

James the Righteous, Brother of Yeshua

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The video version is available at: <https://youtu.be/uip9R7vaybg>

The scripture reading is James chapters 1-3

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem for the Feast of Shavuot in 57 CE, he was met by rumors that he was instructing Jewish believers to abandon the Torah. The Jerusalem Council, led by James the brother of Yeshua, devised a plan to once and for all put a stop to the rumors. Paul was to openly purify himself and fulfill his Nazirite vow according to all the requirements of the Torah as well as pay for four of his fellow believers to fulfill their vows. The plan was going brilliantly until some Jews from Asia confronted Paul in the temple and accused him of desecrating the temple. There was a riot that broke out and Paul ended up being arrested by the Romans. The fiasco grew even bigger when some zealots, backed by the Sanhedrin, plotted to murder Paul. Instead of quelling the rumors as planned, Paul's appearance and subsequent arrest in the temple resulted in more and more Jews believing that followers of the Way were abandoning Torah and were teaching others to do so as well!

The plan to restore the reputation of the Jewish believers among the greater Jewish population failed. How would this change the acceptance of Jewish believers in Jerusalem and the temple? What steps did James and the Council take to protect their flock?

When Paul was arrested at Shavuot, more than three million people were present to witness this event. His subsequent defense before the crowd and their attempt to stone him was similarly witnessed. As the Jewish pilgrims returned to their homes, they would have taken news of this latest unrest in Jerusalem with them. Action needed to be taken to counteract the confusion about doctrine resulting from the rumors about Paul and his arrest. Simon Peter, John the son of Zebedee and James the Righteous were the acknowledged leaders of the Way. Paul describes Peter, John and James as pillars who endorsed him.

Galatians 2:9 NKJV 9 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.

First Fruits of Zion in Chronicles of the Apostles describe the plan devised by James, Peter and John to relate the facts about the events in Jerusalem and to clarify the importance of the Torah.

"They seem to have agreed on a two-part plan. James sent an epistle to the Jewish believers in the Diaspora clarifying the relationship of faith and works in the Torah. Simon Peter and John would travel to the areas Paul had pioneered with the gospel and send out other apostles to follow up on Paul's apostolate."ⁱ

While Peter and John traveled around Asia and Macedonia, James remained in Jerusalem. What do we know about James the Righteous? He is first mentioned when Yeshua returns to Nazareth to teach.

Matthew 13:55 NKJV 55 "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?"

He was the brother of Yeshua and, before Yeshua's resurrection, did not believe that Yeshua was the Messiah. John records that James and his other brothers mocked him about being the Messiah less than a year before Yeshua's death.

John 7:2-5 NKJV 2 Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. 3 His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. 4 "For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." 5 For even His brothers did not believe in Him.

Paul mentions specifically in his first letter to the Corinthians that Yeshua appeared to James after His resurrection. This could be when James and Yeshua's other brothers finally believed.

When did James become a leader of the followers of the Way? We first see him in a leadership role in about 44CE at the time that James the son of Zebedee is executed, and Peter, escaping from prison, sends word to James.

Acts 12:17 NKJV 17 But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

Clement of Alexandria relates that James along with Peter and John received a divine appointment from Yeshua.

After the resurrection the Lord imparted the higher knowledge to James the Just, John and Peter. They gave it to the other apostles, and the other apostles to the Seventy, one of whom was Barnabas.ⁱⁱ

Hegesippus, a church historian of the early second century, describes James as being a Nazarite from birth and known among all the Jewish sects as being righteous.

"He was called "the Just" by everyone from the Lord's time to ours, since there were many Jameses, but this one was consecrated from his mother's womb. He drank no wine or liquor and ate no meat. No razor came near his head, he did not anoint himself with oil, and took no baths. He alone was permitted to enter the sanctum, for he wore not wool but linen. He used to enter the temple alone and was often found kneeling and imploring forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like a camel's from his continual kneeling in worship of God and in prayer for the people."ⁱⁱⁱ

According to church history, once James came to Jerusalem after Yeshua appeared to him, he never left the city. Sometime after 44 CE and before his death in 62 CE, James wrote an epistle to the Jewish believers addressing his letter to the twelve tribes.

James 1:1 NKJV 1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

The fact that James is specifically addressing the Jewish believers supports that James' letter was written at a time of crises for Jewish believers. The time shortly after the arrest of Paul at Jerusalem is definitely a critical time for Jewish believers. The topics of James' letter also support that his letter follows Paul's arrest. First Fruits of Zion in Chronicles of the Apostles states:

The epistle of James targets two primary concerns related to those false rumors: slanderous gossip and the anti-Torah theology. On the one hand, James squarely rebuked believers who taught that one could replace obedience to Torah with faith alone. Employing the same type of language, and even the

same proof texts that Paul frequently used in his epistles, James directly challenged those who placed faith in antithesis to Torah.^{iv}

The epistle of James opens with encouragement during times of trial.

James 1:2-4 NKJV 2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

As we have learned, the Jewish believers in every city experienced persecution from the Jews who did not believe in Yeshua as Messiah. The Jewish exile from Rome by Emperor Claudius was because of the fighting between the Jewish believers and unbelievers. Persecution of Jewish believers by their fellow Jews began with the stoning of Stephen and never stopped. The Jews from Asia who accused Paul were examples of the persecution enacted by the Jewish unbelievers.

After encouraging believers to patiently endure trials, James turns his attention to what true Torah observance looks like.

James 1:22-25 NKJV 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

James describes the Torah as a guideline for living. It's not just for hearing it read each week in the synagogue; it is to be put into action. James describes the Torah as the perfect law of liberty. James may have been thinking about the words of the first Psalm.

Psalms 1:1-3 NKJV 1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

David speaks of keeping the Torah as a path leading to mercy and obtaining liberty.

Psalms 119:41-45 NKJV 41 WAW. Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD-Your salvation according to Your word. 42 So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, For I trust in Your word. 43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, For I have hoped in Your ordinances. 44 So shall I keep Your law continually, Forever and ever. 45 And I will walk at liberty, For I seek Your precepts.

James reminds his Jewish audience that the greatest commandment after loving God is to love your neighbor. Those who do not love their neighbor are guilty of breaking the entire law.

James 2:8-9 NKJV 8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

He encourages all of his readers to follow the example of David and seek mercy not just for themselves but towards others.

James 2:12-13 NKJV 12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James explains that faith and works are both necessary parts of salvation. Indeed, faith without works is no faith at all.

James 2:18-20 NKJV 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

James, like Paul, cites the example of Abraham's faith being demonstrated by his actions and credited as righteousness. James, who is called the righteous, was accounted as demonstrating that faith in his daily prayers for his people.

James, then, turns to the issue of spreading rumors and believing lies. He warns teachers to be careful of what they teach.

James 3:1 NKJV 1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

The words that follow about not guarding what a person speaks are especially relevant to teachers even as they apply to all of James' readers.

James 3:5-6 NKJV 5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

James touches on the sources of the unbridled tongue as being envy and pride.

James 3:14-16 NKJV 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

These are the traits that the Jews from Asia exhibited in their condemnation against Paul. Those in Antioch in Pisidia reacted with both envy and pride when they observed the enthusiasm with which the Gentiles received the gospel.

Acts 13:45 NKJV 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

James, also, has a few words to share about the rich oppressors. James is well acquainted with rich oppressors.

James 5:1-3 NKJV 1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.

For James' entire life, the high priesthood was dominated by the family of Ananias. Ananias was the priest when he and Yeshua were boys. Ananias was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest who presided over Yeshua's trial and execution. Over the next thirty plus years, each of Ananias' five sons would hold the office of high priest. Ananias was the leader of the Sadducees of whom Josephus describes as being barbarous even to each other. Ananias briefly resumed the high priesthood after the assassination of the high priest Jonathan. Shortly after Paul's encounter with Ananias at his appearance before the Sanhedrin, King Agrippa appointed Ismael son of Fabi as high priest. Under Ismael's short tenure of about four years, Josephus describes the infighting among the sects of the priesthood.

“And such was the boldness that had seized on the high priests, that they had the hardness to send their servants into the threshing floors, to take away those tithes that were due to the priests, insomuch that it so fell out that the poorer sort of the priests died for want. To this degree did the violence of the seditious prevail over all right and justice.”^v

As this is going on among the priests and principal men of the city, the Zealots are getting louder and bolder in their protests against Rome attacking any Jew they see as cooperating with Rome. Amid this backdrop, James continued to preach. Hegesippus relates one of James' discourses.

“Representatives of the seven sects among the [Jewish] people,... asked him what “the door of Jesus” meant, and he replied that he was the Savior. Because of this, some believed that Jesus was the Christ.”^{vi}

The Sadducees under the leadership of Ananias had been unsuccessful in stopping the spread of the Way by getting rid of Paul's influence. Now they sought ways to stop James and the other leaders of the Way who continued to preach in Jerusalem.

They received an unexpected opportunity when the procurator Festus died suddenly in 62 CE. Nero immediately appointed Albinus as the new procurator but he would not arrive to take up his duties for about six months. Without a procurator in the land, the Jews decided to reclaim the right to try cases involving capital crimes. They convinced King Agrippa to remove the newly appointed high priest Joseph Cabi and replace him with Ananus the fifth son of Ananias. Ananus immediately went after James as being a breaker of the Torah. Josephus records this event.

“Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he (Ananus) assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.”^{vii}

Josephus records that the most righteous of the Jews objected to this trumped up trial and execution and issued a complaint against Ananus with Albinus. Ananus was promptly removed from office after serving only three months.

The church Historian Hegesippus records a different scenario for James' death. In this account, James is taken to a parapet of the temple and ordered to deny that Yeshua was the Messiah.

We call on you to persuade all who come for the Passover concerning Jesus, since of all us trust you. We and the entire population can vouch for the fact that you are righteous and take no one at face value... So stand on the parapet of the temple, where you can be clearly seen from that height and your words be heard by all the people with all the tribes, and Gentiles too, gathered for the Passover.^{viii}

James did not deny Yeshua; instead he testified that Yeshua was the Messiah. In response, the gathered leaders pushed him off the temple. When James did not die in the fall, the people stoned him even as he prayed that God would forgive them. Hegesippus records that this event happened at Passover. This was either 62 or 63 CE. In just seven or eight years, the temple from which James was thrown down would itself be thrown down.

Hegesippus paraphrases a prophecy in Isaiah as referring to the death of James the Righteous.

Isaiah 57:1-2 (Stone Edition) 1 The righteous one perishes, and no man takes it to heart; men of kindness are gathered in with no one understanding that because of the impending evil the righteous one was gathered in. He will come in peace; they will rest on their resting places—he who walks in his integrity.

The commentary on these verses in [The Stone Edition Tanach](#) explains:

Isaiah addresses the wicked people of his generation, and explains that at a time when righteous people are not respected, they may die so that they should not witness the evil that is about to come upon the world.^{ix}

James died before the evil that was coming upon Jerusalem arrived. From the time of James' execution along with the others arrested with him, the separation between the mainstream Jewish sects and the followers of the Way continued to grow. Jewish believers would soon not be accepted at all in the temple. In spite of this persecution from their fellow Jews, the gospel continued to spread and the number of believers grew.

James the Righteous died praying for his enemies. He died giving faithful testimony that Yeshua was the Messiah of the world.

Study Questions:

1. Some scholars think the James' epistle contradicts Paul's gospel. Does James contradict Paul?
2. How does James address the issues of slanderous gossip and anti-Torah teaching?
3. What influence does the house of Ananias have on the events in Jerusalem and Israel from the time of Yeshua's ministry to the destruction of the temple?
4. Hegesippus says James was pushed off the parapet of the temple and stoned on the pavement below the temple. Compare this event with the temptation of Yeshua.
5. What is the significance of the timing of James' death? How is his death a fulfillment of Isaiah 57:1-2?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

Bonus: What is the law of liberty that James refers to in James 1:25 and James 2:12?

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ⁱ [Chronicles of the Apostles](#). D.T. Lancaster. First Fruits of Zion. ©2011, 2016. Book 3, Page 849-850

ⁱⁱ Eusebius [The Church History](#). Translation by Paul L. Maier. Kregel Publications. ©1999, 2007. Page 53.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eusebius [The Church History](#). Translation by Paul L. Maier. Kregel Publications. ©1999, 2007. Page 71.

^{iv} Chronicles of the Apostles. D.T. Lancaster. First Fruits of Zion. ©2011, 2016. Book 3, Page 851.

^v The Works of Josephus. William Whiston. Kendrickson Publishing ©1987. *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Book 20 Ch. 8 (181). P. 536.

^{vi} Eusebius *The Church History*. Translation by Paul L. Maier. Kregel Publications. ©1999, 2007. Page 71.

^{vii} The Works of Josephus. William Whiston. Kendrickson Publishing ©1987. *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Book 20 Ch. 9 (200). P. 538

^{viii} Eusebius *The Church History*. Translation by Paul L. Maier. Kregel Publications. ©1999, 2007. Page 72.

^{ix} The Stone Edition Tanach. Rabbi Nosson Scherman. ArtScroll Series. Mesorah Publications, Ltd. ©1996, 1998. P.1052.