

JAMES

- 1)--Probably not written by the "brother" of Jesus. Possibly written before the Council of Jerusalem in 48 since it makes no mention of the Christian Gentiles and circumcision. If so, it was the earliest in the NT. According to Josephus, James was stoned in 62 CE. However, it was written in better Greek than one might expect from James, so it may have been written in the time of Domitian's persecution c 90, and later attributed to James. (Burton Scott Easton: "can hardly be earlier than 80 AD.") /// Luke Timothy Johnson (NIB): Four ways in which James stands out among ancient moral literature:
 - 1) Concern with morals rather than manners
 - 2) Addresses a community rather than a household
 - 3) Egalitarian rather than hierarchical
 - 4) Communitarian rather than individualisticStyle very similar to Paul's. Its Christology is based less on the deeds of Jesus than on his words. Language seems to be derived from his sayings *prior* to their incorporation into the synoptic gospels: 1:5-6, 12: 2:5,3; 4:8,11-12; 5:9,12.
- 2) --Sources. James seems to have been derived from several sources. About one-fifth seems to be a letter -- or at least a document -- from "Jacob" to the 12 tribes of Israel. (In Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew, James and Jacob are the same word.) Arnold Meyer, using the patriarch Jacob's address in Genesis 49 as a basis, identifies 10 of the tribes in the five chapters of James. I.e. 1:2, Isaac as "perfection through trials," Jacob as "joy," 1:3 Rebecca as "steadfastness." etc. (See "side sheet" for the rest.) The other four-fifths of the letter come from a Christian editor who has taken James's letter and added teachings of Jesus, some pre-Christian Jewish sources, Hellenist (secular) writings, and perhaps some of the editor's own thoughts. Then the whole was probably extensively rewritten by the final editor. /// In discussing the adaptation of a pre-Christian Jewish writing into a Christian "sermon," Gordon Poterat quotes Augustine: "That which is called the Christian Religion existed among the Ancients and never did not exist, from the beginning of the Human Race until Christ came in the flesh, at which time the true religion, which already existed, began to be called Christianity."
- 3) 1:6-7 – JB: Troubling: Who among us does **not** have doubts, even about such seminal doctrines as life after death
- 4) 1:10-11 – JB: More troubles: I know many rich men and women who are as likely – or more likely – than I to deserve resurrection and heaven.
- 5) 2:14-26. Martin Luther repudiated this part of the letter of James because he felt it did not follow Paul's doctrine of grace, using particularly vss 14-16. But he also praised it because "it teaches no human doctrine at all and sternly declares the law of God." But this entire polemic is probably not directed at true Paulinism (Gal 2:16, e.g.) but against James' distortion of what Paul taught. Paul's use of justification (faith alone being sufficient to receive grace), was merely the initial act in the spiritual life. To James, justification came during the progress or even at the end of the spiritual life. **Dibelius:** In Judaism, Abraham's **faith** was reckoned to him as a work of righteousness (Gen 15:6). In **James**, Abraham's faith **and** works were reckoned to him as righteousness. In **Paul**, this faith was reckoned to him as righteousness **instead of works**.
- 6) 3:1-12 -- A "fascinating connection between speech and creation." The reader should be recalling Gen 1:26-28 (beasts and birds **tamed** by humans) and Gen 2:19 (humans given speech in order to **name** animals).

- 7) 3:5-6 -- Translation is difficult and disputed. "Idea seems to be that the power of wicked speech can spread evil through everything in human existence." (Johnson)
- 8) 4:4 -- The world as "the totality of evil."
- 9) 4:5-6 -- A difficult passage, translated variously. The problem is that the first quote is not from any extant manuscript. Does the phrase "yearns jealousy" refer to God as its subject, or to the spirit of God made to dwell in humans? Johnson makes two sentences: "Does the scripture speak in vain? Is the spirit of God made to dwell in us for envy?" The New American Bible suggests this translation: "God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us."
- 10) 4:11 -- Perhaps Lev 19:17-18, perhaps God's whole law.
- 11) 4:13-17 -- The form of arrogance shown here is not subtle -- the Greek word used (*alazoneia*) means braggart, boaster, foolish loudmouth.
- 12) 5:8 -- "Strengthen your hearts" refers to human intentionality, that is, "stay focused."
- 13) 5:11b -- Probably the source of the tradition of the "patient Job," not the picture of Job that the dialogues suggest in the book of Job.
- 14) 5:12 -- A close parallel to Matt 5:34ff, the emphasis here in James coming from the Christian editor.
- 15) 5:13-15 -- The "sacrament of extreme unction" in the Catholic Church is based on this verse. "Extreme" in this sense means the "final remission of sins." Protestants use the same verses as a prayer that the sick may become well. This is the only reference to the practice in the entire NT except for Mark 6:13 -- "They anointed with oil many that were sick..." Luke omits this. So this was probably confined to a small -- geographically limited? -- circle.
- 16) 5:19-20 -- Unresolved: is it the sinner or the sinner whose multitude of sins are cancelled? The NSRV however: "...will save the *sinner's* soul from death..."