

The General Epistle of James

- I. The epistle is authored by James, whose identity is difficult to determine.
- A. There were definitely two of the original twelve apostles named James. **MAT 10:2-4.**
 - B. James, the son of Zebedee (and sibling of John) was slain by Herod. **ACT 12:1-2.**
 - 1. Jesus surnamed them *Boanerges* (the sons of thunder). **MAR 3:17.**
 - 2. They were zealous for Christ's honor. **LUK 9:52-54.**
 - 3. They both drank of Jesus' cup of tribulation. **MAR 10:35-39.**
 - C. James, *the Lord's brother*, was an apostle, allowing for the possibility of a third apostle named James. **GAL 1:19.**
 - D. James, the son of Alphaeus, *could* be James, the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. **MAT 13:55 c/w GAL 1:19.**
 - 1. Jesus' mother (Mary) had a sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas. **JOH 19:25.**
 - 2. *Cleophas* is a name which corresponds with *Alphaeus* (per Strong's Dictionary). This other Mary may have been a sister-in-law to Jesus' mother.
 - 3. A nephew may fall under the category of a parent's children. **1TI 5:4.**
 - E. The historical consensus is that this epistle was written by James, the brother of the Lord.
 - 1. He was obviously an apostle of note. **GAL 1:19.**
 - 2. He was one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church. **GAL 2:9.**
 - 3. He was the presiding elder of the Jerusalem church. **GAL 2:12; ACT 12:17; 15:13.**
 - F. That this James does not introduce himself as an apostle here does not mean that he was not an apostle. Paul did not introduce himself as an apostle in his epistles to the Thessalonians, Philemon or Hebrews.
 - G. Christ's apostles were given thrones of judgment over the twelve tribes of Israel. **MAT 19:28.**
 - 1. Mind that this epistle is conspicuously written to the twelve tribes. **JAM 1:1.**
 - 2. In the O.T., the judge was the final authority. **DEU 17:8-9; 21:5.**
 - 3. The apostles are the final authority for the reformed church under Jesus Christ. **JOH 14:26; 16:13; 1JO 4:6.**
 - 4. It is to their thrones of the spiritual Jerusalem that the tribes of the LORD go up. **PSA 122:4-5.**
 - 5. Believing Gentiles are graft into the *commonwealth of Israel*. **ROM 11:17 c/w EPH 2:12-14.**
 - a. commonwealth: Public welfare; general good or advantage.
 - b. To Israel pertained a number of exclusive blessings which are crowned by Christ. **ROM 9:4-5.**
 - c. Israel's chief advantage was God's word. **ROM 3:1-2.**
 - d. Believers of any nation are thus brought into the general good or advantage of Israel under its supreme judges whose words enlighten them about God's saving power in Christ and also judge them. **ACT 3:25-26; 10:34-43; 26:16-20; 15:19-21 c/w 16:4.**
 - G. James was one of the apostles to the circumcision. **GAL 2:9.**
 - 1. His ministry was to the Jews whereas Paul's ministry was to the Gentiles.
 - 2. Therefore, this epistle had particular direction and warning to Jewish people.
 - 3. However, the lessons of this epistle are applicable to the Gentile believer.
 - a. In Christ, God has put no difference between Jew and Gentile. **ACT 15:8-11; GAL 3:27-29.**

- b. They have a common human nature, new birth, Savior, hope, resurrection and future in glory.

II. The epistle is written to Christians: those who have been joined to Christ as disciples.

JAM 2:7 c/w ACT 11:26.

- A. They are assembling brethren who have the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. **JAM 2:1-2.**
 - 1. The word translated *assembly* in v. 2 is *sunagoge* (Strong's G4864), most commonly translated as *synagogue*.
 - 2. Assemblies of Jews for worship and instruction are commonly called synagogues.
 - 3. This is therefore an example of the reformed Jewish church. **HEB 9:1-10.**
 - a. Mind how this epistle is devoid of the Levitical ordinances of worship.
 - b. Messiah's coming would *purify the sons of Levi*. **MAL 3:1-6 c/w ACT 6:7.**
 - c. John the Baptist was a Levite. All that are joined to God according to his ordinance are spiritual *sons of Levi*, a spiritual priesthood. **1PE 2:5.**
- B. They are under the oversight of church elders. **JAM 5:14.**
- C. They are brethren in the truth, which could not be said of unbelievers. **JAM 5:19-20.**
- D. It will be helpful to keep in mind that the early Christian movement among the Jews was:
 - 1. numerically large. **ACT 2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 21:20.**
 - 2. not immune to the "bad fish" syndrome of **MAT 13:47-48.**
 - 3. infiltrated by false brethren, including Pharisees. **GAL 2:1-4, 12 c/w ACT 15:1-5.**
 - a. Pharisees were wealth-oriented and exploitative. **MAT 23:14-17; LUK 16:14.**
 - b. False brethren of the Jews would be in the church teaching heresies for financial gain. **2PE 2:1-3 c/w TIT 1:10-11.**
 - c. They sought to buffer ostracism by their own countrymen by "judaizing" the gospel. **GAL 6:12.**

III. James has much to say against the deceitfulness and corrupting influence of riches.

JAM 1:9-10; 2:1-6; 4:13-16; 5:1-6.

- A. An indicator of genuine conversion and faith for the Jewish believers was abandoning their traditional notions of redemption with money. **1PE 1:18-19.**
- B. James essentially continues the historic teaching of the Jewish prophets which set in contrast vain trust in riches with vital trust in a Redeemer. **PSA 49:6-17.**
- C. The gospel of wealth versus the gospel of grace was the cause of much grief amongst them. **JAM 4:1-2 c/w 5:6.**
- D. Similar instruction and warnings against covetousness were given to the churches of the Gentiles. **1TI 6:17; REV 3:17.**

IV. An emphasis is given throughout the epistle on the need for patience, particularly in trials.

JAM 1:3-4; 5:7-11 c/w ROM 12:12.

- A. Many Hebrew believers underwent a great trial in coming to Christ and therefore had need of patience. **HEB 10:32-36.**
- B. Unless patience is allowed to do its work in us, we will never come to fullness. **JAM 1:4.**

V. James also warns against vain religion, religion that is of no effect, profit or value.

JAM 1:26; 2:14-20.

- A. Simply saying we believe is not enough. Believers are to maintain good works. **TIT 3:8.**
- B. James stresses good works as the proof of genuine, profitable faith.

- C. Good works are essential to effective witnessing. **1PE 2:12; MAT 5:16.**
- D. God will not hold guiltless those who take His name in vain. **EXO 20:7.**
- E. Ananias and Sapphira tried a pretence of faith and were slain. **ACT 5:1-11.**
- F. God is dead serious about church and we had best be likewise.

Chapter 1.

vs. 1-4.

- A. James opens his epistle with the purpose and desire of godly ministry, that saints would be brought to perfection (fullness) in Christ. **EPH 4:11-13 c/w COL 1:27-29.**
 - 1. Mark it well: the perfecting of man comes not by wealth, education, social reform or genetic engineering. It comes by conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Ultimate Man.
 - 2. As James makes plain, God's methods for perfecting men are not the things that the natural man would choose.
- B. James introduces himself as "...a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." (v. 1).
 - 1. Jesus Christ should be honored as the Father is honored. **JOH 5:23.**
 - 2. Those who serve the Son will the Father honor. **JOH 12:26.**
 - 3. Those who deny the Son have not the Father. **1JO 2:23.**
 - 4. James made it clear to anyone who should read his words that he was in the service of the LORD God Who had said, "Kiss the Son..." (**PSA 2:11-12 c/w JOH 5:18**).
- C. James gives greeting to "...the twelve tribes scattered abroad..." (v. 1).
 - 1. This does not bode well for the theory of the "lost ten tribes."
 - 2. Paul described the twelve tribes in his day as *instantly* (urgently) *servng God*. **ACT 26:7.**
 - 3. That the twelve tribes of Israel were scattered abroad is one thing; that ten of them were lost in the mists of history is another.
 - 4. Moses had warned Israel that God would scatter them abroad if they turned away from Him. **DEU 28:63-64.**
 - a. A major scattering of ten tribes occurred when the Assyrian empire was given power over them. **2KI 17:6, 22-24.**
 - (1) God divorced the ten tribes (Israel) but remained in covenant union with Judah. **JER 3:8.**
 - (2) God could not take Israel back into covenant with Himself under the Law after she had been put away and had married to another god. **DEU 24:1-4; JER 3:1.**
 - (3) With the death of "God manifest in the flesh" (Jesus Christ), the dispersed ten tribes could be brought back into covenant with God under a New Testament/Covenant. **ROM 7:1-6.**
 - b. The nation of Judah was later overcome and the people scattered abroad by the Babylonians. **JER 9:16; NEH 1:8.**
 - (1) After seventy years captivity, some of the scattered people returned to Jerusalem and Judah. **EZR 9:8.**
 - (2) Many remained dispersed among the Gentiles. **EST 3:8; JOH 7:35.**
 - (3) Devout Jews from every nation under heaven came to Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. **ACT 2:5.**
 - c. The last scattering of natural Israel occurred in the 1st C. by Rome. **LUK 21:24.**
 - (1) The first mention in Scripture of a corporate body of people being scattered

is where the men of old Babel were building in defiance of God.

GEN 11:8-9.

- (2) It was for the defiance of *the builders* that natural Israel would be set at nought and scattered. **MAT 21:42-44 c/w 1TH 2:14-16.**
5. It was owing to another “scattering abroad” that the gospel reached out into the regions where the scattered tribes of Israel were in the nations. **ACT 8:1-4 c/w ACT 11:19-21.**
6. Jesus Christ is the great Gatherer of His people. **GEN 49:10; JOH 10:15-16; 11:51-52.**
 - a. God's purpose was to “...in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things IN Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on the earth; even in him” (**EPH 1:9-10**).
 - (1) We are living in that dispensation. This is the last age when times are being fulfilled or completed.
 - (2) Since Christ's first coming we have been in *the last days* (**HEB 1:2; ACT 2:16-17**), *the last time* (**1JO 2:18**) and *the end of the world*. (**HEB 9:26; 1CO 10:11**).
 - b. This gathering process was marked by the beginning of Christ's public ministry. **GAL 4:4 c/w MAR 1:15.**
 - c. Jesus Christ's resurrection was a gathering together of His spirit, soul and body.
 - d. The elect are quickened together with Christ, raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ. **EPH 2:5-6.**
 - e. This gathering process includes the assembling of believers as local churches which worship Him and conduct His business. **1CO 5:4 c/w HEB 10:25.**
 - f. This process broadened with the gathering in of elect Gentiles while Israel was *sifted among the nations*, and this is the prophesied raising up of David's fallen tabernacle. **AMO 9:9-12 c/w ACT 15:13-17.**
 - g. This process is perfected at the Second Coming and general resurrection. **MAR 13:26-27 c/w 1TH 4:14-18; 2TH 2:1.**
 - (1) Everything IN Christ, which includes God (**COL 2:9; JOH 14:11**), all the elect (**EPH 1:4**), all spiritual blessings (**EPH 1:3**) and our eternal inheritance (**EPH 1:11**) will be gathered together and never again separated.
 - (2) The heavenly angels will also be part of this gathering. **HEB 12:22-23 REV 7:9-12; 19:10 c/w EPH 3:15.**
 - (3) The scattering effect of sin will then be completely eliminated.
 - h. All of this gathering together in Christ is owing to His agony and death of the cross. Christ endured the judgment of being separated, broken and scattered that we might be *gathered together in one*. **JOH 11:49-52.**
 - (1) His disciples were scattered from Him. **MAT 26:31, 56.**
 - (2) His body was broken. **1CO 11:23-24.**
 - (3) His bones were out of joint. **PSA 22:14.**
 - (4) His blood was shed, separated from His body. **MAT 26:28.**
 - (5) His heart was broken. **PSA 69:20.**
 - (6) He was forsaken of God. **MAT 27:46.**
 - (7) His soul was poured out unto death. **ISA 53:12.**
 - (8) His spirit departed from His body. **LUK 23:46.**
 - i. But Christ came back together in the resurrection and ascended to heaven to be rejoined with His Father.
 - (1) He is the firstfruits of them that sleep and our forerunner to glory. **1CO 15:20; HEB 6:20.**

- (2) He is the guarantee that all things in Him will be gathered together in one.