

## **James**

Who is James? The author identifies himself as “James” (1:1). For centuries, Christian tradition took it for granted that the author was James, the brother of Jesus. According to Acts and Paul, James was the “leader” or “head” of the Christian community in Jerusalem. He was executed in the early 60s. Majority of mainstream scholars do not think the author was the brother of Jesus. The author does not say so, but describes himself simply as “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Moreover, his use of Greek language and grammar is quite sophisticated –not impossible for a brother of Jesus from the peasant class whose native language was Aramaic, but at least somewhat unlikely. It is likely that the author knew the teachings of Jesus from the oral tradition or from Q and not from Matthew or Luke. The letter was not sent to a particular Christ-community as the letters of Paul were. Rather, it was written to the Jewish people in diaspora. <sup>1</sup>

Its focus is primarily practical, combining wisdom about how to live and prophetic indictment of how people commonly do live. Half of James’ 108 verses are imperatives. The author emphasizes the importance of doing and acting. Two of the best-known passages are: “*Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers ...doers who act*”(1:22-25) and “Faith without works is dead” (2:14-26). His examples of “works” are concretely compassionate: clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, and supplying their bodily needs. <sup>2</sup>

James speaks of people who are double-minded (1:8; 4:8). People have a divided commitment and thus lack grounding and stability. James contrasts loyalty to God with “friendship with the world” (4:1-10), which is enmity with God. He indicts the humanity created world of covetousness and violence. James includes harsh indictments of “the rich” and their position in the world. <sup>3</sup>

The message of James has been called “scandalous.” Most American Christians will never hear these passages read or preached in church. James echoes more sayings of Jesus than any document in the New Testament other than the gospels themselves. Its fiery passion reflects the passion of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word* (N.Y.: HarperCollins Publisher, 2012), 193.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word* (N.Y.: HarperCollins Publisher, 2012), 194.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word* (N.Y.: HarperCollins Publisher, 2012), 194.