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A Biographical Study of James the Half-Brother of Christ

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James the half-brother of Christ

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. James, the skeptic—Prior to the resurrection of Christ, James, along with his brothers and sisters, were apparently unbelievers.
 - A. Their rebuke—“His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him” (John 7:3-5).
 - B. Jesus’s reply—“Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast: for my time is not yet full come” (John 7:6-8).
- II. James, the saved (1 Cor. 15:7)—Our Lord appeared to James after his glorious resurrection, at which time James became a believer.
- III. James, the shepherd—It is believed that James became the first pastor of the church at Jerusalem. Three events in Acts suggest this:
 - A. The angel’s command to Peter—Following his freedom from prison Peter visited the house of Mary, where many had assembled to pray for his release. “But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place” (Acts 12:16-17).
 - B. James’s words to the Jerusalem council—“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. . . . Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God” (Acts 15:13-14, 19).
 - C. Paul’s final visit with James—“And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present” (Acts 21:17-18).
- IV. James, the segregated—Unfortunately, on at least two occasions, James slipped back (temporarily) into the bond of legalism.
 - A. First occasion—His influence upon Peter: “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision” (Gal. 2:11-12).
 - B. Second occasion—His influence upon Paul: During his final visit to Jerusalem, Paul was persuaded by James to briefly place himself back under the Law to appease certain Jewish legalizers (Acts 21:17-18 21-24).

- V. James, the supporter
 - A. He encouraged Paul during the apostle's first visit to Jerusalem following his conversion—"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:18-19).
 - B. He endorsed Paul during the apostle's second visit to Jerusalem following his conversion—"Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. . . . And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision"(Gal. 2:1, 9).
- VI. James, the scribe—He was the author of the New Testament epistle that bears his name.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

The word "perfect" (a reference to maturity) is found many times in James. Thus the term maturity will be used in outlining this book.

- I. Suffering makes a mature man (James 1:1-15).
 - A. The background of sufferings—Both God and Satan are usually involved in the sufferings of a Christian.
 - 1. God's purpose is to purify and strengthen us. He wants to make us better (James 1:2, 12).
 - 2. Satan's purpose is to pervert and weaken us. He wants to make us bitter (James 1:13-15).
 - B. The purpose of suffering
 - 1. It produces endurance down here (James 1:3-4).
 - 2. It promises rewards up there (James 1:12).
 - C. The response to suffering
 - 1. Positive:
 - a. We are to praise God for it (James 1:2).
 - b. We are to pray while in it (James 1:5).
 - c. We are to persevere through it (James 1:12).
 - 2. Negative:
 - a. We are not to become as tossed waves (James 1:6-8).
 - b. We are not to become as wilted flowers (James 1:9-11).
- II. Scripture study makes a mature man (James 1:16-25).
 - A. Its author—The Father (James 1:17)
 - B. Its accomplishments (James 1:18)
 - C. Its admonitions (James 1:19-22)
 - 1. Our talk is to be pure (James 1:19).
 - 2. Our walk is to be pure (James 1:21-22).
 - D. Its analogy (James 1:23-24)

- E. Its assurance (James 1:25)
- III. Sincerity makes a mature man (James 2:1-13)
 - A. Commands against partiality (James 2:1-8)—An earthly example (James 2:5)
 - B. Consequences of partiality (James 2:9-13)
 - 1. To be guilty of the Law (James 2:9-11)
 - 2. To be judged by the Law (James 2:12-13)
- IV. Christian service makes a mature man (James 2:14-26)
 - A. The problem—some have imagined a contradiction between James and Paul.

Note:

 - 1. Paul’s words—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).
 - 2. James’s words—“What doth is profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? . . . Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:14, 24).
 - B. The particulars
 - 1. Paul spoke about vertical justification before God.
 - 2. James spoke about horizontal justification before man.
 - C. The pattern
 - 1. Two examples of head faith only
 - a. Concerning the destitute (James 2:15-16)
 - b. Concerning the devil (James 2:19)
 - 2. Two examples of head and heart faith
 - a. Abraham (James 2:21-23)
 - b. Rahab (James 2:25)
 - D. The principle—“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17).
- V. Sound speech makes a mature man (James 3:1-18; 1:26-27).
 - A. Importance of the tongue (James 3:2)
 - B. Illustration of the tongue
 - 1. How it can control
 - a. It is as a bridle to a horse (James 3:3).
 - b. It is as a rudder to a ship (James 3:4).
 - c. It is as a fire to a forest (James 3:5).
 - 2. How it can consume (James 3:5)
 - C. Iniquity of the tongue (James 3:5-6; 1:26)
 - 1. It can destroy our witness for God (James 1:26).
 - 2. It can defile our walk with God (James 3:6).
 - D. Incurability of the tongue (James 3:7-8)
 - E. Inconsistency of the tongue (James 3:9-12)
 - 1. The contradiction (James 3:9-12)

2. The conclusion—“Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh” (James 3:11-12).
- F. Instructions for the tongue
 1. Seek and speak the wisdom of God (James 3:13, 17-18).
 2. Refuse and renounce the slander of Satan (James 3:14-16).
- VI. Submission to God makes a mature man (James 4:1-17).
 - A. What we escape when we do this
 1. The flesh (James 4:1-3, 11-12, 16-17)
 2. The world (James 4:4-5)
 3. The devil (James 4:7)
 - B. What we enjoy when we do this
 1. God’s grace (James 4:6)
 2. God’s guarantee
 - a. Of his presence (James 4:8)
 - b. Of his promotion (James 4:10)
 3. God’s guidance (James 4:13-15)
- VII. Self-sacrifice makes a mature man (James 5:1-6).
 - A. The consternation of the selfish rich (James 5:1)
 - B. The corruption of the selfish rich (James 5:2, 5)
 - C. The cruelty of the selfish rich (James 5:4, 6)
 - D. The condemnation of the selfish rich (James 5:3)
- VIII. Steadfastness makes a mature man (James 5:7-11).
 - A. A past example—Job and his trials (James 5:10-11)
 - B. A present example—A farmer and his crops (James 5:7)
 - C. A future example—The Savior and his return (James 5:8-9)
- IX. Supplication makes a mature man (James 5:12-18).
 - A. The seasons of prayer: When one should pray
 1. In times of trouble (James 5:13-14)
 2. In times of triumph (James 5:13)
 - B. The reasons for prayer: Why one should pray
 1. Prayer can heal the sick (James 5:14-15).
 2. Prayer can restore the carnal (James 5:16).
 3. Prayer can accomplish the impossible (James 5:17-18).
- X. Soul-winning makes a mature man (James 5:19-20)—“Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

STATISTICS

Father: Joseph (Matt. 13:55)

Mother: Mary

Brothers: Joseph, Simon, Judas (Matt. 13:55)

First mention: Matthew 13:55

Final mention: Jude 1

Meaning of his name: "Supplanter"

Frequency of his name: Referred to 11 times

Biblical books mentioning him: Seven books (Matthew, Mark, Acts, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, James, Jude)

Occupation: Apostle and pastor

Place of birth: Probably Nazareth

Place of death: Tradition says he was martyred in the Kidron Valley outside of Jerusalem.

Circumstances of death: Tradition says he was cast down from the temple pinnacle and stoned as he lay dying.

Important fact about his life: He pastored the church at Jerusalem and authored the New Testament book of James.