

## ***James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ***

“In fine, Saint John’s Gospel and his first epistle, Saint Paul’s epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Saint Peter’s first epistle, --these are the books which show thee Christ, and teach thee everything that is needful and blessed for thee to know even though thou never see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore is Saint James’s epistle a right strawy epistle in comparison with them, for it has no gospel character to it. (Cited in James H Ropes, *The Epistle of St. James*, *The International Critical Commentary* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978], 106)”

This is a quote from Martin Luther, the father of the Lutheran denomination. Luther did not like the book of James because he said that it had no “gospel character to it.” He was a large advocate of faith only. This was in retaliation to the Roman Catholics and the state or condition they had reached. With the selling of indulgences for sins, they had reached a new low. Luther separated himself from them and tried to reform the group. To combat their beliefs and rituals that lead to such practices as the selling of indulgences, Luther came up with faith only. Now there was a big problem to that theory; the only time “faith only” is found in scripture is in James 2. The problem that Luther would have with this text is that it does not support faith only, but it condemns it! This to Luther contradicted his theology. It destroyed his system of belief. So what did he do? He wrote it off as inspired, but not of, what he called, “gospel character.”

This book is not to be feared by Christians, but embraced! We use it like it encourages us to do in James 1:23-25,

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

We use it for what it is, a part of that “perfect law of liberty” a “mirror” that helps us to examine ourselves. When we do this, this book becomes very edifying.

The book of James is commonly referred to as the book of secondary principles. This letter contains no information regarding what one must do to be saved initially, but contains things that we all, as Christians, should be doing. It has many strong connections with the Old Testament and to the Sermon on the Mount. Some view this as a kind of commentary of the Sermon on the Mount. All of the things spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 5-7 can be indirectly tied to the things discussed in the book James. This also is one of the evidences that bring us to a common belief of the author.

There is no doubt that James wrote the book, but there is a small disagreement as to which James: the apostle or the half-brother of Jesus. There are some key considerations to look at when try to decide which of these men wrote this book. The first is the consideration is the length of James’, the son of Zebedee, life. In Acts 12:2, we have recorded

that he was among the first martyrs of the early church. This would leave a very small window for him to have written this book. Throughout the book, there are charges to repentance and to correct one's life, and if this was written by the apostle James then these brethren had fallen hard and fast. This seems unlikely. James the half-brother of Jesus has many strong arguments in his behalf.

James has many ties with the early church. At first he did not believe that his brother was the son of God. In John 7, we have recorded that himself and his brothers rejected Jesus' teachings in the beginning. Later on we see fruits of James's repentance. In Acts 1, Mary and the brothers of Jesus were gathered together with the apostles on the day of pentecost and at the beginning of the church. In Acts 15, James took a key role in what is referred to as the "Jerusalem Conference." In the book of Galatians, Paul cites James as one of the "pillars of the church." (Gal. 2:9). James had become one of the leaders in the church and had the opportunity to be one that would write a letter such as this.

Most scholars date the writing of this book in the A.D. 44-49 range. There is no reference to the Jerusalem Conference in the book and because James had taken a key role in those proceedings and had a hand in writing the resulting letter that was sent to all the churches, this letter is more than likely written before that time. This would make this one of the first if not the first book in our New Testament, chronologically speaking. We will get into more of where it was written and to whom it was written when we begin a discussion of the first chapter.

Our goal will be to examine this book and examine ourselves at the same time. The things written in James are not outdated and very relevant. Let us all pray that as we read, we keep open minds and open hearts, and be ready to "be a hearer and a doer of the word and not a hearer only."