

INTRODUCTION

There are reams of material focusing on the authorship and timing of the Epistle of James.

Concerning authorship, I see no reason to assume any other James than that of the brother of our Lord. No other option solves more problems than it creates. James was certainly of enough notoriety that his epistles would be accepted by the Jewish believing assembly. See Galatians 1:19 and 2:9. One of the chief reasons that some reject the Lord's brother as the author is because the Greek is of high quality. For example, the Wikipedia article on the Epistle of James (an article filled with error and logical fallacy) states, "the style of the Greek language-text makes it unlikely that it was actually written by James, the brother of Jesus." (Note: I have inserted an edit *some scholars contend*, but often such edits do not remain). This statement is common among "scholars" but displays the arrogance of scholarship rather than known facts. It reminds us of the statement of Nathanael, in a different context, in John 1:46, **can anything good come out of Nazareth?**

Concerning timing, there are *early* and *late* dates that have been proposed. The late date of AD 60-62 seems unlikely for three reasons:

1. The content of the epistle is so thoroughly Jewish that it displays no knowledge of a Jewish-Gentile mixture within the Body of Christ. This would put it prior to the time of the Jerusalem Council (AD 50-52).
2. The epistle displays intimate knowledge of the teachings of Jesus yet contains no direct quotes from Gospels. This suggests that the information was first-hand rather than gleaned from the Gospels.
3. According to Josephus, James was killed during the reign of Luceius Albinus, who was procurator of Judea from 62-64. Because the High Priest and Sanhedrin presented James as one who broke Jewish Law, it seems they associated James with Paul, yet, as we have said, nothing in the book would hint at giving leeway to connect James with lawbreaking. Josephus said, "so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned" (*Antiquities*, XX, ix, 1, 200).

With an early date of perhaps AD 48, James and Paul would have never met, James would have not ever heard of any kind of **dispensation of the grace of God** (Eph. 3:2), and James's message would have been completely within the revelation known to him at that time.

JAMES 1:1 | AN IMPORTANT INTRODUCTION

The name **James** is a French version of the name *Jacob*, which would be a literal transliteration. The Latin *Jacobus* became *Jacomus* in late Latin which became *James* in French. The Geneva Bible of 1560 had *James* (spelled with the letter I). In the KJV, the Greek *iacob* was always translated *Jacob* while *iacobus* was translated James, and this has continued in all modern translations.

That James simply introduces himself as **a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ** sheds no light on whether he is the Lord's brother (as we presume). It is simply a fitting statement of devotion.

James writes **to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad**. He has been serving as the recognized "pastor" of the Jerusalem congregation. However, there were many Jews, including believers in Jesus as the Messiah, who were **scattered abroad**. This *diaspora* was likely the scattering that began with the fall of the Northern Kingdom.

They were likely from among those 3,000 who were baptized on the day of Pentecost (compare Acts 2:5, 9-10), as well as others who were persuaded by their testimony. In addition to the Jewish *diaspora*, these could have been those who were originally from Jerusalem but were scattered by the persecution of men like Saul (see Acts 8:1, taking place about AD 34).

Concerning the application of the letter, this first verse gives us the important information that it applies to *Jews, not the body of Christ*. However, one commentary after another will go to great lengths to show that **the twelve tribes** are the church, the body of Christ.

For example, the New American Commentary on James, by “The recipients of the letter, who possessed a messianic faith and therefore were the church, are named (lit.) “the twelve tribes in the dispersion [diaspora].” The Greek word diaspora is related to the verb diaspeirō, “sow, scatter”; hence the NIV rendering “scattered among the nations.” Dispersion points first of all to Israel since the time of the Assyrian captivity of the ten tribes (cf. John 7:35). The connection is surely made here with believers in terms of the Old Testament anticipation of the restoration of Israel. The use of the term here, however, has been extended to apply to all the people of God in Christ.”¹ [emphasis mine].

Another example comes from the United Bible Society’s *Handbook on the Letter from James* which states, “The twelve tribes is normally a comprehensive expression used to describe all the people of Israel, or the whole Jewish nation (compare Acts 26:7). In this letter the phrase obviously refers to Christians, not to Jews. It is possible that the reference is to Jewish Christians, but more likely it is to be taken figuratively as a description of the Christians, the new people of God who constitute the new Israel... It is for this reason that TEV renders the expression as “all God’s people,” and in many languages this will be a suitable translation. However, if a translator wishes to retain the expression twelve tribes, it will be helpful to include a footnote explaining the term. The footnote in CEV reads: “twelve tribes scattered all over the world: James is saying that the Lord’s followers are like the tribes of Israel that were scattered everywhere by their enemies.”² [underlining mine].

JAMES 1:2-4 | PATIENCE THROUGH TRIAL

VERSE 1 –

James addresses his audience as **My brethren**. He will use the word *brethren* or *brother* 19 times in the epistle, and in this epistle we must always interpret it as it is given in this context: *fellow Jews*. The scripture narrows the definition in verse 1, and we must accept its definition unless a substitute definition is provided. Note that other books of Scripture may define the term differently, and we would use the context of those books to determine the meaning in those locations.

James asks the **brethren** to **count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations**. The word **count** is a leadership word, ἡγεύομαι [hegeomai] (from which we get *hegemony*). By using this word, it puts the responsibility upon the **brethren** to *take the lead* in their attitude toward **divers temptations**. The word **temptations** is used more in the sense of trial than an enticement to sin.

While this instruction is given to Jews, Paul gives the same example in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. However, we would want to take our instruction from Paul because taking it from James in these verses will lead to *works-based-perfection* in the next verses.

¹ Kurt. A. Richardson, *James*. The New American Commentary, Volume 36. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. 1997.

² I-Jin Loh and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Letter from James*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 8.