

# I. Just James

September 9/11/12, 2019 James 1:1

OT: Pr. 4:1-7; Is. 11:10-12

NT: Mk. 6:1-3

**Aim:** To introduce the epistle of James and apply it to a modern audience.

*Moo:* Few NT books have been as controversial as the Letter of James. Its place in the canon was contested by some early Christians. The reformer Martin Luther called it an ‘epistle of straw’ and relegated it to a secondary status within the NT. And modern theologians often dismiss the letter as a holdover from Judaism that does not truly express the essence of the Christian faith. Yet quite in contrast to the sometimes negative view of the letter among academics and theologians is the status of James among ordinary believers. Few books of the NT are better known or more often quoted than James. It is probably one of the two or three most popular NT books in the church.

*Doriani:* For many believers, James is a beloved book. Eminently practical, it is full of vivid exhortations to godly living. In short compass it offers concrete counsel on an array of issues that confront Christians every day: trials, poverty and riches, favoritism, social justice, the tongue worldliness, boasting, planning, prayer, illness, and more. Yet James’s candor and clarity are a two-edged sword.

*Moo:* But why is James so popular among believers generally? Three characteristics of the letter seem to provide the answer. First, James is intensely practical; and believers looking for specific guidance in the Christian life naturally appreciate such an emphasis.... James is filled with...clear and direct commands. In fact, the Letter of James contains a higher frequency of imperative verbs than any other NT book. James’ purpose is clearly not so much to inform as to chastise, exhort, and encourage.... A second factor making James so attractive to believers is his conciseness. He rarely develops the points he makes at any length, being content to make his point and to move quickly on.... Third, James lavish use of metaphors and illustrations make his teaching easy to understand and to remember.

## A. Author (James 1:1a)

<sup>1</sup>*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...*

### 1. James

*Moo:* James...is ‘the brother of the Lord’ mentioned by Paul in Gal. 1:19 (cp. also Gal. 2:9, 12; 1 Cor. 15:8), the James who was leader of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18).

#### a) *Wrong James*

*Moo:* The writer of the letter identifies himself simply as ‘James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.’ ... The Greek name it translates, *Iakōbos*, occurs forty-two times in the NT and refers to at least four different men. Three of them are mentioned in one verse, Acts 1:13.... James the father of Judas is mentioned only here and in Luke 6:16 in the NT. His name occurs only because there is a need to distinguish this particular Judas from the better-known Judas Iscariot. James the son of Alphaeus is rather obscure, mentioned only in lists of apostles such as this one (cp. also Mk. 3:18; Mt. 10:3; Lk. 6:15 and perhaps in Mk 15:40 (‘James the younger’)

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and Mt. 27:56. He was probably not well known enough to have written an authoritative letter to Christians under his own name alone. But James the son of Zebedee is one of the most prominent apostles in the gospel narratives.... But this James was put to death by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2), perhaps in about 44 AD. And we probably should not date the letter of James quite this early.

*Morgan:* A few [scholars] argue that it was written pseudonymously (written under the false name of James by someone or a community in the tradition of James for the purpose of authority and the continuing of the legacy of his teaching.... Others maintain that the author could have been another James mentioned in the New Testament, or maybe even one who went unmentioned, since James (*Iakobos*) was a common name. The New Testament records at least three distinct men named James, besides Jesus' brother. First, there was James, the son of Zebedee (Mk. 1:19), ... [who] was beheaded at the command of Herod Agrippa I in 44 AD (Acts 12:1-2). A second James was the son of Alphaeus (Mk. 3:19). He too was a member of the twelve (cp. Mk. 15:40; Mt. 27:56).... There was a third James who was the father of Judas. This Judas, distinguished from the infamous Judas Iscariot (Jn. 14:22), is listed as one of the twelve disciples in Luke 6:16 (cp. Acts 1:13). Evidently this Judas is also called Thaddeus in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18. These alternatives, however, are problematic.

*MacArthur:* Of the various men in the New Testament named James, only two were prominent enough to have penned such an authoritative letter: James the son of Zebedee and brother of John, and James the Lord's half-brother. But James the son of Zebedee's early martyrdom (Acts 12:2) eliminates him as a candidate, leaving James the half-brother of the Lord as the author.

### b) Right James

*Moo:* This leaves us with the other prominent James in the NT: James the brother of the Lord. He is mentioned in the Gospels (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3), but he became a follow of Jesus only after the resurrection (cp. 1 Cor. 15:7 and Jn. 7:5). He attained a position of leadership in the early church (Acts 12:17), where we find him dialoging with Paul about the nature and sphere of the gospel ministry (Acts 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12). None of the other Jameses mentioned in the NT lived long enough or was prominent enough to write the letter we have before us without identifying himself any further than he does.... Christians have traditionally identified the author of the letter with James the brother of the Lord.

*Dorani:* Several lines of evidence that he is the half-brother of Jesus, the natural son of both Mary and Joseph. When the author calls himself James without further identification, it implies that his audience knows him and his credentials well enough

*Morgan:* The epistle claims to be written by someone named James, but it does not elaborate on his identity. This omission suggests that the author was well-known among Christians in the first century. The historic view is that James, the brother of Jesus, is the author. He was the most prominent leader named James in the early church (Mt. 13:55ff.; Mk. 6:3).... Why is this James, the brother of Jesus, a strong candidate for the author of this letter? First, this James is the only viable James mentioned in the New Testament writings. Second, the testimony of the ancient church supports this as the historical view.... Finally, James' leadership position in the early Jewish Christian church would have made it natural for him to address authoritatively the needs and concerns of the 'twelve tribes in the Dispersion' (1:1).

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### c) 'Just' James

#### (1) Early Life

*MacArthur:* Contrary to Roman Catholic dogma, Joseph and Mary had other children after Jesus was born. That truth is implied in Matthew's statement that Joseph kept Mary a virgin *until* the birth of Jesus (Mt. 1:25) and is explicit in Luke's description of Jesus as Mary's *firstborn* son (Lk. 2:7). Those children were His half-brothers and half-sisters (cp. Mt. 12:46-47; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21; Jn. 2:12). Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 list Jesus' half-brothers as James, Joseph (Joses), Simon, and Judas. Paul explicitly calls James 'the Lord's brother' (Gal. 1:19). Mark also refers to Jesus' half-sisters, although not by name. That both Matthew and Mark list James first implies that he was the eldest of Jesus' half-brothers.

*Morgan:* Since James is mentioned first on both lists of brothers ('James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas'), it is likely that he was the oldest of those four.... Though James and the other brothers occasionally accompanied Jesus at particular times in his ministry, both in Galilee (Jn. 2:12) and in Jerusalem (Jn. 7:1-10), they did not believe in Jesus during his earthly ministry (Mk. 3:13-21; Jn. 7:5). But sometime after the resurrection, Jesus' physical brothers believed and became his spiritual brothers (cp. Acts 1:14).... It is reasonable to conclude that James believed after encountering the risen Christ (cp. 1 Cor. 15:3-8).

*MacArthur:* Surprisingly, although they grew up with Him and observed first-hand His sinless, perfect life, Jesus' brothers did not at first believe in Him (cp. Jn. 7:2-5).... But by the time those who believed in Him gathered in Jerusalem after His resurrection, something remarkable happened (cp. Acts 1:13-14).... What happened to change His skeptical, unbelieving brothers into devoted followers? Paul gives the answer in 1 Corinthians 15:7, noting that after Jesus' resurrection, 'He appeared to James.' Doubtless as a result of that personal, post-resurrection appearance, James came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Dorani:* It is doubtful that James believed in or even respected Jesus in the early phases of His ministry.... Imagine the difficulty of being Jesus' younger brother (if little James was naughty, did his parents say, 'Why can't you be more like Jesus?'). The Gospels hint a familial tension. For example, the first time John's gospel mentions Jesus' siblings, they mock Him (Jn. 7:3-5; cp. Mk. 3:20-22; Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 15:40; Jn. 19:25).... It is impossible to determine when James came to faith. But Jesus, after His resurrection, graciously appeared to James, either to instill or to seal his faith (1 Cor. 15:3-8). After that, James rapidly became a pillar of the Jerusalem church.

#### (2) Church Leader

*Morgan:* As early as 44 AD, James was viewed an important leader in the early church, especially among Jewish Christians (cp. Acts 12:17; Gal. 1:18-19; 2:9).... Acts 15 also describes the important role James played in the early church.... It is important to note how central a leadership role James played among early Jewish Christians. He had a major seat at the table (maybe the chair?) during the Jerusalem Council, his conclusions regarding the Jewish-Gentile controversy won the day, and his speech served to solidify the council's decision. Several of James' followers evidently took their leader's emphasis on Jewish Christianity too far (Gal. 2:1-16).... Acts 21:17-26 recounts another episode that involved both Paul and James.

*MacArthur:* The church was born on the Day of Pentecost and James, although not an apostle, soon became one of its key leaders (Gal. 2:9-12; Acts 12:17; Acts 21:17-18).... James presided

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over the pivotal Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)... James...reinforced Peter's point, handed down the council's decision (Acts 15:12-21), and most likely composed the resulting letter to Gentile believers (Acts 15:23-29)... Also known as James the Just because of his righteous life, he was martyred about 62 AD, according to Josephus.

### (3) Legacy

*Doriani:* In the early church, James acquire the title 'James the Just' because of his personal righteousness and his passion to promote righteousness in others... James subordinated his passion for the law to his greater passion for the gospel. He had a zeal for legal righteousness, but greater zeal for the grace of God.

*Hughes:* James was a late bloomer, but he flowered well! James knew Christ as only a few could. For years he had eaten at the same table, shared the same house, played in the same places, and watched the development of his amazing older brother. And when he truly came to *know* Christ, his boyhood privilege was not wasted, for he became known as James the Just, a man of immense piety. The historian Eusebius records the testimony of Hegesippus that James 'used to enter alone into the temple and be found 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. So, from his excessive righteousness he was called the Just.'

*Moo:* James became a respected and beloved figure in the early church, especially among Jewish Christians. He was considered the first 'bishop' of the Jerusalem church and was called the 'righteous' or the 'just' because of his faithfulness to the law and his devotion to prayer. Hegesippus, an early second-century Christian, describes James's death in his *Memoirs* (which have survived only in fragments quoted by other authors, mainly Eusebius). He claims that James was stoned to death by the scribes and Pharisees for refusing to renounce his commitment to Jesus. The Jewish historian Josephus confirms the essentials of this story, and he also enables us to date the incident to AD 62. Hegesippus provides other information about James, most of it tending to portray him as a zealot for the law and as a Christian who generally championed a strong continuity with Judaism.

*Morgan:* James...was considered the first 'bishop' of Jerusalem and nicknamed 'James the Just' because of his devotion to prayer and faithfulness to the law. Josephus, the early Jewish historian, stated that James was martyred in Jerusalem in 62 AD. Josephus recounted that James was highly regarded by the people of Jerusalem, but feared and hated by the priestly aristocracy that ruled the city. The High Priest, Ananus, had James brought before the Sanhedrin, tried, and stoned.

## 2. Servant

<sup>1</sup>*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...*

### a) Humility

*MacArthur:* In spite of his prominence, what stands out in the first verse of his epistle is James's humility. He does not describe himself as Mary's son and the Lord's brother, refer to his position as head of the Jerusalem church, or mention that the resurrected Christ personally appeared to him. Instead, he describes himself simply as 'a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.' *Doulos* ('bond-servant') depicts a slave, a person deprived of all personal freedom

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and totally under the control of his master. Absolute obedience and loyalty to his master...was required of every *doulos*. In contrast to the *andrapodon*, who was made a slave, the *doulos* was born a slave. James had become a *doulos* by his new birth through faith in Jesus Christ.

*Morgan*: In a manner reminiscent of the apostle Paul, James' introduction does not stress his position as the leader of the Jerusalem church. He does not mention here that he encountered the risen Christ personal. James does not announce that he is Jesus' brother or Mary's son. Instead, he simply refers to himself as 'a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.' In doing so, he demonstrates both humility and authority. The title 'servant' (*doulos*) clearly indicates that his esteem is not tied to his personal agenda but only to his Master. The recipients should listen to James because he represents God and the Lord Jesus Christ.... If James indeed was writing in the late 40's, then the use of the titles 'Lord' and 'Christ' demonstrate how the early Christians viewed Jesus (cp. Acts 2:36).

*Hughes*: James had immense ground on which to pull rank. He could have begun his letter, 'James the Just, from the sacred womb of Mary, congenital sibling of Christ His brother, confidant of the Messiah.' But James did not even allude to this status, being content with 'servant' (cp. Mk. 10:45; Phil. 2:5-8; Rom. 12:7). James the Just was also James the Humble and so was eminently qualified to author Holy Scripture.

*Moo*: James does not claim this status [as an apostle] for himself. He identifies himself simply as 'a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.' By calling himself a 'servant,' James of course acknowledges his subservient status. Indeed, the Greek word translated 'servant' in the NIV also means 'slave' (see NLT).

### b) Honor

*MacArthur*: To be a *doulos* of God was considered a great honor in Jewish culture. Such Old Testament luminaries as Abraham (Gen. 25:24), Isaac (Gen. 24:14), Jacob (Ez. 28;25), Job (Job 1:8), Moses (Ex. 14:31), Joshua (Josh. 24:29), Caleb (Num. 14:24), David (2 Sam. 3:18), Isaiah (Is. 20:3), and Daniel (Dan. 6:20) are described as God's servants. In the New Testament, Epaphras (Col. 4:12), Timothy (Phil. 1:1), Paul (Rom. 1:1), Peter (2 Pe. 1:1), Jude (Jude 1), John, (Rev. 1:1), and our Lord Himself (Acts 3:13) all bore the title of *doulos*. By taking that title, James numbered himself with those honored not for who they were, but whom they served—the living God.

*Moo*: But being a 'servant of God' – because it is God, the sovereign of the universe whom one serves – also carries great honor. For in the OT, this title is applied to the great leaders of the people of Israel, such as Moses (Dt. 34:5; Dan. 9:11) and David (Jer. 33:21; Ez. 37:25). As do Paul (cp. Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1) and Peter (2 Pe. 1:1), James therefore identifies himself in the letter opening with a title that suggests his authority to address – and admonish – the readers.

*Moo*: If the title 'servant of God' is common, the full description 'servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ' is not. Only here in the NT does this language occur.... His point...is that he serves both God and 'the Lord Jesus Christ.' We are so use to the combination 'Jesus Christ' that we forget that 'Christ' is a title, equivalent to the OT/Jewish 'Messiah.' ... James's addition of the title 'Lord' reflects a very early Christian understanding of Jesus, as seen in Peter's claim in his Day-of-Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:36). James' view of his half-brother Jesus had undergone quite a transformation since the days they grew up in the same household together!

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### 3. Not James

*Morgan:* Some scholars believe that certain characteristics of this epistle are inconsistent with the traditional view of James, the brother of Jesus, being the author. So, they suggest another James or an unknown Christian leader in the early church as the author.... A middle-ground position... holds that James, the Lord's brother, is responsible for the teachings of the letter, but that the letter itself may have been composed by another person or by a Christian community.

*Moo:* Many scholars are convinced that the letter contains features incompatible with authorship by James the brother of the Lord.

#### a) *His Relationship to Jesus*

*Morgan:* First, some scholars maintain that it is hard to believe that the brother of Jesus would not have mentioned, or at least alluded to, that relationship in the letter. Such a relationship would have only bolstered his authority to speak and the audience's likelihood to follow his instructions.

*Moo:* 1. If the letter had really been written by a brother of the Lord Jesus, the author would surely have mentioned that special relationship at some point in the letter.... This is obviously an argument from silence and boils down to the question: How important was James's physical relationship to Jesus for his status in the early church/. That his relationship to Jesus was known and could serve, if nothing more, as a mark of identification is clear from Gal. 1:19. But we have little reason to think that James' physical relationship to Jesus was important for the position he held in the early church community.... Physical ties to Jesus became important only after the time of James's death. If anything, therefore, the author's failure to mention the relationship is an argument against the pseudepigraphal view. Moreover, James's physical relationship to Jesus never spilled over into a spiritual relationship.... The fact that James was Jesus' brother did not bring him spiritual insight; nor was it the basis for his position and authority in the early church. His failure to mention the relationship is not, therefore, surprising.

*MacArthur:* Others cite the lack of any emphasis on James's exalted position as the Lord's brother and head of the Jerusalem church as evidence that he did not write the epistle. But James, like Paul, recognized that knowing Jesus 'according to the flesh' was no longer of any value (2 Cor. 5:16; cp. Mt. 12:47-50).... Actually, that the writer of James does not emphasize his personal authority argues convincingly that he was so well-known and respected that such claims were unnecessary.

*Moo:* If James the Lord's brother wrote this letter, why does he not mention his special relationship to Jesus? Probably because being a brother of Jesus gave James no authority to admonish other Christians as he does in this letter. What qualified James to write such a letter was not his physical relationship to Jesus but his spiritual relationship. James was not, of course, one of the original twelve apostles. But, like Paul, James might have been added to the ranks of the apostles after the resurrection. And Gal. 1:19 suggests that Paul, at least, viewed James as an apostle.

#### b) *His Excellent Greek*

*Morgan:* Second, some scholars also point to the language and cultural background of the epistle as inconsistent with the author being James, the brother of Jesus. Ralph Martin contends: '...This document...betrays a debt to the literary conventions and idioms of Hellenistic Judaism. It may have some connection with James in Jerusalem; but its final author, whether as redactor

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or amanuensis, was well versed in the bilingual vocabulary and writing techniques of the Roman provinces.

*Moo:* 2. A second feature of the letter that leads many scholars to deny that James of Jerusalem could have written it is the nature of its Greek and cultural background. The Greek of the letter is idiomatic and even contains some literary flourishes.... The author frequently alludes to Jewish writings typical of the Hellenistic diaspora (Sirach, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Philo). Moreover, the author employs some words and phrases derived from Greek philosophy and religion (e.g., ‘the cycle of nature’ in 3:6). Such Greek, critics argue, could not have been written by the son of a Galilean carpenter who, as far as we know, never left Palestine. But this objection can be easily met. First, we must not exaggerate the quality of James’s Greek. While more polished and closer to the ‘higher *koiné*’ than most NT Greek, the Greek of James is far from literary Greek. Absent are the elaborate sentences found, for instance, in Hebrews.... Second, the alleged technical philosophical and religious terminology in the letter proves, on closer examination, to involve words and phrases that seem to have found a place in the mainstream of the language. They are the kinds of words that an ordinary educated person, familiar with the Hellenistic world, would have known.

*MacArthur:* A simple Galilean peasant like James, they argue, was incapable of writing such excellent Greek. Research has shown, however, that many first-century Palestinian Jews likely spoke Greek in addition to Hebrew and Aramaic. That would have been especially true in predominantly Gentile Galilee (cp. Mt. 4:15), particularly in Nazareth, which lay on a busy trade route. Thus, it is highly probably that James knew Greek from boyhood. And as head of the Jerusalem church, he would have been in daily contact with the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jewish believers, who had been part of the Jerusalem church from its inception (Acts 6:1). That contact would have given James ample opportunity to polish his Greek.

### *c) His View of the Law*

*Morgan:* Third, some suggest that the theological use of law in the epistle varies from the heavy commitment to the law found in James, the Lord’s brother. The epistle depicts the law (i.e., Torah) as ‘the law of liberty’ (1:25; 2:12) and ‘the royal law’ (2:8) and focuses on the moral law, with no mention of the ceremonial law. This, it is argued, does not fit together well with Jesus’ brother’s emphasis on the law, including his particular stress on the ceremonial and ritual aspects of the law.

*Moo:* 3. The letter’s approach to Torah is a third reason that scholars cite for concluding that James of Jerusalem could not have written it. Assumed in the letter is what might be called a rather ‘liberal’ understanding of Torah. Phrases like ‘the law of liberty’ (1:25) and ‘the royal law’ (2:8) suggest the kind of perspective that arose among Jews who were seeking to accommodate the Torah to the general Hellenistic world. Such an approach downplayed the ritual elements of the law in favor of its ethical demands.... In Christian tradition, James is famous for his loyalty to Judaism, being pictured as an example of ‘Torah-piety.’ However, while several scholars think this point is virtually conclusive, it in fact rests on a serious overinterpretation of James.... The letter, with its concern with the ethical dimensions of Torah, stands squarely in a widespread tradition among Hellenistic-oriented Jews and reflected, in some ways, in the teaching of Jesus.... James introduces only topics that were matters of concern for the people to whom he was writing. If they were, as we think, Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem but who had not yet mixed with Gentiles in worship, then observance of Torah may not even have come up as an issue.

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### *d) His Doctrine on Faith and Works*

*Moo*: 4. The fourth reason for denying that James of Jerusalem could have written this letter involves the famous problem of the relationship between James and Paul, especially with respect to their teachings on justification. The letter insists that works are required for justification: ‘a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone’ (2:24). Paul, on the other hand, teaches that a person is justified by faith and not by ‘works of the law’ (e.g., Rom. 3:28). The relationship of these two teachings is one of the biggest theological issues in the letter and, indeed, one of the most significant theological tensions within the NT.... Adequate evaluation of this argument can come only after careful consideration of James 2:14-26 as it relates to Paul’s teaching on justification.... If, indeed, James 2 fails to come to grips with the real point of Paul’s teaching and the letter is written after 48 AD or so, when James and Paul met at the Jerusalem Council, then indeed it is difficult to attribute the letter to James of Jerusalem. But suppose the letter was written *before* 48 AD. James would not yet have had direct contact with Paul. All he would know about Paul’s ‘justification by faith alone’ would come to him indirectly – and perhaps perverted by those who had heard Paul and misunderstood what he was saying.

### *e) His Lack of Christology*

*MacArthur*: Still others point to the epistle’s lack of emphasis on the great doctrinal themes of the Christian faith, particularly those concerning the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as evidence that James was not its author. James the Lord’s brother, who was well acquainted with those momentous events, surely would have mentioned them, they argue. But such a claim overlooks James’s purpose in writing his epistle which...was practical, not doctrinal. And the absence of doctrinal content makes it difficult to discern any motive for a forger.

### *f) His References to Persecution*

*MacArthur*: Finally, some argue that the epistle’s references to persecution (1:2ff.; 2:6-7; 5:1-6) point to a date of writing after James’s death. But there is no evidence that the afflictions being suffered by these Jewish Christians were due to governmental persecutions. They were rather the result of the impositions of the rich upon the poor, the injustices of the employers toward their employees.

*Moo*: [In the] final assessment, none of the four major objections to attributing the letter to James of Jerusalem is conclusive.

*MacArthur*: None of these arguments is sufficient to overturn the traditional view that James, the half-brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church, wrote the epistle that bears his name.

## **B. Audience (James 1:1b)**

*...To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.*

*Morgan*: One characteristic of the audience is clear: the recipients were primarily, if not exclusively, Jewish Christians. Throughout James are references to Jewish institutions and beliefs.... It also seems that James 1:1 corroborates that the recipients were primarily Jewish Christians.

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### 1. Twelve Tribes

*Moo:* The ‘twelve tribes,’ of course, reflects the historical origins of Israel, made up originally of the people descended from the twelve patriarchs. As a result of the Assyrian and Babylonian victories, most of the ‘tribes’ were exiled and scattered. Yet the Lord, through the prophets, promised that he would regather the exiled people of Israel and so reconstitute the twelve tribes once again (Is. 11:11-12; Jer. 31:8-14; Ez. 37:21-22; Zech. 10:6-12)... Jesus’ choice of twelve apostles suggests that His mission was to bring into being this eschatological Israel (see especially Mt. 19:28)... The book of Revelation similar pictures the people of God of the last days in terms of 12,000 people drawn from each of the twelve tribes (Rev. 7:5-8) and of the heavenly Jerusalem, with twelve gates on which ‘were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel’ (Rev. 21:12). By calling his readers ‘the twelve tribes,’ then, James claims that they constitute the true people of the ‘last days.’

*MacArthur:* The term ‘twelve tribes’ was a title commonly used in the New Testament to refer to the nation of Israel (cp. Mt. 19:28; Acts 26:7; Rev. 21:12).

### 2. Dispersion

*Hughes:* The Jews’ scattering, known as the *Diaspora*, began in 722 BC when the Assyrians deported the ten northern tribes. Later, the southern tribes suffered the same fate when the Babylonians took them captive in 586 BC. Because of this, Jews were spread all over Mesopotamia, around the Mediterranean, and into Asia Minor and Europe (cp. Acts 2:5, 9-11)... When Jewish Christians were first persecuted in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, they fled first to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1) and then to Jewish communities around the Mediterranean (Acts 11:19-20).

*Moo:* The phrase ‘scattered among the nations’ translates a Greek phrase meaning, literally, ‘in the diaspora,’ ‘Diaspora,’ or ‘Dispersion,’ became a technical name for all the nations outside of Palestine where Jewish people had come to live (2 Macc. 1:27; Jn. 7:35). In his first letter, Peter uses this term to address his readers, who are almost certainly Gentiles (1:1). Here the word probably has a figurative meaning, characterizing Christians as people who live in this world, apart from their true, heavenly, ‘homeland.’

*Dorani:* The twelve tribes traditionally represent Israel, and the dispersion signifies the Jews scattered throughout the pagan world. But there are reasons to think James is writing for Jewish Christians, not Jews in general. First, James is a *church* leader. Second, Paul and Peter established that the church is the true heir of God’s promises to the tribes of Israel. Third, ‘dispersion’ can serve as a metaphor to indicate that believers are never fully at home in this world (1 Pe. 1:1; 17; 2:11; 1 Peter is also addressed to ‘the dispersion,’ but it is clear that his readers are mostly Gentiles). So, there is reason to believe that James, like other New Testament writers, envisions a wide audience. Wherever his audience lives, James assumes they are familiar with life in Israel, for he often describes life from the perspective of a commoner in the towns of Judea or Galilee.

*Morgan:* Where did these Jewish Christians live? James 1:1 states that the letter was addressed, ‘To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.’ Most scholars view this literally, as referring to Jewish Christians who were scattered among the nations (cp. Acts 11:19). Other scholars are quick to point out that this phrase was used in intertestamental Judaism as a reference for the true people of God in the last days. It was also used in this way by Peter (1 Pe. 1:1). So, it is unclear

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whether these Jewish Christians were located in Palestine and given this label as an encouragement to stand firm through the trials because of the eschatological hope they possessed, or whether they were literally scattered among the nations and lived the realities of Diaspora Judaism.

*MacArthur*: James was...addressing *all* Jews ‘who [were] dispersed abroad,’ regardless of their tribal origins. In this context, ‘abroad’ refers to any place in the world outside Palestine. Over the previous several hundred years, various conquerors (including the Romans in 63 BC) had deported Jews from their homeland and spread them throughout the known world. In addition, many other Jews had voluntarily moved to other countries for business or other reasons (cp. Acts 2:5-11). By New Testament times, many Jews lived abroad. The Greek term *diaspora* (‘scattering’) became a technical term to identify Jews living outside Palestine (cp. 1 Pe. 1:1).

### 3. Occasion

*Moo*: The letter reveals quite a lot about the people to whom it was written. First, they were almost certainly Jews. This conclusion, which is the scholarly consensus, is suggested by references to distinctive Jewish institutions and beliefs. The believers James addresses meet in ‘synagogues’ (2:2);. They share with the author the assumption that monotheism is a foundational belief (2:19) and that the law is central to God’s dealings with His people (1:21, 24-25; 2:8-13; 4:11-12); they understand the OT imagery of the marriage relationship to indicate the nature of the relationship between God and His people (4:4).

*MacArthur*: From the message of the letter itself, as well as from James’ frequent addressing of his readers as brothers, it is clear that he is writing to Jewish Christians. It is likely that most of those believers were converted in or near Jerusalem and may have once been under James’s pastoral care to some degree. James’s primary audience were those Jews who had fled because of persecution and were still suffering trials because of their faith (1:2).

*Hughes*: Refused protection by the Jewish community, these Jewish Christians were exploited by the Gentiles. Homeless and disenfranchised, they were robbed of what possessions they had, hauled into court, and subjected to the Gentile elite. They had less standing than slaves. They became religious, social and economic pariahs.... It is to these Jewish Christian brothers, mistreated ex-parishioners of James’ church, that Pastor James is sending his letter.

*Moo*: The readers seem to have been Jewish Christians who have left their homes in Palestine and are facing economic distress, including persecution at the hands of wealthy landowners. James, the NT makes clear, ministered mainly to Jewish Christians.... As leader of the Jerusalem church, James would have been in a perfect position to address a letter to Jewish Christians who had been forced to flee from Jerusalem and its confines because of persecution. In fact, the situation Luke describes in Acts 11:19 fits very neatly with the scenario we are proposing.... We can well imagine these early Jewish Christians leaving their homes, trying to establish new lives in new and often hostile environments, and, because of the sense of dislocation, losing some of their spiritual moorings. James, as their ‘pastor,’ would naturally want to encourage and admonish them.

*Moo*: The fact that the readers have been ‘dispersed,’ forced to live away from their home country, helps explain a second major characteristic of the readers of the letter: their poverty and oppressed condition. Wealthy landowners take advantage of them (5:4-6); rich people haul them into court (2:6) and scorn their faith (2:7). One of the key purposes of the author is to encourage

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these suffering Christians in the midst of these difficulties, reminding them of the righteous judgment of God that is coming (5:7-11) and exhorting them to maintain their piety in the midst of their trials (1:2-4, 12).

*Morgan:* We find that these Jewish Christians were a part of a local congregation ('synagogue' in 2:2) with teachers (3:1) and elders (5:14). Evidently James is addressing a particular church with specific problems. These believers were experience significant trials (1:2ff.) and serious oppression (2:6; 5:1-11). Some in their ranks were claiming they had faith but had little concern for personal holiness (1:22-25; 4:4) and failed to assist the poor or the marginalized (1:26-27; 2:1-13; 2:14-26). The congregation also included others who were quarrelsome, creating factions rather than peace (3:13-4:10)... [There are] four distinct groups referred to in this epistle: 1) the poor – the majority in this believing community; 2) the severely poor – those reference as without decent clothes and often in need of daily food; 3) the merchants – those who were tempted to be overconfident in their ability to buy, sell, and make a profit; and 4) the wealthy landowners (those who were exploiting and persecuting the poor in the believing community. The congregation itself was composed of the first three groups, with the majority being poor.

### 4. Greetings

*MacArthur:* *Chairein* ('greetings') means 'rejoice,' or 'be glad,' and was a common secular greeting. But to James the word was no mere formality; he expected what he wrote to gladden his readers' hearts by giving them means to verify the genuineness of their salvation.

## C. Additional Introduction

### 1. The Letter in the Church

*Moo:* The Letter of James is not addressed to a single church but to 'the twelve tribes scattered among the nations' (1:1). This general address led early Christians to categorize James, along with the similarly vaguely addressed 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude, as a 'general' or 'catholic' (in the sense of 'universal') letter.... James was not finally recognized by both the eastern and western parts of the church until the fourth century. The Letter of James was, of course, known and used by many Christians long before then.

*Moo:* How should we evaluate the rather slow and hesitant adoption of James into the early church canon? Some scholars think that the uncertainties expressed by some early Christians about James should raise doubts in our minds about the authenticity or authority of the letter for the church. But two factors suggest that this conclusion is unwarranted. First the evidence we possess suggests that James was not so much *rejected* as *neglected*.... The neglect that James experienced can be readily explained. Early Christians tended to accord special prominence to books written by apostles; and James was such a common name than many probably wondered whether the letter had an apostolic origin or not. Moreover, James is filled with rather traditional and quite practical admonitions; it is not the kind of book that would figure prominently in early Christian theological debates.... Finally, the destination of the letter may also account for its relative neglect. The letter was probably written to Jewish Christians living in Palestine and Syria. These churches, partly as the result of the disastrous revolts against Rome in 66-70 and 132-135, disappeared at an early date; and letters written to them may have similarly disappeared for a time.

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*Moo:* At the time of the Reformation, the humanist scholar Erasmus raised doubts about the letter's apostolic origin, questioning whether a brother of Jesus could have written a letter composed in such good Greek. Luther also doubted the apostolic status of the letter, but his criticism of James went much further. His objections to James were primarily theological. Luther's quest for peace with God ended with his discovery of Paul's teaching about justification by faith alone. Justification by faith became for him and his followers, as later Lutheran theologians put it, 'the doctrine on which the church stands or falls.' It was because Luther gave to justification by faith central importance in defining NT theology that he had difficulties with letters like James that were silent about, or even appeared to be critical of, this doctrine. Hence Luther claimed that James 'mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture.' James was 'an epistle of straw,' to be relegated to the end of the NT, along with Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation.... But we should be careful not to overemphasize the strength of his critique. He did not exclude James from the canon and quotes the letter rather frequently in his writings.

*McArthur:* 'Therefore is Saint James's epistle a right strawy epistle in comparison with them, for it has no gospel character in it' (Luther).... The great Reformer was by no means denying the inspiration of James.... Nevertheless, his disparaging remarks about the epistle have been echoed by many throughout the history of the church.... Luther had little use for James because it contains little teaching about the great doctrines of the Christian faith that he so passionately defended. (In fact, some of his hostility to James stemmed from his Roman Catholic opponents' misuse of James 2 to defend justification by works.) It is true that James is not a doctrinal treatise but an intensely practical manual for Christian living. Yet that does not lessen its value, since holy living and sound doctrine must not be separated.

*Moo:* Calvin...accepted the full apostolic authority of the letter and argued that Paul's and James' perspectives on justification could be harmonized so as to maintain the unity of Scripture. Calvin's approach to James is standard among the community of believers. And it is surely the right one.

### 2. Nature and Genre

#### a) *General Epistle*

*Moo:* The book's opening words identify what follows as a letter.... Absent from James are the customary greetings, references to fellow workers, and travel plans that mark many ancient and NT (especially Pauline) letters. Also missing are references to specific people, places, or situations in the body of the letter.... It was for these reasons that early Christians classified James as a 'general' letter: one written to the church at large rather than to a specific church or group of churches. But while the letter does not single out individuals or places, it pretty clearly reflects a specific set of circumstances that would not be true of people living just anywhere. Most scholars agree, therefore, that James addresses a specific church or, more likely, group of churches.... James is therefore more a 'literary' than a personal letter; the closest parallel to it in the NT is perhaps 1 John.

*Dorani:* An observant Christian comparing Romans, Hebrews, and James will notice stylistic differences between James and the other epistles. For example, James neither opens nor closes with formal greetings. He makes no reference to personally shared history. Unlike Paul, James claims no authority or rank. Unlike Paul and Hebrews, James has little theological argumentation. Indeed, James can sound more like a prophet or wise man than like Paul.

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*Morgan:* As is evident from James 1:1, the genre of James is *epistle*. It opens with an address that clearly mentions its author, recipients, and general occasion. Though James' primary form is as an epistle other literary forms can and should be detected within its epistolary genre. For example, James is also *paraenesis* (exhortation). Paraenesis is a genre of ancient moral literature characterized by various collections of moral sayings and essays, loosely held together by common themes and linking catchwords but without literary rhyme, theological reason, or specific spatial location. Its dominant mood is imperative, and the primary exhortation is virtuous living. It often points to moral truth that all should accept and heroic examples that all should imitate. This approach characterizes James.

*Moo:* James makes clear that he is writing a letter – not a short story or a theological treatise. Knowing this, we are in a better position to evaluate what he writes. We will expect, for instance, that James writes for a specific audience – the addresses of the letter – and that what he says will be largely determined by their situation and needs. This being the case, we will not be surprised if James moves rapidly from topic to topic as he takes up these various needs and issues.

### b) Style

*Morgan:* Most New Testament and Greek scholars agree that James is written in a fairly elevated form of literary Koine Greek.... James is also characterized by an unusual vocabulary. J. B. Mayor pointed to 63 New Testament *hapax legomena* (a word only found in James, not in any other New Testament document) in the letter.... It also seems that the language of James includes Semitisms. Some examples of the Hebrew influence on the style include the use of the passive to avoid stating God's name (1:5; 5:15) and parallelism (1:9, 11, 13; 4:8-9; 5:4). Further evidence of Jewish background includes that the believers gather in the synagogue (2:2), acknowledge Abraham as their 'father' (2:21), and know God as 'Lord of hosts' (5:4, the only time this is used in the NT). At minimum, the thought world of James incorporates Jewish concepts and ideas. In addition, James' use of analogy is especially prominent.

*MacArthur:* The epistle's distinctively Jewish character is in keeping with the picture of James given in Acts 15 and 21. The book of James contains four direct quotes of the Old Testament and more than forty Old Testament allusions. In addition, James expresses himself in distinctly Old Testament terms, beginning in the first verse with the reference to the 'twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.'

*MacArthur:* Further evidence that James wrote the epistle comes from the strong verbal parallels between the book of James and James's speech and letter recorded in Acts 15. The Greek infinitive verb *chairein* ('greetings') appears in the New Testament only in James 1:1 and Acts 15:23 (except for its use by the Roman, Claudius Lysias, in Acts 23:26). Other parallels included 'beloved' (James 1:16, 19; 2:5; Acts 15:25), 'your souls' (James 1:21; Acts 15:24), 'visit' (James 1:27; the same Greek verb is translated 'concerned Himself about' in Acts 15:14), and 'turn' in the sense of turning from sin to God (James 5:19-20; Acts 15:19).

*Morgan:* The Greek of this epistle contains some striking similarities to that of the brief speech by James recorded in Acts 15:13-21, and to the letter sent under his authority (Acts 15:23-29).... The Jewish flavor of the epistle seems consistent with what we know about James, the brother of Jesus. The Old Testament allusions, proverbial nature of the wisdom sections, the prophetic style of admonitions, the reference to the synagogue, and strong monotheistic emphasis all resonate with the biblical accounts of this James.

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### c) Content

*Hughes:* To be sure, Paul is practical, but normally he begins with an imposing theological argument (for example, Romans 1-11 or Ephesians 1-3) and then gives practical exhortation (for example, Romans 12-16, Ephesians 4-6). James, however, begins right off with a series of practical admonitions and continues on nonstop to the end.... It is significant that this brief book has fifty-four imperatives. James is a ‘Do this! Do that!’ book that, taken to heart, will dynamically affect our lives on very level.

*Doriani:* With 59 commands in 108 verses, the epistle of James has an obvious zeal for law. In his imperatives, James directly communicates the royal law, the law of King Jesus (2:8).... While James does lack familiar formulation of the gospel, his insistence on obedience is unmistakable. He says good deeds mark true religion (1:27; 2:10; 4:17; 1:22).

#### (1) Wisdom Literature

*MacArthur:* The book of James has been compared with the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, particularly the book of Proverbs, because of its direct, pungent statements on wise living.

*Doriani:* Wisdom has been defined as ‘the discipline of applying truths to one’s life in the light of experience.... James resembles wisdom books in important ways.... Building on biblical themes (James 2:8; 2:23; 4:5-6), James applies them to a stream of observations of daily life.... There are also verbal parallels between James and Proverbs.... If James adopts elements of the style of wisdom, he also shares its interest: the roles of testing and discipline in creating wisdom, the power and the perversions of speech, the lure and emptiness of wealth, and the contrast between righteousness and wickedness.

*Moo:* James has often been classified as a wisdom document. This classification is based more on the letter’s proverbial style and general moral tone than on actual references to the concept of ‘wisdom.’ But James does refer to wisdom specifically twice (1:5; 3:13-18).... James’ most important contribution to NT theology comes in the realm of ethics: no other book of the New Testament concentrates so exclusively on ethical questions.

#### (2) Prophetic Literature

*Doriani:* The book of James is not essentially prophecy, but when James begins to denounce sin, he can sound like a prophet of old. He warns that God’s judgment will shorten the life of the rich and lawless (1:11; 5:5).... This sounds a great deal like the prophets Isaiah and Amos (James 5:1, 4-6; cp. Is. 5:8-9; Amos 5:11-12; Mic. 2:1-3).

*MacArthur:* And James’s strong condemnation of social injustice (cp. chapters 2, 5) has prompted some to call him ‘the Amos of the New Testament.’

#### (3) Sermon on the Mount

*MacArthur:* But James was also profoundly influenced by the Sermon on the Mount; in fact, ... his epistle may be viewed as a practical commentary on our Lord’s sermon.

*Doriani:* James immersed himself in the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7). Though James never quotes Jesus, he constantly alludes to His words and applies them afresh. James expresses the same themes in much the same language as Jesus,

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*Morgan:* The teachings of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, reflected in this letter are striking. This too would be appropriate from the brother of Jesus who was with Him on certain parts of His earthly ministry.

*Moo:* A second feature of James that would immediately impress the ancient reader is the degree to which James borrows from traditional teaching. Two kinds of sources figure especially often in the letter. First, James depends more than any other NT author on the teaching of Jesus. It is not that James directly quotes Jesus.... It is, rather, that he weaves Jesus' teaching into the very fabric of his own instruction. Again and again, the closest parallels to James's wording will be found in the teaching of Jesus – especially as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.... Second, the letter also betrays a striking number of similarities to the words and emphases of a certain segment of Hellenistic Judaism, represented to some extent by the Alexandrian philosopher Philo, but especially by the apocryphal books Sirach and the pseudepigraphal book *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

### d) Organization

*Moo:* Striking to both the ancient and modern reader alike is the letter's lack of clear organization. The author moves quickly from topic to topic, and the logical relationship of the topics is often not at all clear.... The letter has no obvious structure, nor even a clearly defined theme. Moral exhortations follow closely upon one another without connect and without much logical relationship.

*Morgan:* The epistle of James develops many themes: trials and temptations, the Word and Law, faith and works, words, peace, pride and humility, poverty and wealth, eschatology, patience, and prayer.... James moves from topic to topic quickly, in a way that leaves most readers who seek to uncover his primary structure scratching their heads.... Most topics are treated with at least one paragraph, yet many are interwoven from time to time in a brief, loosely connected way.

*Moo:* James consists of several substantial blocks of teaching on specific topics (2:1-13; 2:14-26; 3:1-12; 5:1-6) along with many briefer exhortations that appear to have little relationship to one another.... We think the body of the letter (1:2-5:11) can be divided into five general sections. The first, 1:2-18, while having trials as the unifying motif, touches on several other subjects. The second section, 1:19-2:26, is marked especially by a concern for obedience to the word.... At first sight, 3:1-4:12 does not display any thematic coherence at all. But closer inspection reveals that the section begins (3:1-12) and ends (4:11-12) with exhortations about proper speech and that 3:13-4:3 borrows from a popular ancient *topos* about envy and violence. The paragraph 4:4-10 stands apart; indeed...James bursts out here with an expression of his deepest concern about the readers of the letter. Far more loosely connected is the fourth section, 4:13-5:11.

*MacArthur:* James wrote his epistle to challenge his readers to examine their faith to see if it was genuine saving faith. Accordingly, the outline is structured around that series of tests.

### 3. Date

*Moo:* If we are right in identifying James the brother of the Lord as the author of the letter, then it must have been written before 62 AD, when James suffered a martyr's death. Some scholars think that the letter was probably written very close to this date.... [However,] two indications favor a quite early date for this letter, sometime perhaps in the middle 40's. First, and most important, is the probable relationship between James's teaching on justification in chapter 2 and

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Paul's teaching on the same topic.... James shows awareness of Paul's distinctive emphasis on 'justification by faith alone,' but does not really come to grips with what Paul meant by this doctrine. Such a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching was unlikely after the two had met and hashed out a consensus on the requirements to be imposed on Gentiles for entry into the people of God at the Apostolic Council in 48 or 49 AD (Acts 15). The historical scenario we suggest is that Paul's preaching in Tarsus from c. 36 (Acts 9:30; Ga. 1:21) and in Antioch from c. 45 (Acts 11:25-26) on had been misunderstood by some who heard him. They were apparently using the slogan 'justification by faith alone' as an excuse for neglecting a commitment to discipleship and practical Christian living. It is this 'perverted Paulinism' that James attacks in chapter 2. James probably did not even know that Paul's teaching was the jumping-off point for the view he is opposing. He would have attacked such a perversion, of course, at any date. But had he known what Paul truly preached (as he would have after 48 AD), he would have put matters differently than he did.

*Moo:* A second indication of a relatively early date for the letter is the absence of any awareness of the conflict over Torah that emerged in the early church as a result of the Gentile mission. Again, it was about 47-48 AD that this issue first came to the forefront in the early church (cp. Acts 15:1).... It is clear from what transpired in Acts 15 that this crucial issue of the basis on which Gentiles should be admitted to the church had not been decided. The Apostolic Council sat to decide this matter, and James was the leader of that assembly. So, from this time on James would have been well aware of the question of Torah as it relates to Gentiles. Again, of course, James is not writing to Gentiles, and so we might conclude that the absence of any reference to this issue is not surprising at any date. But James's casual references to Torah in the letter (1:24-25; 2:8-13) make more sense if this issue had not yet arisen.

*MacArthur:* The absence of any reference to the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15 (c. 49 AD) points to a date of writing for James before that council met. It is unlikely that, in a letter addressed to scattered Jewish believers, James would have failed to mention the Jerusalem Council if it had already taken place. That early date is supported by the lack of any reference to Gentiles, Gentile churches, or Gentile-related issues (e.g., circumcision, or the eating of meat sacrificed to idols). The most probably span for James's writing is 44-49 AD, making it the first of the New Testament books to be written. The epistle was undoubtedly written from Jerusalem, the city where its author lived and ministered.

*Morgan:* If James, the brother of Jesus, is indeed the author of this letter, then it must have been written before 62 AD, the date Josephus reported for James' martyrdom. The lack of any reference to the issue surrounding the Jerusalem Council (e.g., Law, Gentiles, kosher food, etc.) seems to point to a date prior to the Jerusalem Council, which occurred in approximately 50 AD. The references to severe poverty would especially make sense if the letter of James were written after 46 AD and the time of the famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28). This would also coincide with the initial versions of the social, political and religious upheavals that culminated in the Jewish war of rebellion in 66-70 AD. This dating also seems consistent with the strong emphasis on the traditions of Jesus' teaching, with the church depicted as a 'synagogue,' and the letter's dependence on Jewish sources. Thus, we tentatively propose a date between 46 and 49 AD. If this is correct, James would be the earliest book written to be included in the New Testament (this of course also depends on how one dates the Gospel of Mark and Paul's epistle to the Galatians).

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*Hughes:* The book of James...was apparently written before the famous Council of Jerusalem in 49 AD, which means it is probably the oldest of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, and thus reflects Jewish-Christian teaching in its initial stages of development.

*Moo:* For these reasons, we think that James was probably written in the middle 40's, perhaps just before the Apostolic Council. This period witnesses some severe economic crises (there was a famine in Judea in 46 AD [Acts 11:28]) and the beginning of the serious social-political-religious upheavals that would culminate in the Jewish war of rebellion in 66-70.

### 4. Theology

#### a) *Primitive Theology*

*Dorani:* James like the Sermon on the Mount, is sublime and penetrating—almost too penetrating. Its piercing assessment of our failures proves we cannot achieve holiness by our striving. James stirs us to action, but as it reveals our sins, we doubt our ability to do what the writer commands.... James demands an obedience that honest readers know they cannot render. Therefore, while the individual sentences and paragraphs of James are clear, we struggle to resolve the tension between the stringency of James's demands and our inability to attain them. If this were Paul, he would turn our attention to redemption and justification. But James never mentions the cross or the atonement, the death or the resurrection of Christ. He never uses the gospel vocabulary of justification by faith, redemption, or reconciliation.

*Moo:* Another aspect of the letter of James also fits well into the kind of early Jewish-Christian environment associated with James the brother of the Lord: its primitive Christian theology. James is far more theological than many scholars have given the letter credit for. But the theology rarely goes beyond accepted OT and Jewish perspectives, combined with some very basic, distinctly Christian conceptions: Jesus as Lord (1:1; 2:1) and coming judge (5:7, 9); the tension between the 'already' of salvation accomplished (1:18) and 'not yet' culminated (1:21; 2:14; 5:20); 'elders' functioning as spiritual leaders in the local church (5:14). This is just the kind of theology we might associate with James as we know him from the NT.

*Moo:* Some people claim that James has no theology.... To be sure, James says little about many basic Christian doctrines. The person and work of Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the theological significance of the church, the fulfillment of the OT in Christ – none is mentioned in James. But this kind of argument from silence...does not carry much weight. James, like all the other letters of the NT, is occasional, written in a specific situation and addressing specific problems. Failure to mention even some basic Christian doctrines is therefore not only surprising but expected – and paralleled by other NT letters.... If we expand the definition [of theology] to include teaching rounded in an understanding of God and His purposes in the world, then James is thoroughly 'theological.' Appeal to God's person, the values taught in His Word, and His purposes in history undergirds virtually everything in the letter. And while Jesus' person and work might be generally absent, His teaching is not. No NT document is more influenced by the teaching of Jesus than James.

#### b) *Theological Topics*

##### (1) God

*Moo:* If we define 'theology' in its strictest sense – the doctrine of God – then theology is very important in James. For he frequently grounds his exhortations about appropriate Christian

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conduct in the nature of God.... Three characteristics of God are especially important in James: His oneness, His jealousy, and His grace.

### (2) Eschatology

*Moo:* One of the chief characteristics of the Letter of James is its extensive borrowing from both Jewish and Greek moral teaching. But what sets James' admonitions apart is the eschatological context in which they are placed. Future eschatology is clearly the dominant perspective in James.... In keeping with early Christianity generally, James insists that the day of judgment and reward is imminent (cp. 5:8-9).... The sense of 'nearness' that James and the other early Christians felt stemmed from two convictions: 1) now that the Messiah had come and the new age had dawned, the end of history was the next event in the divine timetable; and 2) that culmination of history could happen at any time.

### (3) The Law

*Moo:* The law per se is not a topic of discussion in the Letter of James. References to it come in the context of exhortations about other issues (cp. 1:25; 2:8-12; 4:11).... James reveals little concern about obedience of the ritual law. Noting this, scholars sometimes conclude that James of Jerusalem, famous in tradition for his allegiance to Torah and concern to keep good relationships with Judaism, could never have written the letter before us.... [However,] the problems his readers face demand that James focus on certain key ethical issues. Naturally, therefore, it is to this element of the law that James makes frequent appeal.

### (4) Faith vs. Works

*Moo:* The most important, and controversial, contribution of James to NT theology comes in his teachings about the importance of works for justification (2:14-26).... James condemns any form of Christianity that drifts into a sterile, actionless 'orthodoxy.' Faith, not what we do, is fundamental in establishing a relationship with God. But faith, James insists, must be given content. Genuine faith, he insists, always and inevitably produces evidence of its existence in a life of righteous living. *Biblical* faith cannot exist apart from acts of obedience to God. This is James' overriding concern in the passage in question.... James makes such a point of this because he has come to realize that some Christians, misunderstanding Paul's teaching, were taking an extremely narrow view of faith, confining it to verbal profession. Such 'faith,' James responds, is not really faith at all. It is an imposter, masquerading as true biblical faith.... Unlike Paul, who was faced in Galatians and, to a lesser extent, in Romans by 'Judaizers' insisting on obedience to the law as a condition for salvation, James was facing professing Christians who were dismissing the importance of obedience in the Christian life. Works, claims Paul, have no role in getting us into relationship with God. Works, insists James do have a role in securing God's vindication in the judgment. Paul strikes legalism; James at quietism. Each message needs to be heard. Luther, faced with forms of Roman Catholic medieval theology that placed great emphasis on works in salvation, naturally focused on Paul in his preaching. Wesley, on the other hand, confronting a church largely indifferent to the moral imperatives of the gospel, appropriated the perspective of James. So, in our day as well.

*Hughes:* Because it was composed before Paul's writings, James discusses the subject of faith and works independently from Paul's teaching. James and Paul do not contradict each other, but rather supplement each other. James approaches faith *subjectively*—in the sense of trust or

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confidence in the Lord, while Paul explains it *objectively*—as the instrument by which a believer is justified before God.

### 5. Theme

*Moo:* Several themes are persistent in the letter. Testing figures prominently in both the opening (1:2-4, 12) and closing (5:7-11) sections of the letter where James uses some similar vocabulary to make the link fairly obvious.... This testing, while taking many forms (1:2), is particularly manifest in the poverty and oppression that so many of the readers of the letter are suffering; this, then becomes a second general motif (1:9-11; 2:1-13; 5:1-6).... Basic to all that James says in his letter is his concern that his readers stop compromising with worldly values and behavior and give themselves wholly to the Lord. Spiritual ‘wholeness,’ then, we suggest, is the central concern of the letter.

*Morgan:* I...suggest that a central thematic concern in James is ‘wisdom for the community.’ In practical terms, what does this mean? First, I mean that the letter of James has a background and focus that shows it is to be an heir of Jewish wisdom literature.... James is a Christian epistle with deep roots in the Old Testament wisdom tradition. Second, by ‘wisdom for the community’ I also mean that James has a primary concern to dispense wisdom and its practical results.... James applies the truths about God and His ways to such daily issues as trials, temptations, words, wealth, obedience, planning, brevity of life, etc. In doing so, James stresses that our response to these daily challenges must be consistent with God’s person and ways.... Living in a unified and consistent manner is wisdom rightly applied. Third, I mean by ‘wisdom for the community’ that James is addressing Christian living from a community/church perspective. James is an ecclesiological document that speaks to real-life community concerns.

*Dorani:* The climax of James occurs in 4:6. James completes his indictment of human sin in 4:5, then says: ‘But [God] gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”’ The double mention of God’s grace at the rhetorical climax of the book shows that the gospel of James is the message of God’s grace for sinners.

*Hughes:* The dominant theme is, *faith that is real works practically in one’s life. That is, true faith is a faith that works.* James shows us how to have a living, visible, product faith in a fallen world.

[DSB Note: I have chosen to summarize the theme of James as ‘a faith that works,’ which is the essential element of Hughes’ statement. Of course, this theme is based on the discussion of faith vs. works in James 2:14-26. However, this theme also alludes to the very practical nature of James, which describes what a real, vibrant faith looks like when it is worked out in everyday life. ‘A faith that works’ is a faith that consistently lives out the practical implications of Christian theology in both the Christian community and in the world at large. Thus, Moo’s concept of spiritual wholeness and Morgan’s ‘wisdom for the community’ are both included in ‘a faith that works.’]

For next time: Read James 1:2-12.