

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Introductory observations:

This is the first of Seven General Epistles, sometimes referred to as the Catholic Epistles because they were not addressed to any particular individual or church (like Paul's epistles were), but are more general in their application to the whole church. We know that James wrote to Jewish believers, members of all "twelve tribes," but they were Jewish believers who had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. So it was not to Jews in any one, particular place. I prefer to call these epistles, General Epistles, because the word Catholic can be interpreted as meaning the Roman Catholic church, of the Greek Orthodox Church. But such was not the case. They were written to Jewish believers of what has been called, The Dispersion. These General Epistles are:

- 1) James.
- 2) 1 Peter.
- 3) 2 Peter.
- 4) 1 John.
- 5) 2 John.
- 6) 3 John.
- 7) Jude.

The first and the last of these seven as they appear in our Bibles, were half-brothers of our Lord. The other five were written, as we all know, by the Apostles Peter and John.

Consistent with the title, General Epistles, the Epistle of James is a family epistle. God is addressed in 1:17 as "the Father of lights," and as "Father" in 1:27 and in 3:9. But James is also careful to make sure in both of these latter verses that we understand that our Father is God. The people to whom the epistle was addressed in a general way are called "brethren," or *brothers*, fifteen times throughout the epistle. Four times James called his readers "brethren" (4:11; 5:7, 9, 19). Eight times he called them "my brethren" (1:2; 2:1, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 5:10, 12) And three times, "my beloved brethren" (1:16, 19; 2:5). And so James was addressing the Jewish members of the body of Christ as a fellow-member with them of the family of God. There is doctrine, or teaching, in the epistle, and a lot of it, but it is not basically what we would call a doctrinal epistle, like, for example, Romans. Its emphasis is basically practical. And it seems that the message of James in this epistle was focused upon the twenty-second verse of chapter 1: "But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

It is interesting to note some of the things that are not included in this epistle. James does not say anything about himself of a biographical nature except for the fact in 3:1 that he was a teacher. He sends no personal message to any individual. Although James deals with the Gospel, yet he never used the word *Gospel*. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in this epistle. However there can be no doubt but that the Holy Spirit led James to write every word that we have in this epistle. There is no mention of the birth, sufferings, death, or resurrection of the Lord, although twice he mentions the coming of the Lord. There is no evidence in this epistle that the Jews to whom James was writing had any contact with Gentile believers. But, with all of the details that we do not find in this epistle, there is much to occupy our time and much that will be very profitable to us as Gentile believers.

And so it appears from the contents of the epistle that this epistle must have been written early in the history of the church, probably in the late 40's A.D. If so it could well be the first book of the NT that was written.

Discuss the outline.

The Exposition of James - Chapter 1