

An Introduction to the Epistle of James

Historical Context

- Author unknown. 3 candidates for authorship: James the brother of John, James the brother of Matthew, or James the brother of Jesus. Often attributed to James the Lord's brother, who later became the leader of the church at Jerusalem. My position is it was likely one of the apostles (**John 14:26; Luke 6:16, Jude 1**).
- Written to the Jewish dispersion (**James 1:1**), sometime after **Acts 8:1**.
- Likely predates the Jerusalem council (**Acts 15**, circa AD 48-50); there is no mention of the Jerusalem council, or of Paul or his ministry (unlike 2 Peter). Most likely one of the earliest epistles written.
- Another reason to think this epistle was written early in the Acts period is that James warns of the coming of the Lord drawing nigh (**James 5:8**), whereas 2 Peter, written during the dispensation of grace, addresses the delay of His coming (**2 Peter 3:4, 15-16**).

Dispensational Context

- Written to the believing remnant of Israel during the final course of punishment per **Leviticus 26:29-39**; thus it is a time of judgment (**James 4:9**).
- Has doctrinal application for Israel in the last days of their prophetic timeline (**James 5:3, 5:8**)

- Doctrine mirrors that found in the gospels. James specifically quotes Jesus during His earthly ministry prior to the cross (ex: **James 2:5** and **Luke 6:20**; **James 5:12** and **Matt. 5:33-37**).
- The Name of Jesus is mentioned (**James 2:7**)—the cross is not.

Why Study The Book of James?

- All Scripture is profitable (**2 Timothy 3:16**)
- For our learning (**Rom. 15:4**)
- For our establishment (**Rom. 16:25-26**)
- Commanded to study to show ourselves approved (**2 Tim. 2:15**)
- Comfort, love, and full assurance of understanding (**Col. 2:2**)
- For spiritual and practical application—though it does not apply to us dispensationally or soteriologically, there are traits of godliness we can glean.

Some Facts

- Full of practical wisdom; out of **108** verses there are an estimated **54 imperatives** (or commands), and an additional six hypotheticals. This makes for one

imperative out of every two verses.

- **James** is actually the English form of the Hebrew name *Ya'akov*, or *Iakobos* in Greek, which is also where we get the name **Jacob** from. *James* comes from the Late Latin *Jacomus*. And so, the epistle of James is actually the epistle of *Jacob*.

The Purpose

- To make the audience *perfect in every good work*, to do God's will, through Jesus Christ and the blood of the everlasting covenant (**Heb. 13:20-21**).
- To perfect them in patience (**James 1:3-4**).
- A book of wisdom (the application of knowledge); see **James 1:5, 3:13-17**.
- A book that teaches and upholds the Law (**James 2:8-12**).
- James is an epistle exhorting the Hebrews to go on to perfection, adding temperance and patience to the faith, virtue, and knowledge of the book of Hebrews (see **2 Peter 1:3-11, Heb. 10:36**). It is a wisdom book—showing what it looks like to *apply* that faith, virtue and knowledge to their lives. It does not teach faith *and* works as a duality, but teaches “a faith that works.” It is by the power (virtue) of their faith that they will be able to do that which is necessary to enter the Kingdom (**1 John 5:4**).

Typology

- Jacob means “held by the heel,” and is where we get the word *supplant* from in

English (Latin, *sub planta* “bottom of the foot”). Jacob was born second, holding the heel of Esau, and yet supplanted Esau in the birthright of the firstborn; as it is written, the elder shall serve the younger (**Gen. 25:23**)—a picture of the born again nation of Israel inheriting the promises in the New Covenant, not the firstborn Israel under the Old Covenant.

- Jacob was the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, and one of the patriarchs of the nation of Israel, and who's name was changed to Israel after he wrestled with the angel of the Lord (**Gen. 32:25**). The name is fitting as it is written to the twelve tribes of Israel who will, as the name Israel means, contend with God and prevail, and have power with God and with men. The book of James (Jacob) is written to this audience who must contend with God (**Micah 6:2, Hosea 12:2**) during the time of Jacob's trouble (**Jer. 30:7**).

Often Used Proof Texts

- **James 1:5** - If any man lacks wisdom; often taken from its proper context.
- **James 2:10** - Incorrectly used for the Body of Christ to teach that no one can keep the Law; though this principle is true, this is not the point of James' teaching.
- **James 2:24** - Used to teach justification by works for members of the Church today.
- **James 4:8** - “Draw nigh unto God and He will draw nigh unto you” incorrectly applied to the Body of Christ.

- **James 5:14-16** - Used to teach anointing with oil, confession, and faith healing by charismatics.