group of people. As a New Testament letter it follows the common format that almost all New Testament letters were written that have four specific parts to it: **Introduction, Statement of purpose, Main body of teaching and a conclusion or closing.**

James
“A Pathway to Patience”

- I. Chp. 1:1 Introduction**
- II. Chp. 1:2 – 18 Statement of purpose “A pathway to patience”**
 - A. 1:2-12 Finishing your faith**
 - B. 1:13-18 Triumphant over temptation**
- III. Chp. 1:19 – 5:6 Main body of teaching**
 - A. 1:19-27 Furthering faith**
 - B. 2:1-13 Faith without favoritism**
 - C. 2:14-26 Faithful faith**
 - D. 3:1-12 Faith, controlling communication**
 - E. 3:13-18 Faith works through wisdom**
 - F. 4:1-12 Faith in fellowship**
 - G. 4:13-5:6 Faith in the future**
- IV. Chp. 5:7-20 Conclusion: The Finality of Faith**

James may be the oldest book in the New Testament but with that said it's message is as fresh as tomorrow's morning. It is the oldest surviving letter into Jewish Christianity. The challenge rendered by the author is what is much needed in today's church **an active faith**.

The question is what is the key ingredient that God uses to activate our faith? The answer is to be found in the opening statement in verse 2 "*Count it all joy when you fall into **various trials**, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*" Christian maturity is the main theme of this little letter and James is far more practical than it is doctrinal choosing to describe life where most of us live everyday. Although we praise Martin Luther for his Christian influence it is regrettable that his influence hasn't always been for the good. He saw James as a "*Straw epistle, one destitute of evangelical character.*" Luther thought that what Paul said in Roman's 3:28 "*A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law*" and James' words in 2:24 "*You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*" as **completely contradictory** of each other but a close examination of these two statements will reveal that they **are complementary** of each other. **Paul deals with the inner faith of a person's heart as God sees it and James concerns his words with the outward fruits of faith as man sees them!** James' letter could hardly have been written to counter Paul's words Roman's 3:28 "*A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law*" as Luther supposed, as it was written well before Paul wrote Roman's. **Though the two write of the same thing they do so from two positions: Paul writes of justification before God where as James writes of justification before men.** God knows whether or not I'm a true believer on the basis of my faith apart from any works, but people can only know whether or not I am a follower of Jesus as they observe my outward life. James is making his appeal for reality and substance in

what we say we believe and follow! The focus of this book is not surprising as **James tells his readers how they are to live!** It is a “**Do this! Do that!**” kind of book and as such taken to the heart will change our lives on every level.

Christianity is not an organization it is an organism and such it doesn't just ask you to hold abstract teaching but invites you a new life that must be lived to be enjoyed. A life that is best summed up by the words found in 2 Corinthians 10:5 where we read that we are too “*cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*” The Word of God stands in stark contrast to the self-seeking world. James is a completely practical letter that was written to meet the needs of ordinary people of faith. These people of faith were common Jewish followers of their Messiah Jesus that had been displaced to other reigns of the known world. It is obvious be the context of the letter James was NOT written to people who DIDN'T struggle with their faith. In fact, this letter is all about people who found it difficult to live the Christian life at times. It seems from James perspective that following Jesus didn't make life easier to live it made it harder to live. The Christian life is enjoyable not because it is easier to live but because the follower of God can endure the difficulties by obeying His Word by His Spirit!

II. Vs. 1a James

Vs. 1a In the very first verse the author identifies himself and designates who his readers were. “*James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*”, is the way the writer identifies himself to his readers but such an introduction by the author may be a little more difficult to determine just who this James is. Other than his name we are told only that he is the bondservant of Jesus. These are only two letters that start with this

designation of bondservant which is in the Greek “*doulos*”, servant by choice, this one and Jude. We note the similarity of that little letter Jude who uses the same title than adds that he is the brother of James. Such a title as “*a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*” reveals that **they were well known enough that they didn’t need to claim an official position.** It **also reveals that they were not a part of the 12 disciples**, so they didn’t call themselves apostles. **Doctrinally in the Greek James puts God the Father AND the Lord Jesus Christ on the same plane.** When you put this into context with the identification of James as the author it’s a remarkable statement for him to make. **The only way James would have made such a statement is if he was 100% convinced of it’s truth.** Other than this James does nothing to distinguish himself to his readers as there are four known men named such in the Bible.

- Luke 6:16, Acts 1:13: **James the father of Judas (not Iscariot) who is the father of one of the disciples, which is all we know of either.**
- Matt. 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13: **James, the son of Alphaeus (also known as James the less in Mark 15:40)**
- Matt. 4:21, 10:2, 17:1, 10:35, 13:3, Luke 9:54 and Acts 1:13: **James the son of Zebedee the brother of John.**
- Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3 and Gal. 1:19: **James the Jesus ½ brother.**

It is here the reader today must employ some good old fashion detective work: **James the father of Judas** is a complete unknown making him highly unlikely to have been the author of this letter. This is also true of **James, the son of Alphaeus (also known as James the less in Mark 15:40).** **James the son of Zebedee the brother of John** was martyred in A.D. 44 according to Acts 12:2 and make it very unlikely that he wrote this letter. That only leaves **James the Jesus’ ½ brother.** Tradition points to him as well as several other important clues in scripture: **There are internal parallels** between this letter and the known language used by him in Acts 15:13 where a decree was drafted under his

leadership as Paul wrote in Galatians 1:19 and 2:9 that he was a leader in the church in Jerusalem. The word is “Greetings” which only appears three times in the New testament and twice it is James who uses it. Also the Jewish tone of the letter has a stress upon the law with an influence upon the Sermon on the Mount which complements what we know of “James the just”. The headship of the Church in Jerusalem seems to have been given to him early on as Acts 12:16-17 tells us that after Peter’s arrest and miraculous angelic jail break that Peter told them to, “Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.” Then in Acts 15:13-21 James is seen in the prominent leadership roll in the Church in Jerusalem as Paul and Peter shared about Gentile conversion. In Acts 21:18 after Paul’s 3rd missionary journey when he comes back to Jerusalem before his arrest he is granted an audience with James with all the elders present. Finally, in Paul’s letter to the Galatians in the second chapter verses 9, 12 Paul calls him a pillar and leader.

If the authorship is that of James the half brother of Jesus, his story is worthy of a rabbit trail. As already noted Paul calls him the “Lord’s brother” in Galatians 1:19. In Matthew 13:55-56 we are told “*Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?*” **The fact that he is mentioned first in the list of siblings seems to indicate that he was the closest of age to Jesus.** He **may have moved with Jesus and the rest of the family from Nazareth to Capernaum after the death of John the Baptist in Matthew 4:13 at the beginning of Jesus public ministry.** We do know that **during Jesus earthly ministry according to Matthew 12:46-50 that his mother and brothers sought an audience with him as they were concerned with his health.** And **according to John 7:3-5 he remained an unbeliever seven months before Jesus death as we are told “For even His brothers did not believe in Him.”**

According to 1 Corinthians 15:7 he was recipient of post-resurrection of his risen brother and that may have been the occasion of his conversion. Later on we read in Acts 1:14 that he and his brothers along with Mary were all in the upper room waiting for the Holy Spirit. As the Jerusalem Church became established James seemed to assume an increasing prominent role in leadership. Several early church references testify to his walk with the Lord and devotion as we are told that his prayers for the Jewish people were frequent and long that his knees became calloused like a camel's. Clement of Alexandria calls him the Bishop of Jerusalem and Josephus records his death by stoning on the orders of Ananus the high priest. Another account records his trial where he was asked to give his understanding with regards to his half brother Jesus and he proclaimed Him to be the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of God!

III. Vs. 1b The 12 tribes

Vs. 1b "*To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*", tells us that this letter was written to Jewish-Christians living outside of Roman occupied Israel. This letter shares this introduction of its readers with 1 Peter as he wrote to the "*pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.*" The designation of the "twelve tribes" was common title for the nation of Israel and apparently by the time that James wrote this there were no lost tribes by James estimation. The term "scattered abroad" in the Greek is a technical term that speaks of Jews living among Gentiles or Greeks and most likely spoke not just of those in the area of Greece but those who spoke Greek. James, as a leader in the Jerusalem Church was writing to Jewish follower of Jesus who were naturally looking towards Jerusalem for the answers. When James addressed this

letter to his readers he used a common designation to indicate the Jewish Nation that was first used to describe Jews who lived outside of Israel after the Babylonian Captivity. The Diaspora began in 722 B.C. when the Assyrian's captured the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17:6) Then when Nebuchadnezzar carried away the Southern Kingdom to Babylon in 586 B.C. the process continued even into the times of the early church as persecution swept over Jerusalem as we read in Acts 11:19 that after the death of Stephen people traveled away from Jerusalem to escape.

James, wrote to these disenfranchised Jews as “***Falling into***” trials and the phrase best describes those encountering trials that happened to them instead of those that they actively engaged and perused. To place timing of the writing of this letter is difficult but it could be before Paul's first missionary trip out of Antioch It also provides us with keen insight into the problems facing these believers and belongs with other and as such the majority of all followers of Jesus were Jewish. Such letters addressed to this group such as Hebrews and Peter's letters. Again the Greek word “***Greetings***” was a common expression in the first-century letters but it appears in no other New Testament letter but is recorded twice in Acts 15:23, 23:26. All of these letters provide a reflection of the early Church that was still attached to Jewish traditions that were rooted in the Mosaic Law and Jewish culture. ***They were struggling with barriers that were being dissolved by the Messiah they followed. Yet with that said according to chapter 2 verse 1 they were still holding to their faith in Jesus as the Messiah.*** The truth is every person is influenced by their upbringing and culture and as we follow Jesus will find ourselves in conflict with the way we were brought up with the we in which we should be raised up in Christ. The writer chooses to confront these cultural barriers and his style is combative as oral

arguments gave way to written ones, this being the earliest. *The believer's life is to be shaped first and foremost NOT by the traditions of their forefathers but by their Heavenly Father!*

There is no explicit indicator as to the date of this letter so again we need to use some deductive reasoning. There are many references to the teachings of Jesus in this letter but very little verbal comparisons with the gospels and it seems as though James didn't quote from the gospel accounts even though this was common practice after they were written. This suggests that this letter was written before the gospels. There is good amount of attention given to the economic inequity between the wealthy and the poor among the Jewish readers and this condition ceased prior to the Romans destroyed Jerusalem which makes this likely written before 66 A.D. The writer only mentions elders with regards to the sick and this tends to indicate an earlier form of church organization. There is no hint of Jewish- Gentile controversy that occupied a large place in the formation of the early church from the time of the Jerusalem Conference in 49 A.D. which would seem to indicate that this letter was written prior to the Conference, which would make this letter the earliest New Testament document proceeding even the Gospels. It is assumed that James wrote this letter while in Jerusalem to the many Jewish believers he came into contact from all over the world. This is supported by James use of illustrations which all fit the geographical location that surrounded Jerusalem. There are several aspects of this letter that are distinctive in the New Testament: It, along with Hebrews, are the most Jewish books in the New Testament. Except for the mention of Jesus twice this letter would fit into the First Testament literature. Though fully Christian, the book understands the activity and concepts of Jewish life. Even though this book

contains no teaching of redemption through the death of Jesus it rather assumes it as James twice calls his brother the LORD Jesus Christ! This letter is perhaps the most impersonal of all the New Testament letters as it mentions no greetings to individuals, no personal references and instead make only general descriptions. Perhaps the reason for this is that the letter wasn't going to a church but to many churches. Yet while being impersonal to the readers it is perhaps one of the most personal with regards to the writer as he mentions much about the area he lives through his illustrations. Looking at this letter in the Greek reveals that it is very well written with a good command of the language. **The content of the letter centers around the practical aspects of Christian commitment; James purpose is to show that the Christian life is demonstrated through right living!**