



The Letter of James

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The Author of the Letter

Several James in NT

- James the Less (or Little)
 - Apostle, know nothing else about him
- James, son of Zebedee
 - Apostle, martyred about AD 44
- James, brother of Jesus
 - In list of Matthew 13:55



Origin of name "James"

- Greek is "Iacobos"
- Borrowed into Latin as "Iacobus"
- Late Latin has variant "Jacomus"
- Both variants carried into European languages
- Probably King James had something to do with the choice in KJV!

Which James?

- Usually James, Jesus' brother, is assumed to be author
- James, son of Zebedee, died too early
- James the Little only seen as author when identified with James, Jesus' brother
- Liberals sometimes see letter as:
 - Pre-Christian
 - Reworked homily (sermon) from 70-130 AD

Which James?

- Paul refers to a James the Lord's brother in Gal 1:19 as an apostle.
- The Lord's brothers did not believe in him till after His resurrection (Jn 7:5; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor 15:7), so James the Lord's brother not James the Less.
- This James was apparently the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18; Gal 1:19, 2:9).



How the Lord's Brother?

- Younger son of Joseph & Mary
 - Helvidius; common Protestant view
- Older son of Joseph & first wife
 - Epiphanius; rarer Protestant view
- Cousin by Alpheus/Clopas & Mary's sister, Mary
 - Jerome; standard Catholic view

How the Lord's Brother?

- None of these views is beyond question.
- But children being with Mary suggests they are younger than Jesus.
- Unlikely that Mary had a sister with the same name.
- The perpetual virginity of Mary is not the natural reading of the Gospels.

More on James the Lord's Brother

- Conversion
 - Not a Christian during Jesus' ministry
 - Probably became one when Jesus appeared to him
- Quickly became an important figure in the church, heading up church in Jerusalem

More on James the Lord's Brother

■ Death

- Not recorded in the NT, where the narrative of Acts leaves Jerusalem after Paul's arrest.
- Josephus records James' stoning in AD 62 under an irregular proceeding by high priest Ananus (*Antiquities* 20.9.1).



James' Death

Upon hearing of the death of Festus, Caesar sent Albinus to Judaea as procurator. The king removed Joseph from the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to this office upon the son of Ananus, who was likewise called Ananus.... The younger Ananus was rash in his temper and unusually daring.... Possessed of such a character, Ananus thought he had a favorable opportunity because Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way. And so he convened the ...



James' Death

... judges of the Sanhedrin, and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned. Those of the inhabitants of the city who were considered the most fair-minded and who were strict in observance of the law were offended at this... King Agrippa [II] because of Ananus' action, deposed him from the high priesthood.

James' Death

- Recently, an ossuary found that has inscription: "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus."
- There is an on-going argument whether or not the ossuary is genuine.





The Date of the Letter



Date of James

- Hard to prove authorship at this distance.
- "There is no sentence in the letter which a Jew could have written but a Christian could not."
- The letter shows several primitive features which fit James' lifetime.



Date of James

- Machen and Davids suggest shortly before the Jerusalem Council, i.e., late 40s.
- This is reasonable:
 - Apostles go into hiding after 44.
 - James is leader of "mother church."
 - Helps explain problem with faith/works dispute.



Date of James

- James is one of the earliest New Testament books.
- Other candidates for earliest book:
 - Matthew
 - Galatians



Content of James



Recipients of Letter

- Addressed to "the 12 tribes who are dispersed abroad" (1:1).
- Apparently James is writing to Jewish-Christian congregations who are scattered, probably outside the Holy Land.



Claimed Contradiction w/ Paul

James' Teaching

- James teaches salvation by faith + works?
- 2:14 – "can faith save a man?"
- 2:17 – "faith, if it has no works, is dead."



Paul's Teaching



- Paul teaches salvation by faith without works?
- Gal 2:16 – "by works of the Law no flesh justified"
- 2:21 – "if righteous thru Law, Christ died needlessly"

Is This the Picture?





Suggested Resolution

- These are verbal, but not real, contradictions.
- They can be resolved by looking at the contexts.
- The "confusion in terms" suggests a pre-Jerusalem Council date for James, and possibly for Galatians.



Suggested Resolution

- James recognizes one cannot keep the Law perfectly.
 - 2:10 – "whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one point is guilty of all"
 - 3:1-2 – "we all stumble in many ways"
- James is emphasizing that real Christians will have works in their lives.



Suggested Resolution

- Paul's teaching is the same as James'
 - Salvation is by dependence on Christ
 - We cannot depend on our works
 - Gal 5:3 – "whoever receives circumcision is obligated to keep the whole law"
 - 6:13 – "those who are circumcised do not even keep the law themselves"
 - 5:6 – "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith **working** thru love."

Suggested Resolution

- Paul and James are responding to different errors
- James to antinomians:
 - Faith only; live as you please
- Paul to legalists:
 - Works are required in order to save

Suggested Resolution





Emphasis of James

- More practical than doctrinal
- This is similar to many OT books
 - Proverbs
 - Prophets
- Also similar to Jesus' teaching in the Gospels

James & Sermon on Mount

- Jas 1:22 & Mt 7:24-27
 - Doers, not just hearers
- Jas 2:5 & Mt 5:3
 - Poor of this world
- Jas 2:10 & Mt 5:19
 - One point of the Law

James & Sermon on Mount

- Jas 3:12 & Mt 7:16
 - Fruits
- Jas 4:11, 5:9 & Mt 7:1ff
 - Judging
- Jas 5:12 & Mt 5:34-37
 - Oaths, "yes, yes"

Other Parallels

- Jas 1:27, 2:5,15 resemble the judgment scene in Matthew 25.
- Check the cross-references in James 1:2, 20; 2:8; 4:4
- Was Matthew already written when James wrote?
 - Possible, but surely James knew the apostolic preaching



Outline of James



Dauids' Thematic Outline

- Introduction (1:1-27)
 - Greeting (1:1)
 - Themes Presented (1:2-27)
 - Test of Faith
 - Speech and Spirit
 - Piety and Poverty
- Themes Developed (2:1-5:6)



Thematic Outline

- Themes Developed (2:1-5:6)
 - Piety & Poverty (2:1-26)
 - Speech & Spirit (3:1-4:12)
 - Test & Result (4:13-5:6)
- Conclusion (5:7-20)
 - With themes restated



Huddleston's Acrostic Outline

- **W**orking patience thru trials
- **O**bedience accompanies true faith
- **R**estraining the unbridled tongue
- **K**eeping calm in conflicts
- **S**ick and suffering saints



The Argument of James

A condensed, explanatory
paraphrase



The End

Faith without works is dead!