

## Lesson One — The Historical Setting

*Day One — A Man Named James*

*Day Two — The Historical Setting, Acts 1-3*

*Day Three — The Historical Setting, Acts 4-6*

*Day Four — The Historical Setting, Acts 7-9*

*Day Five — The Historical Setting, Acts 10-12*

Before we begin to read the Book of James, it will be good to put James into a historical setting. Therefore, this week we will be studying various passages in the New Testament in order to learn the setting of this epistle as well as who wrote it. To do this we will be reading several chapters in the Book of Acts, along with a few other New Testament passages.

**Please remember to pray for insight.** The Holy Spirit must become your teacher. Discovering Biblical truths is a very exciting adventure, and can only be accomplished through Divine intervention as you study diligently. During your study time, be sure you *ask, seek, and knock* at the door of the Throne Room. (Do you remember the emphasis in Lesson One of Understanding the Bible — Biblical Survey? We learned how important it is that we have seeking and open hearts.) The purpose of our study is to diligently study God's Word to show ourselves approved, workmen who do not need to be ashamed, because we have handled the Word of truth correctly (II Tim. 2:15).

### Day One — A Man Named James

Let's see who wrote this epistle?

**James 1**

**1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.**

According to the opening verse in the epistle, who was James?

To whom did he write?

As stated in the opening verse, a man named James wrote the letter to a scattered and persecuted people. It is believed that James was the first epistle written, exactly **prior** to, or at least simultaneous with, the time Gentiles were becoming believers through Paul's first journey.

There were several men called James in the New Testament. The three most noted were: James, the brother of John and son of Zebedee; James, the son of Alphaeus; and James, the son of Mary (and Joseph), the half brother of Jesus. The passages which follow describe each of these men. As you read through these verses circle the description of the men named James. We'll begin with verses which have to do with the two disciples of Christ — James, the brother of John, and James, the son of Alphaeus:

**Matthew 4**

**21 And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him.**

**Matthew 10**

**2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;**

**Mark 3**

**17 and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder"); 18 and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot;**

**Luke 5**

**10 and so also James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men."**

**Matthew 17**

**1 And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves.**

**Mark 13**

**3 And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately**

**Luke 8**

**51 And when He had come to the house, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother.**

**Luke 9**

**28 And some eight days after these sayings, it came about that He took along Peter and John and James, and went up to the mountain to pray.**

**Mark 14 (in the Garden of Gethsamenee...)**

**33 And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled.**

Now we come to a passage which names the other disciple named James. This disciple is only mentioned in the gospels when all the disciples are named, and in this passage in Acts.

**Acts 1** (in the upper room after Christ's ascension, just prior to Pentecost)

**13 And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.**

From what you have read in these passages, which James is which? Describe the differences between these two men named James.

One of these two men died as a martyr shortly after the ascension of Christ. Acts chapter twelve records the simple fact:

**Acts 12** (We'll look at this last verse in context later this week.)

**2 And he [Herod] had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.**

Which James was an early martyr in the Church?

Now, let's deal with another man named James — the son of Mary (and Joseph), the half-brother of Jesus:

**Matthew 13**

**55 "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"**

**Matthew 27**

**55 And many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, 56 among whom was Mary Magdalene, along with Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.**

These two previous verses names the half brothers of Jesus. List their names:

Now read what Scripture says about James and his brothers, the half brothers of Jesus:

**John 7**

**5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him.**

That was before the death and resurrection of Christ. But upon His resurrection, He appeared to James:

Understanding James —  
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**1 Corinthians 15** (Paul writes...)

**4** and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, **5** and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. **6** After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; **7** then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles

**Acts 1** (...in the upper room after Christ's ascension...)

**13** And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. **14** These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Notice that at this point all three James were present — John's brother, James; James, the son of Alphaeus; and Jesus' brothers, which would include James.

**Galatians 1** (Paul wrote the Epistle of Galatians *after* James, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, had been martyred [Acts 12:2].)

**18** Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. **19** But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

**Galatians 2**

**7** But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised **8** (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), **9** and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

How does Paul refer to James in v. 9?

**Jude 1**

**1** Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ:

From these passages, what did you find out about this particular man named James, the brother of Jesus?

See you tomorrow.

## Day Two — The Historical Setting, Acts 1-3

Yesterday, we read about three men who are mentioned in Scripture with the name of James. James, the brother of John and son of Zebedee; James, son of Alphaeus (the other disciple); and James the half brother of Jesus. Since James, the son of Alphaeus (the other disciple), is not mentioned in Scripture except for being listed among the Twelve, it is believed by most theologians that it is likely he would *not have been* the author of the epistle bearing the name James. Most theologians believe that either James, the brother of John, or James, the half brother of Jesus, would have to be considered as the one who authored the epistle.

For the next few days we are going to be reading several chapters in the Book of Acts. This will give us the historical setting of the early church. It will also tell us of the events leading up the writing of James, and will reveal the probability of which man named James wrote the epistle bearing the name.

Today let's begin reading Acts chapters one through three. After reading the chapter write out the main events in each chapter. Answer the questions who, what, when, where and how as the text permits.

### **Acts 1**

### **Acts 2**

### **Acts 3**

Relate Acts 2:34-35 to 3:19-21. What idea is being mentioned in both passages?

Do you see anything relating to the Kingdom in these chapters? If so, what?

## Day Three — The Historical Setting, Acts 4-6

Continue reading in the Book of Acts. Remember we are reading these chapters in Acts in order to establish the historical setting for the writing of the letter from James. Understanding the setting helps you to understand the **purpose** of the letter.

### **Acts 4**

Describe the hearts of the rulers and elders and the Sadducees in Acts 4:13-17.

What did the persecution cause the disciples to do (Acts 4:23-31)?

### **Acts 5**

What is impressing you as you read through these chapters in Acts?

Particularly note Acts 5:41. Describe the heart of these disciples:

## **Acts 6**

## **Day Four — The Historical Setting, Acts 7-9**

Continue as your were doing yesterday.

## **Acts 7**

## **Acts 8**

Make particular note of what is taking place in the church at Jerusalem (see Acts 8:1-3).

Relate Acts 8:4 with Acts 1:8. Where did Philip go in Acts 8:5?

## **Acts 9**

## **Day Five — The Historical Setting, Acts 10-12**

Continue as before.

## **Acts 10**

## **Acts 11**



**Acts 12** (Back at Jerusalem, note which James was martyred.)

Then Acts chapter thirteen begins to focus on the work of Paul *outside* from Jerusalem.

Think of the effect the martyrdom of John's brother, James, had on the apostles. Reflect on how the political conditions were spiraling down for this small sect of believers in Jerusalem.

Did you see that Peter referred to James, the half brother of Jesus, in Acts 12:17. This probably indicates that James has become a leader in the church at Jerusalem.

At the end of chapter twelve, Paul and Barnabas leave Jerusalem to go to Antioch. Antioch then became Paul's headquarters and it was from there that Paul began his first journey.

Which man named James do you believe wrote the epistle? Why do you believe this?

It is generally believed that the letter of James was written between Acts chapters thirteen and fifteen, and that it was James, the half brother of Jesus, who wrote this letter some time *after* James, the brother of John, had martyred, but *prior to* the Council at Jerusalem which took place in Acts chapter fifteen. Several different commentaries have noted this. (FYI — Acts 15:30 begins Paul's second journey.)

Before we end our study today, please look at the opening verse of James and note again to whom James addressed his letter. We'll talk more about that in the lecture.

**James 1**

**1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.**

See you next week.

