

## James – a quick introduction

Skim through the first 7 chapters of Acts. Imagine being one of these early Christians – growing up a Jew, and then suddenly discovering that this guy Jesus was the one that the scriptures pointed to and longed for. In those early days the ‘church’ was exploding, but then trouble starts to come from the Jews who claim you are heretics and stone Stephen to death, and the Romans who see this new sect as subversive to the empire. Those thousands are scattered by the persecution across the land (Acts 8.1), gossiping the good news as they go, building lots of little communities of believers, not really sure what to do next. As if persecution for this amazing news wasn’t bad enough, a famine hits the area and the rich landowners and employers start reducing wages, and taking land when you couldn’t pay your rent. You can understand support for the zealots – the freedom fighters against the Roman Empire. James was executed (62 AD) as part of the cull of dissidents who would make life difficult with the Romans. Although James was concerned about the inequality and oppression, he advocates that living God’s way – living generously in word and action and not violence and anger is the answer.

James was the brother of Jesus, and one of the leaders of the early church. This letter was probably circulated around the early Christians in the 40’s - just over 10 years since the death of Jesus. It’s full of practical advice on what it means to live as a follower of Jesus and is also full of Old Testament language and echoes of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. James must have been very familiar with the teaching of his older half-brother yet didn’t seem to believe at least in the early days (John 7.2-5, Mark 3.20-21, 31-35). Obviously something changed, and it’s likely that this was the James who Jesus appeared to in 1 Corinthians 15.7.

### **What is he writing about?**

Well that’s what we will discover as we dig into for ourselves. James can seem confusing – just a mixture of advice, but as you read through it a few times you’ll notice a few themes coming through. Simon Jones (in his excellent ‘discovering the New Testament’) suggest that James is a bit like a news programme with a summary of the headlines at the start which are all then explored in more depth later on.

What are the main themes that run through James?

### **Who is he writing to?**

As has been discussed James is writing to scattered groups of predominately Jewish Christians who are undergoing persecution, and oppression both due to their faith and status.

As you read through James and read what he writes – see if you can work out what might have been some of the problems he was speaking into.

### **The big debate**

People often debate whether Paul’s emphasis of salvation by grace through faith and not through works (in Romans 4, Galatians 2-3 and Ephesians 2) contradicts what James says about faith and deeds. What do you think? Read what James says carefully and compare with the passages above