

## Doer of the Word, Activity Two—Introduction to James: A Study of Faith in Action

### Group 1: Author

Bible.org. (2020). *An introduction to the book of James*. Retrieved from

<https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-james>

“I. AUTHORSHIP: Most probably James, the Lord’s half-brother

A, Internal Evidence: Though one cannot not be dogmatic, it seems reasonable to identify the author of this letter with James, the Lord’s half-brother.

1. The author identifies himself as James 1:1
  - a. Only two (2) NT people<sup>6</sup> could fulfill this title of James and the half-brother of the Lord Jesus is the more reasonable choice:
2. James, the son of Zebedee, of the Twelve Apostles--but he is most probably ruled out since he was martyred in AD 44 by Herod, and the epistle seems to have been written after that
3. James, the half-brother of Jesus, who became the leader of the Jerusalem church
  - a. This is support by the simplicity of the description (e.g., a well known James)
  - b. In Church history it seems to have the Lord’s half-brother James who made a significant impact on the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 15; 21).
4. Some believe that the name is only a pseudonym attached to the letter to add authority and others see the salutation as a later addition, but these are not necessary conclusions<sup>7</sup>
5. If the half-brother of the Lord is the more reasonable of the two possible choices, than other internal evidence supports this conclusion:
  - a. The author has a Jewish background:
6. He draws upon the Hebrew Scriptures (1:2; 2:8, 11, 23, 25; 3:9; 4:6; 5:2, 11, 17, 18)
7. He employs Hebrew idioms and style behind the Greek
8. He is concerned with the Jewish Diaspora and uses Jewish terms (cf. 5:4--“Lord of Sabaoth”)
  - a. There are similarities between James and the speech and letter attributed to James in Acts 15:8
  - b. There are similarities with James and the teaching of Jesus. Guthrie writes, “there are more parallels in this Epistle than in any other New Testament book to the teaching of our Lord in the Gospels”<sup>9</sup>
  - c. The rest of the NT supports James as a prominent figure who could have written this letter with authority:<sup>10</sup>
10. Yes, he was an unbeliever in the Gospels (Mr. 3:21; Jn. 7:5)

12. But James is among the brethren in Acts (1:14)
13. James was specially singled out for a resurrection appearance (1 Cor. 15:7)
14. James was the leader whom Paul met in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:19)
15. James held a authoritative position in the church at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13ff)
16. James spoke with Paul on his return to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey and Paul agrees to James' request (Acts 21)
  - a. The community appears to belong to the period before the fall of Jerusalem:
17. Rich land owners who preyed upon the needy was the case before the fall of the Jerusalem<sup>11</sup>

**International Bible Society. (n.d.)** *James*. Retrieved from <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-james/>

"The author identifies himself as James (1:1); he was probably the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem council (Ac 15). Four men in the NT have this name. The author of this letter could not have been the apostle James, who died too early (a.d. 44) to have written it. The other two men named James had neither the stature nor the influence that the writer of this letter had.

James was one of several brothers of Christ, probably the oldest since he heads the list in Mt 13:55. At first he did not believe in Jesus and even challenged him and misunderstood his mission (Jn 7:2–5). Later he became very prominent in the church:

He was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after his resurrection (see 1Co 15:7 and note).

- Paul called him a "pillar" of the church (Gal 2:9).
- Paul, on his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, saw James (Gal 1:19).
- Paul did the same on his last visit (Ac 21:18).
- When Peter was rescued from prison, he told his friends to tell James (Ac 12:17).
- James was a leader in the important council of Jerusalem (Ac 15:13).
- Jude could identify himself simply as "a brother of James" (Jude 1:1), so well known was James. He was martyred c. a.d. 62.

## Group 2: Audience (or Recipients)

International Bible Society. (2020). *James*. Retrieved from <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-james/>

“The recipients are identified explicitly only in 1:1: “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.” Some hold that this expression refers to Christians in general, but the term “twelve tribes” would more naturally apply to Jewish Christians. Furthermore, a Jewish audience would be more in keeping with the obviously Jewish nature of the letter (e.g., the use of the Hebrew title for God, *kyrios sabaoth*, “Lord Almighty,” 5:4). That the recipients were Christians is clear from 2:1; 5:7–8. It has been plausibly suggested that these were believers from the early Jerusalem church who, after Stephen’s death, were scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch (see Ac 8:1; 11:19 and notes). This would account for James’s references to trials and oppression, his intimate knowledge of the readers and the authoritative nature of the letter. As leader of the Jerusalem church, James wrote as pastor to instruct and encourage his dispersed people in the face of their difficulties.”

Bible.org. (2020). An introduction to the book of James. Retrieved from <https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-james>

A. James identifies his audience as the “twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad” (1:1)

1. The designation “twelve tribes” suggests a Jewish audience
  - a. This could be unconverted Jews
  - b. This could be Christian Jews
  - c. This could be Hellenistic Jews
  - d. This could even be Christians generally (both Jews and Gentiles--if one understands the church to replace Israel [which this writer does not])<sup>18</sup>
2. The following evidence suggests limiting the audience to Christian Jews:
  - a. The congregation’s meeting is a synagogue (2:2)
  - b. The Hebrew title “Lord Sabaoth” ( *κυρίου Σαβαώθ* ) is Jewish (5:4)
  - c. The author identifies his readers as Christians (2:1; 5:7,8)
3. It is difficult to identify the exact location of these recipients:
  - a. The fact that they are “dispersed abroad” implies that they are not in one location
  - b. Believers may have fled during the persecution which came upon the heels of Stephen’s death
4. Acts reports Jewish Christians spread out over Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1), Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:19) as a result of the persecution of Stephen. James would have felt responsible as their former pastor to offer instruction to them at this time.

### Group 3: Purpose & Style

Wellman, J. (n.d.). *What is the Purpose of the Book Of James? A Bible study*. Retrieved from <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/11/18/what-is-the-purpose-of-the-book-of-james-a-bible-study/>

#### Purpose

“James gave instructions for the Jews who were dispersed or spread abroad and well beyond the Jerusalem church and so he wanted them to stay connected to the body of Christ. James provides biblical methods for praying, having faith, how to suffer, controlling the tongue, what works and salvation have to do with one another (a “dead faith”), doing and not merely hearing, he chastises the rich (James 2:6; 5:1-2), comforts the poor, shows how to acquire wisdom, and what true religion really is (James 1:27). The purpose is manifold in the Book of James because he talks so much about the Christian faith and examining ourselves to see if we’re bearing works worthy of a genuine Christian.”

GotQuestions.org: (2020). *Book of James*. Retrieved from <https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-James.html>

“Purpose of Writing: Some think that this epistle was written in response to an overzealous interpretation of Paul’s teaching regarding faith. This extreme view, called antinomianism, held that through faith in Christ one is completely free from all Old Testament law, all legalism, all secular law, and all the morality of a society. The Book of James is directed to Jewish Christians scattered among all the nations (James 1:1). Martin Luther, who detested this letter and called it “the epistle of straw,” failed to recognize that James’s teaching on works complemented—not contradicted—Paul’s teaching on faith. While Pauline teachings concentrate on our justification with God, James’ teachings concentrate on the works that exemplify that justification. James was writing to Jews to encourage them to continue growing in this new Christian faith. James emphasizes that good actions will naturally flow from those who are filled with the Spirit and questions whether someone may or may not have a saving faith if the fruits of the Spirit cannot be seen, much as Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-23.”

Style

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- A. This letter/sermon reflects a knowledge of wisdom literature, both canonical (Job - Song of Songs) and inter-biblical (Ecclesiasticus about 180 b.c.). Its emphasis is practical living—faith in action (cf. 1:3-4).
- B. In some ways the style is very similar to both Jewish wisdom teachers and Greek and Roman moral itinerant teachers (like the Stoics). Some examples are:
  - 1. loose structure (jumping from one subject to another)
  - 2. many imperatives (54 of them)
  - 3. diatribe (a supposed objector asking questions, cf. 2:18; 4:13). This is also seen in Malachi, Romans, and 1 John.
- B. Although there are few direct quotations from the OT (cf. 1:11; 2:8,11,23; 4:6), like the book of the Revelation, there are many allusions to the OT.
- C. The outline of James is almost longer than the book itself. This reflects the rabbinical technique of jumping from subject to subject in order to keep the attention of the audience. The rabbis called it "pearls on a string."
- D. James seems to be a combination of OT literary genres: (1) sages (wisdom teachers) and (2) prophets (much like Amos or Jeremiah). He uses OT truths but bathes them in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teachings. (See section B. under Content below).