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A0704 – January 28, 2006 – Jas 1:1 – Salutation - Part 2

Date

Commentators have dated this book between 34ⁱ-61ⁱⁱAD. Most date it between 44 and 50AD. The latest possible date is 62AD because Josephus records his death at that time. There are some very strong evidences that this book was written as early as 35AD but there are also some which indicate it was closer to 44AD. So, I place the book between 35-44AD. To understand why we have to re-create the historical background from the Book of Acts. What is obvious from the letter of James is that his Jewish recipients had been facing persecutions for their loyalty to Jesus Christ and this caused them to be dispersed from the land of Israel. James attacks these situations giving practical ways for believers to respond during times of trial and difficulty. So, to understand the trials these Jewish believers were facing and why James would write this book let's go to the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts was written by a doctor named Luke to an official in the Roman Empire named Theophilus who was investigating the spread of Christianity (Acts 1:1). Luke records that Christianity began in Jerusalem and spread outward.

Let's start with the fact that Jesus was crucified on Friday, April 3, 33AD. Three days later He was resurrected on Sunday, April 5, 33AD. Then He appeared to His apostles over a period of forty days teaching them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:1-8). Just before He departed He gave them these words in Acts 1:8 "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." After these words Jesus ascended to heaven on Thursday, May 14, 33AD (Acts 1:9-11). A few days later His words were fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. On that day Peter delivered the first sermon in Church History to

an exclusively Jewish audience (2:14-47). Over 3,000 believed and entered the Church on that day (Acts 2:41). This was the day the Church began because this is the first day the Holy Spirit baptized believers into the body of Christ which is the Church. No one had ever been baptized by the Spirit before. Therefore, this day is called the Jewish Pentecost because only Jews entered the Church on that day.

In Acts 3 Peter and John were going to the Temple and Peter was instrumental in healing a lame beggar whom everyone knew for he begged for alms their daily (Acts 3:1-10). As a result Peter preached his second sermon at the porch of Solomon (Acts 3:11-26). On hearing Peter speak about the resurrected Jesus Christ the priests and Sadducees arrested Peter and John and took them before the high priest Annas where they were investigated (Acts 4:1-12). After threatening them not to speak in the name of Jesus they released them for fear of the people who had seen the miracle (Acts 4:13-22). So, by this time the early church in Jerusalem was already being persecuted. When Peter and John reported this incident to the other Jewish believers the response was one of full joy and giving glory to God because Peter and John had stood in the trial with such boldness it could only have come from God (Acts 4:23-31). As a result of this the Jewish believers were uniting and a sharp separation was being made between them and the leadership of Israel. Many were believing and being added to their number and those who heard of the miracles were coming from the vicinity of Jerusalem and bringing people to be healed (Acts 5:12-16). The apostles were becoming so popular that the Sadducees became jealous and arrested them and put them in public jail (Acts 4:17-26). Hopefully you can see the tension rising. But during the night they were miraculously released from prison and told to go and preach in the Temple. So, when they came to retrieve them from prison they were gone and they were found preaching in the Temple. So, they went and brought them before the Council and reminded them of their strict orders not to speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:27-32). But Peter and the apostles once more responded with boldness. Then, a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up in the Council and said that if this movement was of man then it would fizzle out and if it was of God they would never be able to overthrow it. So, the Council agreed, warned them not to speak in Jesus' name and sent them out. But the apostles went right on preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:33-42). The preaching of the church became so effective that priests were actually believing and then came a man

named Stephen (meaning “victor” or “crown”). He was preaching and teaching and some tried to stand against him but his wisdom was far superior. So, because they could not beat him with logical argumentation they brought a false charge against him, arrested him and brought him before the Council. After the council heard the charges they were all very angry and ready to condemn him. But Stephen first gave his defense in Acts 7. So, can you see the progression of tension and persecution the Jewish Christians were experiencing in Jerusalem. Well, this all came to a head with Stephen’s speech in Acts 7. Stephen’s speech is one of the greatest of all time. His speech was a history of Israel presented in such a logical way that the conclusion was obvious. What they should do was place their faith in Jesus Christ but what they did do was become so angry that they stoned him to death right then and there! And a man named Saul was there, later named Paul, and he was in hearty agreement with the stoning of Stephen. And he began leading the persecution against the Jewish believers, charging into homes and dragging off women and children (Acts 8:1-3). This was the height of persecution at this time. If you were a Jewish believer in the Messiahship of Jesus then your life was in danger and so, Acts 8:4 records that many of the Jewish believers had scattered (*Gk diaspero*). And a man named Phillip went to Samaria and was preaching and here is where the first non-Jews were baptized into the body of Christ, the church. So, Acts 8 is the Samaritan Pentecost, this was about the year 35-36AD. The letter of James was probably written in light of this event. Stephen’s martyrdom was the event which caused the Jewish believers to disperse from the land of Israel. Obviously this was God’s way of fulfilling Acts 1:8 where Christ said the gospel would begin in Jerusalem and then spread to Judea and Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth. So, God used these persecutions to spread the gospel outside of Jerusalem because they probably never would have gone otherwise. Since Jacob/James stayed in the land of Israel along with the other apostles he wrote this letter to instruct these Jewish believers on how to persevere in trials.

Some other evidence in the letter indicates it could have been written as early as 35-36AD but other evidence indicates it could have been as late as 44AD so let’s look at this evidence. In favor of an early date around 35-36AD we have three facts. *First*, Jacob/James wrote the letter to Jewish believers of the *diaspora* (1:1-2). *Second*, there is no mention of Samaritan or Gentile converts. *Third*, they were still meeting in “synagogues” (James 2:2). In favor

of a later date around 44AD we also have three facts. *First*, there is no mention of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 which happened in 50AD so it was probably written before this. *Second*, these Jewish believers are called “Christians” in James 2:7 and this name originated in Antioch around the year 43-44AD (Acts 11:25-26). *Third*, the authoritative tone of James. James did not become teacher of the church in Jerusalem until 43-44AD (Acts 12:17).

So, it appears that Jacob/James wrote this book between 35-44AD to Jewish believers who fled the land of Israel due to Stephen’s martyrdom. This makes James the earliest NT document that we possess. The next epistle written was Galatians ~49AD.ⁱⁱⁱ

Purpose

In light of Stephen’s martyrdom and rising persecution in Israel this letter was written to encourage these Jewish believers to persevere through trials and to train them how to respond in stressful situations. Their lives were at stake! Who knows if they would be the next Stephen! All Christians face trials. The proper response is to persevere through the trial in faith. In some countries it is illegal to be a Christian and their lives are constantly in the balance, danger waits around every corner. In other countries, although Christianity is legal, there is much persecution by way of intellectual mockery on the university campus, judicial bias in the courts and misrepresentation or unbalanced coverage in the media. When these kinds of persecution are taking place, beware, physical persecution is just around the corner. On a more personal level we all face times of trial and stress. You are gossiped about. You are lied to. You are rejected by others. You are not loved. You are wronged. You are ripped off. You are beaten. You are hurt. You are chronically ill. You have too much work and not enough time to spend with your family. You can’t make ends meet. You lose a mother. You lose a father. You lose your husband. You lose your wife. You can’t have a child. You lose an infant. You lose a son. You lose a daughter. How do we respond in such times of stress and trial? Do we respond with joy and perseverance knowing that God is strengthening our character? Or do we respond with “Why me God?” “Why are you doing this to me?” This is what the Book of James is all about; how to cultivate DVP responses to stress and trials.

Themes

There are three themes in Jacob/James. These are revealed in the key verse, James 1:19. This verse reveals the three basic responses to trials that result in God strengthening our character.

James 1:19 But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger;

First, the believer should be “quick to hear” the word. That is, increase your ability to concentrate on the word of God for extended periods of time. However, hearing means more than listening. It also includes doing. This theme is expounded in 1:20-2:26. *Second*, James teaches that the believer should be “slow to speak”. The tongue is a fire that no man can bridle. Although it is a small part of the body it can easily cause harm to others. Wounds of the tongue are not easily healed. It is for this reason that not many should become teachers. Rather than trying to speak wisdom the believer should focus on wise and holy conduct which displays wisdom. This theme is expounded in 3:1-18. *Third*, the believer should be “slow to wrath”. It is easy to get angry but it is worldly to get angry. Humility must replace anger. This theme is expounded in 4:1-5:6. So, 1:19 is the key verse which contains the three themes of the book “be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger”. Cultivating these three responses now will enable the believer to persevere through trials.

Theology

As you probably know James is the most practical of all the NT books. He is not so much concerned with doctrine but with practice of doctrine. As I explained before, this is because these Jewish Christians already have doctrine from the OT. All they need is some exhortation to put into practice what they already know. It is likely that if James had Gentile believers as his audience he would have written like Paul giving doctrine before application. But he didn't and this is further evidence that his audience is Jewish.

So, James is intensely practical. It has been written that “doctrine without practice (application) is dangerous, but practice (application) without doctrine is deadly.”^{iv} But James considers the two inseparable. Both doctrine without

practice and practice without doctrine are deadly (cf 1:12; 2:14; 5:20)! Why? Doctrine without practice leads to intellectual pride and practice without doctrine leads to moral failure. Therefore both doctrine and practice are essential to a balanced Christian life.

In terms of theology, James' biggest concern is a branch of the Doctrine of Salvation. James does not teach how to be saved from hell but how a child born of God can be saved from the deadly consequences of sin. In other words, James is concerned about the believer's present salvation from the power of sin by putting one's faith to work (1:12; 2:14; 5:20). Also, James briefly touches the Doctrine of God in James 1:13; 17, 27; 4:13-15, the Doctrine of Sin in James 1:14-15; 4:1-2, the Doctrine of Christ in James 1:1; 2:1, the Doctrine of Prayer in James 1:5-8; 4:1-3; 5:13-18, and the Doctrine of Last Things in James 2:12-13; 5:7-12.

Difficulties

There are two difficult sections in James. *First*, in James 2:14-26 he explores the relationship between faith and works. In this section James teaches two things that bother many modern readers. One, he teaches that faith without works cannot save (2:14). The solution to this difficulty is apparent when we understand two facts. One, when James uses the word "save" he never means saved from hell but rather saved from the deadly consequences of sin in the believers' life (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15; 5:20). That is, James uses the word "save" with respect to our present salvation from the power of sin and not with respect to our past salvation from the penalty of sin. In fact, James never digresses to question whether his readers are born again. That is stated and assumed throughout. What he does question is whether they are putting their faith to work or not. James argues that if a born again Christian is not putting his faith to work he cannot be expected to be saved from the deadly consequences of sin (1:15; 5:20). Two, he teaches that justification is by works and not by faith alone (2:21). James and Paul are often juxtaposed because James taught justification was by works and Paul taught justification was by faith alone. How are James and Paul to be reconciled? It is really quite simple. Paul argued that justification before God was by faith alone. James argued that justification before men was by works.

The *second* major difficulty in James is James 5:13-18 where he mentions the elders anointing the sick with oil. But, no explanation is given for why the sick were anointed with oil and we are not going to create one out of thin air. It is best to let the text stand as written.

Canonicity

James' acceptance as canonical did not come easy. It was one of the five disputed epistles. In the early church Victorinus knew the letter of James but did not consider it canonical.^v By far most eventually accepted its authenticity and it was of course, recognized universally as canonical. Of course, there are always a few dissenters. One who is often thought to have denied the canonicity of James was Martin Luther but this is not totally accurate. Luther placed the NT books in a hierarchy of authority and he placed James in the lowest tier. In his 1522 New Testament he calls it 'an epistle of straw' because he thought it contradicted the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith.^{vi}

Outline

The outline is based on two observations. *First*, it is based on the fact that the three themes mentioned in 1:19 are developed in the heart of the epistle. *Second*, the minor divisions to be included in a more detailed outline are discovered by the phrase "my brethren" or "beloved brethren" (1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19).

- I. Salutation (1:1)
- II. DVP Responses to Trial (1:2-12)
- III. DVP Responses to Temptation (1:13-18)
- IV. Cultivating DVP Responses (1:19-5:6)
 - A. By Being Swift to Hear (1:21-2:26)
 - B. By Being Slow to Speak (3:1-18)
 - C. By Being Slow to Anger (4:1-5:6)
- V. Persevering in Trials (5:7-20)^{vii}

ⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing*.

ⁱⁱ Robinson, T., *The Bible Timeline*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hill, A.E, *Guide to Bible Data*. Guthrie, D., *New Testament Introduction*.

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- iv Bigalke, Ron, The Emerging Church in the *Journal of Dispensational Theology-Dec 2006*, footnote 10, page 22.
v Bruce, F.F., *The Canon of Scripture*, 222-223.
vi Bruce, F.F., *The Canon of Scripture*, 243-244.
vii Jeremy Thomas, *James: In the Refiner's Fire*, Dec. 2006.

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