

Outline of the Book of James¹
Fall Message Series “Faith in Action: Living Out the Gospel”
September 1, 2024
By Dr. Bob Lee

Introduction:

The Author: James, half-brother of Jesus (Greek is *Ya’akov* – a transliteration from the Hebrew, Jacob). Different than the disciple, James, brother of John and son of Zebedee.

- Paul writes of James -- Galatians 1:19
- Leader of church in Jerusalem – Acts 12:17
- Presided over the Jerusalem Conference – Acts 15:13-21, 22-29
- Leading Elder in Jerusalem at Paul’s last visit – Acts 21:18-25
- Once disbelieved in Jesus’ claims to be the Messiah – John 7:1-6
- Came to faith by a special vision of the Risen Christ – 1 Cor. 15:7

Date and Audience:

- Likely written close to James’ death by execution in 62 AD
- However, there are some scholars who place the book earlier.
- James (pastor of the Jerusalem church) wrote to the “diaspora” -- James 1:1. Most likely, this was written late in his life to the many Jewish Christians who were scattered by persecution all over the known world including the areas in the east of Syria, Mesopotamia and Babylon. Peter wrote to the five provinces in the west – Asia Minor.

¹ Sources: A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, General Epistles/Revelation*; Cecil Sherman, *James: Gaining True Wisdom*; Bill Hybels, *Live Wisely – James*; William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter*; “The Bible Project” Video on James and related commentary:
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/james/>

- There was severe famine and poverty across the region
- Christians were constantly under persecution from Rome and from Jewish religious leaders (just like Jesus and Paul)

Purpose and Structure:

- To provide words of wisdom for any and every community of Jesus' followers.
- James is calling the messianic community to become truly wise by living according to Jesus' summary of the Torah: to Love God and to Love Neighbor as Yourself. There is a heavy reliance on the Book of Proverbs as well, particularly chapters 1-9.
- James can be divided into two parts:
 1. Chapter 1 introduces Jesus and the wisdom he offers.
 2. Chapters 2 through 5 contain twelve teachings and an encouragement for perseverance in prayer.
- Chapter 1 is an overall summary of key themes in the book. Chapters 2 through 5 expand on each of the key themes such as favoritism and elitism, faith and work, our words, sin and temptation, patience in suffering, and perseverance in prayer.

Overall Theme:

1. The loving wisdom of Jesus.
2. Real faith is inseparable from actions.
3. Perseverance and patience in times of difficulty.