

JAMES: CHAPTER ONE

I. Introduction

A. Author

The epistle's salutation begins with the proper noun **Ἰάκωβος** (*Iákōbos*), translated "James." It is Greek for the Hebrew proper noun **יַעֲקֹב** (*ya'aqōv*), translated "Jacob." From this comes the term Jacobéan which relates to the period of visual and literary arts during the reign of James I of England (1603–25). During this period the literature of England boasted the works of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Francis Bacon, John Donne, Michael Drayton, and the King James Version of the Bible.

Since James was linked to the man for whom the nation Israel was named, it is not unusual that it was very common among men of the first century.

We find this trend to be true in the New Testament. Five Jameses are mentioned, one of which is the author of the Epistle of James. Let's introduce the other four and determine through elimination which wrote James.

Two chosen by the Lord to serve among His original twelve apostles are listed by Matthew:

Matthew 10:1 Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits [**demons**], to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

v. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John His brother;

v. 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;

v. 4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

James the son of Zebedee is the first of the Jameses to be named in Scripture. He and his brother John joined Peter in witnessing the Lord's transfiguration in Matthew 17:1–9.

He was the first of the apostles to be martyred. Acts 12:1–2 informs us that in A.D. 44, King Herod Agrippa I had him slain with the sword. Although a leader in the Jerusalem church, James's death in 44 makes it extremely unlikely that he was the one who could have written the Epistle of James.

James the son of Alphaeus was one of the twelve, but nothing is known about him or his activities. He is completely ignored in the Gospels and Acts with the exceptions of lists naming the original twelve apostles.

There is possibly a third James whose mother was among “many women” who witnessed the crucifixion, three of whom are mentioned: “Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee” (Matthew 27:56).

Nothing further is known about this James. In fact, his identity is so vague that there are many theories among theologians about who he is.

Mark in his Gospel refers to a James in a parallel passage to the one above as “James the Less” (Mark 15:40). Cyrus Scofield in his *The Scofield Study Bible*, assigned the moniker, “James the Less” of Mark 15:40 to James the son of Alphaeus in his footnote at Matthew 4:21.

In that same footnote, Scofield lists a fifth **James** as **the father of the apostle Judas** (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). He is referred to as Thaddaeus in Matthew 10:3.

This leaves only one man that could be the author of the Epistle of James. He is identified in Jude's introduction to his epistle, “Jude [Ἰούδας (Ioudas)], a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James” (Jude 1:1a).

James was distinguished from the other Jameses by Eusebius as James the Just. That he and Jude are half-brothers of our Lord is confirmed by noting the chart pedigree of Mary and Joseph:

Matthew 13:55 “Is not this the carpenter's son?
Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and
Joseph, Jr. and Simon and Judas.

v. 56a And His sisters, are they not all with us?”

Paul mentions the Lord's brothers as being married men in 1 Corinthians 9:5 and James by name in Galatians 1:19. There was no prohibition against marriage placed on leaders of the church, whether apostles or pastors. Although Paul chose to remain celibate, there is no mandate for it.

The Acts of the Apostles is the New Testament history of the incipient church's outreach during the thirty years following the resurrection of Christ. In Luke's account, he identifies James as the leader of the Jerusalem church and the one who hosts the Jerusalem Bible Conference documented in Acts 15.

When Paul unadvisedly goes to Jerusalem in Acts 21, James is still the leader of that church.

It becomes apparent that the James, who authored the Epistle of James, is the son of Joseph and Mary, the Lord's half-brother, and the leader of the Jerusalem church.

B. The Epistle

The best guess for the date of this epistle is somewhere between c. A.D. 35–45 making it the first entry in what became the New Testament canon. The book was received by James during his pastorate at the church of Jerusalem.

Virtually all of those who had come to believe in Jesus as Messiah were Jewish converts. However, their relationship with God was still centered on the Tanakh: the Mosaic Law, the prophets, and the writings, also called the Torah, the *Nevi'im*, and *Kethuvim*.

James's Epistle is directed at what he refers to as the "twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad" (James 1:1). There is no in-depth development of doctrines in his book, but it is replete with commands regarding what the character traits, behavior patterns, and lifestyle of believers ought to be.

James in its five chapters contains almost 60 imperative moods and, consequently, becomes a guidebook revealing the moral attitudes and behaviors that should define the life of the believer in Jesus Christ.

In the chart we have noted quite often, "Four Categories of Positive or Negative Volition," James emphasizes the fourth positive category: Doctrine retained is to be applied to life and circumstances.

He recognizes that it is common for the believer to know biblical truths but neglect the duty of converting that knowledge into application. He is not bashful to criticize this spiritual breakdown throughout chapter one.

In James 1:16 James implores his audience: “Do not continue deceiving yourselves, my fellow believers.”

The word for “deception” is the present middle imperative of prohibition of the verb **πλανάω** (*planáō*) which means you are to stop doing something that is habitually going on. When you know what to do and then do not do it, you have deceived yourself into betraying the Word of God.

James uses a synonym of *planáō* in chapter one, verse 22, the present middle participle of **παρalogίζομαι** (*paralogízomai*) which also means to self-deceive, but also to delude oneself. This indicates an advance on the self-deception of verse 16:

Deceive implies imposing a false idea or belief that causes ignorance, bewilderment, or helplessness.

Delude implies deceiving so thoroughly as to obscure the truth.¹

The third synonym used by James in chapter one occurs in verse 26, “If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.”

The word “deceives” in this verse is the present active participle of the verb **ἀπατάω** (*apatáō*). This time the emphasis is on self-seduction of one’s *kardía*.

The continuous involvement in self-deception and self-delusion has moved the believer into advanced reversionism so that blackout of the soul has resulted in self-seduction controlling one’s thoughts. When this occurs, one’s status in the royal family is rendered worthless with regard to performing one’s duty before the Lord.

These are the kinds of admonitions that James will unleash upon us throughout his epistle. Most of what he addresses in chapters 2–5 are introduced in chapter one.

James’s development of the epistle reveals a man of high intellect: well-read, multilingual, and classically trained. If this is the case for him, then we must extrapolate that it was likely true of his siblings including the Lord.

¹ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., s.v. “deceive.”