**An Introduction to James**

**What do others say about James?**

* Luther: a epistle of straw because it has nothing of the gospel in it
* Church tradition: it remains a canonical text
* Scholars: it depicts a bridge from one kind of church to another (pre -Pauline to a post-Pauline church; from Jewish to Gentile Christianity
* For us: it provides lots of quotations, but often out of context.

Perhaps a very Yorkshire text – direct and to the point, business like

A very Jewish text in its orientation and interests ( correct behaviour)
Can seem quite negative, offering one point of view only

Contains many images: billowing sea, withered flower face in the mirror etc. Images can help to connect with the text

**Who was James?**

*‘James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.’ (James 1:1)*

* James: common name. (In Acts 1: 13 there are many James: James, James - son of Alphaeus, and Judas, son of James etc.)
* Possibly one of 2 people:
1. James, son of Zebedee and John’s brother – part of inner circle with Peter and John. Killed by Herod Agrippa in 44AD (Acts 12: 2) therefore unlikely.
2. James, the brother of Jesus (James the Just)
(Matthew 13: 55, Mark 6: 3, Galatians 1: 18-19, 1 Corinthians 15: 7)
James didn’t seem to become a Christian during Jesus’ ministry
He is part of family group who thinks Jesus is mad
James comes to the fore only in Acts
Might be a dynastic rather than charismatic leadership.
He becomes much honoured: Paul describes him as on of the three pillars of the Church (Gal 2: 9).
* Possibly a pseudonymous writer who wished to give the epistle apostolic authority.

**When was James written?**

* Early period of Church’s life (before AD62, if James is Jesus brother. Possibly as early as mid 40s)

*‘ The Letter of James also, according to the majority of scholars who have carefully worked through its text in the past two centuries, is among the earliest of New Testament compositions. It contains no reference to the events in Jesus' life, but it bears striking testimony to Jesus' words. Jesus' sayings are embedded in James' exhortations in a form that is clearly not dependent on the written Gospels’*

Luke Timothy Johnson

**Audience**

* Jewish (Christian): synagogue (2:2), monotheistic (2:19), Torah observant
* Exiled, poor? (James 5: 1-11)
* Oppressed legally by wealthy (James 2: 4-6)

 (Wealthy people don’t get a good press here!)

**Structure**

* Doesn’t really have one, rather it has a number of themes

 *‘Spaghetti not lasagne’*

However, the bible study guide offers a structure to help lead 4 studies

* James 1 Doers of the word
* James 2 Faith and works
* James 4- 4: 12 Speech and Wisdom
* James 4: 13-5: 20 Living for the Lord

*Two choices?*

* Loyalty to God and his word (1: 21-25, 2: 14)
* Following wisdom from above (3: 16)
* Displaying pure, undefiled religion (1:27)
*Or*
* Inconsistent lifestyle, worldly values (3: 15)
* Deceiving themselves about faith (1: 22)
* Adulterous towards God himself (4: 4)

**James’ understanding of God**

* God’s oneness – monotheistic, Jewish perspective
* A personal God (Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah)
* A God on his way, at the door

**Faith in action**

* Faith and/or works: a social gospel in action
* Pure religion: caring for widows and orphans and keeping away from worldly influence (1: 26)
* Obedience to God and his royal word - *stoop over not just read* (2: 8)
* Doing religion, not simply believing religion (2: 14)

*James 2: 26*

* Body without breath = dead
* Body (faith) and Breath (works) = Life (James 2: 26)
* Hebrew concept of ‘nephesh’4

**A social liturgy**

* Doing God by doing good: walk the walk and pray it also
* *Doing good: a future for Christianity in the 21st Century*, by Nick Spencer (Theos, 2016)
Downloadable from [www.theosthinktank.co.uk](http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk)

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* http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2468931/bible-month-magazine-1216.pdf