

TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT
COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 16

TNTC

JAMES

TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 16

SERIES EDITOR: ECKHARD J. SCHNABEL
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JAMES

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

DOUGLAS J. MOO



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GENERAL PREFACE

The Tyndale Commentaries have been a flagship series for evangelical readers of the Bible for over sixty years. The original New Testament volumes (1956–1974) as well as the new commentaries (1983–2003) rightly established themselves as a point of first reference for those who wanted more than is usually offered in a one-volume Bible commentary, without requiring the technical skills in Greek and in Jewish and Greco-Roman studies of the more detailed series, and with the advantage of being shorter than the volumes of intermediate commentary series. The appearance of new popular commentary series demonstrates that there is a continuing demand for commentaries that appeal to Bible study leaders in churches and at universities. The publisher, editors and authors of the Tyndale Commentaries believe that the series continues to meet an important need in the Christian community, not least in what we call today the Global South, with its immense growth of churches and the corresponding need for a thorough understanding of the Bible by Christian believers.

In the light of new knowledge, new critical questions, new revisions of Bible translations, and the need to provide specific guidance on the literary context and the theological emphases of the individual passage, it was time to publish new commentaries in the series. Four authors will revise their commentary that appeared in the second series. The original aim remains. The new commentaries are neither too short nor unduly long. They are exegetical and thus root the interpretation of the text in its historical context. They do not aim

to solve all critical questions, but they are written with an awareness of major scholarly debates which may be treated in the Introduction, in Additional Notes or in the commentary itself. While not specifically homiletic in aim, they want to help readers to understand the passage under consideration in such a way that they begin to see points of relevance and application, even though the commentary does not explicitly offer these. The authors base their exegesis on the Greek text, but they write for readers who do not know Greek; Hebrew and Greek terms that are discussed are transliterated. The English translation used for the first series was the Authorized (King James) Version, while the volumes of the second series mostly used the Revised Standard Version; the volumes of the third series use either the New International Version (2011) or the New Revised Standard Version as primary versions, unless otherwise indicated by the author.

An immense debt of gratitude for the first and second series of the Tyndale Commentaries was owed to R. V. G. Tasker and L. Morris, who each wrote four of the commentaries themselves. The recruitment of new authors for the third series proved to be effortless, as colleagues responded enthusiastically to be involved in this project, a testimony both to the larger number of New Testament scholars capable and willing to write commentaries, to the wider ethnic identity of contributors, and to the role that the Tyndale Commentaries have played in the church worldwide. It continues to be the hope of all those concerned with this series that God will graciously use the new commentaries to help readers understand as fully and clearly as possible the meaning of the New Testament.

Eckhard J. Schnabel, Series Editor
Nicholas Perrin, Consulting Editor

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

My first sermon, delivered to a long-suffering professor and four fellow novice preachers, was on James 1:22–25. I thought that James' emphasis on the need to do the word was important in a seminary context, where all too easily the Scripture becomes a book to be analysed rather than a message to be obeyed. That the message was needed then is certain; that it is still urgently required is equally certain – and not only in seminaries. All across the world, people are awakening to biblical Christianity. Third World churches are burgeoning, American 'evangelicalism' continues to attract much attention, and European Christians are seeing renewal and a new evangelistic concern. Yet the personal and social transformations that should accompany such revival are, very often, sadly lacking. Why is this? Surely one of the main reasons is that the simple plea of James – 'do the word' – is not being heeded. The Bible is being translated, commented on, read, studied, preached and analysed as never before. But it is questionable whether it is being obeyed to a comparable degree.

All this suggests that the message of James is one that we all need to hear – and obey. No profound theologian, James' genius lies in his profound moral earnestness; in his powerfully simple call for repentance, for action, for a consistent Christian lifestyle. His words need to thrust through our theological debates, our personal pre-conceptions, our spiritual malaise, and set us back on the road to a biblical, invigorating, transforming Christianity.

I owe thanks to many people who helped in making this commentary possible. Dr Leon Morris has been an encouraging yet eagle-eyed editor. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where I teach, has graciously provided secretarial time – and Luann Kuehl has had the perplexing (and sometimes amusing) job of deciphering my handwriting. Students here at Trinity and in several churches have, with their papers, questions and comments, greatly influenced my understanding of the letter. My five children have been a source of diversion (not always wanted!), personal renewal and joy. Most of all, my wife Jenny has both encouraged me in the work and, by commenting on the whole manuscript carefully, immeasurably improved both its style and its content. It is to her I dedicate the book.

Douglas J. Moo

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

I am grateful for the opportunity to return, after almost thirty years, to the first book I wrote and to bring it up to date for a new generation of believers. Differences from the older edition consist in the addition of some of the important books and articles on James published since 1985, improvement in style, and a few tweaks in my interpretive conclusions. I appreciate the editing assistance of my colleague Nick Perrin and former colleague Eckhard Schnabel. And two of my PhD students at Wheaton, Mike Kibbe and Ben Dally, have provided very valuable bibliographic and editing assistance.

As was the case in the first edition, I dedicate this new version to my wife, Jenny.

CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , ed. W. Haase and H. Temporini (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–)
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>
<i>AusBibRev</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
BDAG	<i>A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , ed. W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BDF	<i>A Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , ed. F. Blass, A. Debrunner and R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961; reprint 1982)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BNTC	Black’s New Testament Commentaries
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>DLNTD</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i> , ed. P. H. Davids and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997)
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>

<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>H.E.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Her	Hermeneia
HTKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IRM</i>	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–1988)
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LW</i>	<i>Luther's Works</i> , ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–1986)
LXX	Septuagint; English translations of LXX passages are taken from Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., <i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
MM	<i>The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources</i> , ed. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930 = 1982)
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975–1978)
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>

OTNT	Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament
Phillips	J. B. Phillips, <i>The New Testament in Modern English</i> (1958)
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
RHPR	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976)
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Bible Versions

CEB	Common English Bible (2010)
ESV	English Standard Version (2007)
GNB	Good News Bible (1990; Today's English Version)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible (2010)
KJV	King James Version
NAB	New American Bible (2011)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NEB	New English Bible (Old Testament, 1970; New Testament ² , 1970)
NET	New English Translation (2006)
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
NLT	New Living Translation (1996)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)

REB Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV Revised Standard Version (1971 New Testament
 Second Edition)

Quotations from Philo are taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition of the Works of Philo. The Apocrypha is cited from the NRSV translation. The Pseudepigrapha is cited from the translation edited by J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985).

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INTRODUCTION

1. The letter in the church

The epistle of James has had a controversial history. Along with 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude, it belongs to that category of New Testament epistles called ‘general’ or ‘catholic’ (in the sense of universal). This designation was given to these seven letters early in the history of the church because each appears to be addressed to the church at large rather than to a single congregation. These letters also shared an uncertain status in many areas of the early church. Along with Hebrews and Revelation, several of them were the last to achieve generally recognized canonical status. In the case of James, it was not until the end of the fourth century that both eastern and western Christendom acknowledged it as Scripture.

The first mention of the epistle of James by name comes early in the third century. But since ancient authors did not always cite their sources, it is possible that earlier writings made use of James without acknowledgment. Mayor discerned allusions to James in most of the New Testament epistles and in many late first and early

second century non-canonical Christian writings.¹ On the other hand, Allison doubts that clear evidence of the use of James can be found before the second part of the second century.² The truth lies between these extremes. Many of Mayor's alleged allusions are doubtful because they involve fairly common language. Very often, then, the relationship between James and these other books is indirect: both have made use of traditional teaching. This is almost certainly the case for the two New Testament books that have the most in common with James – Matthew and 1 Peter. However, a good case can be made that the letter of James was known and being used early in the first century. The *Shepherd of Hermas* (early or middle second century) has a significant number of parallels to James. In the section of that book called the 'Mandates', several of James' characteristic themes are found; the encouragement to pray with faith and without double-mindedness in Mandate 9 is particularly close in wording and emphasis to James 1:6–8. Probably this section of *Hermas* is dependent on James. It is also possible that 1 *Clement* (AD 95) and the *Epistle of Barnabas* (written sometime between AD 70 and 132) show dependence on James, but this is less certain.³

Clement, head of the important catechetical school in Alexandria, is said to have written a commentary on James, but no such commentary has ever been discovered, and Clement never shows dependence on James in his extant writings.⁴ Clement's successor in Alexandria, Origen, is the first to refer to the letter of James by name. He cites the letter as Scripture (*Select. in Ps.* 30:6) and attributes the letter to James the apostle (*Commentary on John*, frag. 126).⁵ The Latin trans-

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1. Mayor, pp. lxi–lxxi, lxxxviii–cix.
 2. Allison, pp. 13–24; cf. also Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone*, pp. 102–106.
 3. See esp. Johnson, pp. 68–80, for a careful and convincing evaluation.
 4. Westcott, *General Survey*, pp. 357–358, theorizes that 'Jude' should be read for 'James' in the statement of Cassiodorus that attributes the commentary to Clement. See, on the other hand, Mayor, p. lxxx, and Tasker, p. 18.
 5. In *Comm. on John* XIX, 6 (*Patrologia Graeca* XIV, 569), Origen quotes from James 2 and asserts that the words are found in *tē pheromenē Iakobou epistolē* (the epistle bearing [the name of] James). The word *pheromenē* ('bear, carry') has been taken as an indication of Origen's doubts about the

lation of Origen's works, made by Rufinus, explicitly identifies the author of the letter as the brother of the Lord, but the reliability of Rufinus' work is open to question.

Other third-century writings show acquaintance with James, and the pseudo-Clementine tractate *Ad Virgines* seems to quote James as Scripture. Eusebius (d. AD 339) uses James frequently in his writings and apparently accords it canonical status. However, he also includes it among the 'disputed books' (*antilegomena*), signifying that he was aware of some Christians who questioned its scriptural authority (*H.E.* 3.25.3; 2.23.25). Probably he has in mind the Syrian church, where many of the general epistles had a difficult time finding acceptance – Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. AD 428) rejected all the general epistles. James was, however, included in the fifth-century Syriac translation, the Peshitta, and is quoted approvingly by Chrysostom (d. AD 407) and Theodoret (d. AD 458). With some exceptions, then, the eastern church readily accepted James as a canonical book.

The situation in the west was similar, although acceptance of James came a bit later there. Neither the Muratorian canon (late second century) nor the Mommsen catalogue (giving the African canon, c. AD 360) mentions James.⁶ The earliest clear references to James in the west come in the middle of the fourth century, when Hilary of Poitiers (writing in AD 356–8) and Ambrosiaster (d. AD 382) each quote James once. Jerome's influence was important in leading to the final acceptance of James in the western church. He included the epistle in his Latin translation, the Vulgate, and cited it often in his writings. And, in an argument which was to have considerable importance, Jerome identified the author as the brother of the Lord mentioned in Galatians 1:19. At about the same time, Augustine added his weight of authority, and no questions about James were again raised in the western church until the Reformation.

epistle's origins, but the word simply means 'current' and does not qualify Origen's acceptance of the letter (cf. Ropes, p. 93; Mußner, p. 39).

6. It is possible, however, that the omission from the Muratorian canon is accidental, since the text of the canon is mutilated. Cf. Westcott, *General Survey*, pp. 219–220; Mayor, p. lxxvii; on the other hand, Mußner, p. 41.

Thus James came to be recognized as canonical in all segments of the early church – and this without the benefit of a single authority imposing a decision. To be sure, James’ status was not immediately recognized. But it is important to stress that James was not *rejected*, but *neglected*. How may this neglect be explained? One factor may have been uncertainty about the apostolic origin of the book, since the author identifies himself only by name and James was a common name in the ancient world. Another factor could have been the traditional character of much of James’ teaching – the letter contains little fuel for the fiery theological debates in the early church.⁷ More important, perhaps, was the nature and destination of the epistle. The letter betrays a strong Jewish orientation and was probably written to Jewish churches in Palestine or Syria. The early demise of the Jewish church in Palestine as a result of the Jewish revolts of AD 66–70 and 132–5 may have resulted in a serious slow-down in the circulation of the letter. It may be significant in this regard that Origen makes reference to James only after coming into contact with the church in Palestine.⁸

It was at the time of the Reformation that doubts about James were again expressed. Erasmus, impressed by the good quality of James’ Greek, questioned the traditional view that the letter was written by the Lord’s brother. Luther, too, questioned the apostolic authorship of James, but his criticism went much deeper than Erasmus’s. For Luther, the sticking-point was the theological tension that he perceived between James and the ‘chief’ New Testament books over the matter of justification by faith. James, said Luther, ‘mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture’ (*LW* 35:397), and he characterized the letter as ‘an epistle of straw’ (*LW* 35:362). Along with Jude, Hebrews and Revelation, therefore, Luther consigned James to the end of his German translation of the New Testament. But, while Luther obviously had difficulties with James and came close to giving the letter a secondary status, his criticism should not be overdrawn. He did not exclude James from the canon and, it has been estimated,

7. Dibelius, pp. 53–54; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 726.

8. Cf. Laws, p. 24.

cites over half the verses of James as authoritative in his writings.⁹ Even the ‘epistle of straw’ reference must be understood in its context: Luther is not dismissing James as worthless, but contrasting it unfavourably with the ‘chief books’ (John’s Gospel, 1 John, Paul’s epistles [especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians] and 1 Peter), ‘which show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salutary for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine’. Therefore, Luther says of James elsewhere, ‘I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him’ (*LW* 35:397).

Few of the other reformers followed Luther in his criticism of James. Calvin, for instance, while admitting that James ‘seems more sparing in proclaiming the grace of Christ than it behooved an Apostle to be’, notes that ‘it is not surely required of all to handle the same arguments’.¹⁰ He accepted the apostolic authority of James and argued for a harmonization between James and Paul on the issue of justification. Calvin’s approach is surely the correct one. In hindsight, we can see that Luther’s excitement over his discovery of the doctrine of justification by faith and his polemical context prevented him from taking a balanced approach to James and some other New Testament books. With greater knowledge of the Jewish background of James, and at a distance of several centuries from the battles Luther was fighting, we can appreciate the way James and Paul complement one another. Their opponents are different, and their arguments accordingly different, but each makes an important contribution to our understanding of our faith.

2. Authorship

The author of the letter identifies himself simply as ‘James’ (Greek *Iakōbos*). Who is this individual? The New Testament knows of at least four different men named James:

9. Stoutenberg, ‘Luther’s Exegetical Use’, p. 51.

10. Calvin, p. 277.

1. James the son of Zebedee. Called to be a follower of Jesus early in the ministry (Mark 1:19), James, along with his brother John and Peter, became one of the apostles closest to Jesus (cf. Mark 5:37; 9:2; 10:35; 14:33).

2. James the son of Alphaeus. Also one of the twelve, he is mentioned only in the lists of the apostles and (possibly) in Mark 15:40 as 'James the younger', or 'lesser' (simply 'James' in the parallel, Matt. 27:56).¹¹

3. James the father¹² of Judas. This Judas, who is distinguished from Judas Iscariot (see John 14:22), is identified as one of the twelve in Luke 6:16 (and see Acts 1:13) and is probably to be identified with Thaddaeus in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18.

4. James 'the Lord's brother' (Gal. 1:19). Jesus' brothers did not believe in him during his earthly ministry (John 7:5; cf. Mark 6:3), but James quickly attained a position of prominence in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9).

The James of the epistle need not, of course, be identified with a James mentioned in the New Testament. But the use of the name by itself in a letter written with such authority implies that the author was a well-known figure, and it is improbable that such an individual would have gone unmentioned in the New Testament. Of the four New Testament Jameses, only the son of Zebedee and the Lord's brother stand out as prominent. James the son of Zebedee, however, died a martyr's death in AD 44 (Acts 12:2) and it is unlikely that the epistle was written as early as this. We are left, therefore, with James the Lord's brother as the most likely author of the epistle.

This James became a popular and respected figure in the early church, especially among Jewish Christians. He was venerated as the first 'bishop' of Jerusalem and was given the title 'the righteous' or 'the just' because of his faithfulness to the law and constancy

11. Alternatively, it is possible to regard this James as a fifth individual with that name (as does Kümmel, *Introduction*, p. 411).

12. The phrase in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 could also be rendered 'Judas the brother of James' (as in κJV), in which case James the Lord's brother might be intended (cf. Jude 1). But the translation 'son of' for the genitive of relationship is more likely.

in prayer. Much of our information about James comes from Hegesippus's account of James' death as recorded by Eusebius (*H.E.* 2.23). He tells us that James was stoned by the scribes and Pharisees for refusing to renounce his commitment to Jesus. This account of James' death is independently confirmed by Josephus (*Ant.* 20.9.1), who also enables us to date it in AD 62. However, much of the rest of Hegesippus's account, which portrays James as a zealot for the law, is legendary.¹³ It may be that Hegesippus derived his information from a strict sect of Jewish Christians called Ebionites, who regarded Paul with considerable disfavour and extolled James as the true heir to Jesus' teaching.¹⁴ Therefore, while all our sources agree that James was a pious, devoted Jewish Christian, anxious to maintain good relationships with Judaism, the picture of a legalistic, anti-Paul James must be rejected as a tendentious caricature.¹⁵

James has figured importantly in church history on another score also. As ascetic tendencies became ever more influential in the early church, the description of James, along with others, as a 'brother of the Lord' became a controversial issue. For, taken straightforwardly, this designation contradicts the notion that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus. Jerome popularized the view (often called the Hieronymian view, after that church father) that James and the other brothers of Jesus were in fact his cousins. He identified Mary of Clopas, a sister of Mary (John 19:25), with the Mary who is said to be the mother of James and Joses (Mark 15:40), both of whom

13. Cf. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 366; Ropes, p. 66.

14. In the pseudo-Clementine *Epistle of Clement* 1:1, James is named as the 'bishop of bishops'; according to the *Gospel of the Hebrews* (quoted in Jerome, *De vir. ill.* 2) the Lord appears first to James after his resurrection; in *The Gospel of Thomas*, Logion 12, the disciples ask Jesus, 'Who is to be our leader?' and Jesus replies, 'Wherever you are you are to go to James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being' (the quotation is taken from Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library*, p. 119). Mußner, pp. 4–7, cites much of the literature and provides a helpful discussion.

15. Ward, 'James of Jerusalem', pp. 799–810.

are identified as ‘brothers’ of Jesus (Mark 6:3). Thus James and Joses would be cousins, not brothers, of Jesus. The interpretation of the relationship among the different individuals named Mary and James mentioned in these texts is a vexing question that we will not pursue further here;¹⁶ suffice it to say that Jerome’s interpretation is by no means the only one. Most damaging to the Hieronymian position is the fact that *adelphos* always means ‘brother’ when blood relationship is denoted in the New Testament. James, then, must either be an older brother of Jesus, born to Joseph by a wife before Mary (the ‘Ephiphanian’ view),¹⁷ or a younger brother of Jesus, borne to Joseph and Mary (the ‘Helvidian’ view). Of these, the Helvidian better explains the close association suggested in the New Testament between Mary the mother of Jesus and the brothers of Jesus (cf. Mark 3:32; 6:3).¹⁸

It is this James, then, a younger brother of Jesus and respected leader of the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem, who is most naturally identified as the author of the letter bearing his name. Is there other evidence to confirm this identification? The testimony of the ancient church, as we have seen, is in agreement with this conclusion. This testimony, though not very early, is consistent in maintaining that James the Lord’s brother wrote this epistle. It was only very late, and then rarely, that the epistle was

16. See especially the discussion between Gunter, ‘The Family of Jesus’, pp. 25–41, and Wenham, ‘The Relatives of Jesus’, pp. 6–15.

17. This view is defended at length by Lightfoot in his excursus on ‘The Brethren of the Lord’ in *Galatians* and is slightly preferred in the latest full investigation of the matter (Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 19–32). Lightfoot claims that this view offers the best explanation for the authority Jesus’ brothers have over him (John 7:1–5), and for Jesus’ committing the care of his mother to a disciple rather than to one of his brothers (John 19:25–27). But it is not clear that Jesus’ brothers had any more authority over him than any relative might possess, and his brothers’ opposition to his message suffices to explain his passing them over as caretakers of his mother.

18. For an extended defence of the Helvidian position, see especially Mayor, pp. 6–55.

assigned to James the son of Zebedee or to James the son of Alphaeus.¹⁹

The Greek of the epistle contains some striking similarities to the Greek of the brief speech attributed to James the Lord's brother in Acts 15:13–21, and to the letter sent under his authority, recorded in Acts 15:23–29. The epistolary 'Greetings' (*chairein*) occurs in James 1:1 and Acts 15:23, but only one other time in the New Testament; the use of 'name' (*onoma*) as the subject of the passive verb 'call' (*kaleō*) is peculiar, yet occurs both in James 2:7 and Acts 15:17; the appeal 'listen, my brothers' is found in both James 2:5 and Acts 15:13; and there are other slight similarities.²⁰ These parallels are certainly not numerous enough to provide proof of common origin, yet they are suggestive when taken in conjunction with the first two points.

Finally, there are several features of the letter that do not point directly to James the Lord's brother, but would be quite in keeping with his authorship. The Jewish atmosphere of the book is very marked: Old Testament and Jewish teachings are frequently alluded to; the style reflects in places both the proverbial nature of Jewish wisdom traditions and the denunciatory preaching of the prophets; the meeting-place of the church is called a synagogue (2:2); and a central Jewish tenet, the oneness of God, is specifically mentioned (2:19). On the other hand, the epistle shows little evidence of a developed or self-consciously Christian theology. All this suggests an author who was writing at an early date, in a Jewish context, and who sought to maintain good relationships with Judaism. The way in which the teaching of Jesus thoroughly permeates the letter, without being directly cited, would also be entirely natural for someone with James' background. And, finally, James' position as the leader of the mother church of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would eminently qualify him to address an authoritative admonition to 'the twelve tribes scattered among the nations' (1:1).

19. Some Spanish writers, from the seventh century on, claimed that their patron, the son of Zebedee, was the author; the tenth-century Corbey manuscript makes the same ascription. Calvin (p. 277) suggests that James the son of Alphaeus may be the author.

20. See Mayor, pp. 3–4, for a full list and discussion.

These considerations together give us excellent reason to adopt the traditional view that James the brother of the Lord wrote this letter. But many scholars have felt otherwise, and a number of alternative theories of authorship have been propounded. One of the more extreme views denies that the bulk of James is a Christian book. According to this proposal, James was originally a Jewish tractate that was christianized with a couple of references to Jesus (see 1:1 and 2:1).²¹ This theory has many weaknesses, but the decisive objection to it is the degree to which the letter is permeated with references to the teaching of Jesus.²² A few scholars have attributed the book to an unknown James.²³ But the view that has attained the most popularity assigns the epistle to an unknown Christian leader. The name James in 1:1 – which is usually taken to refer to the Lord’s brother – was either added at a later date (so that the book was originally anonymous) or was used by the author himself in order to lend greater authority to the book (in which case the book is pseudonymous). Advocates of these alternative theories are convinced that the letter itself contains features incompatible with authorship by the Lord’s brother. Four such features are most often cited. We will examine each in turn.

1. First, some argue that it would be inconceivable to think that a brother of the Lord could have written such a document without some reference to his special relationship to the Lord, or to the resurrection appearance which may well have led to his conversion (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7).²⁴ However, special interest in physical ties to Jesus

21. Cf. Massebieau, ‘L’Épître de Jacques’, pp. 249–283; Spitta, ‘Der Brief des Jakobus’, pp. 1–239. Meyer, in *Das Rätsel des Jakobusbriefes*, suggested that this original Jewish document was based on the ‘testament’ of Jacob to his twelve sons in Genesis 49.

22. Kittel, ‘Der geschichtliche Ort’, pp. 84–91.

23. Erasmus; Luther; Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament*, pp. 164–165 (although Hunter is more cautious in the third edition [1972]; cf. pp. 168–169). Moffat (p. 2) thinks that an unknown James was the author and that the name of the more famous James of Jerusalem was later linked with it.

24. Cf. e.g. Laws, p. 40.

emerged only after the time of James' death; therefore the author's failure to include the title 'brother of the Lord' stands against pseudonymity and in favour of authenticity.²⁵ Moreover, James' physical relationship to Jesus did not spill over into a spiritual relationship. He remained estranged from Jesus and his true family – those who do the will of God (Mark 3:35) – until after the resurrection. If, then, being a brother of the Lord gave James no special insight into the person and mission of Jesus and carried with it no special status, his failure to mention the relationship should occasion no surprise.²⁶ Nor should it occasion surprise that James does not describe his special confrontation with the resurrected Christ. Paul, whose vision of the resurrected Christ decisively changed the course of his life, refers to it in only two of his thirteen letters. Tasker has pointed out the capriciousness of this sort of argument by noting that 2 Peter is often considered pseudonymous because its author *does* emphasize his relationship to Jesus.²⁷ In fact, without considerably more information about the circumstances in which New Testament letters were written, and the degree of intimacy between the author and his readers, arguments based on what a particular individual was likely to have written or not are of little value.

2. A second factor which is said to weigh heavily against the traditional view of authorship is the language and the cultural background of the letter. James is written in idiomatic Hellenistic Greek, with some literary flourishes (cf. the incomplete hexameter in 1:17), and occasionally employs language derived from Greek philosophy and religion (e.g. 'the course of human existence' [NET] in 3:6). This Greek, it is alleged, can hardly be attributed to the son of a Galilean carpenter who was known in tradition as a conservative Jewish Christian and who, as far as we know, never left the confines of Palestine. Three responses may be made to this argument.

First, while the Greek of James is undeniably more polished and closer to literary Greek than most New Testament Greek, its quality

25. Kittel, 'Der geschichtliche Ort', pp. 73–75.

26. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 125–130.

27. Tasker, p. 20. Dibelius, who thinks that James is pseudepigraphic, also notes the subjectivity of this argument, p. 17.

should not be exaggerated. While exhibiting some literary skill, the author does not use long words and elaborate grammatical structures. As Ropes says, ‘. . . there is nothing to suggest acquaintance with the higher styles of Greek literature’.²⁸

Second, the degree to which any particular Palestinian Jew could have written idiomatic Greek is impossible to determine. Certainly Greek was widely used in Palestine (particularly in Galilee) and many Palestinians, even from poor families, would grow up with fluency in the language.²⁹ The real question is: would James have been exposed to the kinds of influences that would have enabled him to write the semi-literary Greek of this letter? Without knowing the details of James’ education, the extent of his travels or the people with whom he associated, this question is impossible to answer. We may certainly suspect that a man elevated to the head of the Jerusalem church had the capacity to learn Greek well; and the Hellenistic element of that church (cf. Acts 6:1) would have given him both the opportunity and perhaps the motivation to acquire facility in the language. J. N. Sevenster, who uses James as a test case in his investigation of the use of Greek in Palestine, concludes that the Lord’s brother *could* have written this letter.³⁰ This, of course, does not prove that he *did*; but the language is no obstacle to the view.

Third, the philosophical and religious concepts that are found in James are all in the nature of popular concepts that would have been familiar to decently educated people in Palestine, where Hellenistic ideas were very widespread.³¹ It is quite arbitrary to argue that James could not have been familiar with them. One may as well argue that

28. Ropes, p. 25. Zahn, *Introduction*, I, p. 112, minimizes the quality of the Greek even further: ‘how limited is his [author of James] command of this foreign language.’

29. This has been demonstrated by, among others, Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?*

30. Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?*, p. 191. Cf. also Turner, *Style*, p. 114.

31. M. Hengel’s classic work, *Judaism and Hellenism*, has documented the evidence of a thorough penetration of Hellenistic ideas in first-century Palestine.

a man in the street has a degree in philosophy because he uses the word ‘existentialism’.

3. The approach to the Old Testament law exhibited in the epistle is the third reason why many critics think James ‘the Just’ could not have written it. The author characterizes the law (*nomos*: the Jewish *torah*) as ‘the law that gives freedom’ (1:25; 2:12) and ‘the royal law’ (2:8) and focuses exclusively on moral commandments (2:11), ignoring the ritual law (see the silence in 1:27). This liberal approach to the law, it is claimed, is in complete contrast to what we know of the attitude of James, who sought to impose the ritual law on Paul in Acts (21:20–25) and who is known in both Jewish and Christian tradition as an exemplar of ‘torah-piety’.³²

However, the picture of James as ‘an advocate of hidebound Jewish-Christian piety’³³ requires considerable modification. As we have seen, much of the evidence for this picture comes from Hegesippus, whose historical veracity is more than a little questionable. The New Testament certainly portrays James as one who was concerned to maintain the best possible relationships between Jews and Christians and who accordingly advocated the legitimacy of Jewish tradition and customs for Jewish Christians (Acts 21:20–25; perhaps Gal. 2:12). But it also makes clear that he opposed the attempt to impose the Mosaic law on Gentile Christians (Acts 15:13–21); and nowhere does he argue that Christians, Jewish or not, *must* continue observing the ritual law. The point is, then, that the ritually legalistic James, with whom the author of the epistle is sometimes contrasted, is little more than an un-historical fabrication. We must also keep in mind that an author’s silence about an issue does not necessarily indicate his lack of concern about it. Thus, if James is writing to a group of Christians among whom the observance of the ritual law is not an issue, there may be no reason for him to mention it.³⁴ We will say more about James’ attitude towards the law in our summary of his theology

32. Dibelius calls this the ‘decisive argument’ against the traditional view (p. 18). Cf. also *Laws*, pp. 40–41.

33. The description is Dibelius’s, p. 17.

34. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 738–739.

and in our comments on the relevant verses. Suffice it to say here that the attitude towards the law found in the epistle is by no means incompatible with the view which James of Jerusalem is likely to have held.

4. The fourth main reason for denying that James the Lord's brother could have written this epistle involves the vexing problem of the relationship between James and Paul in their teaching on justification. As is well known, James' insistence that works are taken into account in justification (2:14–26) is often seen as a direct contradiction of Paul's proclamation of justification by faith alone. Most scholars now agree, however, that the two are not in direct contradiction on this issue. Their use of key terms with different meanings and the different problems with which they are concerned result in their arguments passing each other's by, like ships in the night.³⁵ Either each is unaware of what the other is saying, or one of them is responding to a misunderstood form of the other's teaching. While the former view is certainly possible, most scholars think the distinctive language of 'justification by faith' points to some contact with the teaching of Paul.³⁶ On this basis, then, it is claimed that the letter of James could not have been written by James of Jerusalem, because this James must have been very well acquainted with the teaching of Paul – the two were key participants in the first council of the church (Acts 15), and met at a later date also, when some of these basic theological issues must have been discussed (Acts 21:18–25). The letter of James must have been written late in the first century, when Paul's theology was no longer understood in its proper context. Kümmel gives succinct expression to this argument: 'The debate in 2:14ff. with a misunderstood secondary stage of Pauline theology not only presupposes a considerable chronological distance from Paul – whereas James died in the year 62 – but also betrays a complete ignorance of the polemical intent of Pauline theology, which lapse can scarcely be

35. See e.g. Martin, pp. xxxiii–xli; Johnson, pp. 111–116.

36. See esp. Allison, pp. 445–457, for a convincing argument that James knows of Paul's distinctive theological emphases. For the opposite view, see e.g. McKnight, pp. 53–56.

attributed to James, who as late as 55/56 met with Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18ff.).³⁷

The issue touched on here is one of the most difficult in the epistle of James. We shall devote a full discussion to it in the section on James' theology and in the commentary on 2:14–26. For the present, however, it is sufficient to point out that the situation we have described – assuming, for the moment, its accuracy – is capable of a very different explanation. Could it not be that the perverted form of Paul's teaching contested in James 2 is very *early* and that James is not yet aware of Paul's true intent because they have not had time to understand one another's teaching? Paul undoubtedly began preaching very shortly after his conversion (to be dated about AD 33). How soon Paul seized on and proclaimed his distinctive emphasis on justification 'apart from the works of the law' is impossible to know for certain; but the earliest Pauline letters presume the full development of the concept. We know also that already during Paul's ministry his preaching on justification by faith was being misunderstood (cf. Rom. 3:5–8). It is not at all improbable, then, that some Christians who had been exposed to Paul's preaching may have – intentionally or not – perverted Paul's doctrine into an excuse for spiritual passivity. James' attack on this perversion would then betray 'a complete ignorance of the polemical intent of Pauline theology' because James was not yet well acquainted with Paul's teaching.³⁸ Indeed, it is perhaps more probable that a 'complete ignorance' of the thrust of Paul's teaching would exist before his letters were widely circulated than long afterwards. The possibility we suggest would imply an early date for James; we hope to show in the next section that an early date has much to commend it. At least we can conclude that an early date is as capable of explaining James 2 as a late one. This means, then, that the argument of James 2 presents no difficulty in ascribing the letter to James the Lord's brother.

We conclude, therefore, that the epistle contains nothing that James the Lord's brother could not have written. The way is then

37. Kümmel, *Introduction*, p. 413.

38. Kittel, 'Der geschichtliche Ort', pp. 96–97; Wessel, 'The Epistle of James', *ISBE* II, p. 765; McKnight, pp. 259–263.

open to accept the epistle's own apparent claim that James was the author. Still, there are some who, while accepting this claim, are impressed by one or more of the arguments just examined. These scholars suggest some sort of compromise solution, according to which someone besides James had a hand in the composition of the letter. Some attempt to explain the quality of the Greek by supposing that a scribe was responsible for the actual composition.³⁹ This hypothesis cannot *a priori* be ruled out, for we know that scribes (or *amanuenses*, as they were called) were frequently used in the drafting of ancient letters. In the case of James, however, the exact wording is so often crucial to the flow of the letter (see e.g. the wordplays: *chairein*, 'greetings', 1:1/*charan*, 'joy', 1:2; *leipomenoi*, 'lacking', 1:4/*leipetai*, 'lacks', 1:5) that the final compositor must almost be identified as the author.⁴⁰ A second suggestion is that our epistle is a free translation of an Aramaic discourse or series of sermons originally given by James.⁴¹ It cannot be argued against this view that James' Greek does not betray evidence of translation from a Semitic language. For, if the translation is good enough, little evidence of the original language will be present (would it be obvious to the uninformed reader that J. B. Phillips' paraphrase is based on Greek?). But while, in the nature of the case, it is impossible to disprove the theory, there remains little in favour of it.

A third compromise position is ably defended by P. Davids. He is impressed by some of the apparent anomalies of the letter – good Greek alongside Semitisms, curious divergences in vocabulary, disjointedness in the treatment of various topics – and concludes that these are best explained if we posit a two-stage process of origin for the letter. The first stage would have consisted of a series of Jewish-Christian homilies (some translated from Aramaic, others original Greek compositions); the second stage, the redactional process by which these were moulded into a single composition.

39. Robert and Feuillet, *Introduction*, p. 564. Mußner, p. 8, suggests the participation of a fellow-author (*Mitarbeiter*).

40. Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?*, pp. 10–14.

41. Burkitt, *Christian Beginnings*, pp. 65–71; cf. also Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James and John*, p. 113.

Dauids allows that James may have been the author of the first stage, or of both stages.⁴² Again, this theory is difficult to prove or disprove. But in so far as it rests on anomalies in James, we may question whether it is necessary. The inconsistencies that Dauids cites are not of a type that require the hypothesis of two different stages of composition. An author who was fluent in both Aramaic and Greek would naturally betray some influence from Aramaic when writing in Greek. And while Semitic ways of putting things can often be discerned in James, the Greek, as Dibelius says, is ‘relatively homogenous’.⁴³ Similarly, the disjointedness of topics seems to be a product of the genre in which the letter is written; and would not an editor, as much as an author, seek to smooth out the composition? That James may have utilized his own sermons in writing the letter is not improbable in itself. But evidence for an earlier literary stage is not compelling.

While none of these compromise positions can be definitely ruled out, they are, in the end, unnecessary. It is more natural to take the reference to James as an indicator of the epistle’s sole author.

In conclusion, one further consideration on the question of authorship must be considered. Proponents of the pseudepigraphical hypothesis often portray it in terms of a ‘transparent literary device’. The person writing in the name of James would have been claiming some kind of continuity with the teaching of James but would not be intending to deceive anyone about authorship.⁴⁴ Viewed in this light, the claim that James is pseudepigraphical would pose no challenge to the full truthfulness of the letter. The connection of the letter with James established in 1:1 is not intended to be, and would not have been understood to be, a claim about who wrote the letter. It is, rather, a claim about the theological tradition in which the letter stands. Of course, we possess many pseudepigraphical books from the world of James’ day (e.g. Jewish apocalypses). It is hard to know what kind of claim is being made when these books claim

42. Dauids, pp. 12–13. See also, in modified form and cautiously, Wall, ‘James, the Letter of’, pp. 547–548.

43. Dibelius, p. 34.

44. See e.g. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*.

to be written by Adam, Moses or Abraham. However, the issue of genre plays a significant role here. Expectations about the meaning of a claim such as ‘James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations’ are determined by genre. James is clearly a letter; yet we have no evidence from the early church that claims to authorship in letters were treated as a ‘transparent literary device’. If the claim about authorship was determined to be true, the letter was accorded a certain authority; if it was proven false, the letter was rejected. The very fact that James was accepted as a canonical book, then, presumes that the early Christians who made this decision were sure that James wrote it. Those who did not think that James wrote it barred it from the canon for this reason. This means that we have to choose between 1) viewing James as a forgery, intended perhaps to claim an authority that the author did not really have – and therefore omit it from the canon; and 2) viewing James as an authentic letter from James. The ‘have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too’ theory of canonical pseudepigraphon does not seem to be an alternative.⁴⁵

3. Circumstances of the letter

From the content of the letter itself we are able to learn something about the people to whom it was written. First, it is almost certain that the readers were Jews. The letter is thoroughly imbued with the spirit and imagery of the Old Testament and Judaism – so thoroughly that it likely reflects the readers’ background as well as the author’s. For instance, James’ use of the feminine ‘adulteresses’ (*moichalides*) in 4:4 would make no sense to anyone who was not well acquainted with the Old Testament tradition comparing the Lord’s covenant with his people to a marriage relationship. Similarly, the simple and unexplained way in which James refers to the ‘law’ presumes that his readers are familiar with this law and have no questions about its relevance to them. Also indicative of a Jewish

45. See e.g. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy*; Wilder, *Pseudonymity*; MacDonald and Porter, *Early Christianity*, pp. 388–393; Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, pp. 337–350.