

## The General Epistle of James

- I. The epistle is authored by James, whose identity is difficult to determine.
  - A. There were definitely two of the original twelve apostles named James. **MAT 10:2-4.**
  - B. James, the son of Zebedee (and sibling of John) was slain by Herod. **ACT 12:1-2.**
    1. Jesus surnamed them *Boanerges* (the sons of thunder). **MAR 3:17.**
    2. They were zealous for Christ's honor. **LUK 9:52-54.**
    3. They both drank of Jesus' cup of tribulation. **MAR 10:35-39.**
  - C. James, *the Lord's brother*, was an apostle, allowing for the possibility of a third apostle named James. **GAL 1:19.**
  - D. James, the son of Alphaeus, *could* be James, the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. **MAT 13:55 c/w GAL 1:19.**
    1. Jesus' mother (Mary) had a sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas. **JOH 19:25.**
    2. *Cleophas* is a name which corresponds with *Alphaeus* (per Strong's Dictionary). This other Mary may have been a sister-in-law to Jesus' mother.
    3. A nephew may fall under the category of a parent's children. **1TI 5:4.**
  - E. The historical consensus is that this epistle was written by James, the brother of the Lord.
    1. He was obviously an apostle of note. **GAL 1:19.**
    2. He was one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church. **GAL 2:9.**
    3. He was the presiding elder of the Jerusalem church. **GAL 2:12; ACT 12:17; 15:13.**
  - F. That this James does not introduce himself as an apostle here does not mean that he was not an apostle. Paul did not introduce himself as an apostle in his epistles to the Thessalonians, Philemon or Hebrews.
  - G. Christ's apostles were given thrones of judgment over the twelve tribes of Israel. **MAT 19:28.**
    1. Mind that this epistle is conspicuously written to the twelve tribes. **JAM 1:1.**
    2. In the O.T., the judge was the final authority. **DEU 17:8-9; 21:5.**
    3. The apostles are the final authority for the reformed church under Jesus Christ. **JOH 14:26; 16:13; 1JO 4:6.**
    4. It is to their thrones of the spiritual Jerusalem that the tribes of the LORD go up. **PSA 122:4-5.**
    5. Believing Gentiles are graft into the *commonwealth of Israel*. **ROM 11:17 c/w EPH 2:12-14.**
      - a. commonwealth: Public welfare; general good or advantage.
      - b. To Israel pertained a number of exclusive blessings which are crowned by Christ. **ROM 9:4-5.**
      - c. Israel's chief advantage was God's word. **ROM 3:1-2.**
      - d. Believers of any nation are thus brought into the general good or advantage of Israel under its supreme judges whose words enlighten them about God's saving power in Christ and also judge them. **ACT 3:25-26; 10:34-43; 26:16-20; 15:19-21 c/w 16:4.**
  - G. James was one of the apostles to the circumcision. **GAL 2:9.**
    1. His ministry was to the Jews whereas Paul's ministry was to the Gentiles.
    2. Therefore, this epistle had particular direction and warning to Jewish people.
    3. However, the lessons of this epistle are applicable to the Gentile believer.
      - a. In Christ, God has put no difference between Jew and Gentile. **ACT 15:8-11; GAL 3:27-29.**

- b. They have a common human nature, new birth, Savior, hope, resurrection and future in glory.

II. The epistle is written to Christians: those who have been joined to Christ as disciples.

**JAM 2:7 c/w ACT 11:26.**

- A. They are assembling brethren who have the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. **JAM 2:1-2.**
  - 1. The word translated *assembly* in v. 2 is *sunagoge* (Strong's G4864), most commonly translated as *synagogue*.
  - 2. Assemblies of Jews for worship and instruction are commonly called synagogues.
  - 3. This is therefore an example of the reformed Jewish church. **HEB 9:1-10.**
    - a. Mind how this epistle is devoid of the Levitical ordinances of worship.
    - b. Messiah's coming would purify the sons of Levi. **MAL 3:1-6 c/w ACT 6:7.**
    - c. John the Baptist was a Levite. All that are joined to God according to his ordinance are spiritual *sons of Levi*, a spiritual priesthood. **1PE 2:5.**
- B. They are under the oversight of church elders. **JAM 5:14.**
- C. They are brethren in the truth, which could not be said of unbelievers. **JAM 5:19-20.**
- D. It will be helpful to keep in mind that the early Christian movement among the Jews was:
  - 1. numerically large. **ACT 2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 21:20.**
  - 2. not immune to the "bad fish" syndrome of **MAT 13:47-48.**
  - 3. infiltrated by false brethren, including Pharisees. **GAL 2:1-4, 12 c/w ACT 15:1-5.**
    - a. Pharisees were wealth-oriented and exploitative. **MAT 23:14-17; LUK 16:14.**
    - b. False brethren of the Jews would be in the church teaching heresies for financial gain. **2PE 2:1-3 c/w TIT 1:10-11.**
    - c. They sought to buffer ostracism by their own countrymen by "judaizing" the gospel. **GAL 6:12.**

III. James has much to say against the deceitfulness and corrupting influence of riches.

**JAM 1:9-10; 2:1-6; 4:13-16; 5:1-6.**

- A. An indicator of genuine conversion and faith for the Jewish believers was abandoning their traditional notions of redemption with money. **1PE 1:18-19.**
- B. James essentially continues the historic teaching of the Jewish prophets which set in contrast vain trust in riches with vital trust in a Redeemer. **PSA 49:6-17.**
- C. The gospel of wealth versus the gospel of grace was the cause of much grief amongst them. **JAM 4:1-2 c/w 5:6.**
- D. Similar instruction and warnings against covetousness were given to the churches of the Gentiles. **1TI 6:17; REV 3:17.**

IV. An emphasis is given throughout the epistle on the need for patience, particularly in trials.

**JAM 1:3-4; 5:7-11 c/w ROM 12:12.**

- A. Many Hebrew believers underwent a great trial in coming to Christ and therefore had need of patience. **HEB 10:32-36.**
- B. Unless patience is allowed to do its work in us, we will never come to fullness. **JAM 1:4.**

V. James also warns against vain religion, religion that is of no effect, profit or value.

**JAM 1:26; 2:14-20.**

- A. Simply saying we believe is not enough. Believers are to maintain good works. **TIT 3:8.**
- B. James stresses good works as the proof of genuine, profitable faith.

- C. Good works are essential to effective witnessing. **1PE 2:12; MAT 5:16.**
- D. God will not hold guiltless those who take His name in vain. **EXO 20:7.**
- E. Ananias and Sapphira tried a pretence of faith and were slain. **ACT 5:1-11.**
- F. God is dead serious about church and we had best be likewise.