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A0703 – January 21, 2007 – Jas 1:1 – Salutation

This morning we will start with the salutation in James 1:1 and deal with the introductory issues; the human author, the recipients, the date of composition, the purpose of the letter, the major themes, the theology of James, the difficulties in James and an outline of the letter.

Author

The author of this epistle in our English Bible is James but his actual name in the Greek is *Iakobos* (1:1) or the English equivalent Jacobus.ⁱ There is no NT person named James. If you called out the name “James” in 1st century Israel no one would have responded. You would have to call out *Iakob* or *Iakobos*. So, technically the name of the book is not James but *Iakobos*. This name originated from the Hebrew *Yakob* (yah-ak-obe). Since the NT was written in Greek and the Greek does not have a “Y” sound it was changed to an “I” becoming *Iakobos*. The classical Latin spelling was very similar to the Greek, *Iakobus* but as Latin evolved the “I” was replaced with a “J” and became *Jacobus*. As Latin continued to evolve the “B” changed to an “M” and his name was *Jacomus*. The English dropped the “C” and became *James*.ⁱⁱ (Heb = *Yakob* → Gk = *Iakobos* → Lat = *Iakobus* → *Jacobus* → *Jacomus* → Eng = *James*). Why translators still translate the first word *Iakobos* as “James” is due only to a late tradition. Most of the Church knew this book as *Iakobos*. I will refer to it as Jacob or James both of which mean “one who grabs the heel” or “one who supplants”.

Jacob/James was a popular name during the 1st century at the time of Christ. While some hold that the author is an unknown Jacob/James most consider him one of the four mentioned in the NT.

1. James, the son of Zebedee (see Matt. 4:21). He qualified as an apostle but was martyred at such an early date that most think it is highly unlikely he wrote this epistle (ca 44AD, cf Acts 12:2).
2. James, the son of Alphaeus (see Matt. 10:3), called “the Less” or “the Younger”. He also qualified as an apostle but was probably too obscure to be likely.
3. James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot see Luke 6:16) qualified as an apostle but was also probably too obscure.
4. James, the half brother of Jesusⁱⁱⁱ (see Matt. 13:55)^{iv} is the most likely candidate for six reasons.

First, early church writings claim James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the author. This stands in light of the fact that this James never mentions he was the brother of Jesus. He only calls himself a “bond-servant” of Jesus (Js 1:1). *Second*, the authoritative tone of the letter which fits well with Jacob/James’ position in the early church as the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. Of the 108 verses in this letter 54 are imperatives.

Of all the letters in the NT none carry as authoritative a tone as James. Since James was an experienced teacher (cf Js 3:1) we would expect him to carry an authoritative tone in his writings. His authoritative tone may also be a partial explanation as to why he did not claim to be the half-brother of Jesus. He had no need to proclaim his authority since he was already well-known as the leader of the Church of Jerusalem. *Third*, James’ Greek is very good and shares similar qualities with the speech of James at the Jerusalem Council. This may be some indication that the two James’ are the same.

<u>James</u>	<u>Acts</u>
1:1	15:23
1:16, 19	15:25
1:27	15:14, 29
2:5	15:14, 25
2:7	15:17
5:19-20	15:19

Fourth, commentators have also noted similarities between this epistle and the Sermon on the Mount showing that James may have been present when his half-brother, Jesus, delivered that sermon. *Fifth*, Hegesippus called him “the Just” because of his high moral standards and concern for practical

living.^v Practical living is precisely the concern of this epistle. *Sixth*, the author gives several evidences he is writing from the Land of Israel (cf Js 1:6, 11; 3:4; 3:11, 12; 5:7) and this is where James, the half brother of Jesus, lived. In conclusion, there is little room to doubt that James, the half brother of Jesus, was the author of this epistle.

We know seven things about Jacob/James from the NT. *First*, he did not believe Jesus was the Messiah until after the resurrection (John 7:3-5; 1 Cor 15:7). Even though he grew up in the same home as Jesus and personally witnessed His sinlessness he still did not believe in His half-brother's Messiahship until after His resurrection. This demonstrates that even growing up in the family of Jesus does not guarantee that person will believe unto salvation. This should give hope to all of us who have family members who have not yet believed. No matter how well we witness and no matter how well we live our lives this does not guarantee our family members will believe. Belief that Jesus is the Son of God is a personal choice that must be exercised by the individual. Each individual has to be convinced in his own mind of the truth and place their faith in Jesus Christ alone. *Second*, upon seeing the resurrected Messiah (1 Cor 9:1) he became an apostle of the second category (cf Gal 1:19). There are two categories of apostle. The first category of apostle consisted of those who were with Jesus from His baptism until His ascension (Acts 1:22-25). James did not meet this requirement. Outside of the 12 only two people met this requirement; Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus) and Matthias. The second category of apostle's consisted of those who saw Jesus in His resurrection body. Over 500 people met this requirement and James was one of them (1 Cor 15:3-8). *Third*, James became the third most influential man in the early church. His rise to prominence took place when Peter was jailed in Acts 12:1-17. In Peter's absence James became the leader of the Church of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). His prominence is also evidenced by the fact that when Paul first went up to Jerusalem he saw only Peter and James (Gal 1:18-19). Paul also noted that James was reputed to be a pillar in the early church (Gal 2:9). His prominence is further noted by the fact that he made the final judgment at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. *Fourth*, in verse 1 he calls himself a "bond-servant". The title "bond-servant" or "slave" comes from the Greek *doulos* and signified two sides of the same coin. On one side it signified a person who is completely obedient to his master. On the other side it signified one who was among the highest stature in the OT. James considered himself on par with OT bond-servants

like Moses (Num 12:7), David (Ps 89:20) and Elijah (2 Ki 10:10). So, a “bond-servant” was both a humble slave and a great man. The relationship between humility and greatness is this. Humility precedes and is the basis of greatness. God exalts to greatness those who are humble. James fit this description. He was humble and this led to his exaltation by God so he became a great man. Thus, humility and greatness are not at odds for the believer. “The only greatness to which the Christian can ever aspire is the greatness of being the slave of God.”^{vi} *Fifth*, James had a brother named Jude who was the human author of the NT book bearing his name (Jude 1:1). Jude probably claimed to be the brother of James because he did not have the kind of influence his brother did in the early church and mention of his name would add a degree of authority to his letter. *Sixth*, James was married (1 Cor 9:5). There is nothing wrong with an elder or pastor of the church being married.^{vii} *Seventh*, James met his untimely death in AD62 when he was thrown from a wall in Jerusalem and stoned to death. The events that lead up to his death were as follows. Jacob/James was so well-known for his piety, even among the unbelievers in Jerusalem, that he became known as James the Just. Probably out of jealousy, the High Priest Ananus, accused James of violating the Mosaic Law^{viii} and ordered him to be stoned unless he would stand on the walls of Jerusalem and renounce his faith in Jesus. Jacob/James agreed and when the Jewish masses had gathered he took the opportunity not to renounce his faith but to proclaim the gospel. In anger, Ananus pushed him off the wall and the masses below stoned him to death. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, this wrongful death was one of the reasons God allowed Jerusalem and the Temple to be destroyed in 70AD. James’ death in 62AD gives the latest possible date of composition.

Recipients

While many have argued that Jacob/James is a general epistle it is not. The recipients of the letter are addressed in James 1:1-2 as “the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.” Three observations from these verses solidify the fact that Jacob/James is writing to Jewish believers living outside the land of Israel and not to the Church in general. *First*, they are physical descendants of “the twelve tribes”. Throughout the whole Bible “the twelve tribes” refer to the physical descendants of Jacob who was re-named Israel. The church cannot be divided into twelve tribes. *Second*, the members of the twelve tribes

he is writing to “are dispersed abroad”. The phrase “dispersed abroad” is from the Greek *diaspora*. This is a technical term referring to Jews living outside the land of Israel (John 7:35; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1).



Third, in verse 2 James calls them “my brethren”. This does not refer to their physical kinship which has already been established by the phrase “the twelve tribes” but to their spiritual kinship. Both James and his audience have believed that Jesus is the Messiah and therefore share a spiritual kinship because they are one in the Messiah. Therefore, the epistle was written by Jacob/James who was in the land of Israel to Jews who lived outside the land of Israel. This is the opposite of the book of Hebrews which was written outside the land of Israel to Jews living inside the land of Israel. Thus, James is written to the true Israel or the believing remnant of Israel. Paul called them “the Israel of God” in Gal 6:16. Again, this is not a designation of the whole church but of the Jewish remnant within the church. James had special concerns for the Jewish remnant who had been scattered from the land of Israel by persecution.^{ix}

Six other observations from Jacob/James highlight the Jewish flavor of this epistle. *First*, in James 1:18 they are said to be “a kind of firstfruits among His creatures”. In the Book of Acts the Jews were the first to become a part of the church on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. So, these Jewish believers are “a kind of firstfruits”. *Second*, in James 2:2 he mentions their place of gathering with the Greek word *sunagoges* which refers to the “synagogue”. When James wrote this letter Jewish believers in Jesus still worshipped in the Temple and still met in the synagogue. *Third*, there are 13 comparisons to nature some of

which are unique to the land of Israel and would be familiar only to Jews who had lived in the land.

Comparisons to Nature

Scripture

The one who doubts is compared with the surf of the sea^x

James 1:6-8

The rich man is compared to withering flowers of the grass^{xi}

James 1:10-11

Lust, temptation and sin are compared to conception, birth and death

James 1:14-15

Faith without works is compared to the body without a spirit

James 2:26

The tongue is compared to a horses bit

James 3:3

The tongue is compared to a ships rudder

James 3:4

The tongue is compared to a spark of fire

James 3:5-6

The taming of the tongue is contrasted with the taming of animals

James 3:7-8

The fruit of the mouth is contrasted with the waters of a fountain

James 3:9-11

The fruit of the mouth is contrasted with the fruit of a fig tree

James 3:12

The fruit of the mouth is contrasted with the water of the sea

James 3:12

Life is compared to vapor

James 4:14

Patience is compared to a farmer waiting for the fruit of the field

James 5:7

These comparisons and contrasts are similar to the OT Proverbs making James “the Proverbs of the NT”. *Fourth*, James does not give a doctrinal treatise. James is intensely practical. This can only be explained by the fact that his Jewish audience was already doctrinally trained and fully conversive with the OT Hebrew text. For example, James assumes his readers are familiar with the lives of OT people like Abraham (2:21-23), Rahab the harlot

(2:25), Job (5:11) and Elijah (5:17). Since they were already doctrinally trained there was no need to go to great lengths to establish doctrine. But there were practical issues in light of their dispersion from the land. *Fifth*, there is no mention of Gentiles having believed on the Messiah. *Sixth*, in James 5:4 he uses an OT name of God used nowhere else in the NT, the Lord of Sabaoth (except Rom 9:29 where Paul is quoting Isa 1:9). This name is sometimes translated “Lord of hosts”. The Hebrew word *saba* from *saba oth* means “armies”. God is the “Lord of armies”, that is He has at his full disposal angelic, human and natural forces (ultimately realized in the Tribulation). This name has a distinctly Jewish flavor. These six observations indicate that Jacob/James was written to Jewish believers who once lived in the land of Israel but now lived outside the land due to persecution within the land.

ⁱ The Latin name Jacobus was at least a common name in the late 1500’s as attested by the well-known theologian Jacobus Arminius who is credited as the father of Arminianism.

ⁱⁱ Fruchtenbaum, Arnold, Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Book of James, 207.

ⁱⁱⁱ While the Roman Catholic Church teaches the Doctrine of Perpetual Virginity of Mary the Bible is quite clear that Mary did not maintain her virginity but had several children by Joseph. Jesus had multiple sisters and four brothers named James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (cf Matt 13:55-56).

^{iv} Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). The Nelson study Bible: New King James Version. Includes index. (Jas 1:2). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

^v 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 [public] bath...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. (from Eusebius quoting Hegesippus in Hodges, Zane, *The Epistle of James*, 8-9.)

^{vi} Barclay, William, *The Letters of James and Peter*, 42.

^{vii} Contra the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

^{viii} “...but this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees,^a who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; (200) when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [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;” (Josephus)

^{ix} There are five NT epistles that have as their primary audience Jewish believers; James, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude.

^x James had in mind either the Mediterranean Sea or the Lake of Galilee.

^{xi} James had in mind the hot winds of Israel that wither the flowers of the field.

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