

Introduction to James

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Authorship

James the brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3) would appear to be the most likely author according to the Biblical evidence. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Only this James has the stature to have written this epistle with authority, expecting it to be heeded. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

James did not accept his half-brother as the Christ during his earthly ministry (John 7:5). Yet, following Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to him (1 Cor 15:7), James was counted among the original "congregation" in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), and he became its leader. On James' leadership, see Acts 12:17 (ca. A.D. 44); the Apostolic council in Acts 15:13–21 (A.D. 49); Paul's visit to James and Paul's acquiescence to James' suggestion that Paul make a vow in Acts 21:18, 23–26; and Paul's references to James in Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

James writes with authority, speaking simply and without relying on or invoking others. He does so from a strong Jewish-Christian perspective, showing none of the tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians that were addressed at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15, ca. A.D. 46) and in Galatians. Nor does James portray the relationship between faith and works with the same emphasis that Paul does, which suggests that the works-righteousness Paul was fighting was not yet prominent in the Christian church. James could well be the earliest of the New Testament writings. James urges the observance of Mosaic Law (2:8–11), but he does so out of faith in the mercy of Christ (2:13) rather than any hope of temporal or eternal reward. Paul, writing later, serves as a corrective to those who would misapply James' theology. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Historical Situation

The recipients were Jewish Christians who still worshiped in the synagogue (2:2), scattered after the persecution of Acts 8 and suffering "trials" and "testing" (1:2–3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Their impatience for the Parousia (5:7–8) was taking its toll on morality and, ultimately, on faith itself. Internal dissensions caused the love of many to grow cold; people gossiped, slandered, judged each other, and fought. Others clung tenaciously to the doctrine of justification through faith but lacked its fruit—works of love. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Message

James was written to correct these problems. It is a practical book about sanctified living that results from faith in Jesus the Christ. The letter assumes the readers' knowledge of the facts, reminding them (2:19) that what is needed is repentance (4:7–10; 5:16) that leads to godly living. The content of James is similar in many respects to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The reader will find many parallels (though no direct quotes). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Luther judged James to be an epistle of straw (*Luther's Works* 35:362, 395–397) because of how it extols the “law” (*nomos*, 1:25; 2:8–12; 4:11). Yet the epistle must be viewed in a context similar to that which prompted James' advice in Acts 15:13–21: Christianity is not “God starting over” but rather the fulfillment of God's promise to the patriarchs (2:21–23) and the Mosaic covenant, now established “through the grace of our Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The “law” James promotes is not doctrinal Law as opposed to Gospel, but rather, like the “law of Moses,” the *revelation* of God which is both Law and Gospel, with the accent on the Gospel. Doctrinally, “law” in James means “Gospel in the wide sense,” as does Hebrew *torah*, “Torah.” This is why James can say this “law” gives freedom (from condemnation) and leads to works of mercy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The chief topic of this epistle is the necessity of good works—the sanctified life—as the fruit of faith. The Third Article of the Creed is of course predicated on the Second Article and inseparable from it. Every teaching in Scripture is connected, to justification. Therefore, while James offers the welcome opportunity to concentrate on the practical aspects of Christian living, Walther's last thesis—that the Gospel (Christ's work *pro nobis*) should predominate—must also be true of our preaching on James. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)