

James: *A Belief that Behaves*

Introduction

I. The Author— The author identifies himself by the name “James” in 1:1. This is the Greek form of the Old Testament name Jacob (*Jakobos*). James was a very common name in first century Israel. James the half-brother of Jesus was the human author.

II. The Audience—The audience of this letter is identified in four main ways: ethnically, spiritually, geographically and economically. *Ethnically*, James identifies the readers as “the twelve tribes” (1:1). This clearly identifies the readers as Jews. *Spiritually*, James states clearly that he assumes that the readers are believers. He refers to them as “brethren/brothers” 8 times (1:9; 2:15; 4:11 [3x]; 5:7, 9, 19) “my brethren” 8 times (1:2; 2:1,14; 3:1,10,12; 5:10,12) and “my beloved brethren” 3 times (1:16,19; 2:5). *Geographically*, the location of these Jewish believers is not specifically identified. The addressees are simply described as “dispersed abroad” (1:1). The words “dispersed abroad” translate the Greek phrase *in the diaspora*. The word *diaspora* literally means “through a sowing” (John 7:35; 1 Pet 1:1). It was the term used of Jews living outside the Promised Land among Gentiles. According to Acts the initial scattering of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem occurred in A.D. 35 in conjunction with the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1-4). Jewish believers from Jerusalem scattered throughout Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch (Acts 8:1; 11:19). The next major persecution in Jerusalem occurred in A.D. 44 at the hand of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12). This is probably the persecution and further dispersion that prompted James to write to his scattered former church members. Apparently, James received reports of the problems his scattered brothers and sisters were having. As the shepherd of this scattered flock, James felt responsible for the spiritual well-being of his former “parishioners” and wrote to instruct them just as he would have done if they had still been under his direct care in Jerusalem. *Economically*, the majority of James’ readers were probably poor (2:6-7; 5:4-6). However, there were some who had significant financial means (1:10-11).

III. The Aim—James wrote as a pastor to the scattered flock from the church in Jerusalem to exhort them to Christian maturity—to live out their belief in their behavior.

IV. The Arrangement—

- I. Salutation (1:1)
- II. Trials, Temptation, the Truth, and True Religion (1:2-27)
- III. Favoritism and Faith (2:1-26)
- IV. The Teacher, the Tongue and Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:1-18)
- V. Strife and Self-Sufficiency (4:1-17)
- VI. The Prospect of the Rich, Patience, and Prayer (5:1-20)

V. The Analysis

I. Salutation (1:1)

II. Trials, Temptation, the Truth, and True Religion (1:2-27)

III. Favoritism and Faith (2:1-26)

IV. The Teacher, the Tongue and Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:1-18)

V. Strife and Self-Sufficiency (4:1-17)

VI. The Prospect of the Rich, Patience, and Prayer (5:1-20)

VI. The Application