



## JAMES, A FOLLOWER OF JESUS

There has been some discussion about the book of James and its inclusion in the Bible. Martin Luther thought that James did not tie in with his teaching of salvation by grace. He thought that James was teaching salvation by works.

There are some who say that Martin Luther thought that James should not be included in canon. James tells us that our faith is shown by our works. When we do the will of God by keeping his commandments and helping others, we are showing the world our faith by our works.

The son of Alphaeus, or Cleopas, “the brother” or near kinsman or cousin of our Lord (Gal. 1:18, 19), called James “the Less,” or “the Little,” probably because he was of low stature. He is mentioned along with the other apostles (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). He had a separate interview with our Lord after his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7), and is mentioned as one of the apostles of the circumcision (Acts 1:13). He appears to have occupied the position of head of the Church at Jerusalem, where he presided at the council held to consider the case of the Gentiles (Acts 12:17; 15:13-29; 21:18-24). This James was the author of the epistle which bears his name.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew Henry starts his commentary on James with the following introduction:

<sup>1</sup> “James,” Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary dict on line dictionary.

The writer of this epistle was not James the son of Zebedee; for he was put to death by Herod (Acts xii,) before Christianity had gained so much ground among the Jews of the dispersion as is here implied. But it was the other James, the son of Alphaeus, who was cousin-germane to Christ, and one of the twelve apostles, Matt x. 3. He is called a *pillar* (Gal. ii. 9), and this epistle of his cannot be disputed, without losing a foundation-stone. It is called a general epistle, because (as some think) not directed to any particular person or church, but such a one as we call a circular letter. Others think it is called general or catholic, to distinguish it from the epistles of Ignatius, Barnabas, Polycarp, and others who were noted in the primitive times, but not generally received in the church, and on that account not canonical, as this is. Eusebius tells us that this epistle was “generally read in the churches with the other catholic epistles.” Hist. Eccles. page 53, Ed. Val. Anno 1678. James, our author, was called the just, for his great piety. He was an eminent of those graces which he presses upon others. He was so exceedingly revered for his justice, temperance, and devotion, that Josephus the Jewish historian records it as one of the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem. “That St. James was martyred in it.” This is mentioned in hopes of procuring the greater regard to what is penned by so holy and excellent a man. The time when this epistle was written is uncertain. The

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design of it is to reprove Christians for their great degeneracy both in faith and manners, and to prevent the spreading of those libertine doctrines which threatened the destruction of all practical goodness. It was also a special intention of the author of this epistle to awaken the Jewish nation to a sense of greatness and nearness of those judgments which were coming upon them; and to support all true Christians in the way of their duty, under the calamities and persecutions they might meet with. The truths laid down are very momentous, and necessary to be maintained; and the rules for practice, as here stated, are such as ought to be observed in our times as well as in preceding ages.<sup>2</sup>

### **Matthew 10:1-3**

1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus;

Here we see where James is called to be an apostle of the Lord. Paul calls James one of the pillars in Galatians.

### **Galatians 2:9**

9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who

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<sup>2</sup> "An Exposition with practical observations, of the general epistle of James," Matthew Henry's Commentary (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co.) Vol. 6, pp. 966-967.

seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

James was a practical follower of Christ. He was one who believed by leading by example and not just by saying that he was a Christian. He led the church by his actions. Each of the apostles had their own attributes, with each having certain strengths. James' strength was in his practicality. Whereas Paul's strength was in his understanding of theology, John with his love, Peter with his strength, James epistle deals with the practical and everyday situation that the Christian faces.

James wrote primarily to the Hebrew Christians who were scattered abroad throughout the Roman Empire. It is supposed that he wrote the Epistle from Jerusalem before the destruction by Titus in 70 AD.

James starts his Epistle very different than any of the other epistle writers. Imagine receiving a letter starting with the following:

### **James 1:1-4**

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

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