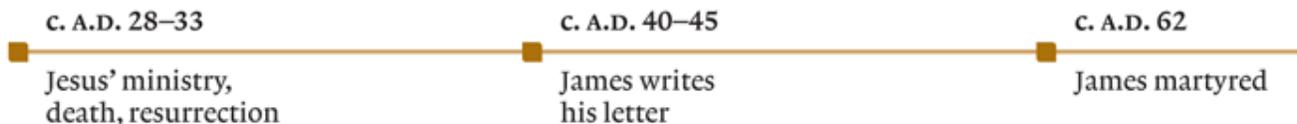


Introduction to James

 esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-james/

Timeline



Author, Date, and Recipients

This letter was written by James, the brother of Jesus ([Matt. 13:55](#)) and leader of the Jerusalem church ([Acts 15](#)). It was probably written about a.d. 40–45 to Jewish Christians living outside Palestine.

Theme

Christians must live out their faith. They should be doers, not just hearers, of God's Word.

Purpose

James's readers were suffering persecution and living in poverty. They were in social and spiritual conflict. Many believers were living in a worldly manner. James corrects them and challenges them to seek God's wisdom to work out these problems.

Key Themes

1. God is a gracious giver, the unchanging Creator, and merciful and compassionate. He is also a Judge, the one and only God, a jealous God, a gracious God, and a healing God ([1:5, 17–18](#); [2:5, 13, 19](#); [4:5–6](#); [5:1–3, 9, 15](#)).
2. Wisdom comes "from above." It enables believers to withstand trials and to have peace rather than divisions among themselves ([1:5](#); [3:13, 17](#)).
3. God allows tests and trials ([1:2–4](#)), but temptation comes from self and Satan. The required response is patient endurance ([1:3, 13–14](#); [4:7](#); [5:7–8](#)).
4. These trials include poverty and mistreatment by the rich. The poor are the special focus of God's care. They must be cared for by his people. They must not be taken advantage of or ignored. The wealthy are condemned for pride and for stealing from the poor ([1:9, 27](#); [2:1–5, 15–16](#); [4:13–17](#); [5:1–6](#)).
5. There is both future judgment and future reward ([1:12](#); [2:5, 12–13](#); [3:1](#); [4:12](#); [5:1–7, 9, 20](#)).

6. What a person says has power both to destroy and to bring peace (3:1–4:12).
7. Rather than merely hearing God’s word, believers must obey it in their daily actions (1:19–27; 2:14–26).
8. Prayer is the proper response to trials, but it must not be self-seeking. It is to be central in all of life’s circumstances, good or bad. God has great power to heal physical and spiritual problems (1:5–7; 4:2–3; 5:13–18).
9. James and Paul agree that justification comes only by God’s grace through faith, and that true faith always results in good works. If no works result, there was no justification in the first place (2:14–26).

Outline

1. Greeting (1:1)
2. The Testing of Faith (1:2–18)
3. Hearing and Doing the Word (1:19–27)
4. The Sin of Favoritism (2:1–13)
5. Faith without Works Is Dead (2:14–26)
6. The Sin of Dissension in the Community (3:1–4:12)
7. The Sins of the Wealthy (4:13–5:12)
8. The Prayer of Faith (5:13–18)
9. Concluding Admonition (5:19–20)

The Setting of James

c. a.d. 40–45

The letter of James was likely written to predominantly Jewish Christian house churches outside of Palestine, based on its mention of the “twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (1:1), its distinctly Jewish content, and its focus on persecution and poverty. This would mean it was sent throughout most of the ancient Mediterranean world. The author has traditionally been believed to be James, the brother of Jesus and an early leader of the church in Jerusalem.

