

Biblical criticism paper on the book of james religion essay



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As Dr. once Bob Said, in his video commentaries “ this was Soren Kierkegaard’s favorite book in the New Testament because it emphasizes practical, daily Christianity. This was Martin Luther’s least favorite book in the New Testament because it seems to contradict Paul’s “ justification by faith” (http://freebiblecommentary.org/video_nt.htm) emphasis in Romans and Galatians (i. e., James 2: 14-26). This is a very different genre from other NT books very much like a new covenant book of Proverbs (i. e., wisdom literature) spoken by a fiery prophet written early after Jesus’ death and still very Jewish and practical (Douglas, p. 36).

Authorship

The author identifies himself in the opening verse as “ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1: 1). From the middle of the third century, patristic authors cited the Epistle as written by James the Just, a relation of Jesus and first Bishop of Jerusalem Not numbered among the Twelve Apostles, unless he is identified as James the Less, James was nonetheless a very important figure: Paul described him as “ the brother of the Lord” in Galatians 1: 19 and as one of the three “ pillars of the Church” in 2: 9. He is traditionally considered the first of the Seventy Disciples. John Calvin and others suggested that the author was the “ Apostle James, son of Alphaeus, who was often identified with James the Just. If written by James the Just, the place and time of the writing of the epistle would be Jerusalem, where James resided before his martyrdom in 62AD” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_of_James#cite_note-2).

Authorship has also occasionally been attributed to the apostle James the Great, brother of John the Evangelist and son of Zebedee. The letter does <https://assignbuster.com/biblical-criticism-paper-on-the-book-of-james-religion-essay/>

mention persecutions in the present tense (2: 6), and this is consistent with the persecution in Jerusalem during which James the Great was martyred (Acts 12: 1). However, some challenge the early date on the basis of some of the letter's content, which they interpret to be a clarification of St. Paul's teachings on justification found in his Epistle to the Romans, then if written by James the Great, the location would have also been Jerusalem, sometime before 45AD. The Protestant reformer Martin Luther denied it was the work of an apostle and termed it an " epistle of straw," not least because of the conflict he thought it raised with Paul on the doctrine of justification.

Date

Here there are two major theories. An attempt to apply the New Covenant specifically to first century Jewish Christians living in pagan settings. Some believe it was wealthy Jews persecuting Christian Jews. It is also possible that the early Christians were subject to anti-Semitic pagan abuse. It was obviously a time of physical need and persecution (cf. 1: 2-4, 12; 2: 6-7; 5: 4-11, 13-14). But some say, if James, the brother of the Lord, wrote the letter, as it is being argued, then it must be date sometime before ad 62, when James was martyred. Some scholars argue for a date close to 62 on the ground that James shows many similarities to 1 Peter. But James contains parallels with many writings, dating all the way from 100 B. C. to 150 , so this is hardly significant but many people like Arnold, among others agreed the date to be in 44-48 A. D. (Arnold, p. 87).

Different from Paul

Much has been made of James' difference from Paul. The two apostles each begin their letters with a salutation, but the similarity seems, at times, to end

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there. This is true, to some extent, in regard to style as well as content.

Martin Luther's opinions about James are well known (as are most of Luther's opinions!). "It is a right strawy epistle," he said, because of James' emphasis on works rather than faith. (In typical Luther fashion: "At the University of Wittenburg, we fire our stoves with the epistle of James.") This is simply a misunderstanding of James, and Luther is said to have moderated his views later in life. This misunderstanding stems from a failure to recognize the issues in focus in James and Paul—they are not standing face to face fighting each other but back to back fighting different enemies. Paul attacks the idea that a man can be saved by works and so emphasizes faith. James attacks the idea that a man's faith may be dead (i. e., unproductive) yet real, and so James emphasizes works. The two men are not contradictory but complementary to each other.

Is identical to Paul's writings?

For the record, it should be understood that everything James says is also found in the writings of Paul despite Martin Luther's disqualification of this epistle. Compare Rom. 2: 6-10 & Eph. 2: 8-10 to James 2: 1, 5, & 23. Also, it should be noted that the two often use the same terminology with different meanings. The "works" Paul attacks are those which pretend to save; the "works" James demands are those which demonstrate salvation.

Does it similar to Jesus teachings?

It has been said that if John rested on Jesus' bosom, James sat at his feet.

James preserves more of Christ's teaching than all the other epistles

combined. He never actually quotes his older brother, but he seems to

constantly refer to his teachings as a basis for his own. There are at least 10
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parallels to Jesus' sermon on the mount, and for almost everything we read in James we can recall some statement of Jesus which may have suggested it. This is so pervasive that even when the parallels fail, many are inclined to suspect that James may be repeating some unrecorded teaching of our Lord. This is all the more interesting seeing that James was an unbeliever until after Jesus' resurrection. (Cf. Mt. 5: 48 & James 1: 4, Mt. 7: 7 & James 1: 5, Mk. 11: 23 & James 1: 6, Mt. 7: 24-26 & James 1: 22, Mt. 7: 1 & James 4: 11-12, Mt. 23: 12 & James 4: 10, Mt. 7: 16 & James 3: 12, etc.)

James the brother of Jude & half-brother of our Lord

This seems to be the author of our epistle. He is not so identified, but much about his character is revealed that is in keeping with what is known about him. This choice is also in keeping with tradition which tells us that he remained in Jerusalem and that Peter, James, & John chose James, the brother of Jesus to be the pastor of the Jerusalem church after the ascension of Christ (cf. Clement of Alexandria). The fact that he does not so identify himself (as our Lord's brother) may be an indication of his humility, but it also reveals the standing and personal authority he had in the opinion of his readers. He was a man well known and highly esteemed in the new Christian community. " James, a servant of God and of Jesus Christ" was an entirely sufficient identification to them. The brevity of it only makes the author obscure to the modern reader.

Canonicity of Epistle of James

The Epistle said to be quoted by " Origen of Alexandria, and possibly a bit earlier by Irenaeus of Lyons as well as Clement of Alexandria in a lost work according to Eusebius. The Epistle of James was included among the 27 New
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Testament books first listed by Athanasius of Alexandria and was confirmed as a canonical epistle of the New Testament by a series of councils in the fourth century” (Gran, p. 155). Today, virtually all denominations of Christianity consider this book to be a canonical epistle of the New Testament. In the first centuries of the Church the authenticity of the Epistle was doubted by some, and among others by Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia; it is therefore deuterocanonical. It is missing in the Muratorian fragment, and because of the silence of several of the western churches regarding it, Eusebius classes it among the Antilegomena or contested writings). St. Jerome gives a similar appraisal but adds that with time it had been universally admitted. Gaius Marius Victorinus, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, openly questioned whether the teachings of James were heretical (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muratorian_fragment).

Its late recognition in the Church, especially in the West, may be explained by the fact that it was written for or by Jewish Christians, and therefore not widely circulated among the Gentile Churches. There is some indication that a few groups distrusted the book because of its doctrine. In Reformation times a few theologians, most notably Martin Luther, argued that this epistle should not be part of the canonical New Testament. (Ned, 1957 pp. 186-197).

Its Canonicity

When the ancient church sat to determine which writings were Inspired and so to be included in the “ Canon” of Holy Scripture, the epistle of James faced some problems. It was a part of the antilegomena – books “ disputed” by at least some section of the Church. The ancient church historian, <https://assignbuster.com/biblical-criticism-paper-on-the-book-of-james-religion-essay/>

Eusebius (265-340) records this for us, although he himself accepted James. The problems were provoked basically by two considerations, much later by a third. The first problem was its relative obscurity-the letter had remained for some time unknown to a good many churches, especially those in Africa. This problem was resolved by the consideration that the letter was addressed only to a specific locality and people; furthermore, it finally became evident that the letter was more widely recognized than previously thought. The second problem was its questionable authorship even after the book had become more widely known. They questioned who the writer was and what was his authority for doing so (i. e., his apostleship). With the author identified & its wide acceptance, these doubts were settled by the fourth century, and at the third council of Carthage (397) it became universally recognized. James suffered no further problems until Martin Luther questioned it on the grounds of a supposed conflict with Paul (see above).

VI. Its Position in the Canon

Although James was written before Paul's letters, it has been placed after Paul's for several reasons, perhaps the best of which is the fact that Paul's are a more complete and systematic presentation of Christian Truth, and James is therefore supplementary to Paul. It falls into a group of NT books called the General ("catholic") Epistles (Hebrews-Jude). They are called "General" because the authors & audiences are varied.

Audience and Purpose

The reference to "the twelve tribes that are scattered over the world" (1: 1) is our major hint. Also, the inclusion of the letter in the "catholic epistles" (i. <https://assignbuster.com/biblical-criticism-paper-on-the-book-of-james-religion-essay/>)

e., letters addressed to several churches) reflects its encyclical nature.

Obviously one church is not as prominent as a specific though scattered group of individuals and these seem to be Jewish Christians outside of Palestine. Although James has a Jewish flavor, it is addressed to a Christian audience. This is confirmed by the use of the term “ brother” (cf. 1: 2, 16, 19; 2: 1, 5, 14; 3: 1, 10, 12; 4: 11; 5: 7, 9, 10, 12, 19)

the use of the term “ Lord” (cf. 1: 1, 7, 12; 2: 1; 4: 10, 15; 5: 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15) the specific mention of faith in Christ (cf. 2: 1); and (4) the expectation of Jesus’ return (cf. 5: 8). There are three possible interpretations of the phrase in 1: 1 Jews This seems improbable because of the recurrent use of “ brethren,” the lack of the major gospel truths about Jesus, as well as the specific mentioning of faith in Christ in 2: 1. Also, after the Babylonian Exile, many of the

original twelve tribes never returned. The same metaphor is used symbolically of believers in Rev. 7: 4-8. Christian Jews This seems to be the most likely because of the Jewish flavor of the book and the leadership

position of James in the Jerusalem church. The church as spiritual Israel This is possible because of the use of “ diaspora” in I Pet. 1: 1 and Paul’s allusion to the church (believing Jews and Gentiles) as spiritual Israel (cf. Rom. 2: 28-29; 4: 16-25; Gal. 3: 7, 29; 6: 16; I Pet. 2: 5, 9).

Literary Genre of Epistle of James buffer

This letter/sermon reflects a knowledge of wisdom literature, both canonical (Job – Song of Songs) and inter-biblical (Ecclesiasticus about 180 B. C.). Its

emphasis is practical living-faith in action (cf. 1: 3-4). In some ways the style
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is very similar to both Jewish wisdom teachers and Greek and Roman moral itinerant teachers (like the Stoics). Some examples are: loose structure (jumping from one subject to another) many imperatives (54 of them) diatribe (a supposed objector asking questions, cf. 2: 18; 4: 13). This is also seen in Malachi, Romans, and I John. Although there are few direct quotations from the OT (cf. 1: 11; 2: 8, 11, 23; 4: 6), like the book of the Revelation, there are many allusions to the OT. The outline of James is almost longer than the book itself. This reflects the rabbinical technique of jumping from subject to subject in order to keep the attention of the audience. The rabbis called it “ pearls on a string.” James seems to be a combination of OT literary genres: (1) sages (wisdom teachers) and (2) prophets (much like Amos or Jeremiah). He uses OT truths but bathes them in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount teachings. (See section. Under Content below). Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, p. 69 says, “ a case could also be made for the letter (James) as having been written by James as having been first a homily or a sermon perhaps extracts drawn from a number of James’ sermons – and only later cast into the form of a letter and circulated more sidely.”

Theological emphasis of the letter

Many scholars consider the epistle to be written in the late first or early second centuries, after the death of James the Just. Among the reasons for this are:

The author introduces himself merely as “ a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”, without invoking any special family relationship to Jesus.

The cultured Greek language of the Epistle, it is contended, could not have been written by a Jerusalemite Jew. This argument has lost much force as recent insight into Greek influence on Judea at the time has come to light. It is plausible that the letter in Greek to the Jewish diaspora could have been composed with a secretary, as Jerome argued. Some scholars argue for a primitive version of the letter composed by James and then later polished by another writer.

the author fails to mention Jewish ritual requirements such as circumcision, whereas James the Just is known from Galatians and the Acts of the Apostles to have been particularly concerned with ministering to the Jewish and circumcised (however, since it is addressed to a Jewish audience, such requirements would naturally be taken for granted; moreover, the Epistle could have been written before the end of Paul's First Missionary Journey (AD 46-48), when the inclusion of gentiles first became an issue).

the author fails to mention any details of Jesus' life the epistle was only gradually accepted into the (non-Jewish) canon of the New Testament.

Some see parallels between James and 1 Peter, 1 Clement, and the Shepherd of Hermas and take this to reflect the socio-economic situation Christians were dealing with in the late first or early second century. It thus could have been written anywhere in the Empire where Christians spoke Greek. There are some scholars who argued for Syria.[7]

the Complete Jewish Bible calls the book Jacob, noting the Jewish tone and references, and that James is not a Jewish name. It has been suggested the

name was changed with publication of the King James translation.

(<http://www.wels.net/sab/qa/luther-03.html>).

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