

EPISTLE OF JAMES

Approximate date: 45-50 C.E.

Time period: prior to, or just after, the Jerusalem Council

Author: James the Just, brother of Yeshua

Location of author: Jerusalem or Judea

Target audience and their location: Jewish Believers in the immediate Diaspora: Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch

The Epistle of James is widely considered by theologians to have the most “Jewish character” of all of the other writings of the Apostolic Scriptures,¹ perhaps save the Gospel of Matthew. This is largely due to its emphasis on works and the moral conduct of the individual, deeply rooted within the Torah or Law of Moses. Some have suggested that aside from the few references to Yeshua the Messiah, that the Epistle of James would more appropriately fit within the canon of the Tanach (Old Testament) than the Apostolic Writings (New Testament). James’ letter certainly does address many of the practical aspects of faith, with his communication style being most assertive and authoritative. There are many parallels between the Epistle of James and the teaching style of the Messiah seen in His Sermon on the Mount, as well as the Wisdom literature of both the Tanach and the Apocrypha. Some of James’ letter even parallels that of ancient Greco-Roman moralists,² which can be taken as meaning that a rather broad audience was intended to receive this letter. Viewpoints of James as a letter, wisdom literature, a midrash, a sermon, a homily,³ and even some kind of diatribe—have all been made by various examiners.⁴ The summary offered by Bauckham is quite good for readers of James to consider:

“He draws creatively on the wisdom of Jesus, as also on the Jewish wisdom tradition, using the teaching of Jesus as the focal point and principle that guides his appropriation of the wisdom tradition in general. This is the way in which we should understand the specifically Christian character of James. There is nothing un-Jewish in his teaching, any more than there is in that of Jesus, but the

particular shape and character, emphases and concerns of James’s wisdom have been determined by the corpus of the sayings of Jesus” (*ECB*).⁵

While some critics of the Epistle of James claim that Yeshua the Messiah is only mentioned twice (1:1; 2:1), the fact remains that “there are more parallels in this epistle than in any other New Testament book to the teaching of our Lord in the gospels” (Guthrie).⁶ The notable connections that are seen between James and Yeshua’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount are:

- 1:2: Joy in the midst of trials (cf. Matthew 5:10-12).
- 1:4: Exhortation to perfection (cf. Matthew 5:48).
- 1:5: Asking for good gifts (cf. Matthew 7:7ff).
- 1:20: Against anger (cf. Matthew 5:22).
- 1:22: Hearers and doers of the Word (cf. Matthew 7:24ff).
- 2:10: The whole law to be kept (cf. Matthew 5:19).
- 2:13: Blessings of mercifulness (cf. Matthew 5:7).
- 3:18: Blessings of peacemakers (cf. Matthew 5:9).
- 4:4: Friendship of the world as enmity against God (cf. Matthew 6:24).
- 4:10: Blessing of the humble (cf. Matthew 5:5).
- 4:11-12: Against judging others (cf. Matthew 7:1-5).
- 5:2ff: Moth and rust spoiling riches (cf. Matthew 6:19).
- 5:12: Against oaths (cf. Matthew 5:33-37).⁷

Other important parallels with the teachings of Yeshua include:

- 1:6: Exercise of faith without doubting (cf. Matthew 21:21).
- 2:8: Love to one’s neighbor as a great commandment (cf. Matthew 22:39).
- 3:1: On the desire to be called teacher (cf. Matthew 23:8-12).

¹ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 727-718; W.W. Wessel, “James, Epistle of,” in *ISBE*, 2:960.

² Sophie Laws, “James, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:623.

³ Carson and Moo, 630.

⁴ R.B. Wall, “James, Letter of,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 551-554; Duane F. Watson, “James, Letter of,” in *EDB*, 671.

⁵ Richard Bauckham, “James,” in *ECB*, 1484.

⁶ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 729.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid*, pp 729-730.

- 3:2ff: On the dangers of hasty speech (cf. Matthew 12:36-37).
- 5:9: The Divine Judge at the doors (cf. Matthew 24:33).⁸

The author of James claims only to be a servant of Yeshua (1:1), even though Roman Catholic tradition espouses that James the son of Alphaeus was the author.⁹ Traditionally throughout history, though, the Epistle of James is believed to have been written by the half-brother of the Messiah Yeshua. Yet even within a traditional framework that somehow acknowledges James the half-brother of the Lord as the originator of this material, there are divergent viewpoints regarding how the Epistle of James came to be. The various options before the examiner include this letter being (1) an authentic work of James the half-brother of Yeshua (possibly with secretarial assistance), (2) a pseudepigraphal work written to honor James, or (3) a collection of genuine Jamean sayings edited together in an epistolary form to preserve James' teachings.¹⁰ While it might be preferable for many to read the Epistle of James as being composed entirely by James himself, the proposition that the Epistle of James was meant to preserve James' sayings and/or teachings cannot be haphazardly disregarded. Wall summarizes this point of view with,

"James the Just is responsible for most of the book's raw material, delivered first as homilies and preserved by the Jewish Christian Diaspora (Jas 1:1; cf. Act 8:4; 11:19). This may help explain the letter's 'primitive' theological content....These precious memories of James were then edited and written by another, probably (although not necessarily) after James's death, under the pressures of the educational mission of an expanding church. The editor who actually wrote James may have done so without a religious agenda of his own: his intent was to compile and preserve the most enduring 'sayings of James' for future readerships."¹¹

Viewing the Epistle of James as an editor's compilation of genuine Jamean sayings near or after his death, is certainly more inviting than thinking that James was composed in the early Second Century C.E. as a pseudograph—dating almost three-quarters of a century from the 40s-early 60s C.E.

There is strong evidence in favor of James, the half-brother of the Messiah, being the author of this text. The thematic overlap between the content of James and Yeshua's teachings in the Gospels, and the personality of James witnessed in Acts chs. 15

and 21,¹² help support Jamean authorship. This would likely place James' composition somewhere in the 40s C.E., although it could be dated as late as 62 C.E., when James the Just is believed to have died. Liberal scholars who deny genuine Jamean authorship place its composition to the first half of the Second Century.¹³ A few liberals, though, have begun to recognize that James the half-brother of Yeshua could have been the author, even if he employed a professional secretary in the letter's transcription.¹⁴

There are conservative interpreters who are notably divided between James the half-brother of the Lord composing a letter for First Century Messiah followers, and those who think that a colleague of James wanted to preserve his teachings or sayings in a written form, perhaps as a kind of homily.¹⁵ The Fourth Century Church historian Eusebius probably regarded James the half-brother of Yeshua as the authentic author of this epistle, even though its inclusion within the Biblical canon was disputed by some (cf. *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.3; 6.14.1).

The authorship of the Epistle of James is agreed by a majority of conservative theologians to in some way be James the Just, the half-brother of Yeshua.¹⁶ (This is not the Apostle James, the brother of the Apostle John and one of the two sons of Zebedee, who was killed by Herod in Acts 12:2.) As early as Acts 12:17 where Peter commanded, "Report these things to James and the brethren" (NASU), James the half-brother of the Lord was an instrumental player in the assembly of Jerusalem. If genuine Jamean authorship is assumed, it is quite possible that the Epistle of James was written between 45-50 C.E., concurrent with James' position as the leader of the Jerusalem assembly. It is also possible it was written in the early 40s, as no direct reference to the events or controversies surrounding the Jerusalem Council are mentioned. The Apostle Paul attests that during his relief mission to Jerusalem, he sought out no one but Peter and James (Galatians 1:18-19), and is notably given the right hand of fellowship by James, as "James and Cephas and John...were acknowledged pillars" (Galatians 2:9, NRSV), as these three individuals, beginning with the half-brother of the Lord, were the main leaders of the First Century *ekklesia*.

There are some important things witnessed about James the Just in the writings of the emerging Christian Church. Following the ascension of Yeshua into Heaven, Eusebius describes that James was chosen to be one of the deacons for the public

⁸ Ibid., 730.

⁹ Watson, "James, Letter of," in *EDB*, 670.

¹⁰ Wall, "James, Letter of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 546.

¹¹ Ibid., 547; against: Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 746.

¹² Wall, "James, Letter of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 546-547.

¹³ A.E. Barnett, "James, Letter of," in *IDB*, 2:795.

¹⁴ Watson, "James, Letter of," in *EDB*, 670; Bauckham, in *ECB*, 1483.

¹⁵ Wessel, "James, Epistle of," in *ISBE*, 2:962.

¹⁶ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 726-727.

service of the Jerusalem assembly: "Then also James, called the brother of our Lord, because he is also called the son of Joseph...This James, therefore, whom the ancients, on account of the excellence of his virtue, surnamed the Just, was the first that received the episcopate of the church at Jerusalem" (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.1.2).¹⁷ Eusebius also details that "Clement, in the sixth book of his Institutions, represented it thus: 'Peter, and James, and John after the ascension of our Savior, though they had been preferred by our Lord, did not contend for the honor, but chose James the Just as bishop of Jerusalem'" (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.1.3).¹⁸ These historical attestations tell us of the position that James held in the Jerusalem assembly, and the regard that others had for him as the half-brother of Yeshua. We have to infer from this that James' Epistle must likewise be held in high regard.

Eusebius further records, "James, the brother of the Lord, who, as there were many of this name, was surnamed Just by all, from the days of our Lord until now, received the government of the church with the apostles. This apostle was consecrated from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor fermented liquors, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head, he never anointed with oil, and never used a bath. He alone was allowed to enter the sanctuary. He never wore woolen, but linen garments. He was in the habit of entering the temple alone and was often found upon his bended knees, and interceding for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as camel's, in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God" (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.4-5).¹⁹ This is the kind of devotion that James had regarding his faith in God *and* his Torah adherence.

James the Just was likely martyred in 62 C.E.,²⁰ as the First Century historian Josephus records that Ananus, the high priest, had James stoned to death: "Ananus was of this disposition [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; 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 of the Jews* 20.200).²¹ What is interesting, of course, is that even though James was brought forward on the charge of breaking the Torah, the historical record attests that James was quite faithful to Moses' Teaching, and

was very much permitted to enter into the Temple complex.

There is no agreement as to who the original audience of James' Epistle was intended to be.²² Jewish Believers in Yeshua are undeniably involved, but are non-Jewish Greek and Roman Believers to be completely discluded? The greeting of James 1:2b says, "To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings" (NASU). The three approaches to this include: an audience (1) of Jewish Believers in the Diaspora,²³ (2) the Christian Church as a "new Israel" superseding the ethnic Jewish people,²⁴ or (3) God's restored people in the eschaton which is to include all Twelve Tribes of Israel recognizable (Isaiah 11:11-16; Zechariah 10:6-12). Dispensational interpreters have at times looked at James' Epistle as only being applicable for Jews, and not non-Jewish Believers (especially given James' high value for the Torah or Law of Moses).

Who is the intended audience of the Epistle of James? It need not be overlooked how during the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, James is the one who delivers the final ruling concerning the non-Jews coming to faith in the Messiah of Israel and what is to be done. He makes a reference to the Prophets from Amos 9:11-12 (cf. Acts 15:16-18), and associates the salvation of the nations as being a key part of the restoration of Israel's Kingdom *and* its enlargement. Even with significant parallels to be detected between the Epistle of James and much ancient Jewish literature from the Second Temple period, the parallels that can be evidenced from Greco-Roman classicism cannot be easily dismissed. A primary Jewish audience does not at all exclude non-Jews from among James' audience. The third option of "the twelve tribes" representing a Kingdom of Israel in the process of being restored, which would make James' audience broader than just First Century Jewish Believers, actually seems to be the best choice.²⁵

The circumstances of James' audience can be easily understood. Rich people are denounced (4:13-17; 5:1-6) as being sinners against the poor (2:1-12; 5:1-11). There is a setting of landowners and farm laborers in view, with the workers not adequately paid (5:4). While many of these Believers were Jewish, the situation is general enough to the human condition that it probably involved a greater mix of people to some degree (cf. 4:3-5).²⁶ The tenor of James also seems to suggest that there may have

²² Cf. Wessel, "James, Epistle of," in *ISBE*, 2:964-965; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 747-748; Laws, "James, Epistle of," in *ABD*, 3:623, 624.

²³ Carson and Moo, 628.

²⁴ Wall, "James, Letter of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 548-549; Watson, "James, Letter of," in *EDB*, 670.

²⁵ Cf. Dan G. McCartney, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 79.

²⁶ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 749.

¹⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁰ Laws, "James, Epistle of," in *ABD*, 3:622.

²¹ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 538.

been some kind of agricultural famine, or at least a non-productive season, occurring (5:17-18), and that “the economic pressures of field hands and harvesters became more intense and their economic well-being more precarious as landowners tried to maximize their profits (Jas 4:4-6). The result is that some lacked even the basic requirements of a humane existence (see Jas 2:15-16)” (Wall).²⁷ It has been proposed at times that the wealthy who are criticized were aristocratic Sadducees,²⁸ but this is hard to tell. Furthermore, given James’ reference to not only suffering (5:10), but to trial (1:12) and the crown of life (*ton stephanon tes zōēs, τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς*), it can be thought that James’ primary audience was composed of Jewish Believers who had fled the Land of Israel following the martyrdom of Stephen.²⁹ Because Stephen was a Hellenistic, Greek-speaking Jew (Acts 6:5-9), James’ primary audience may have been Hellenistic Jews living in the Diaspora, with a substantial part of them living in “Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch” (Acts 11:19).

Conservative examiners of James have little problem dating the epistle before the destruction of the Second Temple, and rather early in the development of the First Century Messianic movement. The discussion witnessed on faith and works (2:14-26) would indicate that it was composed some time around Paul’s relief visit to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-29), and his writing to the Galatians (Galatians 2:1-10). The faith-works misunderstanding that arose from Galatians seems to place James’ composition after Galatians.³⁰

Could the Epistle of James have originally been written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and not Greek? While a large degree of Second Temple Jewish influence is easily detected in the letter, particularly in terms of connections with a wide array of ancient Jewish literary sources, the Semitic linguistic influence witnessed in James is consistent with that seen in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Tanach.³¹ An array of scholars, both conservative and

liberal, recognize that a Septuagintal style of Greek is what is present in the Epistle of James. “[T]he author is obviously at home in the Greek language, a fact revealed by the vocabulary and style of the Epistle” (*ISBE*),³² meaning that “Despite the good Greek of the Epistle, Semitic influences are evident” (*ISBE*).³³ The main focus of the reader, as always, should be to balance what has been transcribed in the source text with the relevant background materials in history, as well as religious and philosophical literature. Carson and Moo are keen to direct us, “James’s style is not that of a literary Atticist but that found in other Hellenistic-Jewish works of his day, such as *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *Sirach*,”³⁴ with Guthrie simply asking readers of James to consider him bilingual, given his position of leadership within the Jerusalem assembly.³⁵

Many within today’s Messianic community try to suggest that as a Jew, largely writing to fellow Jews, James would have composed his letter in Hebrew or Aramaic. But how probable is this if his (Jewish) audience was in the Diaspora (1:1), meaning that it would have included a sizeable number of Greek-speaking Jews, as well as new non-Jewish Believers added to the fold? James was notably included rather late within the Aramaic Peshitta version, being translated from Greek into Aramaic by the Fifth Century C.E.³⁶ Yet even though the Epistle of James was written in a very high quality of Greek,³⁷ it includes many Hebraisms and Septuagintisms. For a person of James’ caliber as leader of the Jerusalem assembly, it is highly probable that he learned Greek as a secondary language, especially with many of the early Jewish Believers coming from Greek-speaking lands. This would account for James’ usage of Hebraisms in the Greek text, while still retaining a high Greek linguistic style.

Theologically speaking, no reader of the Epistle of James can deny that its author has a very high view of the Torah or Law of Moses. The stellar regard that is demonstrated in 1:25, “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty...” (NASU), as though the Torah brings a degree of liberty or “freedom” (NIV) to God’s people, is sometimes immediately reworked by various Christian readers as only being a reference to “love.”³⁸ At the same time, there are those Christians who at least recognize that the moral and ethical instructions of Moses’ Teaching are to be in view

²⁷ Wall, “James, Letter of,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 550.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Donald W. Burdick, “James,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976-1992), 12:163.

³⁰ Wessel, “James, Epistle of,” in *ISBE*, 2:965.

Carson and Moo, 626 actually think that James responds to a “garbled form of Paul’s teaching...because he is writing before he had the opportunity to learn from Paul himself just what Paul means by the doctrine” of justification by faith.

³¹ Laws, “James, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:627.

³² There is no doubt that James was written in Greek, especially in view of the fact that the author employs frequent wordplays (2:22; 4:13), catch-word connections (1:4, 5, 12, 13), alliteration (1:2), and other linguistic devices which can only be explained if Greek were the original language. But James is also characterized by many instances of Semitisms, including direct, spontaneous Semitisms to the LXX...With reference to sentence syntax James displays more Semitisms—in distinction from septuagintisms—per page of the text than any other NT letter except I-III John. The author knew ordinary Koine Greek as it was written by people of some education, but he also had recourse to a Semitic style” (R.B. Ward, “James, Letter of,” in Keith Crim, ed.,

Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume [Nashville: Abingdon, 1976], 469).

³³ Wessel, “James, Epistle of,” in *ISBE*, 2:962; cf. Carson and Moo, pp 623-624.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:963; cf. Bauckham, in *ECB*, 1483.

³⁵ Carson and Moo, 624.

³⁶ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 735.

³⁷ Barnett, “James, Letter of,” in *IDB*, 2:795; Laws, “James, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:621.

³⁸ Barnett, “James, Letter of,” in *IDB*, 2:795.

³⁹ Cf. Carson and Moo, pp 624-625.

here,³⁹ which must be adhered to in *any* generation that God's people may find themselves.

James definitely attacks any of those who fail to demonstrate the expected works of kindness, mercy, and grace toward others in the Body of Messiah (2:2-9). Throughout much of Christian history, at least—and certainly in the post-Reformation period—various pietistic movements which have focused upon a social gospel of good works toward the downtrodden, have taken a great deal of inspiration from the Epistle of James. Because of this, James continues to urge people up until today to stand up against oppression of the poor and exploited. The Torah in action, as envisioned by James, is very much concerned with issues of social justice, equality, and making sure that the basic needs of all human beings—such as food, clothing, and shelter—are surely met. The positive legacy that James has, especially among Christian theological traditions that look to the so-called “moral law” of the Old Testament for guidance in the emulation of Jesus, does very much speak for itself.

Perhaps the most striking and self-condemning statement found in James, for his audience, is: “one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? **Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself**” (2:16-17, NASU). James the Just highly emphasizes the lifestyle character of God's people in accordance with their actions, and it is because of this emphasis on works that many Christian readers have had difficulty understanding the Epistle of James over the centuries. Many have viewed James and his emphasis on works as being contradictory to Paul's letters, which are viewed to favor grace. Martin Luther notably viewed James as an “epistle of straw,” because he thought that James invalidated Paul's doctrine of justification by faith.⁴⁰ However, James' clear and traditional position as the half-brother of the Lord has assured the epistle a place in the canon, and Catholics and Protestants alike have highly valued James' message throughout history, although in Protestantism this has varied from denomination to denomination. “Many believers and their...faith traditions still agree with Luther's negative verdict of its usefulness for Christian formation...At the same time, others have come to depend on the book's wise solutions to everyday situations...” (Wall).⁴¹ “James insists that true faith is always marked by obedience and that only such faith evidenced in works will bring salvation” (Carson and Moo),⁴² because “On both historical and theological

grounds, James fully deserves the canonical status that the church has accorded it” (Ibid.).⁴³

The Epistle of James is one of the most highly valued texts within the Apostolic Scriptures for today's Messianics. The classic challenge, of course, is that James' letter is sometimes *pitted against* the Pauline letters—but rather than James being disregarded as unimportant compared to Paul, Paul is cast aside as being sub-standard to James. Within such an unfortunate paradigm, the vantage point of James' letter is frequently not considered, because James and Paul are approaching *different* mishandlings of “works.” “James's use of the word ‘works’ differs significantly from Paul's. For James, ‘works’ are works of faith, the ethical outworking of true piety and include especially the ‘work of love’ (2:8)” (ISBE).⁴⁴ Even those who are more liberal in their reading of James think, “Paul talks specifically about works done in obedience to and fulfillment of the Jewish law, while James makes no such reference to the law, but thinks of works of charity in general” (ABD).⁴⁵ There is a tendency among many Messianics for them to think that the “works” James primarily expects are those of keeping the Sabbath, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, or eating kosher—when this is not the case. An honest reading of the Epistle of James demonstrates how its author is much more concerned about those required actions of people of faith that help instill a sense of human wholeness in others. As he summarizes,

“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world” (1:27, NASU).

Messianic Believers today should know the appropriate place that works play in their lives. They follow the Torah's commandments because the Messiah Yeshua did. They cannot just have “faith in one's faith”; our faith in the God of Israel must be evidenced by good conduct in the world, and the standard that the Lord has set forth in His Torah. James, the half-brother of Yeshua, continued to live by this standard, and instructed others to live by it as well. He emphasizes the ethics and morality that all Messiah followers *and* emulators should have, as they live forth God's love in the world. This is not contrary to the words of Paul which emphasize grace and faith. Faith, grace, and works are not contradictory to one another, as they all play a role in the life of a Believer—but faith and grace by no means invalidate the need to live properly in obedience to God. Balancing all of these critical concepts together is important for readers of the Epistle of James.⁴⁶

³⁹ Wessel, “James, Epistle of,” in *ISBE*, 2:960.

⁴⁰ Laws, “James, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:622.

⁴¹ Wall, “James, Letter of,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 545.

⁴² Carson and Moo, 621.

⁴³ Ibid., 632.

⁴⁴ Wessel, “James, Epistle of,” in *ISBE*, 2:961.

⁴⁵ Laws, “James, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:625.

⁴⁶ There have been a number of Messianic resources written on the Epistle of James, including: Arnold G. Fructenbaum, *Ariel's Bible*

Consult the commentary *James for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee for a more detailed examination of James.

Bibliography

- Barabas, Steven. "James, Letter of," in *NIDB*, pp 494-495.
- Barnett, A.E. "James, Letter of," in *IDB*, 2:794-799.
- Bauckham, Richard. "James," in *ECB*, pp 1483-1492.
- Burdick, Donald W. "James," in *EXP*, 12:161-205.
- Carson, D.A., and Douglas J. Moo. "James," in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp 619-635.
- Gundry, Robert H. "The Catholic, or General, Epistles," in *A Survey of the New Testament*, pp 431-453.
- Guthrie, Donald. "The Epistle of James," in *New Testament Introduction*, pp 722-759.
- Laws, Sophie. "James, Epistle of," in *ABD*, 3:621-628.
- Martin, Ralph P. *Word Biblical Commentary: James*, Vol 48.
- Moo, Douglas J. *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter of James*.
- Perkins, Pheme. "James," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, pp 2171-2179.
- Tree of Life—The New Covenant*, pp 403-411.
- Wall, R.B. "James, Letter of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 545-561.
- Ward, R.B. "James, Letter of," in *IDBSup*, pp 469-470.
- Watson, Duane F. "James, Letter of," in *EDB*, pp 670-671.
- Wessel, W.W. "James, Epistle of," in *ISBE*, 2:959-966.

Commentary: The Messianic Jewish Epistles—Hebrews, James, 1&II Peter, Jude (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2005); David Friedman, with D.B. Friedman. *James the Just Presents Applications of Torah* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer, 2012).

1

Salutation

¹ James^a, a servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora: Greetings.

Faith and Wisdom

² Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you fall into various trials,

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproaching, and it will be given to him.

⁶ But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed.

⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord,

⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Poverty and Riches

⁹ But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position;

¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like the flower of the grass he will pass away.

¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance perishes; so also will the rich fade away in his pursuits.

Trial and Temptation

¹² Blessed is the man who endures trial; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself tempts no one.

¹⁴ But each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.

¹⁵ Then the lust, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin; and the sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters.

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Hearing and Doing the Word

¹⁹ *This* you know, my beloved brothers and sisters. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

²⁰ for the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.

²¹ Therefore, putting away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror;

^a Grk. *Iakōbos* (Ἰάκωβος); "masculine proper noun; Greek form of the Hebrew name *Jacob*" ([BibleWorks 8.0: Friberg Lexicon](#)) or *Ya'akov* (יאָקֹב); Messianic versions tend to employ "Ya'akov" (CJB/HNV) or "Jacob" (TLV, The Messianic Writings).

²⁴ for he observes himself and goes away, and immediately forgets what he was like.

²⁵ But one who looks into the perfect Torah, the *Torah* of liberty, and abides by it, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who works, this one will be blessed in his doing.

²⁶ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep oneself unstained from the world.

2

Warning against Partiality

¹ My brothers and sisters, do not hold the faith of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, *the Lord* of glory, with *an attitude* of personal favoritism.

² For if a man comes into your synagogue with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and a poor man comes also in dirty clothing,

³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothing, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor one, "You stand over there, or sit down under my footstool,"

⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters: did not God choose those who are poor in the world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

⁶ But you have dishonored the poor one. Is it not the rich who oppress you, and personally drag you before the courts?

⁷ Do they not blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

⁸ If, however, you fulfill the royal Torah^a, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" [Leviticus 19:18]^b, you do well.

⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin, being convicted by the Torah as transgressors.

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole Torah and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

¹¹ For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY" [Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18]^c, also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER" [Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17]^d. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the Torah.

¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by a Torah of liberty^e.

¹³ For judgment *is* without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Faith and Works

¹⁴ What does it profit, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but has no works? Can that faith save him?

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food,

¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," and yet you do not give the things needed for the body, what does it profit?

^a Grk. *nomon teleite basilikan* (νόμον τελείτε βασιλικόν); "the goal of Kingdom Torah" (CJB); "the royal law" (TLV).

^b "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am YHWH" (Leviticus 19:18, PME).

^c "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14, PME; also Deuteronomy 5:18).

^d "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:14[13], PME; also Deuteronomy 5:17).

^e Grk. *dia nomous eleutherias* (διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας); correctly rendered as "by the law of liberty" (NASU, NRSV) or "by the law that gives freedom" (NIV); incorrectly rendered as "under the law of liberty" (RSV/ESV).

¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.”

¹⁹ You believe that God is one^a; you do well. The demons also believe, and shudder.

²⁰ But do you want to know, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren^b?

²¹ Was not Abraham our ancestor justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?

²² You see that faith was working with his works^c, and by works faith was perfected;

²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS” [Genesis 15:6]^d, and he was called the friend of God^e.

²⁴ You see that a person is vindicated^f by works and not by faith alone.

²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.

3

The Tongue

¹ Let not many of you become teachers, my brothers and sisters, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment.

² For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man^g, able to bridle the whole body also.

³ Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they may obey us, we guide their whole body as well.

⁴ Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are guided by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot directs.

⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

⁶ And the tongue is a fire. The world of unrighteousness among our members is the tongue, which defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna^h.

^a The CJB has bolded “God is one” for 2:19, noting a possible allusion to Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, Isra’el! *ADONAI* our God, *ADONAI* is one” (CJB).

^b Grk. *hē pistis chōris tōn ergōn argē estin* (ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων ἀργὴ ἐστίν); “faith without works is dead” (KJV); “faith without works is useless” (NASU).

^c Grk. *hē pistis sunērgei tois ergois autou* (ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ); “faith was active along with his works” (RSV/NRSV/ESV); “his faith and his actions were working together” (NIV).

^d “Then he believed in YHWH; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6, PME).

^e The CJB has bolded “God’s friend” for 2:23, noting a possible allusion to Isaiah 41:8; 2 Chronicles 20:7:

“But you, Isra’el, my servant; Ya’akov, whom I have chosen, descendants of Avraham my friend” (Isaiah 41:8, CJB).

“You, our God, drove out those living in the land ahead of your people Isra’el and gave it forever to the descendants of Avraham your friend” (2 Chronicles 20:7, CJB).

^f Grk. verb *dikaioō* (δικαίω); more traditionally rendered as “justified”; the TLV has “proved righteous.”

There are different dimensions of “righteousness” or “justification” (Heb. noun *tzedaqah*, תְּצַדִּיק; Grk. noun *dikaioσunē*, δικαιοσύνη) encountered throughout the Scriptures. 2:21 is a place where being declared innocent or forgiven of sins, the most frequent application of righteousness/justification, is not in view; 2:21 is a place where Abraham is depicted as being in covenant relationship with God as one of His own.

^g Grk. *teleios anēr* (τέλειος ἀνὴρ); “mature man” (HCSB).

^h Grk. noun *geenna* (γέεννα); “Gehenna, Grecized fr. גֵּי הִינּוֹם (א) [gei hinnom] (...Josh 15:8b; 18:16b; Neh 11:30) cp. Targum גֵּי הִינּוֹם [geihinnam]...really גֵּי הִינּוֹם (א) [gei ben-Hinnom] (Josh 15:8a; 18:16a; 2 Ch 28:3; Jer 7:32; cp. 2 Kings 23:10, where the kethibh has the pl.: sons of Hinnom) Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, a ravine south of Jerusalem. There, acc. to later Jewish popular belief, God’s final judgment was to take place (cp. Just., A I, 19, 8). In the gospels it is the place of punishment in the next life, hell” (BDAG, 190-191).

⁷ For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human species.

⁸ But no human being can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With it we bless the Lord and Father; and with it we curse people, who are made in the likeness of God^a;

¹⁰ from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so.

¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter *water*?

¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? Neither *can* salt water yield fresh.

The Wisdom from Above

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom.

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and *so* lie against the truth.

¹⁵ This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is Earthly, sensual, demonic.

¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is confusion and every vile deed.

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

¹⁸ And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

4

Friendship with the World

¹ Where do conflicts and where do fightings among you *come* from? *Are they* not from here: from your pleasures that wage war in your members?

² You lust and you do not have; *so* you murder. And you envy and cannot obtain; *so* you have conflict and war. You do not have, because you do not ask.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

⁴ You adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture speaks in vain: "He yearns jealously over the Spirit which He caused to dwell in us"?^b

⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore *it* says, "GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE" [Proverbs 3:34, LXX]^c.

⁷ Submit therefore to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.

^a The CJB has bolded "in the image of God" for 3:9, noting a possible allusion to Genesis 1:26-27: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth.' So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them" (CJB).

^b This statement is likely a synthesis of various Tanach passages, including, but probably not limited to: Exodus 34:14; Zechariah 8:2; Psalm 42:1-2; 84:2:

"for you shall not worship any other god, for YHWH, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:14, PME).

"Thus says YHWH of Hosts, 'I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her'" (Zechariah 8:2, PME).

"For the choir director. A Maskil of the descendants of Korah. As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2, PME).

"My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of YHWH; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God" (Psalm 84:2, PME).

^c "The Lord resists the arrogant, but he gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34, NETS).

⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Judging a Brother or Sister

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one against another, brothers and sisters. He who speaks evil against a brother or sister, or judges his brother or sister, speaks evil against the Torah, and judges the Torah; but if you judge the Torah, you are not a doer of the Torah, but a judge *of it*.

¹² *Only* one is the Giver of the Torah^a and Judge, He who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor?

Warning against Boasting

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that city, and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”;

¹⁴ whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

¹⁵ Instead *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

¹⁷ Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

5

Warning to the Rich

¹ Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.

² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.

³ Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a testimony against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days.

⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cries out *against you*; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth^b.

⁵ You have lived luxuriously on the Earth and in self-indulgence; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

⁶ You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous *one*; he does not resist you.

Patience and Prayer

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the land, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rain^c.

^a Grk. *nomothetēs* (νομοθέτης); a Messianic version like the TLV has the more standard, “lawgiver”; the rendering here follows the CJB.

^b Grk. *Kuriou sabaōth* (κυρίου σαβαώθ); Heb. equiv. *Adonai Tzavaot* (אֲדֹנָי־צְבָאוֹת; Delitzsch); Messianic versions vary on what to include, having a standard English “Lord of Hosts” (TLV); “Commander of all forces” (The Messianic Writings); or “ADONAI-Tzva’ot” (CJB).

The inclusion of the Tetragrammaton (YHWH/YHVH) in various modern Hebrew versions, is most perplexing, considering the fact that Second Temple Judaism would not readily pronounce the Divine Name of God.

^c The CJB has bolded “the fall and spring rains” for 5:7, noting a possible allusion to Deuteronomy 11:14; Jeremiah 5:24; Joel 2:23:

“then, [says ADONAI,] ‘I will give your land its rain at the right seasons, including the early fall rains and the late spring rains; so that you can gather in your wheat, new wine and olive oil’ (Deuteronomy 11:14, CJB).

⁸ You also be patient; establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

⁹ Do not grumble, brothers and sisters, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors.

¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

¹¹ Behold, we call those blessed who endured. You have heard of the patience of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful^a.

¹² But above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by the Heaven or by Earth or by any other oath; but let your yes be yes and your no be no; so that you may not fall under judgment^b.

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

¹⁵ and the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effective petition of a righteous person can accomplish much.

¹⁷ Elijah was a human being with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the Earth for three years and six months.

¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the sky gave rain, and the ground brought forth its fruit.

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if any among you wanders from the truth and one turns him back,

²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins^c.

"They don't say to themselves, 'Let's fear *ADONAI* our God, who gives the fall and spring rains in season, who reserves us the weeks assigned for harvest'" (Jeremiah 5:24, CJB).

"Be glad, people of Tziyon! rejoice in *ADONAI* your God! For he is giving you the right amount of rain in the fall, he makes the rain come down for you, the fall and spring rains- this is what he does first" (Joel 2:23, CJB).

^a The CJB has bolded "*ADONAI* is very compassionate and merciful" for 5:11, noting a possible allusion to Exodus 34:6; Psalms 103:8; 111:4:

"*ADONAI* passed before him and proclaimed: 'YUD-HEH-VAV-HEH!!! Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [[*ADONAI*]] is God, merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in grace and truth'" (Exodus 34:6, CJB).

"*ADONAI* is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in grace" (Psalm 103:8, CJB).

"He has gained renown for his wonders. *ADONAI* is merciful and compassionate" (Psalm 111:4, CJB).

^b Grk. *hupo krisin* (ὑπὸ κρίσιν); "under condemnation" (RSV/NRSV/ESV).

^c The CJB has bolded "cover many sins" for 5:20, noting a possible allusion to Proverbs 10:12: "Hate stirs up disputes, but love covers all kinds of transgressions" (CJB).