

James – The Brother of the Lord?

Study Week 2012



Dear Leaders and Helpers,

The following is a brief guide designed to help you **investigate the identity of James**, the author of the letter we are considering together. As you will know from the workbook, we have put forward the suggestion that this was in fact James the brother of the Lord. It is worthwhile remembering that this is *only* a suggestion as at the end of the day it cannot be conclusively proved. As such, it is recommended that for those of you who are presenting Discussion Group #1 on the background, you ensure this is communicated to your group.

Let us very briefly re-cap the content from the workbook to assist you with the above:

1. Why is it important?

Strictly speaking, at the end of the day **it is not a major issue** as to who exactly wrote the letter, as we are not specifically told.

However, as with all the other letters in the New Testament, knowing the author and the context in which a letter is written goes a long way in **assisting our understanding of the lessons, and giving power to the message.**

2. So why the Lord's brother?

There are many reasons why James the Lord's brother seems to be the same person who wrote this letter, but for ease's sake we are going to consider just a handful here. Further information can be found in your workbook, on the website, or in the book "The Epistle of James" by Neville Smart. Consider the following:

- The Lord had a brother named James (**Matt 13:55**) who was named first amongst his brethren. As such, he was one of them who confronted Christ in **John 7:2-5** and told the Lord that he ought to stop saying he was the Christ and actually openly *do* something about it. We are told in this passage and others (**Psa 69:8-9**) that he did not believe in Jesus.
- Crucially, in **Luke 8:19-21** the mother and brethren of Christ come to see him whilst he is preaching. He declines to see them, stating instead "*my mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it*". This idea will form the centre of the letter of James to the believers: "*be ye **doers of the word and not hearers only***" (**James 1:22**). James would have heard these words and clearly never forgot them.

- James and his brethren were most likely not present at the crucifixion of Jesus (**John 19:25-27**). Whilst we are not directly told this, if indeed they were present, Jesus would not have had to use his dying breath to tell John to look after his mother – surely this would have been the responsibility of his brethren, of whom James was probably the eldest.
- The Lord appeared to a man called James in **1 Cor 15:7**. Shortly after this, a man named James begins appearing in Acts and Galatians in a position of prominence and leadership. The language of this James’ speech in **Acts 15** and the language of the letter of James seem to be similar, as the workbook illustrates.
- There are a number of references throughout the letter of James to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, which implies the author of the letter was present at this time. Early in Christ’s ministry his brethren followed him (**John 2:12**). It is likely James was present also and remembered these words.
- The author of the letter refers constantly to “*brethren*” (13 times). James knew what it was to be an unbelieving brother of Christ. He now terms himself “*a servant*” (James 1:1).

3. Who else could it be?

There are three other men named James in the New Testament:

James the son of Zebedee (**Matthew 4:21**)

James the son of Alphaeus (**Matthew 10:3**)

James the less (**Mark 15:40**)

Of these three, James the son of Zebedee was executed by Herod in **Acts 12:2**. Of the other two, it is possible one of them wrote the letter. **There is no clear evidence or context to indicate this is the case.**

4. Closing thoughts and lessons for us

In summary, there is no black-and-white answer as to who wrote this letter and we should only provide the above as a possibility. However, when all four James’ are put side by side, one seems to have strong evidence to be the author. Furthermore, there is much to be learned from the story of a brother who once rejected the Lord, was visited after the resurrection, converted and then became a leader amongst the early ecclesia and wrote a letter inspiring the believers scattered abroad.

If you have any remaining questions, please do not hesitate to contact Dave or Des.

Love in the Lord,
Des