

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## JAMES

### THEME

#### Author and Title

The title of this book derives from the name of its author, James the Just (as he was called), the brother of Jesus ([Matt. 13:55](#)) and leader of the Jerusalem church ([Acts 15](#)). There is general consensus regarding his authorship, though some have challenged this on the grounds that: (1) the Greek is too polished and the rhetoric too Hellenistic for someone who never left Palestine; (2) the author never calls himself Jesus' brother; and (3) the author seems to be interacting with Pauline issues on faith and works, justification, and liberty and so had to write much later than James could have written, since he was executed in A.D. 62.

There is no good reason, however, to deny that James the Just is the author. As scholars now recognize, there was substantial contact between Jews and Gentiles, especially in Galilee where James grew up. Moreover, James is not reacting to Pauline issues but rather addressing similar themes in his own church; it is possible he is addressing a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching, but that could have been quite early since Paul wrote Galatians in A.D. 48. It is also possible that James is writing so early that he has no knowledge of any of Paul's letters.

The historicity of James the Just is well confirmed in historical literature (e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200–201; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23).

#### Date

Since James died in A.D. 62, the letter had to precede that date. Further, if this had been written after the apostolic council in Jerusalem (A.D. 48–49), it surely would have mentioned the issues from that momentous occasion. Thus the letter was most likely written in the early to mid-40s.

#### Theme

James's primary theme is living out one's faith, being a doer and not just a hearer of the word. This theme is developed in view of the social conflict between rich and poor and the spiritual conflict between factions in the church. James rebukes his readers for

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their worldliness and challenges them to seek divine wisdom in working out these problems and getting right with God.

## Purpose, Occasion, and Background

The audience for James's letter is almost certainly Jewish Christians, as evidenced by the designations "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" ([1:1](#)) and "assembly" (Gk. *synagōgē*, [2:2](#)), the Jewish reasoning throughout, and James's frequent reflection on the Torah (Mosaic law). If "Dispersion" is literal as well as metaphorical (see note on [1:1](#); cf. [Acts 2:9–11](#)), then these are a group of Jewish Christian house churches outside Palestine, which fits the situation of persecution and poverty in the letter. More than that cannot be said, but the social situation can be gleaned from the letter. As a result of the troubles, conflict has entered the churches, and they have splintered into fighting factions. Moreover, some have fallen into a worldly lifestyle ([James 1:27; 4:4](#)) and have failed to put their faith into practice ([1:19–26](#)), with the result that they have become "double-minded," wavering between God and the world ([1:8; 4:8](#)).

## Key Themes

1. God is seen as a gracious giver, the unchanging Creator, merciful and compassionate, a Judge, the one and only God, a jealous God, a gracious God, and a healing God.	<a href="#">1:5, 17–18; 2:5, 13, 19; 4:5–6; 5:1–3, 9, 15</a>
2. Wisdom comes "from above" and enables one both to withstand trials and to bring peace rather than discord.	<a href="#">1:5; 3:13, 17</a>
3. God allows tests and trials ( <a href="#">1:2–4</a> ), but temptation comes not from God but from self and Satan. The required response is patient endurance.	<a href="#">1:3, 13–14; 4:7; 5:7–8</a>
4. The primary trial is poverty and oppression from the rich. The poor are the special focus of God's care and must be cared for by his people and not shown prejudice or ignored. The wealthy are condemned for presumptuous pride and for stealing from the poor.	<a href="#">1:9, 27; 2:1–5, 15–16; 4:13–17; 5:1–6</a>
5. Apocalyptic themes are prevalent in terms of both future judgment and reward.	<a href="#">1:12; 2:5, 12–13; 3:1; 4:12; 5:1–7, 9, 20</a>
6. The power of the tongue to destroy or to bring peace dominates the middle section.	<a href="#">3:1–4:12</a>

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7. The ethical mandate to go beyond hearing the word to living it out in daily conduct is made explicit early on and is implicit throughout the letter.	<a href="#">1:19–27; 2:14–26</a>
8. Prayer is the proper response to trials, but it must not be self-seeking. It is to be central in life not only when afflicted or sick but also when cheerful. God has great power to heal, both physically and spiritually.	<a href="#">1:5–7; 4:2–3; 5:13–18</a>
9. Faith, in its relationship to both works and justification, does not contradict but supplements Paul's teaching. James and Paul are united in teaching that justification comes only by the grace of God through faith but will of necessity result in works. If there are no resultant works, there was no justification in the first place.	<a href="#">2:14–26</a>

## History of Salvation Summary

Christians are to live with the wisdom ([Prov. 1:2, 7](#)) that befits followers of Christ. (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the [Overview of the Bible](#).)

## Literary Features

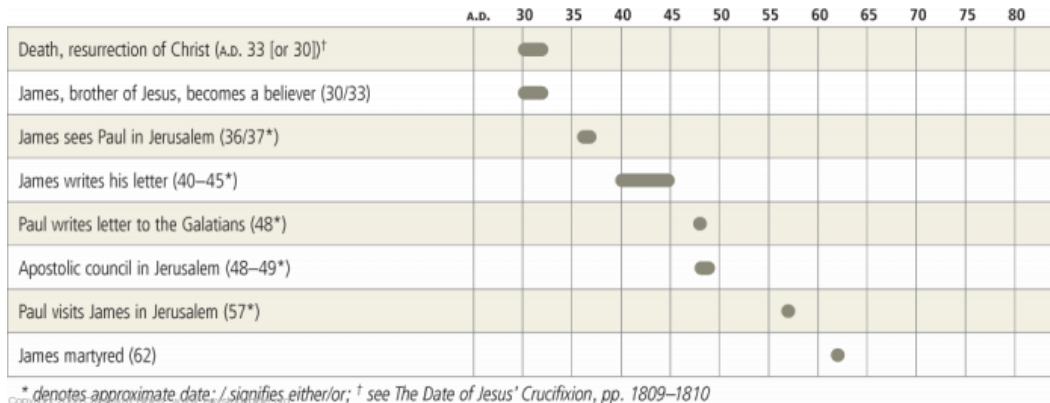
Even though James begins with an epistolary salutation, the rest of the book does not have the format of an epistle but rather is a collection of wisdom sayings, much like the genre of wisdom literature as seen in the OT. The generic format of that wisdom literature is the collection of proverbs. Additionally, the book of James belongs to an ancient Greek form of satire known as the diatribe, the traits of which include: imaginary dialogues (including question and answer constructions); apostrophe (direct address to absent people or things as though they are present and can hear); metaphors taken from nature and everyday life; allusions to famous people from the past (stock instances, or well-known representations of the qualities that are under discussion); harsh addresses to readers; and heightened contrasts.

The most pervasive technique in the book of James is the proverb or aphorism, in the mode of ancient wisdom teachers. Next in frequency is the rhetorical device of direct command, expressed in the imperative mood of the verb (e.g., "be doers of the word, and not hearers only," [1:22](#)). In fact, there are over 50 imperatives in the book's 108 verses. This abundance of commands is a signal that the writer has a practical bent

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and is interested in action rather than mere belief as the distinguishing characteristic of Christians. There is also a strongly persuasive stance as the author seeks to move his readers to action. The tone is continuously energetic, and satire is never far from the surface, sometimes couched in a somewhat scolding manner.

## Timeline



## The Setting of James

c. A.D. 40-45

The epistle of James was likely written to predominantly Jewish Christian house churches outside of Palestine, based on its mention of the “twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (1:1), its distinctly Jewish content, and its focus on persecution and poverty. This would mean it was sent throughout most of the ancient Mediterranean world. The author has traditionally been believed to be James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus and an early leader of the church in Jerusalem.

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## Outline

- I. Greeting ([1:1](#))
- II. The Testing of Faith ([1:2-18](#))
  - A. Joy in trials ([1:2-4](#))
  - B. Wisdom from God for trials ([1:5-8](#))
  - C. The place of rich and poor before God ([1:9-11](#))
  - D. Reward for those who endure ([1:12](#))
  - E. The process of temptation ([1:13-18](#))
- III. Hearing and Doing the Word ([1:19-27](#))
  - A. Hearers of the word ([1:19-21](#))
  - B. Doers of the word ([1:22-25](#))
  - C. True, practical religion ([1:26-27](#))
- IV. The Sin of Partiality ([2:1-13](#))
  - A. Preferring the wealthy over the poor in the assembly ([2:1-7](#))
  - B. The royal law of love ([2:8-11](#))
  - C. Acting in light of judgment ([2:12-13](#))
- V. Faith without Works Is Dead ([2:14-26](#))

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- A. Faith without works ([2:14-17](#))
- B. Response of a critic ([2:18-20](#))
- C. Examples of Abraham and Rahab ([2:21-26](#))
- VI. The Sin of Dissension in the Community ([3:1-4:12](#))
  - A. Taming the tongue ([3:1-12](#))
  - B. The solution: wisdom from above ([3:13-18](#))
  - C. Warning against worldliness ([4:1-12](#))
- VII. The Sins of the Wealthy ([4:13-5:12](#))
  - A. Boasting about tomorrow ([4:13-17](#))
  - B. Warning to the rich ([5:1-6](#))
  - C. Patience in suffering ([5:7-12](#))
- VIII. The Prayer of Faith ([5:13-18](#))
- IX. Concluding Admonition ([5:19-20](#))<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 2387-2390). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.