

We resume our study now looking at the epistle of James, or Jacob, as I would prefer to call it, since that's what it is in the original, and it is meaningful because this is addressed specifically to the twelve tribes. We'll get to that. But our point of interest here is who is the author, and this goes to the authority of the letter, because there are spurious writings. There are apocryphal and pseudepigraphical letters. Pseudepigraphical are those that are given the name of someone famous or prominent, and yet they weren't actually written by that individual. The Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, and others are examples of the latter. But it is important for us to ascertain if the half-brother of the Lord did not write the letter.

Actually, if he did write the letter, I would be suspicious of its inspiration and authority, because everything I know of James, the half-brother of the Lord, elsewhere in the New Testament is negative. Paul details how he threw Peter off stride. Luke details how he threw the early church in general, and Paul in particular, off stride. Men from James caused trouble and spark legalism. There are early church traditions that indicate that James, the half-brother, was actually having difficulty letting go of the law of Moses. And his words in Acts chapter 15 are something of an outlier, because elsewhere he seems to be with the Pharisees who said, you know, these people really need to be keeping the law. So I don't believe the half-brother Jacob, James, wrote this letter.

Here is who I think wrote it. Despite the two primary considerations to the contrary, I believe James, the brother of John and the son of Zebedee, one of the two sons of thunder, wrote this letter. Here is why. You can do a very interesting comparison, and I wish I had time to cover it. I did it for myself, looking at the similarities between the Gospel of John and the epistles of John. We know that John wrote the Gospel of John, and unlike some liberal scholars, we believe that John wrote all three of the epistles that bear his name in the New Testament. And without going into detail, you can look this up for yourself, but themes of light and darkness, of walking, the overarching thematic emphasis in both the Gospel, "These are written that you might believe," and the role of faith in the life of a believer is emphasized in the epistles as well. So we can see that there is a correspondence between the John of the Gospel of John, the beloved disciple, and the John who wrote the epistles and the Revelation.

There is a difficulty when it comes to James. His brother James is the older brother. We know this because of the order in which they are always listed in the Gospels: James and John, the sons of Zebedee. John is the younger brother; James is the older brother. And yet we have copious testimony of John's writing style, his simple but elegant Greek that is deep beyond what you would expect from the grammar and syntax. We don't have anything to compare the epistle of James to, to see how does it comport with the disciple James.

However, think about what the Lord Jesus did on those occasions where he did not take all of the disciples with him. You think of the upper room where the young girl is raised. "She is not dead, but sleeping." Talitha kumi. And who is present to witness that? Peter, who wrote 1st and 2nd Peter, and whose reminiscences were recorded by John Mark for the Gospel of Mark. So we have an abundance of testimony from Peter. John gives us his Gospel, the three epistles, and the Revelation. James is the third member that is there on the Mount of Transfiguration, that is there in the upper room, that accompanies the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and on other occasions. He is one of those three, and yet if you peruse the Gospels, there is not a single independent set of words spoken by James. Not in Matthew, not in Mark, not in Luke, not in John, not in Acts. He's never quoted independently.

There are two references to him speaking, and only two, and you can look these up in the Gospels. One is when the question is posed to the Lord Jesus, in one account by their mother, "Grant that James and John may sit at your right hand and at your left in the kingdom." In another account, it is the brothers who pose this question. But it apparently is the three of them, the mother and James and John, say, "Grant that we may sit." "Are you able to be baptized with the baptism I have experienced?" Jesus says. "Can you drink the cup that I'm going to drink?" And they say, "Lord, we are able." This is James and John speaking together. That's one occasion.

The only other occasion is when there are disruptive people following Jesus and his disciples, and they say, "Let us call down fire from heaven on these individuals." And that's James and John speaking together. So, "Grant that we may sit," and, "We are able," in one occasion, and, "Let's call down fire," is the other. Other than that, we have nothing recorded of James speaking.

So if, as I suggest, he is the author of our epistle, how would we know? Well, here is my argument. Here is my case. Unlike the half-brother of the Lord, James the son of Zebedee, James was present for the Lord Jesus' teaching on all of the occasions that John and Peter were, and was privy to those special occasions where only

those three were included. As a result, you would expect that if James is that disciple, he would reflect the words and the teaching of the Lord Jesus that is recorded in the Gospels. So let's take a look.

Consider the Sermon on the Mount. This is number one. There are 18 of these. I have 18 reasons why I think James, the son of Zebedee, wrote this epistle of James. Number one, there is the theme, there is the concept of joy in trial, joy in difficult circumstance. The Lord Jesus addresses this in Matthew chapter 5, verses 11 and 12: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you for my name's sake. Rejoice and be glad." That's Matthew 5:11 and 12. James, in the very next verse, when we proceed from verse 1 to verse 2, says, "Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds." That's number one.

Number two, the Lord Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7, verses 24 through 27, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them—to hear and to do. Most of you will recall that this is one of the primary themes of the entire epistle of James, is be doers of the word and not hearers only, in James 1:22. The Lord Jesus said, "You've got to hear my words and do them. You're like the man who builds his house on the rock," and so on. That's in Matthew chapter 7, verses 24 through 27, paralleled in James chapter 1, verse 22.

Number three, the Lord Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5, verse 10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake," Matthew chapter 5, verse 10. James says in chapter 1, verse 12, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial."

Number four, the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5:22, "Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment." James says in chapter 1, verse 20, "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." Anger yields judgment, not righteousness, found in Matthew 5:22 and in James 1:20.

Fifth, the Lord Jesus says in Matthew chapter 25, verse 40, the criteria for judgment of the sheep and the goats is, "What did you do for the least of these my brethren? Do it to them; you have done it for me." James chapter 1, verse 27: "Religion that is pure is to visit orphans and widows in their affliction." Care for the poor, concern for the poor. Notice the James of the Jerusalem Church believes that pure and undefiled religion is to follow certain strictures in the law of Moses, avoid idolatry and fornication, don't eat things that have blood or have been strangled. Far different. This James says religion that is pure and undefiled is to visit widows and orphans in their affliction. Look out for the poor.

Just as Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5, verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The last will be first, Matthew chapter 20, verse 16. James says in chapter 2, verses 1 through 4, and again in verse 9, "Show no partiality. If you show partiality, you commit sin." Jesus said, "The last will be first, first will be last." Don't express partiality. So this notion that your economic status doesn't determine your spiritual status is found in both.

Next, Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom, but the one who does the will of my Father." It isn't what you say; it's what you do. James says in chapter 2, verse 17, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." You can claim faith, you can state faith, you can use all kinds of holy and religious language, but if it doesn't work itself out, it's dead.

The Lord Jesus next said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," Matthew chapter 12, verses 34 through 37. It isn't what goes into your mouth; it's what comes out of your mouth. James chapter 3, verse 8: "No human being can tame the tongue." And the addressing of the difficulty of what we say and how harmful it can be is addressed by both the Lord Jesus in Matthew 12:34 through 37 and James chapter 3, verse 8 and its context.

The Lord Jesus said next, "Blessed are the peacemakers." This again is in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, verse 9. James chapter 3, verse 18: "A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Peacemaking found in both.

Matthew chapter 6, verse 19, again right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount: "Woe to you who are rich. Do not store up for yourself treasure on earth." You find this also in Luke chapter 6, verse 24. Matthew 6, verse 19: woe to the rich, do not store up treasures on earth. James says in chapter 5, verses 1 through 6, "Come now, you rich, weep and howl." You can't put your hope in riches, warning against the dangers of wealth being a distraction.

The Lord Jesus next, Matthew chapter 5, verse 34 through 37: “Do not swear at all. Let what you say be simply yes or no. Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay. Don't swear.” James chapter 5, verse 12: “Do not swear, but let your yes be yes and your no be no.” Integrity in our speech.

Next, the subject of patience and endurance. The Lord Jesus says in Luke 21:19, “By your endurance you will gain your lives.” By endurance, you will lay claim to life. James chapter 5, verses 7 and 8: “Be patient until the coming of the Lord.” Patience, endurance.

Next, Matthew 23:12: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” James 4:6—you've memorized this—“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Pride goeth before a fall, a haughty spirit before destruction. “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled,” Matthew 23:12. “God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble,” James 4:6.

Next, Matthew 7, verse 1: “Judge not, lest ye be judged.” James 4:11: “Do not speak evil against one another.” The Lord Jesus said next in Luke 22:42, praying to his Father, “Not my will, but thine be done.” James 4:15: “We should say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will do this, we will live, we will do that.’” We shouldn't say confidently, “Tomorrow we will do this or that.” If the Lord wills, we live in accordance with the Lord's will, just as the Lord Jesus in Luke 22:42.

Next, Matthew 20, verse 26: “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” James 3:16: “Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder.” The Lord Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5, verse 7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” James 2:13: “Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.” Over and over again, you see these themes.

The last one I'll give you here, there are so many, in Mark 11, verse 24, the Lord Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it.” James says in verse 6 of chapter 1, one who lacks wisdom, let him ask the Lord. Let him ask in faith, doubting nothing. Ask in faith. Believe that you have received, the Lord Jesus says in Mark 11:24.

I would submit that the author of the epistle of James has paid close attention over a period of months and even years to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and didn't get it secondhand or thirdhand as his half-brother would have to have done after the resurrection. This is someone who knows and who has reformulated, who has digested and gotten the essence and the application from these teaching moments that he experienced during the incarnation of the Lord Jesus.

There is a contrast between the James of Acts, of the Jerusalem Church, and what is expressed in the epistle of James. For example, the James in Acts, in Acts chapter 15, verses 19 through 21, emphasizes that the law of Moses is still a factor. You've got to pay attention to the law of Moses. James the epistle focuses on practical ethics, on the application of wisdom. He does not appeal to the law of Moses, and this is a difference.

In Acts, James of the Jerusalem Church exercises leadership over the group and basically states a final decision on behalf of that entire community. He doesn't appear to have consulted or to have prayed or to have garnered further opinions. He listens to the case presented by the Pharisees, he listens to Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, and then he adjudicates, and that's it. He writes the letter that is going to be sent out and says, “It seemed good to us. Here's your rules.”

In the epistle of James, you have the author speaking as a moral teacher, not to Jews in Jerusalem, but to the twelve tribes who are scattered. And so he's not speaking authoritatively, “Listen, and we're authoritatively...” And we're going to see this as we continue in verse 1. The very next word is a sharp contrast. He doesn't say, “James, brother of the Lord, leader of the Jerusalem Church,” because he's not that James. He says, “James, a slave.” Entirely different approach, entirely different ground for authority, as we will see coming up.

The tone and style: the James of Acts and the Jerusalem Church is a persuader. He argues and gets his way with a soft tone, with persuasive words, making these arguments in a way that seems amenable. He's sort of a facilitator of compromise and of consensus. He tries to get everyone to agree and to go along. The James in this letter under our gaze is direct. He is personal. He is abrupt. In many cases, he uses the imperative mood frequently, and he speaks with authority, with apostolic authority, in my view.

Interestingly, there is almost no appeal to the Lord Jesus in the words of Jerusalem James in Acts, very minimal allusion even to the Lord Jesus. As you have seen, I've given you 18 examples of reformulations of Jesus' direct

teaching in this epistle. And as John does in his epistles, this is wisdom that came from the source of the Lord Jesus Christ and then is presented and communicated in a way that reflects both authority and a desire to communicate truth that will be beneficial in the hands of the Holy Spirit for believers to live by.

So there are additional reasons why I believe James, the other son of thunder, is the author. I believe that this letter was written early, before his execution in Acts chapter 12, verse 2. I think that his presence as one of the three—all the other disciples understood that it was Peter and John and James who were the leaders of the group—and it would be something of an astonishment for the Lord Jesus to have plowed into the souls of all three of those men these advanced classes and then have not a single word from James. It seems to me strange that James's voice would be entirely silenced after the Lord Jesus so thoroughly equipped and prepared him for testimony.

You can also do a comparison. That's one reason I don't think the Lord Jesus would have done that preparation and then James dies early and has no legacy, no teaching ministry whatsoever. I think the epistle of James, balancing as it does the tension of faith and works, is essential.

Secondly, I think that James and John as brothers were very different in personality. I think John, the younger brother, sees the spiritual and the eternal side, as you see reflected in the first chapter of his Gospel and as you see throughout his letters and into the visions he experiences on Patmos toward the end of his life, recorded in the Revelation. And God uses that personality and that perspective and that set of structures in the soul for John to present, for example, in the Gospel of John: there are so many signs, but he selects seven. "These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, is the Messiah, and that believing you might have life through his name."

Then you have James, who is the older brother, and in this epistle he says, "It's wonderful that you have faith, but you've got to live that faith out. It is not enough to assent. It is not enough to affirm. It is not enough to agree. If you have genuine faith, it is going to be practical, it is going to work itself out and be visible." And the two of them make a wonderful team. You have the spiritual and the eternal and the large perspective presented by John. You have the practical and the rubber-meeting-the-road and the let's-get-it-done side from James, which they, I believe, as you know, are going to do again.

I believe that they are the two witnesses of Revelation, and their testimony is once again going to run the gamut, span the spectrum, of truth that is to be believed for eternal life and for salvation, and how that truth is to be lived out—what pure and undefiled religion means when it is visible and practiced in its outworking, in the circumstances, in conduct, in speech, in attitude, in concern for widows and orphans and the poor, for those who are wayward, and so on.

So I think that James and John, the sons of thunder, who wanted to call down fire from heaven on those who were causing problems, will be the ones who do call down fire from heaven on those who oppose them in the Revelation. And I think they both speak in our New Testament.

I think James wrote this early. I think he was concerned that there be meaningful expression of righteousness, practical righteousness, among Christians who were busy trying to have all things in common, and the distribution to widows and orphans that you find in the earliest days of the Jerusalem Church. Peter, James, and John are in Jerusalem. James himself is aware of these early difficulties and that there needs to be practical application to care for those who are in need, so that the disciples slash apostles can devote themselves to the teaching of the Word of God and prayer. And James is one of those, and he goes through that.

And I think he had ample time. It is thought that he was executed somewhere in the vicinity of A.D. 44, which is, by the traditional account, 11 years after 33 A.D. If the crucifixion of the Lord was as early as 27, then he's got 17 years to have written this letter. He is the first martyr of the apostolic group, but he had ample time to express, to reformulate, and to teach what he learned under the tutelage of the Lord Jesus at firsthand.

This is going to help us understand this letter and also to not have to worry about the rather negative impression you get of Jerusalem James and his misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and poor leadership in Jerusalem that slows down the apostles and trips them up, slows down understanding amongst the Gentiles, which is the field for Paul. If Jerusalem James understood that Paul is the apostle commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to go to the Gentiles, then he needs speak no word and send no letters trying to mollify the Jews in Jerusalem who are legalistic and hung up on the law of Moses. But that's what he does, and I don't believe that God somehow engineered an inspired letter from that James.

I do think James, the son of Zebedee, was well qualified to provide a balance and another perspective from that of his brother John. He's the older brother. He's the get-it-done guy. He's the practical application man.

And as we're going to see, the primary objection to his authorship by those who want to believe it's Jerusalem James is that he doesn't claim apostolic authority at the beginning of the letter. That is going to be the subject of our study next time, because are we not all servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ? Why does James lead with this in verse 1 and not say, "James, an apostle"? Why would, if it was written by Jerusalem James, why does it not say, "James, brother to the Lord," or "James, bishop of the Jerusalem Church," or some other claim to authority? It is really important to understand how this letter is framed as it is addressed to its recipients, because it tells us something about how we are to look at ourselves and live our lives.

And this word is not servant. This word is not deacon or elder or the word that is translated bishop. The word *doulos* here is slave in the slavery sense. This is a bondsman. Why would you introduce yourself as bondsman rather than as apostle or as brother or as some other element? You find the apostle Paul does this in two letters, the letter to Philippians and the letter to Philemon. Paul doesn't claim his apostolic authority as he does in Romans and most of his other letters, but in two of them he doesn't. And it is significant that he doesn't say, "Paul, an apostle." He says, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ." There are reasons for this that we'll see next time, but I think if anything, it is evidence that John's brother James did write this letter because he does not claim apostolic authority.

In conclusion, we have a wonderful letter ahead of us. It is inspired. It is profoundly practical. And those of us who have learned enough of the Word of God to trust it, to believe it, to want to apply it in our lives, to see how that application is accomplished—what should our attitude be? What should our priorities be? What should our goals and values be? This letter details them and is such a wonderful complement, in my mind, to the epistles of John and indeed the Gospel of John in that light. So it's going to be a fun study. It is a fruitful study, and it is one that I think we will enjoy in the weeks ahead.

Having introduced it, we'll close here in a word of prayer and continue next week. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the confidence we can have that you have spoken to us via your Holy Spirit through these human authors, the words that are life and are power and are guidance for us. We pray that as we reflect on this letter, that God the Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts, that we can see its pertinence and application in our own conduct, our speech, our actions, our thoughts, our attitudes, and that in so doing we can be fit representatives of the Lord Jesus, to represent him on this earth until the day of his return. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen