

The Book of James, Session 1

Introduction

1. Authorship:

In the book the only information about the author is 1:1, “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

There are five men named “James” in the New Testament:

- The father of the apostle Judas (not Iscariot) Lk. 6:16. Nothing else known of him.
- The apostle who was the son of Alphaeus, Matt. 10:3. Nothing else known of him.
- James the Younger, Mark 15:40. Nothing known of him.
- James, the brother of John, son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles, Matthew 10:2. First apostle to be martyred, in A.D. 44. His martyrdom is too early for him to have written the letter.
- James, called the brother of Jesus. First clear attribution was by Origen in the early 200s. Widely accepted. One of Jesus’ brothers, and an opponent of Jesus during Jesus’ ministry. After Jesus’ resurrection James is soon identified as a follower (see 1 Corinthians 15:7) and became the leader of the Jerusalem Church. James was martyred, probably in A.D. 62

2. Date:

No clear evidence for a specific date, but general thought is that the book was written around 60 A.D.

3. Recipients:

James 1:1b, “To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”

Not written to a specific individual or church. There are no specific situations or problems addressed such as in the Corinthian letters. This is a message meant to be spread to believers throughout the Roman world.

4. Canonical Acceptance of the Book of James:

The church was slow in including James in its canon.

- Latin Church, mid 300s, Jerome was influential in its acceptance.
- Greek Church, mid 200s, Origen quoted James.

- Roman Catholic Church, 1546, Council of Trent, Books were divided into proto-canonical (accepted without dispute) and deuterocanonical (gradually won their way into acceptance into the N.T.) James is in the deuterocanonical list.
- Martin Luther, “the epistle of James is an epistle full of straw, because it contains nothing evangelical.”

The “issue” of the message of James is that some think it teaches “works righteousness.” See especially James 2:14-26.

Let’s look at Ephesians 2:8-10 to provide some biblical perspective.

James 1:1-18

- **Trials**, vss. 2-4, 12

“Peirasmos” = “testing” directed toward the end that the person will be stronger and purer from the testing. These tests are not meant to make us weaker but rather to make us stronger. We can rejoice in these trials because they have purpose, God will work in us through them, and we will be stronger and better prepared for life having endured them.

“Dokimion” is used to describe the process of testing. It is the word for “sterling coinage,” for money that is genuine and unalloyed. The purpose of testing is to purge us of all impurity.

“Hupomone” is perseverance, which is much more than patient endurance. It is the ability to turn trials into triumph. It makes a person mature and complete, lacking nothing.

The end result of trials used by God; we receive the “crown of life.”

There are 4 associations of the Greek word “stephanos”

- The crown of flowers was worn at times of joy, such as weddings and feasts.
- The crown was the mark of royalty.
- The crown of laurel leaves was worn by the victor at the athletic games.
- The crown was the mark of honor and of dignity.

The crown of life includes all of these meanings!

- **Wisdom and Doubt**, vss. 5-8

For James, wisdom is a practical thing. It is not philosophical speculation, but is concerned with the daily business of living. It is knowledge turned into action in the decisions and relationships of life.

- God gives wisdom readily and generously.
- We are to ask believing, not with doubt. Doubt relates to trust. Two things need to be satisfied in order to trust God or other people; We need to trust their heart and we need to trust their capacity.

- **Humility and Pride**, vss. 9-11

For James, Christianity brings to each of us what we need;

- To the poor it brings a radically new sense of value. Everyone matters in the church, in the world and to God.
- To the rich it brings a new place to find our security. The peril of wealth is that it promises us security, and it cannot truly deliver. The rich can easily fade away like a wild flower under the scorching sun.

- **Temptations**, vss. 13-15

One of the oldest temptations, and practices, of people is to blame someone else for our sin. The ultimate example of this is in these verses; some blame God!

James says the root of our sin is our own evil desire. Then look at the cascading consequences....Desire leads to sin which leads to death.

- **All Good Gifts**, vss. 16-18

Ultimately, all that is good comes from God. All that God gives is good. And, since God is unchangeable, all of His future gifts to us will be just as good!

Discussion Questions

1. How can James' teaching help you deal with the trials in your life?
2. Where do you look for wisdom? Do you regularly ask God for wisdom? Does that give you confidence in decision making and daily living?
3. Do you value others as James does? Why or why not? It is hard to value yourself? Why or why not? What helps you find your value and security in God?
4. Do you ever inappropriately blame others or God? What helps you accept responsibility for your own mistakes and sins? How can we help others do this?
5. What gifts have God given you?