

James

By James West

Key message of the book: True faith is evidenced by a changed life.

Background information: This book is most likely written by James, the Lord's brother, also known in history as 'James the Just'. He is not the same as the James who was martyred in Acts 12. It could be the earliest New Testament book penned with an estimated date of A.D. 45. It seems that James didn't believe in Jesus until after the resurrection (John 7:5; 1 Cor 15:7; Acts 1:14). James simply introduces himself as 'a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ'. He held a high profile position in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; Gal 2:9), and was most likely a pastor in the main church there, ministering closely with Peter. His leadership played a huge part in the outcome of the Jerusalem council concerning circumcision in Acts 15. History speaks of his 'camel-knees', showing that he was a man of prayer, and no wonder, for he had the task of leading Jewish converts from the oldness of the letter into the newness of the Spirit-filled life in Christ.

James was in a primary position to be informed concerning the spiritual and circumstantial conditions of the Jewish converts scattered abroad, to whom he was writing. It was certainly logical that he should be the one to write to them, reminding them of the substance and nature of their new-found religion in Christ Jesus, and to warn them against slipping into hypocrisy, and against the carnal and selfish ways of living and talking which had governed them under the dead religion of Judaism. The Diaspora (Jews scattered abroad) to whom James was writing were probably a mixture of Jews who already lived abroad permanently and those Jews in particular who had lately been scattered as a result of the persecution led by Saul of Tarsus (see Acts 7-8).

James uses many figures of speech, comparisons, metaphors, and similes. His epistle 'combines the rhythmic beauty of Greek with the stern intensity of Hebrew'. (Hester, *New Testament Bible History*, p. 258).

Some think that James is contradicting Paul's teaching on justification-by-faith-alone by teaching justification by works. However, Paul wrote about justification as that declarative act of God to bring a lost sinner into relationship with Himself, whereas James was simply concerned to show that a man's works will declare that he is a justified man. 'To imagine a contradiction between the two is to forget our three words: early, simple, and transitional.' (Hester)

According to Josephus, the first-century historian, James was martyred in A.D. 62.

Key words and phrases:

Brethren (15 times): including 'my brethren' (eight times) and 'my beloved brethren' (three times). Although stern, he writes with great compassion.

Faith (16 times): It is particularly mentioned with reference to its evidence in the believer's life.

Outline of the book:

1. The evidence of faith
 - a. Maturity in temptation—1:1-27
 - b. Maturity in impartiality—2:1-13
 - c. Maturity in works—2:14-26
 - d. Maturity in words—3:1-18
 - e. Maturity in submission to God—4:1-17
2. The end of faith
 - a. Indictment upon the rich—5:1-6
 - b. Strength and counsel for the righteous—5:7-12
3. The exercise of faith
 - a. Maintaining and restoring spiritual health in the church—5:13-20



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