

# Ministry of Grace Church

## James 1:1-8 - Speaker Notes

### Introduction

There has probably been more discussion regarding the author and date of this letter than any other book of the New Testament. Clearly, neither the author nor the date of writing can be definitively identified. What will be provided here is a presentation of the major discussion points and what seems to be the most reasonable conclusion.

### **Who Wrote this Letter?**

There are four men named James mentioned in the New Testament. They are:

1. James the Apostle, son of Zebedee and brother of the Apostle John.

Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. (Matthew 4:21)

This James was the disciple who, along with Peter and John, was present at the transfiguration of Christ.

2. James the Apostle, son of Alphaeus (or Cleopas) also referred to as James “the less” or “the younger.”

Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; (Matthew 10:3)

3. James the father of Judas the Apostle (not Iscariot).

Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6:16)

Nothing more is written about this James.

4. James the brother of our Lord.

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? (Matthew 13:55)

But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Galatians 1:19)

There is much debate as to what is meant by “His brothers” and “the Lord’s brother” as shown above. This is because it was common practice to refer to near relatives as brothers and sisters even though they failed to have a common mother or father (or both). Some people will cite as an example of this the description of the women standing near the cross during the crucifixion given in John 19:25.

But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:25)

The confusion arises because there are very few commas in the original Greek. According to the Apostle John, while Jesus was hanging on the cross, his mother Mary and several other women were standing near Him. The key phrase is, “Mary the wife of Cleopas.” If one is to interpret this

as a description of, “His mother’s sister” then it would be read as, “... His mother, and His mother’s sister Mary the wife of Cleopas.” This would indicate that both the mother of Jesus and her “sister” were named Mary. Since it is illogical that there were two sisters named Mary, those who hold to this translation say that the wife of Cleopas is a near relative of the mother of Jesus.

Therefore, since James #2, above, was the son of Cleopas, making him a near relative (perhaps cousin) to Jesus, he may very well be the one referred to as the Lord’s brother. If this is the case, then James #2 and James #4 are the same person. This is the position held by the Catholic Church, since they believe that Joseph and Mary had no other children which is why they refer to her as the virgin Mary.

This argument is countered by [Matthew 13:55](#) which refers to Jesus brothers as James, Joseph, Simon and Judas:

[Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? \(Matthew 13:55\)](#)

If, in fact, the four brothers referred to here were simply near relations of Jesus, then why are only four mentioned and not all of his near relations.

Adding to this is the fact that, if the phrase in question (Mary the wife of Cleopas) is interpreted simply as another person in a list of people, then by changing the order of the women mentioned we could translate this as, “His mother, Mary the wife of Cleopas, His mother’s sister, and Mary Magdalene.

Therefore, it seems clear that James, the Lord’s brother, was truly a son of Mary and Joseph, not some other near relative.

So, we have four men by the name of James as potential authors for this book. Since there is no other reference to James, the father of Judas the apostle, either in the Bible or by early church historians, it is reasonable to assume that this is not the James who wrote this letter. Also, the Apostle James, the brother of John, was put to death by Herod somewhere between about AD 41 and 44:

[Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. \(Act 12:1,2\)](#)

Little is said by ancient historians about James the brother of John or about James “the less.” And, since the author of this letter makes no attempt to identify himself, it appears that he was well known to his readers and, therefore, is most likely James the half-brother of Jesus.

It is said of this James that he was a man well known for his integrity of life, which earned him the nickname “James the Just.” He was also known for his strict, holy manner of life, and the historian Hegesippus says that he frequently prostrated himself on his knees in the Temple, calling on God to forgive the sins of his people. In fact, he was known to spend so much time on his knees in prayer for others that he was called “old camel knees” by some because of the calluses built up from such constant prayer.

In the book of Acts, James appears as a prominent and leading man in the church at Jerusalem and is called by early church writers “Bishop of Jerusalem.” During the council that was held in Jerusalem to decide the rules that should be imposed on Gentile converts to Christianity ([Acts 15:13-29](#)), after the other apostles had expressed their positions, James stood up expressing his thoughts, and his advice was followed. Also, after being released from prison in [Acts 12:17](#), Peter

expressed to those around him that they should “go and show these things to James, and to the brethren” indicating James’ prominent position. Finally, when Paul visited Jerusalem after his conversion and again some fourteen years later, James is named among the apostles there and even referred to as one of the “pillars” of the church along with Peter (Cephas) and John.

and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:9)

Thus, James the brother of our Lord, James the Just, the Bishop of Jerusalem, was clearly in a position of prominence within the early church and, as one in such a capacity, is very likely the writer of this letter.

### **When Was this Letter Written?**

James deals with the issue of works as evidence of faith and yet does not mention at all the Jerusalem Council (AD 48 or 49) over which he presided. This council addressed whether or not a Christian was required to be circumcised and uphold the Law of Moses in order to be truly saved. Surely, James would have made mention of the council or its findings if this letter had been written after that time. We must conclude, therefore, that the book must have been written before that time. A date between AD 45 and 48 is widely accepted, which would make this the first of the New Testament books to have been written.

### **Greeting – James 1:1**

**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.**

We’ve just learned that the author of this letter was James, the half-brother of Jesus of Nazareth. As a devout follower of the Lord, he lived an exemplary life of devotion and was the leader of the church at Jerusalem. He was highly respected, especially by the apostolic leaders within the early church. Therefore, as he began his letter, it is noteworthy that he neglected to tout his position and prominence, especially his being the brother of Jesus. But, in spite of his prominence in the church, he was supremely submitted to our Lord and Savior. He was a living example of his own teaching, especially:

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

He tells us that this letter was written to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. This is an obvious reference to Jewish people who had been separated from their native Israel. Does this mean that it was intended for Jewish people and not for Christians? Keep in mind that this letter was written during the middle of the first century and it wasn’t until later that followers of Christ were referred to as Christians. At the time that James wrote this letter most Christians identified themselves as Jews. At this time, followers of Christ were referred to as members of “The Way.” Paul refers to them in this manner as described in the book of Acts.

and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:2)

There have been numerous dispersions of the Jewish people including their defeat and scattering at the hands of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Romans. Also, shortly before this letter was written, the church was scattered as a result of the persecution of Stephen.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. (Acts 11:19)

### **James 1:2-4**

**Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

Before we go on, let's look at a couple of words here. The word translated "meet" is *periptō*. This is from *peri*, meaning "around" and *ptō*, meaning "to fall." It is a picture of a person falling into a deep pit with steep walls on all sides. The word "trials" is from *peirasmos*, which refers to a temptation, or solicitation to do something you shouldn't. The word "testing" is from *dokimadzō*, which means to test something with the intent of finding good. It is the word used in reference to testing gold to determine its purity and value.

Steadfastness is translated from the Greek word *hupomonē*. It literally means "to remain under." It is a picture of a beast of burden who is burdened with a very heavy load. Instead of shaking it off and getting relief, the animal "remains under the load" and perseveres. The word "perfect" does not mean "without fault." It is from the Greek word *teleios*, which means "finished" or "complete." And the word translated "complete" actually means "containing all the parts," or "whole."

Once again, James shows his humility by referring to his readers as "brothers." Notice that there is no pretense with James about being a bishop writing to ordinary Christians. That's because in Christ there is no distinction between priests and lay believers as some churches teach today. We are all equal in the body of Christ.

In the previous verse James gave his greeting with an expression of joy and delight. That's precisely what he wants for us, and that's how he wants us to respond to the everyday trials that come into our lives.

The main point of James' message to his brothers (and sisters) in Christ is that we should not complain about the fact that we are being bombarded by all sorts of situations that try our patience and our faith, even though we repeatedly stumble. Rather, he says, we should consider it delightful because of what it will produce in us. Just as a jeweler has to strike and abrade a precious stone to bring out the best in it, so each of us needs difficulties and trials to help us grow into the type of servant of God who is more Christ-like.

And, just as a plant grown indoors away from any wind cannot survive outside because it has no strength, so we need challenging and toughening to make us stronger servants of the Lord. That way we can stand strong for Him in the life He has given us. Without continual trials and testing we, too, become weak and unable to stand our ground in the midst of a sinful world.

### **James 1:5-8**

**If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

In Greek, there are three types of conditional clauses. They are all translated with “if.” The first-class condition is most easily explained as “If, and it is assumed to be true.” This is sometimes translated as “since.” The second-class conditional clause is, “If, and it is assumed not to be true.” The third-class condition is the real unassuming conditional. In this verse we have the first-class conditional clause (it is assumed to be so). So, James is implying that we do, in fact, lack wisdom.

James makes a statement about prayer that we all need to keep in mind. When we pray, we need to do so believing that God will answer. That means praying with God’s interest in mind, not our own. This is sometimes referred to as “praying God’s will.” I think the best example of this type of prayer comes from the Old Testament. It comes from the three Jewish boys that were captives in Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar made an idol and made a law that everyone was to fall down and worship this idol. Here’s how the three boys replied:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” (Daniel 3:16-18)

These three Jewish boys had no doubt that God would deliver them. But, even if they were wrong, they would not retract their intentions.

James tells us that if we don’t pray with this kind of conviction, if we doubt that God will hear us and answer us, then we are “wishy-washy” Christians and we should not expect Him to answer any of our prayers. We have an unstable faith, one that is only strong when things are going well and weak when things aren’t going well.

## **So what?**

Let me start off the “So What” with a question. What is the most important part of the Christian life? Some would say that it is fulfilling the Great Commission, preaching the Gospel and making disciples. Others would say that it is living what Jesus called the two greatest commandments, love the Lord your God, with all your heart, mind, and soul and love others as yourself. Still others might say that it is worshipping the Lord from a sincere heart.

But I submit to you that even more important than what we do as Christians is what we are as Christians. What I mean is that before we can effectively serve or worship our God and Savior, we have to have a solid, personal relationship with Him. There are religious people today who believe that what they do for God will get them saved or keep them saved. They do their good works out of selfish necessity, not out of selfless love. They do it because they have to - or else! Our salvation does not depend on what we do, it depends on what He has already done. We do good works out of gratitude, not to pay a debt.

Remember, we will one day be the bride of Christ. That means that right now we are engaged to Him. With humans, engagement indicates a commitment to a life-long close personal relationship with one another and it’s no different in our relationship with God.

However, no marriage exists without difficulties, especially in the beginning. We have to get used to doing things differently than we have in the past and we have to learn to submit our will to the will of our spouse. As we go through these difficult times, we learn more about our spouse and, perhaps, we learn more about ourselves. But this is not a marriage counseling session, this is a message on how to live a happy, successful Christian life.

In preparing His disciples for His departure, Jesus gave them instructions on what things lie ahead for them.

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

We should not be surprised when difficulties come, we should expect them. But Jesus didn't tell His disciples what to do about these difficult times. Perhaps that's why James did. He said to treat these tribulations as sources of joy. Say what?! Is James trying to turn us all into masochists? No, he's trying to turn us into mature Christians. Let me give you an example.

Here you are going through life trying to be the best Christian that you can be, when, Wham!, your washing machine quits working. And the repairman says that it will cost more to fix it than to purchase a new one. Fortunately, your credit card can cover the cost of a new one and you can worry about paying that off later. But, as you get into your car to drive home from the appliance store, it won't start, and – it just began to rain, I don't mean a drizzle, I mean a good ol' Oregon downpour. That's when you realize that you left your cell phone on the kitchen counter at home.

Perhaps, your Heavenly Father, your future Father-in-law, is trying to get you to just stop everything and turn to Him. As you do, you realize that you've been ignoring Him lately; you haven't been reading your Bible and your prayer life has all but disappeared. As you sit in your car, with tears running down your face, you cry out to the only one who cares about your situation.

Fifteen minutes later, after a heartfelt time of fellowship with God, you close your prayer time with a question and a plea. Lord, what am I going to do? Please help me! As you try one last time to start your car you discover to your amazement that it starts!

That evening, as you think about the events of the day you realize not only has God been with you throughout this ordeal, but He has taught you something. You realize how important it is to keep the communication lines with God open. You vow to be more consistent in reading your Bible and you determine in your heart that you will set aside a certain part of your day to pray, every day! Then it hits you. God hasn't been punishing you, He's been helping you to grow. He just had to get your attention. God is on your side and He is by your side, all day, every day. This is what James is talking about.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

God loves you, my friend! You are His child, and He cares about you. Therefore:

Humble yourselves, ... under the mighty hand of God ..., casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

I can almost hear some of you saying, “But sometimes I just don't know what to do. I don't even know what I should pray! James would tell you to simply ask for wisdom. That's a prayer that our Heavenly Father just loves to answer, and He won't be critical of you for it.

But you've got to keep this in mind, you need to believe that not only will God hear you, He will answer your prayer for wisdom.

“You mean, if I pray for wisdom God will miraculously put the thoughts in my head?”

No, that's not how our God works. He has already given us all the ideas we need, and they are stored in the pages of the Bible. So, if you've been neglecting your daily Bible reading, it is less likely that you will perceive what God is telling you when you need wisdom.

There are two aspects of communication with God: talking to Him and listening to Him. Talking to Him is easy, but listening to Him is difficult. Some of you may think that I talk too much about reading your Bible. But that's how God talks to us. His Word is filled with wisdom, and you won't get that wisdom by reading books about the Bible and you won't get that wisdom by just listening to someone else talk about the Bible. We all need to spend time every day pouring through His Word, letting it wash us and letting it fill us with wisdom.