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A COMMENTARY ON
JAMES

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A Commentary on James

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PREFACE

The Kregel Exegetical Library is a wonderful series aiming to provide a close exegetical-literary reading of the text that explores the thematic emphases of each major literary unit in a way that is exegetically helpful for the scholar but theologically accessible and homiletically useful for the pastor and teacher. I am honored and delighted to contribute to this series. I particularly want to show the thematic unity of the Letter of James, since the unity is not always readily apparent to the reader. My goal has been to demonstrate the subtle progression of themes in order to show how the parts of the letter interrelate to create a coherent whole. I have done the majority of the translation from Greek and some from Hebrew; if I preferred the wording of another version, it is indicated. My desire is to reflect the original language as a basis for the exposition to follow. The New Revised Standard Version has often been used as a complementary translation since it is a more literal version than others.

My specialty is literary and historical analysis. My work on my doctoral dissertation, *Paul's Literary Style*, has helped me to recognize and evaluate James's stylistic features and images. He uses many delightful and descriptive illustrations from nature and daily life. I also take seriously the historical background of James, Jesus's earthly brother, in his Jewish and Roman settings. James appears to rely throughout on Jesus's teachings, as well as on the Old Testament, as indicated. I have focused attention on the relationship between verses

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and, as well, on the meaning of words in their paragraphs. Words are the building blocks of meaning, as they are stacked into clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. Words and phrases studied are indicated in **bold** font for easy recognition.

As a former Hispanic community organizer, born and reared in the Dominican Republic and New Jersey, I have empathized with James's sympathy for the poor. And as a Presbyterian minister with more than forty years of experience, I have included some specific contemporary pastoral applications, as well as considered issues of language and gender.

I have enjoyed teaching the Letter of James for many years to graduate students at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA. Gordon-Conwell has been a supportive place for scholarship with its sabbatical programs, complimentary computers, extensive Goddard Library holdings, helpful library staff, and active interlibrary loan system. The current director, Jim Darlack, was particularly helpful in confirming the chart on "Unusual Words and Phrases in James," as was my Byington Scholar (teaching assistant) Jihyung Kim. David Shorey, the Director of Support Services, was most diligent and efficient in duplicating the different manuscript versions over the years. The Kregel editorial team has been most gracious, giving me much freedom in my approach. I am especially grateful to my husband, the Rev. Dr. William David Spencer, who as a grammarian and theologian teaching theology and the arts at Gordon-Conwell's Boston campus, graciously read in depth the first draft of the manuscript, despite his own busy writing schedule.

I have had a community of resources to bolster my own thoughts as I requested God the Trinity to enlighten me so I could help enlighten others. My overall goal has been to increase the reader's confidence in God's reliable and authoritative revelation, which is applicable through the Holy Spirit to everyone in every place in every era.

—Aída Besançon Spencer

INTRODUCTION

AUTHORSHIP

Determining authorship is a foundational issue for the letter of James. Who the author is affects dating and setting. We will begin our search with data from the letter, then look at early church traditions about authorship, and then compare this data to the New Testament and extrabiblical information. I will present my conclusions on authorship, date, and setting, and then look at alternate theories on authorship and explain why I think what I accept is to be preferred. Several possibilities for authorship have been proposed: James, the Lord's brother (which I prefer); James, the brother of John; James, the son of Alphaeus; James, the Lord's brother, plus an editor; and a pseudonymous author using the name "James."

The Letter of James on Its Author

The letter begins: "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). The Greek form, Ἰάκωβος, replaces the Hebrew יַעֲקֹב¹ and was applied to other Jews in the first century, such as James son of Zebedee (Ἰάκωβος, Matt. 4:21). The James of our letter humbly describes himself simply as a "slave" (δοῦλος), emphasizing of whom he is a slave: "of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). Thus, he is a disciple of Jesus, whom he describes as equal with God (see also 2:1).² He also describes himself as a teacher (διδάσκαλος, 3:1) who exhorts his readers to be wise (1:5; 3:13, 15–17), guarding their speaking.³ Truth is important to him (3:14). Maturity and

1. E.g., Gen. 25:26 LXX; Matt. 1:2; Robertson 1933, 10.

2. See exposition of James 1:1.

3. James 1:19, 26; 2:12; 3:2, 5–10; 5:12.

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integration in faith are major issues.⁴ He is impatient with ambivalence (1:8; 4:8), evil,⁵ self-deception (1:16), and slander (3:17; 4:11–12).

He is a Messianic Jew who describes Abraham as the “father” or ancestor of himself and the readers (2:21). He uses many Old Testament people as positive illustrations: Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah, and the prophets as a group.⁶ The Old Testament is authoritative for him,⁷ and he has a positive view of the law of freedom.⁸ He believes in only one God (2:19) who is generous, fully good, compassionate, and worthy of blessing, full confidence, and love.⁹ Humans should exhibit humility and dependence toward such a great God.¹⁰ Trusting prayer is very effective with God (5:13–18).

James’s language is direct. After his introductory sentence, he immediately begins with a command: “consider for yourselves” (1:2). His letter has many imperatives: sixty-seven.¹¹ Twenty-five percent of all finite verbs in James are imperatives (sixty-seven out of 264 finite verbs). His use of imperatives is similar to Paul’s use in the letter to the Philippians (16 or 23 percent of Phil. 3:2–4:13). Only with a receptive as well as intimate audience can a person be so “bold” as to exhort so directly. The readers need exhortation and encouragement, and James the author has a claim on those to whom he writes.¹² Therefore, although James may be humble, he writes in a familial and an authoritative manner.

Paul and James address their readers as equals, as “brothers and sisters,” frequently and in an affectionate manner. But James uses it a total of fifteen times, the most of any New Testament writer.¹³ The total number is surpassed by 1 Corinthians (twenty times); however, 1 Corinthians is a letter with sixteen chapters, more than four times as long as James’s letter (437 verses vs. 108). In addition, James’s affection is shown by his frequent use of the modifiers “my” and “beloved” (eleven times), more than any other New Testament letter.

4. James 1:4, 12, 19, 22–26; 2:14, 17, 20, 22; 3:2; 5:15–16, 19–20.

5. James 1:14–15; 2:9; 3:15–16; 4:1–4, 8, 17; 5:15–16, 19–20.

6. James 2:21–25; 5:10–11, 17–18.

7. E.g., James 2:8, 11, 23, 25; 4:5–6.

8. James 1:25; 2:9–12; 4:11–12.

9. James 1:5, 12–13, 17–18, 27; 2:5; 3:9; 5:11.

10. James 3:13; 4:6–10, 14, 16.

11. See Appendix.

12. Spencer 1998a, 126–27, 184. In contrast, the use of imperatives in Romans 8:9–39 and 2 Corinthians 11:16–12:13 is much less—respectively, two and zero.

13. First Thessalonians is close, with fourteen references to ἀδελφοί in five chapters.

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Use of “Brothers and Sisters” as Address (Vocative)¹⁴ (Total number, followed by specific passages)				
Letter	“brothers & sisters” ἀδελφοί	“my brothers & sisters” ἀδελφοί μου	“(my) beloved brothers & sisters” ἀδελφοί (μου) ἀγαπητοί, ἀδελφοί ἡγαπημένοι	Total ¹⁵
Rom.	8 (1:13; 7:1; 8:12; 10:1; 11:25; 12:1; 15:30; 16:17)	2 (7:4; 15:14)	0	10
1 Cor.	16 (1:10, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24, 29; 10:1; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26; 15:1, 31, 50; 16:15)	3 (1:11; 11:33; 14:39)	1 (15:58)	20
2 Cor.	3 (1:8; 8:1; 13:11)	0	0	3
Gal.	9 (1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18)	0	0	9
Eph.	0	0	0	0
Phil.	4 (1:12; 3:13, 17; 4:8)	1 (3:1)	1 (4:1)	6

14. See also the table “Gender Language in James Chapter 1.”

15. Figures are from the UBS 4th ed. Greek text.

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Use of “Brothers and Sisters” as Address (Vocative)¹⁴ (Total number, followed by specific passages)				
Letter	“brothers & sisters” ἄδελφοί	“my brothers & sisters” ἄδελφοί μου	“(my) beloved brothers & sisters” ἄδελφοί (μου) ἀγαπητοί, ἄδελφοί ἡγαπημένοι	Total ¹⁵
Col.	0	0	0	0
1 Thess.	13 (2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25)	0	1 (1:4)	14
2 Thess.	6 (1:3; 2:1, 15; 3:1, 6, 13)	0	1 (2:13)	7
1, 2 Tīm., Titus	0	0	0	0
Philem.	2 (7, 20)	0	0	2
Heb.	4 (3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22)	0	0	4
James	4 (4:11; 5:7, 9, 10)	8 (1:2; 2:1, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 5:12, 19)	3 (1:16, 19; 2:5)	15
1 Peter	0	0	0	0
2 Peter	1 (1:10)	0	0	1
1 John	1 (3:13)	0	0	1
2, 3 John	0	0	0	0
Jude, Rev.	0	0	0	0

James is concerned for the poor among his readers and exhorts people in the community to demonstrate humility, respect, impartiality,

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and justice toward them.¹⁶ He values physical as well as spiritual health (5:13–16). His use of images and illustrations are creative and fresh. He uses many metaphors, similes, and illustrations from nature, including references to water,¹⁷ winds (1:6; 3:4), fire (3:5–6), plants (1:10–11; 3:5, 12), animals (1:8; 3:7–8), horses (1:26; 3:2–3), the home (1:23–25), birth (1:15, 18), farming and agriculture (1:17–18, 21; 3:17–18; 5:7, 18), boating (3:4), landowners and laborers (5:4–7), and merchants (4:13). He also coins many new words.¹⁸ In summary, as a prophet, he calls for repentance (5:1–6); as a teacher, he educates (3:1–4); as a pastor, he exhorts; as an artist, he creates.

Early Church Traditions about the Letter of James

The internal data from the letter suggests a humble Messianic Jew who writes in an authoritative and didactic yet pastoral and prophetic manner to other Jews. The early church traditions support James, the Lord's brother, as the author. Even critics of the traditional view, such as James Hardy Ropes, concede: "In general there was no departure from the traditional view; and down to the sixteenth century, if nothing to the contrary is indicated, a reference to 'James the apostle' as author of the epistle is to be taken as meaning James the Lord's brother. . . . Modern Protestant criticism of the epistle begins with the first edition of DeWette's *Einleitung*, 1826."¹⁹

Origen, who lived in the second-third century (AD 185–253) is the earliest writer to cite "the apostle James," the Lord's brother, as author, specifically quote the letter, and describe the letter as canonical. He cites passages such as "faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:17).²⁰ Portions of James are retained in early papyri²⁰ and p²³, which date from the third century. Papyrus²³, dated AD 250–300, contains James 1:10–12, 15–18, and papyrus²⁰, dated 275, contains James 2:19–3:9. Both are Alexandrian text-types, which are considered the most

16. James 1:9–10, 26–27; 2:1–9, 15–16; 5:1–4.

17. James 1:6; 3:11–12; 4:14; 5:7, 17–18.

18. See "Unusual Words or Phrases in James" in the Appendix. See also Mayor's fine summary of James's style (1913, cclix): "Whatever he says, he says forcibly. . . . He wastes no words . . . richly endowed with a high poetical imagination and all a prophet's indignation against wrong-doing and hypocrisy, is now softened and controlled by the gentler influences of the wisdom which cometh from above."

19. Ropes, 1916, 45, 46.

20. *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.1; *Hom. Josh.* 10.2; *Comm. Jo.* 19.6; and others, cited by Mayor 1913, lxxxi–lxxxii.

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accurate.²¹ Careful professional scribes copied these manuscripts for churches to be read aloud.²² Papyrus¹⁰⁰ from the third-fourth century, also Alexandrian, contains James 3:13–4:4 and 4:9–5:1. Papyrus²⁰ and p²³ are some of the earliest Greek New Testament manuscripts.²³ The third-century *Epistles to Virgins* (1.11.4) also cites James.²⁴

But even before Origen, unusual words in James were cited by Christians in the first and second centuries (see Appendix). Clement of Rome (ca. AD 95–97) and Shepherd of Hermas (1–2 c.) use the word “two-willed” (δίψυχος, James 1:8; 4:8).²⁵ Polycarp, writing to the Philippians (ca. 117), cites “to bridle” (χαλιναγωγέω, James 1:26; 3:2) and “partiality” (προσωποληψία, James 2:1) (Pol. *Phil.* 5:3; 6:1). Shepherd of Hermas (1–2 c.) refers to “compassionate” (πολύσπλαγχνος, James 5:11).²⁶ Barnabas (ca. 70–135) probably alludes to James 1:21 when he refers to “the one who placed within us the *implanted* [ἐμφυτος] gift of his covenant” (Barn. 9:9).

By the third and fourth centuries, many well known Christians quote James directly, such as Dionysius of Alexandria (264), Gregory Thaumaturgus (270), Methodius of Olympus (3rd c.), Lactantius (300), Hilary of Poitiers (367), Athanasius of Alexandria (373), Cyril of Jerusalem (386), Gregory of Nazianzus (390), Didymus (398), and John Chrysostom (407). J. B. Mayor cites as well numerous allusions to James’s letter from AD 95–394.²⁷

The historian Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 260–339), who collected the early traditions about the church, states that few ancients quote James and thus its authenticity is denied by some, but “we know that these letters have been used publicly with the rest in most churches” (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.24–25). He also notes it is “the first of the Epistles called Catholic.” When he summarizes the New Testament canon, he lists two categories of “disputed” books. James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, although disputed, were “known to most” and “according to the tradition of the church” were also considered “true, genuine, and recognized.” Other “disputed” books were neither “genuine” nor canonical

21. They may be found in Grenfell and Hunt 1912, 1914, 9:9–11; 10:16–18.

22. Comfort 1992, 21, 57, 63–64, 67.

23. Comfort 1992, 31–33.

24. James 3:1–2; Dibelius 1976, 51; Ropes 1916, 94.

25. 1 Clem. 11:2; 23:3. Δίψυχος is a frequent word in Herm. Vis. 2.2:4; 3.4:3, 7:1; 4.2:6. *Commandments* and *Parables* use this noun thirteen more times. See also Laws 1980, 22–23.

26. Herm. Sim. 5.7:4; πολυσπλαγχνία: Herm. Vis. 1.3:2; 2.2:8; 4.2:3; πολυεύσπλαγχνος: Herm. Mand. 4.3:5; 9.2.

27. Mayor 1913, lxxviii–lxxxiv.

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but familiar to most of the writers of the church: the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, Barnabas, and Teachings of the Apostles. None of these fit under the “heretical” books category, “put forward by heretics under the name of the apostles,” such as the Gospels of Peter, Thomas, Matthias, and Acts of Andrew and John: “To none of these has any who belonged to the succession of the orthodox ever thought it right to refer in his writings” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.3–7). Thus, although James was not included in Eusebius’s category of “Recognized Books,” Eusebius did consider it “true, genuine, and recognized” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.6).²⁸ All the books included in his disputed section are short books. In addition, the second fall of Jerusalem in AD 135 must have seriously disrupted the presence of Jews in Jerusalem, which may have affected the promotion of James’s letter written to diaspora Jews. The placement of the letter of James as the “frontispiece” of the Catholic Epistles, some suggest, is best explained by the “decisive role played by James at the conference in Acts 15.”²⁹

The letter of James was affirmed as canonical by Origen (253/54), Cyril of Jerusalem (386), Gregory of Nazianzus (390), Athanasius (373), Epiphanius (403), Jerome (419/420), Augustine (430), the Synod of Hippo (393), the Third Council of Carthage (397), and the Apostolic Constitutions (380).³⁰ Mayor has noted the similarities between the letter of James and James’s words at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13–29). The parallels do not prove the letter of James is by the speaker in Acts (a large sample of writing, 100,000 words, is needed for that),³¹ but they do confirm the historical data assigning authorship to the same person. Donald Guthrie concludes that the parallels are “indisputable” and “remarkable in that they all occur within so short a passage attributed to James in Acts and because they are of such a character that they cannot be explained by the common accidents of speech.”³² For instance, both letters begin with “greeting” (χαίρειν, James 1:1; Acts 15:23), and both use words such as “brothers and sisters” (ἀδελφοί, Acts 15:13, 23; James 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10), “beloved” (ἀγαπητοῖς, Acts 15:25; James 1:16, 19; 2:5), “called by name” (ἐπικαλέω ὄνομα, Acts 15:17; James 2:7), “hear my brothers and sisters” (ἀκούσατε, ἀδελφού, Acts 15:13; James 2:5; 5:10, 14), “visited”

28. Mayor also notes that Eusebius himself cites James as Scripture spoken by the holy Apostle (1913, lxvii).

29. Goswell 2016, 78.

30. Mayor 1913, lxxviii–lxxix; lxxxiii–lxxxiv; cxliv; Goswell 2016, 78.

31. Spencer 1998a, 149.

32. Guthrie 1970, 742.

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(ἐπισκεπτω, Acts 15:14; James 1:27), and “turn” (ἐπιστρέφω, Acts 15:19; James 5:20). Two hundred and thirty words in the speech and letter in Acts 15 reappear in the letter of James.³³

New Testament Information on James

The New Testament refers to three men by the name of “James” (Ἰάκωβος) who might have authored the letter of James: two are members of the twelve; all are “apostles.”³⁴ James, son of Alphaeus, is mentioned but is not prominent.³⁵ James the fisherman, brother of John and son of Zebedee and Salome, is prominent in the Gospels but is killed by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2). James, the brother of Jesus, is mentioned by name at one incident in the Gospels, but after the resurrection his prominence increases. When Jesus is in his hometown of Nazareth, his brothers are specifically named (James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas) and his sisters are mentioned (Matt. 13:55–56; Mark 6:3), as well as the fact that their father Joseph worked as a carpenter or builder.³⁶ James is mentioned as one of the siblings in five other incidents reported in the Gospels. Jesus traveled with his disciples, his mother Mary, and his brothers (and probably sisters) to Cana in Galilee for a wedding and returned together with them to Capernaum (John 2:1–12). This means that James witnessed Jesus’s first sign, his miraculous changing of water to wine. Later, James, his brothers (and probably sisters), and mother Mary were in the midst of a large crowd hearing the questions directed to Jesus by some Pharisees and teachers. While they waited to speak to him, Jesus tells their messenger that his real mother, brothers, and sisters are those who do the will of his heavenly Father (Matt. 12:38, 46–50). When some teachers of the law were claiming Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub, the family went to seize him because people were saying he was out of his mind (Mark 3:20–35). After Jesus finished teaching about the parable of the sower and the importance of listening, again his family wanted to see him. Probably three times Jesus repeated in their presence that his real mother and siblings were those who heard the word of God and did it (Luke 8:4–21). Hearing and doing God’s word will become a major theme of James’s letter. If Jesus’s family may have been more positive

33. Mayor 1913, iii–iv.

34. Not relevant are James, Judas’s father (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13), and James the younger, the son of the “other” Mary and brother of Joseph (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1; Luke 24:10).

35. Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13.

36. Τέκτων, LSJ, 1769; BDAG, 995.

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in his early ministry, the gospel writer John notes that eventually they did not believe in Jesus and, as a consequence, his siblings chided him to go with them to Judea at the Festival of Booths to show himself to the world (John 7:3–10).

The many allusions to Jesus's teachings in James's letter³⁷ indicate that James heard many of his brother's teachings, even though he may not have believed all his claims at the time. A radical change is witnessed in Acts 1:14 when Mary and her children are included with the eleven apostles in an upper room in Jerusalem (a crowd of 120) gathered in prayer waiting for the "promise of the Father," baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5, 12–15). The apostle Paul adds the key missing incident: Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). Sometime after Pentecost, James becomes an authoritative figure in the church in Jerusalem. When Peter is released from prison by an angel and describes this event to the household of Mary, mother of John Mark, he tells the crowd to inform James and the others what happened (Acts 12:17). When Paul first goes to Jerusalem for two weeks, he visits only Peter and James (Gal. 1:18–19). He describes James, Cephas (Peter), and John as the "acknowledged pillars." They affirm Paul's ministry to the Gentiles while James and Peter would themselves prioritize outreach to Jews. They ask only that Paul remember the poor (Gal. 2:9–10). James's letter is indeed a letter to other Messianic Jews, with emphasis on care for the poor. When Paul and Barnabas want to resolve the issue of whether converted Gentiles had to be circumcised, they again go to Jerusalem to see the "apostles and elders." James becomes the spokesperson for the group in replying to Peter, Barnabas, and Paul. He proclaims that he has passed this judgment on the matter: "We should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19). He proposes a compromise to maintain fellowship between believing Gentiles and Jews. The concluding solution from the group is almost identical to James's original proposal (Acts 15:1–29; 21:25). After Paul arrives in Jerusalem, before his arrest, within a day he visits James and the elders. The group affirms Paul and his team's ministry among the Gentiles, but they do not want the converted Jews zealous for the law to think that Paul himself does not observe the law (Acts 21:17–26).

Thus, the New Testament view of James, the Lord's brother, is commensurate with the James of the letter. He is someone who has undergone a phenomenal transformation, which has resulted in

37. The exposition of James will indicate these many allusions. Also, see excursus "James Shows Christ."

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humility. Yet, as a leader of the church, he is comfortable with his own ecclesial authority. Even his own brother Jude defines himself with respect to James (Jude 1). But both of them humbly describe themselves simply as “slaves” of Jesus Christ. James’s ministry is mainly to fellow Jewish converts. He is gracious and compassionate, yet firm. As Jesus’s brother, he has heard Jesus’s preaching and Mary’s teachings, as illustrated in the Magnificat, which he echoes throughout his letter.³⁸

Eusebius and Josephus on James

James’s ecclesial authority is affirmed in early writings outside the New Testament, and many of the qualities seen in his letter were observed. Eusebius mentions many times that James was the first elected to be bishop of the church in Jerusalem.³⁹ Repeatedly, he was called the “Just” (δίκαιος), a quality he esteems in his letter.⁴⁰ Eusebius summarizes that James was “believed to be most righteous because of the height which he had reached in a life of philosophy and religion” (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.2). His fluid Greek style is evidence of his scholarly aptitudes. He was known also as no respecter of persons (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.10). James was renowned for his prayer. Hegesippus wrote that James used to be found in the temple “kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel’s because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people” (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.6). At his death, although dying because he confessed that “our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” he prayed for his killers: “Forgive them, for they know not what they do” (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.2, 16).

James was the first Hebrew bishop in Jerusalem, but, after the second Jewish revolt, Hebrew bishops ceased (*Hist. eccl.* 4.5), and thus their important testimony was missing from the great councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon. But his witness remains in the canon for Jew and Gentile to read today.

DATE AND SETTING OF THE LETTER OF JAMES

If James, the Lord’s brother, is the writer of the letter of James, then the date of the letter must precede his death. James’s death is one of the more firm New Testament dates because he died shortly after Roman governor Porcius Festus died, and therefore before his replacement Albinus arrived. Festus is mentioned in Acts 25–26; he died in

38. See exposition of James 1:9–11.

39. *Hist. eccl.* 2.1; 2:23; 3.5; 4.5; 7.19.

40. James 1:20; 2:21, 23–25; 3:18; 5:6, 16.

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AD 62.⁴¹ Hegesippus, in agreement with Clement, cited by Eusebius, gives a full account of his martyrdom at the temple in Jerusalem (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.10–19).

The dispersion to which James refers is probably the earliest one that affected the Messianic Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).⁴² Since James writes to a Jewish church still meeting in synagogues (2:2) and does not refer to any of the issues that become so important later (e.g., must the converted Gentiles be circumcised and follow the Old Testament laws of cleanliness?), most likely, then, he wrote his letter between Acts 8:1–14:28, ca. AD 34–48, before the Jerusalem Council cited in Acts 15. The Roman emperors during that time period were Tiberius (AD 14–27), Gaius (Caligula) (AD 37–41), and Claudius (AD 41–54). Herod Agrippa I was king in AD 37, 40–44 and Herod Agrippa II in AD 50–92/93. Procurators were: Marullus (AD 37–41), Cuspius Fadus (AD 44–46), and Tiberius Iulius Alexander (AD 46–48).

From James's letter we learn that the Jewish readers were in diaspora and in trials (1:1–2). Economically, the churches had both rich and poor, teachers, merchants, landowners, and farm laborers.⁴³ The poor included orphans and widows (1:27) and those without sufficient food to eat or water for cleaning (2:2, 15). Jeremias includes in the category of “wealthy” those who had property both in Jerusalem and the countryside, rulers, merchants, landowners, tax-farmers, bankers, Jews of private means, temple officials, and the priestly aristocracy. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are examples of wealthy landowners. The middle class included retail traders and craftsmen.⁴⁴ The majority of the priests lived in poverty, as did widows, slaves, and day laborers.⁴⁵ There was often animosity between the high priests and the ordinary priests. Josephus cites an incident, during the time of Governor Felix, when the high priests sent “slaves to the threshing floors to receive the tithes that

41. Hammond and Scullard 1970, 435; *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.21–24; *Ant.* 20.9.197–203.

42. See exposition of James 1:1.

43. James 1:9–10; 2:2–3, 6, 15; 3:1; 4:13; 5:1–4.

44. Jeremias 1969, 95–100.

45. Jeremias 1969, 108–11. Gerhard Lenski suggests up to 10 percent of the population in the first-century Mediterranean world could have been poor and/or sick enough for their lives to be in jeopardy (Blomberg and Kamell 2008, 30). Some divide ancient society into five levels: 3 percent truly wealthy—political and military elite; 7–15 percent well-to-do veterans, merchants, and traders; 22–27 percent economically stable merchants, traders, farmers, and artisans; 30–40 percent subsistence-level workers and wage earners; 25–28 percent truly poor (Verbrugge and Krell 2015, 108–11).

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were due to the priests, with the result that the poorer priests starved to death” (*Ant.* 20.8.8.181). Jesus’s family was probably between the lower and middle class. Joseph, as an artisan, may have fit in the middle class, but Mary’s sacrifice for Jesus’s purification was that offered by the poor (Luke 2:22–24; Lev. 12:6–8).

The spiritual difficulties mentioned in James’s letter include sinful internal desires, anger, hearing but not doing the word, partiality to the wealthy, the need for mercy, not controlling the tongue, cursing people, envy, selfish ambition and competition, asking for wrong desires, friendship with the world, haughtiness, lack of perseverance, and swearing.⁴⁶ Their doctrine about monotheism was correct (2:19), but not their practice.

If it is true that James writes to diaspora Jews before the issue of the inclusion of Gentiles becomes prominent, then the letter needs to be set between Acts 8–15. Acts 8–15 can be divided into several stages, as seen from the perspective of the apostles in Jerusalem. Even though James is not mentioned until Acts 12:17, he would most likely be present whenever “apostles” (and probably “elders”) in Jerusalem are mentioned.

Early Stages in Development in Acts 8:1–15:35

1. *Persecution of the church in Jerusalem after Stephen is martyred, led by Saul* (8:1–40, ca. AD 34)
 - a. The “apostles” remain in Jerusalem while other Messianic Jews disperse to Judea and Samaria (8:1–3).
 - b. Philip preaches in Samaria. When the “apostles” hear of the Samaritans becoming believers, they delegate Peter and John to check them out. They return to Jerusalem (8:4–25).
 - c. Philip goes to Azotus and Caesarea (8:26–40). This must have been a time of great shock and mourning at the death of Stephen (8:2) and fear and anxiety, particularly fear of Saul coming to one’s house (8:3). Yet also it would be a time of excitement as the good news is spread (8:4), miracles of exorcism and healing are witnessed (8:6–7, 13), and people are led by the Holy Spirit (8:39).
2. *Saul extends persecution of Christians outside of Jerusalem* to places of “safety,” such as Damascus, but then returns to Jerusalem a follower of Christ (9:1–29; ca. AD 35). The terror

46. James 1:14–15, 20; 2:3, 9, 13, 22; 3:2, 8–9, 13–14, 16; 4:1–6, 16; 5:8, 12.

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of Saul's extension of persecution of women as much as men (8:3; 9:2) throughout the provinces is then followed by the shocking rumors of his change. Saul is then persecuted himself by Hellenists (9:29).

3. *The church experiences a time of peace* in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria after Paul leaves for Tarsus (9:30–43). Peter travels to Lydda and Joppa (9:32–43). The church grows.
4. *Gentiles begin to be converted* in Judea with Cornelius in Caesarea (10:1–11:18). Peter's views about Gentiles are transformed. The "apostles" hear that Gentiles have converted and the circumcision party criticizes Peter (11:1–3), but his testimony is positively received in Jerusalem (11:18).
5. *The diaspora Messianic Jews spread out, traveling to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch* (11:19–30). They preach to Gentiles, who are converted, in Antioch. When the church in Jerusalem hears of this, it sends Barnabas to Antioch to check it out. Barnabas brings Paul from Tarsus to teach with him at Antioch (11:25–26). Agabus warns the church in Antioch of a future famine in Judea. Barnabas and Paul bring relief to elders in Judea (11:27–30). The famine occurs in AD 46–47.
6. *King Herod initiates persecution against Messianic Jews in Jerusalem* (12:1–25, AD 37–44). James, the brother of John, is killed and Peter is arrested (12:2–3). James is told of Peter's release (12:17). The church must have been terrified of this return to persecution. Food is scarce in Tyre and Sidon (12:20).
7. *Barnabas and Paul are sent by the Holy Spirit from Antioch to Cyprus and South Galatia* (13:1–14:28, AD 47–48). They first preach to Jews, then to Gentiles (13:46–47). They learn that hardship precedes entrance into God's reign (14:22).
8. *The earlier criticism from the circumcision party* (11:3) *escalates*, as Pharisee Christians insist that Gentiles must be circumcised and obey the laws of cleanliness in order to be saved (15:1–35, AD 48–49). Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem to resolve the issue. James affirms their ministry but recommends guidelines.

The issue of Gentiles begins to become prominent in stage 4 (Acts 10), but it escalates at stage 8 (Acts 15). Thus, Acts chapters 8–9 (stages 1–3) fit the context of James's letter best, although stages 4–7 are possible. By stage 8, the place of Gentiles in the church has become a major issue. The "trials" the Jewish church endures appear to change at this period.

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During these years (AD 34–48), Israel has had to experience brigands, crucifixions, friction with Roman authorities about the temple, and uprisings (*Ant.* 20.1, 2). There was also a major famine in Judaea (AD 46–47). During Gaius Caligula's reign, the Jews in Alexandria, Egypt, were persecuted by Gentiles. Gaius wanted to install statues of himself in the synagogues in Alexandria and in the temple in Jerusalem. But Emperor Claudius restored religious rights to the Alexandrian Jews.⁴⁷ Before the war in AD 66, there was a chasm between the rich and poor. Landowners were able to amass much land and were harsh with hired laborers. After the war against Rome, all were affected economically. By the end of the war, the countryside and Jerusalem were destroyed.⁴⁸

Since James stayed in Jerusalem, the letter was written from that city. Israel was a land of springs, figs, and olives (3:11–12),⁴⁹ near the sea (1:6; 3:4). It was renowned for its early (October) and late (April) rain (5:7), characteristic of Israel, not Egypt, Italy, or Asia Minor.⁵⁰

Alternate Theories on Authorship

Although many commentators agree that James the Lord's brother wrote the letter early in his ministry,⁵¹ some commentators have proposed alternate theories.

1. James the son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of John, wrote the letter. This view was proposed by Isidore of Seville (d. AD 636) according to a subscription in a tenth-century Latin Codex Corbeiensis. This theory was followed through the seventeenth century by Spanish writers and assumed in Dante's *Paradise* 25 and by Martin Luther.⁵²

Since Herod Agrippa I (who killed this James) himself died in AD 44, the letter would be very early (before Acts 12). This theory has no early church attestation. Acts does not present this

47. *J.W.* 2.10.1–5.184–203; Schürer 1973–79, 1:389–94, 446.

48. *J.W.* 5.12.3.511–26; 6.1.1; 7.1. See also Davids 1982, 30–32.

49. Olive trees abounded in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. The fig is prominent in Mediterranean countries (Zohary 1982, 56, 58).

50. Joel 2:23; Vlachos 2013, 4; Davids 1982, 14.

51. E.g., McCartney 2009, 30–32; Hiebert 1979, 25, 41; Robertson 1933, 4–5; Vlachos 2013, 5–6; Kistemaker 1986, 19; James 2005, 1738; Mayor 1913, cxliv–cl; Guthrie 1970, 758, 764; Maynard-Reid 1987, 8. A few argue for James writing the letter after the Jerusalem Council, such as Witherington 2007, 401. Foster 2014, 24, leaves the date open.

52. Ropes 1916, 45; Dibelius 1976, 55; Manton 1693, 13.

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James as prominent in the early church. Therefore, even Martin Dibelius declares that James, the brother of Jesus, is the “only *one* person of reputation in primitive Christianity who could have been suggested by the way in which his name appears.”⁵³

2. A few suggest that James the son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve, wrote the letter. This view was proposed by Thomas Manton (d. 1620): “No epistle but theirs [of apostles] being received into the rule of faith.”⁵⁴ John Calvin was inclined to agree: “I am therefore rather inclined to the conjecture, that he of whom Paul speaks was the son of Alphaeus. I do not yet deny that another was the ruler of the Church at Jerusalem.” Yet, he goes on, “The ancients are nearly unanimous in thinking that [the author] was one of the disciples named Oblias and a relative of Christ, who was set over the Church at Jerusalem.”⁵⁵ Calvin himself admits that the view that James son of Alphaeus was the author of the letter has no early attestation. Acts does not present this James as prominent in the early church. In addition, the New Testament does not limit “apostles” to the Twelve, but rather the term includes witnesses of Jesus’s resurrection.⁵⁶ Therefore, James can be called an “apostle” (Gal. 1:19).⁵⁷
3. James, the Lord’s brother, plus an editor⁵⁸ or an unknown author wrote the letter, possibly called “James,” or writing in James’s name.⁵⁹

53. Dibelius 1976, 12. Vlachos adds that James the son of Zebedee did not have “the authoritative influence to issue an encyclical of this tone. . . . Only this James [the Lord’s brother] would have been well enough known to have required no identification beyond his mere name in the letter’s greeting” (2013, 3). Also, Paul mentions James first in the list of pillars of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9, 12).

54. Manton 1693, 12.

55. Calvin n.d., 2552. Jerome identified the son of Alphaeus as brother of the Lord in *De perpetua virginitate B. Mariae* (Dibelius 1976, 12, 54; Ropes 1916, 57–58).

56. E.g., Acts 1:21–22; 1 Cor. 9:1. See Spencer 2005, 133–40.

57. As did Origen (Ropes 1916, 93).

58. E.g., Davids 1982, 12–13.

59. Those who argue for a pseudonymous author are, e.g., Laws 1980, 41; Painter and deSilva 2012, 25; Dibelius 1976, 18–19; Ropes 1916, 47; Eisenman 1997, 10; Hartin 2004, 93; Boring 2012, 438–39.

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However, a pseudonymous writer is unlikely to use such a simple self-designation as “James, a slave” for himself.⁶⁰ For instance, the Gospel of Thomas (2nd c.) describes the leader who will replace Jesus as “James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being” (log. 12). The apostle Paul warned his readers about pseudonymous letters (2 Thess. 2:2–3; 3:17) and exhorted them instead to be truthful (e.g., Eph. 4:15, 25; Col. 3:9). The early church also used authenticity as a criteria for the canon. For instance, the elder in Asia who wrote the fictional Acts of Paul resigned from office after confessing he had “wrongly inscribed” it with Paul’s name.⁶¹ Moreover, why should we designate the author of James as pseudonymous or unknown when we have strong evidence for James, the Lord’s brother?

The reasons some commentators do not recognize James, Jesus’s brother, as the author of the letter may be summarized under four broad concerns.⁶²

1. *The letter appears to be disconnected in thought.* Martin Dibelius developed this hypothesis. *Paraenesis* is a series of sayings, or brief moral teachings, without continuity in thought: “*It is not possible to construct a single frame into which [the admonitions] will all fit.*” James has “no theology.”⁶³ James has groups and series of sayings with no continuity between them. The text only has catchwords as mnemonic devices. In addition, the letter has no hint of personal reasons that inspired the author to compose the writing, no specific occasion, no epistolary remarks, and no epistolary ending.⁶⁴

However, since 1976, contrary to Dibelius, numerous commentators have shown that James is a carefully constructed work, especially Peter Davids.⁶⁵ For example, Timothy Cargal cites the dissertation by Manabu Tsuji: “Tsuji’s work provides

60. See also Vlachos 2013, 4; Davids 1982, 9.

61. *Bapt.* 17; Lea 1991, 538–41.

62. Cf. Painter and deSilva 2012, 22–23.

63. Dibelius 1976, 2, 11, 21.

64. Dibelius 1976, 2–6.

65. E.g., Davids 1982, 25–29. This letter as a “tightly woven composition of several related themes” “amply refutes the once-common dismissal of James as a jumble of disconnected fragments” (Adam 2013, xx).

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clear evidence of both the shifting consensus regarding James and of the emerging direction of scholarly research on the book. There has developed in the past two decades widespread agreement that the letter is not simply a hodgepodge of sayings strung together by catchword links, as Dibelius argued. Moreover, there is general agreement among most researchers regarding the general contours of the book's internal structure."⁶⁶ Repetition of words does not necessarily mean that they were added later. In this commentary, I will show how each verse relates to its previous verse. The repetition of words is one way James connects the ideas, as do many other New Testament writers. Jesus's sermons do the same.⁶⁷

James fits in the genre of an encyclical letter, a letter sent to a group of people, common among ancient Jews.⁶⁸ The occasion for the letter becomes explicit in the imperatives. James is concerned for the Christianity of these diaspora Jewish Christians, which probably was described to him by messengers. Unlike many Hellenistic letters, James lacks a final greeting. However, David Aune discovered that many Hebrew and Hebrew Hellenistic letters do not have any final greetings, dates, or signatures before the Bar Kosiba period (AD 132–35).⁶⁹

2. *The letter appears to be too extensive in Hellenistic thought and form* for the bishop of Jerusalem. In other words, the Greek is of too good a quality for a son of a Jewish carpenter. Some claim that James uses the diatribe form familiar to Greeks, including dialogue with imaginary persons and rhetorical questions emphasizing points already known. According to Aune, the diatribe reflects the oral public preaching style of wandering Cynic and Stoic philosophers who used the Socratic method of censure and persuasion. Their opponents are imaginary and

66. Cargal 1999, 568–69.

67. Dibelius 1976 (8–10) himself illustrates this in, for instance, Matt. 6:34 and 31–33; 10:31 and 28, 26; 37 and 35; 12:36 and 34; 13:12 and 11; 18:12–14 and 10, 6–9.

68. E.g., Acts 15:23–29. See also Bauckham 1999, 13; McCartney 2009, 39, 58.

69. Paul, as he reaches out to the Gentile world, follows the Hellenistic style. Aune 1987, 175–80; also, Francis 1970, 125. On ancient letters, see Bateman 2013, ch. 1.

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the objections are hypothetical. Ridicule may be used in these brief questions and answers.⁷⁰

However, James's precedent is not necessarily the Socratic style. Rather, his style is more similar to the prophetic style, especially of Malachi, who uses questions and answers to deal with authentic contemporary issues.⁷¹ Although Malachi addresses the nation of Israel and the temple setting, his concerns are similar to James, such as impartiality (Mal. 2:9–10); humility (4:1); importance of education (2:6–8; 4:4); the second coming (3:2; 4:1, 5); paying the hired worker, care of the widow and orphan (3:5); the need for purity and righteousness (1:11–12; 2:17; 3:3, 18; 4:2); and God as “Father” (1:6; 2:10; 3:17), “one” (2:15), and unchangeable (3:6).⁷²

Commentators who disagree that James has too extensive a Hellenistic style and thought will also frequently cite parallel Hebrew writers. Adam explains: now there is no longer a “polar contrast between ‘Hebrew’ and ‘Hellenistic’ but rather ‘varied degrees of Hellenization within Judaism.’”⁷³ James was reared in bilingual Galilee. Even Greek was common in Israel.⁷⁴ By Isaiah's time, the region was called “Galilee of the Gentiles”

70. Aune 1987, 200–201; Ropes 1916, 12–15.

71. E. g., Mal. 1:2, 6–8, 13; 2:10, 14–15, 17; 3:7–8, 13–14. See also chapter 2 tables “Sequence of Questions and Statements” in James 2 and Malachi 1.

72. Both James and Malachi use Elijah as an example (James 5:17–18; Mal. 4:5). Martin (1988) agrees that James stands in the “tradition of the Hebrew prophets” of the eighth to sixth centuries BC (156). James also echoes the prophetic and wisdom concerns (content and images) of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Proverbs. These books emphasize, as does Malachi, justice for the poor and oppressed, especially orphans and widows; righteous behavior; human humility and mortality; faithfulness to God and to one's spouse; and impending judgment and punishment. However, unlike James, Isaiah and Jeremiah focus on Jerusalem, the temple, and condemnations of the nations. In style, they differ in that their prophetic messages come from visions or oracles that are presented in the narratives. Proverbs too has much concern for the poor including orphans and widows, for justice and righteous behavior, and for humble wisdom expressed in the use of the tongue. But it too is centered on the king and Jerusalem. Proverbs is written in tightly worded proverbs, which James does not use. Amos, Hosea, and Zechariah also discuss similar concerns as those of Isaiah and Jeremiah, but not as extensively.

73. Adam 2013, xviii. See also Laws 1980, 36.

74. See also Robertson 1934, 123; Laws 1980, 40.

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(Isa. 9:1). Greek was in everyday use by the second century BC. It was needed for marketplace negotiations. The coastal towns and Decapolis were Greek cities. Galilee had many Gentiles and much commerce and travel. In Herodian Israel, writing in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew was widespread at all levels of society.⁷⁵ Although James has a fluid Greek style, unlike some Greek rhetoricians, he does not use elaborate periods or studied rhetoric.⁷⁶ Some commentators who consider James too Hellenistic even find some Semitisms in his writing.⁷⁷ Besides being reared in a bilingual area, the Jewish people were (and still are) renowned in their educational achievements. Josephus claims: "Above all we [Jews] pride ourselves on the education of our children, and regard as the most essential task in life the observance of our laws and of the pious practices, based thereupon, which we have inherited," and the Law "orders that [children] shall be taught to read, and shall learn both the laws and the deeds of their ancestors" (*Ag. Ap.* 1.12.60; 2.25.204). In addition, James as a teacher was remembered for his educational achievements. As a leader in Jerusalem, James would meet many Greek-speaking Jews.⁷⁸ James would most likely not need a Greek amanuensis.⁷⁹

3. *The letter has few ideas, interests, and allusions peculiar to any particular phase of early Christianity*, such as the temple, circumcision, validity of the law, death of Christ, justification by faith, resurrection, cultic ritualism, the Holy Spirit, or Eucharist.⁸⁰ Bart Ehrman agrees: nowhere does "the author

75. Millard 2001, 104, 107, 115, 117, 210; Robertson 1934, 27–29. The rabbis had documents (e.g., bills of divorce) written in Greek and Hebrew (m. Git. 9:6, 8). Greek wisdom was even taught alongside Hebrew Scriptures by Rabbi Simeon (Sot. 49b).

76. Mayor 1913, cclv; Robertson 1934, 123. A "period" in rhetoric is a well-rounded sentence in which one to four clauses or phrases have a circular form (Spencer 1998a, 199–201; Lanham 1991, 112–13). See also "Glossary of Stylistic Terms."

77. E.g., "forgetful hearer" 1:25; "royal law" 2:8; "Lord of Sabbath" 5:4; "he prayed fervently" 5:17 (Dibelius 1976, 36–37; Ropes 1916, 26). See also McCartney 2009, 6. Witherington 2007 adds that only thirteen words in James are not found in the LXX (388).

78. See also Guthrie 1970, 748–49.

79. Cf. Davids 1982, 13; Bateman 2013, 56.

80. E.g., Ropes 1916, 27; Marxsen 1970, 229.

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claim to be a member of Jesus's family or to have any first-hand knowledge of his teachings." His examples of ethical behavior are drawn not from the lives of Jesus and his apostles, but from the Jewish Scriptures.⁸¹ Martin Luther introduced the first edition of his German New Testament (1522) with: "In fine, Saint John's gospel and his first epistle, Saint Paul's epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle,—these are the books which show thee Christ, and teach thee everything that is needful and blessed for thee to know even though thou never see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore is Saint James's epistle a right strawy epistle in comparison with them, for it has no gospel character to it. Therefore I will not have it in my Bible in the number of the proper chief books, but do not intend thereby to forbid anyone to place and exalt it as he pleases, for there is many a good saying in it." Luther put James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation at the end of the volume and assigned them no numbers in his table of contents. Tyndale followed Luther's example, but wrote: "Me thynketh [James] ought of ryght to be taken for holye Scripture."⁸²

Yet, many of James's ethical injunctions are similar to Jesus's own teachings as preserved in the Gospels, as we shall see in the exposition of the text.⁸³ There are many affinities to the gospel of Matthew, especially Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. No textual variants eliminate the two clear references to Jesus Christ. The letter presupposes a high Christology, the glorious Lord and judge (1:1; 2:1; 5:8–9). It has eschatology (5:7–9), conversion (1:18, 21; 2:7), and ecclesiology (5:14).⁸⁴ Of course his letter will sound different from Paul's letters, since James is early and closely dependent on Jesus's oral teachings. Justification is the first stage of conversion, to which James refers. If Jesus had not been resurrected, how could he be the Lord of glory (2:1)? If his readers were forced to leave the temple in Jerusalem, James should not be expected to refer

81. Ehrman 2004, 282.

82. Ropes 1916, 108–9.

83. Even critics of James as the author will agree, e.g., Ehrman 2004, 282. See also Guthrie 1970, 743–44. See also chapter 4 excursus "James Shows Christ."

84. Laws 1980, 2–4, 12, 14, 18–20; Davids 1982, 14–17, 38–41; Dibelius 1976, 23; McCartney 2009, 69–70.

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to it. If the questions of Gentiles and circumcision have not come up with these Jews, why would he refer to these issues? Unfortunately, Luther's apprehension of justification by faith through grace was such a moving experience for him that it became his own hermeneutic (or interpreting tool) to create a canon within the canon that limited his appreciation of James's message to Christians who were not living like Christians. John Calvin, who followed, was more balanced in his assessment: "By faith all are justified apart from the works of the law. The same Spirit teaches through James that the faith both of Abraham and of ourselves consists in works, not only in faith. It is sure that the Spirit is not in conflict with himself."⁸⁵ He adds that James contends with those who "vainly pretended faith as an excuse for their contempt of good works."⁸⁶ In other words, James's letter deals with a different problem than does Paul's letters and thus has different emphases.

4. *The church has always had doubts about the letter of James.* Neither the Muratorian Canon nor Tertullian nor Cyprian mentions it. Marxsen adds that Eusebius "does not accept it as genuine."⁸⁷ The Peshitta (5 c.) is the first Syrian witness to include James, 1 Peter, and 1 John.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, I have shown the strong support for James's authorship. Eusebius does not say that James is not genuine. Rather, he simply mentions that some churches had doubts about the letter because few early writers referred to it, but the letter was regularly used in many churches (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23). Sophie Laws concludes that "the epistle was known at an early stage within the Western Church" because the Shepherd of Hermas gives a "strong impression" of familiarity with the letter of James. She adds, Clement of Rome appeals to Rahab and Abraham, as did James.⁸⁹ The Muratorian Canon has a

85. Calvin 1960, 3.17.11.

86. Calvin 1960, 3.17.12.

87. Marxsen 1970, 231. Laws writes of the "neglect of the epistle in the Western Church from the late second to the mid fourth century" (Laws 1980, 21). In contrast, Mayor finds allusions to James in Tertullian's writings (1913, lxxxi). See "Early Church Traditions about the Letter of James" in this introduction.

88. Dibelius 1976, 51.

89. Laws 1980, 21, 23. *Haer.* 4.13.4; 16.2 also refers to the "friend of God."

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corruption at its beginning and end,⁹⁰ or it may have omitted James and Hebrews because, as Gentile elements in the church increased, Jewish epistles became less known. Or, possibly, since some second-century Ebionites used James's letter as precedent for a Torah-observant form of Christianity, later Gentiles rejected it.⁹¹ We can be certain that the Alexandrian school, which sought for authenticity, always supported it. Ropes proposes that in the West "it seems to have been men acquainted with the learning and custom of Alexandria who brought the Epistle of James into general use and made it an integral part of the N. T."⁹² It is not so much that the church had "doubts" but rather that the church did not always have early extended quotations. But that should be no surprise for a short letter addressed to Jews.

In conclusion, these important questions are ones that might first arise in a simple reading of the letter. However, further prayerful humble study of the letter and the early church can reveal the letter's organic type of structure, its early understanding of Christianity, its acceptance by the church, and the potential bilingual abilities of James. It may appear to differ with some of Paul's understandings, but we will see that, in reality, it complements Paul's views.

STRUCTURE OF THE LETTER OF JAMES

Peter Davids offers an excellent analysis of three themes in the Letter of James.⁹³ What he is missing is the fourth uniting theme: becoming doers of the word, which is first presented in 1:22–25. The three themes presented earlier in James chapter 1 are summarized in 1:26–27: wisdom about speaking (1:26), wealth and care for the poor (1:27a), and "trials" or control of internal desires (1:27b).⁹⁴ James uses a parallel thought structure in 1:2–2:26: trials (1:2–4), wisdom (1:5–8),

90. Hennecke 1963, 42. In addition, it is more of an introduction to the NT and pious readings than the definitive listings of NT "Scriptures," as have Origen and Athanasius.

91. Mayor 1913, lxx; Blomberg and Kamell 2008, 28.

92. Ropes 1916, 103.

93. Davids 1982, 25–29; also Francis 1970, 110–26.

94. Francis (1970, 118) calls 1:26–27 "a kind of literary hinge, both recapitulating the preceding introduction of the two main sections and turning the reader to the initial argumentative section of the body of the epistle."

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wealth (1:9–11); trials (1:12–18), wisdom (1:19–21), wealth (2:1–17).⁹⁵ The chiasmic⁹⁶ thought structure begins with the last parallel topic: wealth (2:1–26). In his next set he covers the three themes in further detail. The uniting theme (doer of the word) is covered at the conclusion of each topic: wealth (2:1–13) followed by “doer of the word” acts for the poor (2:14–26); wisdom (3:1–12) followed by “doer of the word” reflects wisdom in action (3:13–18); and “trials” from internal desires (4:1–17) followed by “doer of the law” indicates not speaking against another (4:11–12). The terms “doer” (ποιητής) or “action” (ἔργον) occur in each of these four pericopes that present the uniting theme: 1:22–25: ποιητής and ἔργον; 2:14–26: ἔργον; 3:13–18: ἔργον; 4:11–12: ποιητής. The three themes are then reviewed: wealth (5:1–6), persevering in trials (5:7–11), and wisdom about use of the tongue (5:12).⁹⁷ The final section explains how to persevere in the midst of trials (5:13–18, 19–20), describing the place of prayer and community to resolve issues of joy, health, and sin.⁹⁸ Most commentators are agreed on these subdivisions,⁹⁹ but the reappearance of the uniting theme is not always highlighted in studies about the structure of the letter. Becoming doers of the word summarizes chapter 1 (1:22–27) and ends, or is in the middle of each of, the three themes in chapters 2–4 (2:14–26; 3:13–18; 4:11–12). Differences among commentators occur on how to classify 4:1–12: whether this concerns “trials” or “wisdom,” and also, whether

95. Francis (1970, 111–22) shows how such “double opening statements” were relatively common in Hellenistic letters. They functioned to emphasize the important subject matter of a letter.

96. Chiasm is a reverted type of parallelism, an inversion of the second of two parallel phrases, clauses, etc. It is diagonal arrangement, usually of one to four clauses or phrases in sequences in a well-rounded sentence or period. The first clause corresponds with the last, and the second with the second to last, as in the sequence ABBA, ABCDDCBA, or even ABCBA. A theme may be developed in a chiasmic pattern of thought in larger contexts (Spencer 1998a, 189). See “Glossary of Stylistic Terms” in Appendix.

97. Francis (1970, 125) observes that ancient letters may end with an oath formula. Instead, at that point in the letter, James commands the readers not to make oaths.

98. Davids (1982, 25–26) suggests that Christian letters often end with something about prayer and a health wish, e.g., 1 John 5:14–17 (prayer and sin); 2 Cor. 13:5–10 (sin and prayer); Eph. 6:19–20 (prayer); 1 Thess. 5:12–22 (final directions include prayer); Heb. 13:18–19 (prayer). See also Francis 1970, 125–26.

99. Bauckham 1999, 63–64.

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to include 4:13–17 with the earlier 4:1–12 or the later 5:1–6.¹⁰⁰ Since James writes concerning internal “desires” as a type of “trial” in 1:2–4, 12–18, and he repeats “desires” again in 4:1–3, then 4:1–12 appears to fit as a further development of the same theme. James 4:13–17 continues the same topic as 4:1–10, addressing one way to handle wrong “desires”: to realize one’s own mortality. Then, 5:1–6 clearly moves to the theme of wealth. The effect of this overall literary structure is to cause the reader to interrelate the different themes under the broad umbrella of becoming doers of the word, as one should also do in one’s structure of life.

The following outline indicates that James 1:21 serves as a helpful thesis sentence: James exhorts the twelve tribes in the dispersion, having laid aside all evil deeds, to receive in humility the implanted word. The positive command to “receive the implanted word” is discussed at the beginning (ch. 1) and end (5:13–20) of the letter, while in the middle of the letter the negative command to “lay aside evil deeds” is covered, including partiality (ch. 2), misuse of the tongue (ch. 3), fighting as the world fights (ch. 4), wealth (5:1–11), and swearing oaths (5:12). Each of these chapters or sections ends (ch. 4 in the middle) with the reason behind the earlier commands, which incorporates the theme of becoming a doer of the word. In effect, the process of receiving the implanted word includes becoming a doer of the word.

As to its genre, the letter of James—a letter written to a group of people—has prophetic and wisdom elements, and hearkens back to the Old Testament law, prophets,¹⁰¹ and to Jesus’s teachings applied to its contemporary first-century situation. However, the letter is always relevant to any situation where Christians are not living out their faith as they should.

What follows is a chart and an outline summarizing my own approach to themes in James.

100. Bauckham (1999, 64) keeps 4:13–17 separate from 5:1–6 as summarizing the consensus among commentators. Davids (1982, 28–29), Francis (1970, 121), and McCartney (2009, 67) combine 4:13–5:6 in one larger heading.

101. See “Alternate Theories on Authorship and Sequence of Questions and Statements in James,” chapter 2.

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Themes in James Become Doers of the Word: Laying Aside All Evil Deeds and Receiving the Implanted Word (1:21–22)		
1. Be wise about unavoidable TRIALS 1:2–4 (A).	2. WISDOM helps you deal with trials 1:5–8. God is generous to give (B).	3. WEALTH: one type of trial is injustice by and for the rich. Have a right attitude to riches 1:9–11 (C).
Inward	Tongue connects	Outward
4. Avoidable “trials” are sinful internal desires 1:12–18. God, who is good, never gives these trials. Doer of word keeps spotless 1:27b.	5. Be slow to speak 1:19–21. Doer of word hears & acts 1:22–25 & bridles tongue 1:26.	Doer of word cares for poor 1:27a. 6. Do not favor the wealthy over the poor. The rich oppress the poor 2:1–13. Doer of the word speaks & acts 2:14–26.
	7. Few should become teachers, because the tongue needs to be tamed 3:1–12. Doer’s wise teaching is reflected in good actions 3:13–18.	
8. Wrong desires can result in becoming God’s enemy. Instead, be humble 4:1–10. Doer of law does not speak evil against another 4:11–12. Change wrong desires by realizing one’s mortality 4:13–17.		

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Themes in James Become Doers of the Word: Laying Aside All Evil Deeds and Receiving the Implanted Word (1:21–22)		
		9. The rich who oppress the poor will be judged 5:1–6.
10. The laborer needs to persevere through trials because the judge is near 5:7–11.	11. Do not swear 5:12.	
12. Use prayer & community to resolve issues of joy, health & sin 5:13–18, 19–20.		

LETTER OUTLINE

James exhorts the twelve tribes in the dispersion, having laid aside all evil deeds, to receive in humility the implanted word.

Greetings: James humbly greets the twelve tribes (1:1). He commands:

- I. Receive the implanted word in the midst of trials (ch. 1).
 - A. Meet trials with joy because of their effects (1:2–4).
 - B. Ask God in faith for wisdom (1:5–8).
 - C. Do not boast in riches because they are perishable (1:9–11).
 - D. Having endured trials, you will be rewarded (1:12–18).
 - E. (thesis paragraph) Receive the implanted word by becoming doers of the word and not hearers only (1:19–27).
- II. Lay aside partiality and faith without actions (ch. 2).
 - A. Show no partiality to the rich (2:1–13).
 - B. (reason) Verbal faith without actions is dead (2:14–26).
- III. Lay aside misuse of the tongue (ch. 3).
 - A. Be careful, because of the misuse of speaking, before becoming a teacher (3:1–12).
 - B. (reason) True wisdom is reflected in a life of good deeds (3:13–18).

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- IV. Lay aside fighting as the world fights; rather, humble yourself before the Lord and God will exalt you (ch. 4).
 - A. Instead of fighting, which makes you God's enemy, humble yourself before the Lord (4:1–10).
 - B. Fighting makes you a judge—a person who speaks evil of brothers and sisters; rather, be a doer of the law (4:11–12).
 - C. Do not do business as the world does, because such arrogance is inappropriate to humans whose lives are temporary and dependent on God's will (4:13–17).
- V. Lay aside wealth (5:1–12).
 - A. The rich will be judged (5:1–6).
 - B. Therefore, be patient and be ready because the Judge is standing at the doors (5:7–11).
 - C. Do not swear oaths (5:12).
- VI. Receive the implanted word by being mature in actions (5:13–20).
 - A. Deal wisely with suffering, joy, and illness (5:13–18).
 - B. Deal wisely with those led astray (5:19–20).