

**THE PULPIT
COMMENTARY:
THE GENERAL
EPISTLE OF JAMES**

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The Pulpit Commentary: The General Epistle of James by E. C. S. Gibson

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E. C. S. GIBSON

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EPISTLE OF JAMES**

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE

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VICAR AND RURAL DEAN OF ST. PANGRAS, AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD
BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL;

AND BY THE

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

J A M E S .

Exposition and Homiletics

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Homilies by Various Authors.

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THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF

JAMES.

INTRODUCTION.

I. THE WRITER OF THE EPISTLE.

CH. i. 1, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The following is a list of all those of this name mentioned in the New Testament:—

1. James the brother of John, the son of Zebedee and Salome: put to death by Herod, A.D. 44 (Acts xii. 2).
2. James the brother of the Lord (Matt. xiii. 55; Mark vi. 3; Gal. i. 19).
3. James the son of Mary (Matt. xxvii. 56; Luke xxiv. 10, equivalent to James the Little; Mark xv. 40).
4. James the son of Alphaeus (Matt. x. 3; Mark iii. 18; Luke vi. 15; Acts i. 13).
5. James the father of Jude (Luke vi. 16; Acts i. 13. The ellipse in the expression, Ἰουδᾶν Ἰακώβου, is rightly supplied in the Revised Version, "Judas the son of James," not as A.V. "brother").
6. James (Acts xii. 17; xv. 13; xxi. 18; 1 Cor. xv. 7; Gal. ii. 9, 12).
7. James the brother of Jude (Jude 1).
8. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (ch. i. 1).

Of these eight, (1) numbers 2 and 6 are certainly the same (cf. Gal. i. 19 with ii. 9, 12). (2) 3 and 4, and perhaps 5, may also be identified; as may be (3) 7 and 8. Next, there can be little doubt that (4) 7 and 8 may be further identified with 2 and 6. It is true that the oldest manuscripts simply ascribe the Epistle to "James." κ , A, C, have no superscription. B has Ἰακώβου ἐπιστόλη. In the subscription, B has simply Ἰακώβου: κ , ἐπιστόλη Ἰακώβου: A, Ἰακώβου ἐπιστόλη. But no other James was of sufficient importance in the early Church, after the death of the son of Zebedee, for there to be any hesitation about this identification. The view that the Epistle was the work of the son of Zebedee scarcely requires serious consideration. It rests on the subscription in the Codex Corbeiensis (κ),

a Latin manuscript of the ninth century: "Explicit Epistola Jacobi filii Zebedei." It has lately been advanced, with arguments which are ingenious rather than solid, by Mr. Bassett ('The Catholic Epistle of St. James,' 1876). A refutation of this theory (if such be needed) may be found in Dean Plumptre's volume in the Cambridge Bible for schools, 'Epistle of St. James,' pp. 6—10.

We have now reduced the list to *three*—

1. James the son of Zebedee.

2. James the son of Alphaeus, one of the twelve.

3. James the brother of the Lord, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and writer of the Epistle, one of the most prominent figures in the early Church.

Shall we proceed a step further, and identify 2 and 3? This brings us to a very difficult question, and one with regard to which much may be urged on either side. On behalf of the identification, reference may be made to Dr. Mill's volume on the 'Mythical Interpretation of the Gospels,' p. 219, *seq.*

Against it, it will be sufficient to direct the reader's attention to Bishop Lightfoot's dissertation on "The Brethren of the Lord" in his 'Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians,' p. 247, *seq.* The identification rests mainly on John xix. 25 as compared with Matt. xxvii. 56 and Mark xv. 40; and requires us (1) to take "Mary the wife of Clopas" as "his mother's sister;" (2) to identify Clopas with Alphaeus; and (3) to give *ἀδελφός* a wide meaning, so as to include first cousin. None of these things is impossible; indeed, they can scarcely be said to be improbable; and in favour of the identification it may be urged (1) that if the two Jameses are distinct, then one of them, James the son of Alphaeus, one of the twelve, disappears altogether from the New Testament after Acts i. 13, his place being silently taken by another "James," whose relationship is not specified in the Acts, and who at once takes a prominent position in the Church. This is an important consideration, and has scarcely had sufficient weight attached to it. Elsewhere St. Luke is very careful in specifying and distinguishing characters; e.g. the two Philips are distinguished; the other James is "the brother of John," etc. It is, therefore, most improbable that, after having mentioned "James the son of Alphaeus" in Acts i. 13, he should introduce an entirely new character in Acts xii. 17 without any clue to his identity.

Again, (2) if the two are distinct, we have certainly *two*, and in all probability *three*, pairs of cousins bearing the same names: James, Joseph, and Simon, the Lord's brethren; and James, Joseph, and Symeon (see Eusebius, iv. 22), the sons of Clopas (equivalent to Alphaeus). The names, however, being all common ones, not much stress can be laid upon this argument.

On the other hand, in favour of the distinction of the two Jameses, it may be urged—

(1) That it enables us to give the term "brother" its natural meaning.

(2) That if the two are identified, James the Lord's brother must have been one of the twelve; whereas we are expressly told in John vii. 6

that his brethren did not believe on him. This, however, is not conclusive, for St. John only speaks in general terms, and one of the brethren may have been an exception. (It must be remembered that there is no sufficient reason for supposing Simon Zelotes to have been a brother of James, and that Judas the apostle was the son not *brother* of James. Hence the random assertion, so often made, that on this view two or even three of the "brethren" were apostles, falls to the ground.) The statement of St. Paul in Gal. i. 19 is too doubtful in meaning for any stress to be laid on it in either way. The *prima facie* view is that he *does* include the Lord's brother among the apostles. But no reliance can be placed on this, as it may fairly be asserted that ἀδελφοί is applied to others besides the twelve; or it is even possible (with R.V. margin) to render ἐμὴ "but only," in which case St. James will be excluded from the number of the apostles.

(3) A third argument may be given in Bishop Lightfoot's words: "The Lord's brethren are mentioned in the Gospels in connection with Joseph his reputed father, and Mary his mother, never once with Mary of Clopas (the assumed wife of Alphæus). It would surely have been otherwise if the latter Mary were really their mother" ('Galatians,' p. 256).

(4) The identification is apparently due to St. Jerome in the fourth century, never being heard of before his day.

These last considerations are weighty, and will show us that there are difficulties in either view. If the identification be given up, there still remains two competing theories, known as the Helvidian and the Epiphanian.

(a) *The Helvidian*, which supposes that the "brethren" were own brothers of our Lord, the sons of Joseph and Mary.

But (a) the passages quoted in favour of this view utterly fail to establish the point for which they are adduced (see Lightfoot, 'Galatians,' p. 263).

(β) If Mary had other children of her own, why did our Lord, on the cross, commit her to the care of the beloved disciple, who took her to his own home from that hour?

(γ) The "brethren" appear to have been older than our Lord, from the part which they took in endeavouring to restrain him, in advising him, etc.

(δ) The early Church *must* have had knowledge on such a point as this.

(b) *The Epiphanian* theory, which supposes that the brethren were sons of Joseph by a former wife, has a considerable amount of support from early writers, and has lately been revived and supported with consummate ability by Bishop Lightfoot. It has the advantages mentioned above, and is not open to the same formidable objections as the Helvidian. But at the same time, the points urged in favour of the Hieronymian theory are weighty objections to it. The real choice, however, must lie between these two—the Hieronymian and the Epiphanian. The arguments are so evenly balanced, and the objections to both so considerable, that it is difficult to decide positively in favour of either; and the writer of these lines is inclined to think that the question is one of which, in our present state of knowledge, a

solution is impossible. He will, therefore, leave it undecided whether the author of our Epistle was the first cousin of the Lord, or his reputed half-brother, a son of Joseph by a former wife.

II. CHARACTER AND POSITION OF THE WRITER.

His position throughout the Acts of the Apostles appears as that of Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem, the only example of *diocesan* episcopacy before the closing years of the apostolic age. The earliest reference to him in this capacity is found in Acts xii. 17, just about the time when persecution first fall on the members of the apostolic college. Subsequent notices of him are in Acts xv. and xxi. At the Council of Jerusalem he acts as president, sums up the debate, and gives sentence (*ἔπος ἐπέειπε*, Acts xv. 19); and it has been thought, from certain slight coincidences with his Epistle, that the letter to the Syrian Churches was drawn up by him. Later on, St. Paul, on the occasion of his last visit to Jerusalem, "went in unto James, and all the elders were present" (Acts xxi. 18).

As might be expected from the bishop of the Church of the circumcision, the glimpses we get of him show us one who is zealous for the Law.

1. While St. Peter "proposes the emancipation of the Gentile converts from the Law, it is James who suggests the restrictive clauses of the decree."

2. Very characteristic is the allusion made by him to the fact that "Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day" (Acts xv. 21).

3. Equally characteristic is the tenderness shown by him for the feelings of the "many thousands of the Jews which believe, who are all zealous of the Law" (Acts xxi. 20), and the suggestion with regard to the vow (ver. 23).

4. In accordance with all this, it is not unnatural that the Judaizers in Gal. ii. 12 are spoken of as having come "from James." "It is not improbable," says Bishop Lightfoot, "that they came invested with some powers from James which they abused."

This is all that can be gathered from Holy Scripture with regard to the person and position of St. James. To fill in the outline of the picture thus sketched, we must have recourse to tradition and early historical notices, some of which are interesting and suggestive.

(1) The fact that one of the early appearances of the risen Saviour was to "James" is stated by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xv. 7; but there is no further mention of it in the New Testament. We learn, however, from Jerome, 'Catalogus Scr. Eccl.' (s.e. "Jacobus"), that the 'Gospel according to the Hebrews' contained an account of this appearance. The passage from this apocryphal Gospel is given by Mr. Nicholson, in his edition of the 'Gospel according to the Hebrews' (p. 62), as follows:—

"And when the Lord had given his linen cloth to the servant of the priest, he went to James, and appeared unto him.

"For James had sworn, that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the cup of the Lord, until he saw him rising again from the dead.

"... bring a table and bread.

"... [and ?] he took up the bread, and blessed, and brake, and afterwards gave to James the Just, and said to him, My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of man is risen from them that sleep."

Without giving credence to the details thus brought before us, it is at least interesting to notice how the *Jewish* character of St. James comes out in the vow attributed to him. Compare the oath of more than forty men, "neither to eat nor drink till they have killed Paul" (Acts xxiii. 12).

(2) Eusebius (Bk. II. xxiii.) has preserved the following remarkable account from Hegesippus, a writer of the second century, "who flourished nearest the days of the apostles:"—"James, the brother of the Lord, who, as there were many of this name, was surnamed the Just by all, from the days of our Lord until now, received the government of the Church with the apostles. This man was holy (*ἀγιος*) from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor strong drink, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head, he never anointed himself with oil, and never used a bath. He alone was allowed to enter the sanctuary (*εἰς τὰ ἁγία*). He never wore woollen, but linen garments. He was in the habit of entering the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, and asking for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as camels', in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God. And, indeed, on account of his exceeding righteousness, he was called the Just (*καὶ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ καλεῖτο Ἰσχυρός*), and Oblias (*Ὀβλίαν*), which is in Greek 'bulwark of the people' and 'righteousness,' as the prophets declare concerning him."

It is impossible to accept this account as literally true. There are difficulties in it which cannot be explained (see Lightfoot on 'Galatians,' p. 349; and Routh, 'Reliquiæ Sacrae,' vol. i. 228, seq.).

But there can be little doubt that there is *some* foundation for the portrait thus drawn; and his surname of "the Just" bears witness to his rigid observance of the Mosaic ritual. This appears to have been a name not uncommonly given to those who were signalized by an extreme devotion to the observance of the Law (Acts i. 23; xviii. 7; Col. iv. 11; cf. Schöttgen, 'Horsæ Hebraicæ,' vol. i. p. 407).

(3) Clement of Alexandria, in a fragment of his 'Hypotyposes,' preserved by Eusebius (Bk. II. i.), has thus recorded St. James's appointment to the charge of the Church of Jerusalem: "Peter and James and John, after the ascension of our Saviour, did not contend for the honour, but chose James the Just as Bishop of Jerusalem." And in another fragment he says, "The Lord imparted the gift of knowledge to James the Just, to John, and Peter,

after his resurrection; these delivered it to the rest of the apostles, and they to the seventy."

(4) Epiphanius ('Hær.,' lxxviii. 14) strangely enough transfers to St. James the well-known statement of Polykrates with regard to St. John, that he wore the *πέριλον ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς* (cf. Eusebius, V. xxiv.)—a statement which cannot be literally true, but could never have been invented except of one who was known to regard the Mosaic ritual with the utmost veneration.

(5) Of the death of St. James two accounts have been preserved. (a) A brief one in Josephus, 'Ant.,' xix. ix. § 1: "Cæsar, having learnt the death of Festus, sends Albinus as governor of Judæa . . . Ananus . . . supposing that he had a favourable opportunity in consequence of the death of Festus, Albinus being still on the way, assembled the Sanhedrim, and brought before it James [the brother of him who is called Christ], and some others, and having charged them with breaking the laws, delivered them over to be stoned. But those of the city who seemed most moderate and most accurate in observing the Law were greatly offended at this, and secretly sent to the king, entreating him to send to Ananus with the request not to do these things, saying that he had not acted legally even before this." Eusebius (Bk. II. xxiii.) and Origen (in 'Matt.' xiii. 55, 'Contr. Celsus,' i. 47; ii. 18) also ascribe to the Jewish historian the statement that the murder of James was the immediate cause of the siege of Jerusalem and the troubles which fell upon the Jews. "These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was the brother of him that is called Christ, and whom the Jews had slain, notwithstanding his pre-eminent justice." There is, however, no sort of doubt that the passage is spurious. It is not found in the existing copies of Josephus.

(b) A longer and very remarkable account is given by Hegesippus in Eusebius, Bk. II. xxiii. The passage is so familiar that there is no need to repeat it here, more especially as it contains serious difficulties, and is unhesitatingly set aside by Bishop Lightfoot in favour of the shorter version of Josephus (see Lightfoot's 'Galatians,' p. 348, *seq.*; and cf. Routh's 'Reliquiæ Sacre,' vol. i. p. 228, *seq.*).

The date of St. James's death is fixed for us by Josephus as happening between the death of Festus and the arrival of his successor Albinus, i.e. in the year A.D. 62 (see the date discussed in Lewin's 'Fasti Sacri,' p. lxxix; cf. No. 1931).

III. OBJECT AND CHARACTER OF THE EPISTLE.

As might be expected from the position and character of the writer, the Epistle is addressed to *Jewish Christians*.

1. "To the twelve tribes . . . scattered abroad" (ch. i. 1). "The standpoint of the Epistle," it has been well said, "is essentially Jewish: the address, as we have seen, is to the twelve tribes; the terms 'rich' and 'poor'