

# Finer Grounds

## James & Jude

### Lesson 1: Introduction

Describing himself in the opening verse of chapter one as “a bond-servant [DOULOS] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (NASB), this declaration by James, who is widely embraced among scholars to be the Lord’s half-brother, indicates a great transformation from a skeptic to one with a mighty and submissive faith (see Matthew 13:55 and John 7:1-5). What caused this drastic alteration in the life of one who, while not an apostle, would later become a “pillar” in the early church (see Acts 15:13; Galatians 2:9, 12)? Many scholars point to the miraculous, post-resurrection appearing of Jesus as told in 1 Corinthians 15:7 as the main turning point in the life of James. Thus, it serves us well to understand that while he could have opened this letter by identifying himself as a brother in the flesh in relation to Jesus, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, James, in humbleness of heart, opts for a description of his spiritual relationship with his Lord and Savior.

**In your own words, give a brief description of “humility”.**

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**How does James’ description of himself demonstrate humility?**

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**If humility is something you are challenged with, what are some practical ways you can change to become humbler?**

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Any question concerning the credit of universal acceptance that James the Lord’s half-brother was, indeed, the author is explained by various indicators. Due to the date of the writing (presumably 45-49 AD), this would rule out James the son of Zebedee as author because of his death through martyrdom in 44 AD. James the son of Alphaeus can also be eliminated from consideration due to his lack of prominence in early church records. Certainly, the writer of James was a distinguished individual, a man of reputation, who was well enough known to simply identify himself only as: James. There is very little noted regarding James, the father of Judas (Luke 6:16), including the knowledge to determine if he was even a follower of Jesus Christ. This leaves many to conclude that James, the Lord’s half-brother, was doubtlessly the one who penned this early epistle.

It is this James, with the earthly family bond to Jesus, who was not only a pillar of the church, but a mediator between the Jews and the Gentiles (Acts 21:18) during a pivotal transitional time in early church history. In fact, historical evidence points to his leadership position in the church, with the held belief that he may have even been an elder (Acts 15). Through research in various New Testaments books of the Bible (Galatians 1:19, Acts 15:13, 12:17) it is evident that James

# Finer Grounds

was a man of great influence. Ancient documents similarly agree that he held a high position of eminence, and for centuries he has often been referred to as “James the Just”. Another bold claim describing James was that he prayed so continuously that his knees became hardened like that of a camel. Oh, to have such a faith and prayer life! It is professed that this confidence is what would ultimately cost James his life, as he refused to deny Jesus and was put to death through the gruesome practice of stoning.

**In your life right now, could it be said that you have a strong prayer life? If not, why not?**

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**What are some practical changes you could make right now to improve your prayer life?**

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**Do you (subconsciously) place more value on your earthly life than your spiritual life? How do you think you would respond if you were asked to deny Christ or face death?**

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While some researchers will place the book of James at a date of 60-62 AD (which still remains consistent with the belief that James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the author because his stoning date is understood to have taken place between 61-68 AD), it is generally believed that the book was assuredly composed before the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The nature of the teaching demonstrates that enough

time needed to be allowed for the persecutions and dispersion of 33 to 41 AD to occur, but the controversy of accepting Gentiles in the church was not a problem until around 48 AD. Thus, an early date for the writing around 44-49 AD is a most prevalent belief.

**Do you believe that locating a written date for a book of the Bible and learning its author is important for Bible study?**

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**Briefly describe why you feel this way?**

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**What are some qualities you see in James, the half-brother of Jesus, that you view as helpful in the study of this book?**

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While there are varying opinions and a few different phrases of writing in the letter to determine who the exact audience of the letter was written for, James was likely penned for a Jewish Christian audience, who were scattered throughout the Roman region (James 1:1). Some hold the belief that it was specifically written to the Jewish Christians in the eastern dispersion, which had come about because of attacks on the unbelieving Jews (Acts 8:1; 12:1). These particular people had looked to James as their teacher and guide.

# Finer Grounds

Classified in the “epistle” category because of the size of its audience, the book of James has been identified as the “Proverbs” and “Amos” of the New Testament. It is in strong unity with the book of Acts (15:13-21, 21:17-25) and Galatians (1:19, 2:9, 10), and also has numerous parallels to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapter 5-7).

**Take time to research these passages and understand the comparisons. Study the parallel passages in the book James to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Do you agree with the conclusion of correlation?**

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There are several key themes throughout the book of James including:

- Treatment of others
- Wisdom
- Wealth/Worldliness
- Sin/Lust
- Faith/Works
- Obedience
- Patience
- The Tongue
- Relationships
- Future
- Prayer

While many believe these are just isolated pieces of good advice, it has been stated, “James is far from a random collection of thoughts and sayings, but is a carefully constructed work” (Davids, p. 22). I propose that the themes addressed in the book of James string together like a beautiful strand of pearls, interconnected, and creating a beautiful and completed thought.

There is little doubt that this epistle was written for those undergoing trial through oppression by the rich, fighting and friction to not fail in their responsibilities. It was meant to discourage Christians from returning to the Old Law, to correct misunderstandings and doctrine, and to encourage those experiencing conflict by warning, prompting, and strengthening! It is a practical book with the specific purpose of spurring Christians ahead in their mission. The good news is that the material merits application for all Christians everywhere over the span of time!