

## **James, The Epistle**

For the purposes of this study, we will assume that it was written by James, the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jewish churches in Jerusalem. That makes this epistle special above all others in this sense: James lived with Jesus and grew up with Him. James watched Him over the years and it is safe to assume that their values were shaped by their parents. Therefore, what is important to James was important to Jesus. So when James wrote, He is not writing as one who had met Jesus as an adult. He wrote as one who beheld the majesty of God firsthand without realizing it as he was growing up with the Song of God in the bed next to him! You can be sure that James saw what he wrote about in his brother's life and that makes his message so authoritative.

Many believe that James' letter is one of the oldest in the New Testament. They think this because the letter is so Jewish in flavor and tone. Keep in mind that Christianity was a branch of Judaism for several decades in the minds of believers, nonbelievers and Jews. James wrote to believers who were also Jews and he saw no need to distinguish between the two. That would represent a mindset of the early church and would date the epistle before any of Paul's letters. I personally hold to this opinion, since no definitive evidence as to the letter's date is available.

Some have referred to James as the Amos of the New Testament, for James message is authoritative and directive. He uses 54 commands and imperatives in just 108 verses. James expected to be obeyed, because of his position of authority and because he saw what he taught firsthand from the time both Jesus and he were children. Others have referred to James' letter as the Proverbs of the New Testament for it is full of pithy directives of how to live out faith in daily life.

James body of teaching directly reflects Jesus teaching in the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5-7. Perhaps James was present for one of those presentations and used that as a model for his own life message. (Keep in mind that Jesus was an itinerant minister. I am sure that He delivered His messages on more than one occasion in more than one location. That accounts for some of the variety of reporting in the gospels. So James could have even heard Jesus preach more than once, even though he disagreed with Jesus' ministry.) You may want to read those three chapters in Matthew as you prepare to study James.

Experts say that the Greek James used was excellent, leading us to believe that Jesus and His family were well educated. It is also interesting to think of Mary's influence on the early Church, for God handpicked her to impart the truth of the covenant to not only Jesus but to James. So we can also assume that what James wrote was imparted to him by not only his godly brother, but also his godly mother.

With that in mind, let's look more closely at James' epistle.