**Three of them are mentioned in one verse, Acts 1:13. James, the brother of the Lord, … is mentioned in the *Gospels*, but he became a follower of Jesus only after the resurrection (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 15:7 and John 7:5).**

**He attained a position of leadership in the early church (Acts 12:17), where we find him dialoging with Paul about the nature and sphere of the gospel ministry. None of the other Jameses mentioned in the New Testament lived long enough or was prominent enough to write *The Letter* we have before us without identifying himself any further than he does. Christians have traditionally identified the author of *The Letter* with James the brother of the Lord.**

**A well-known James must have written *The Letter*, and the brother of the Lord is the only James we know of who fits the profile. Proof is, in the nature of the case, unavailable. But several circumstances about *The Letter* at least corroborate this conclusion.**

**First, *The Letter* has a few suggestive similarities to the wording of the speech given by James of Jerusalem, the brother of the Lord, at the Apostolic Council (Acts 15:13––21) and to the letter subsequently sent out by him to Gentiles in northern Syria and southern Asia Minor (Acts 15:23–29).**

**The epistolary "greeting" occurs in James 1:1 and Acts 15:23, but in only one other place in the New Testament; the use of "name" (ὄνομα [ *ónoma* ]) as the subject of the passive form of the verb "call" (καλέω [ *kaléō*) ] is peculiar, yet is found in both James 2:7 and Acts 15:17.**

**The appeal, "listen, my brothers," occurs in both James 2:5 and Acts 15:13; and several other less striking similarities are also found.**

**Second, the circumstances reflected in *The Letter* fit the date and situation in which James of Jerusalem would be writing. We sketch some of these circumstances in the section that follows.**

**Briefly, the readers seem to have been Jewish Christians who have left their homes in Palestine and are facing economic destress, including persecution at the hands of wealthy landowners. James, as the New Testament makes clear, ministered mainly to Jewish Christians.**

**As leader of the Jerusalem church, James would have been in a perfect position to address a letter to Jewish Christians who had been forced to flee from Jerusalem and its confines because of persecution. In fact, the situation Luke describes in Acts 11:19 fits very neatly with the scenario we are proposing: "Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews." We can well imagine these early Jewish Christians leaving their homes, trying to establish new lives in new and often hostile environments, and, because of the sense of dislocation, losing some of their spiritual moorings.**

**James, as their "pastor," would naturally want to encourage and admonish them. Another aspect of *The Letter of James* also fits well into the kind of early Jewish-Christian environment associated with James the brother of the Lord: its primitive Christian theology. James is far more theological than many scholars have given *The Letter* credit for. But the theology rarely goes beyond accepted Old Testament and Jewish perspectives, combined with some very basic, distinctly Christian conceptions: Jesus as Lord (1:1; 2:1) and coming Judge (5:7, 9); the tension between the "already" of salvation accomplished (1:18) and "not yet" culminated (1:21; 2:14; 5:20); "elders" functioning as spiritual leaders in a local church (5:14).**

**This is just the kind of theology we might associate with James as we know him from the New Testament.**[1]

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[1] **Douglas J. Moo** (b. 1950) is a Christian theologian and is Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College Graduate School. He was previously Blanchard Professor of New Testament from 2000–2011 and previously taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for over 20 years. Moo received his Ph.D. from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland (1980). He has published several theological works and commentaries on the Bible; notable among them are *An Introduction to the New Testament* (with D. A. Carson and Leon Morris).

 

**IV. Excursus. A point of great controversy concerning James "the brother of the Lord" is his exact physical relationship to Jesus. As asceticism became a more dominant impulse in the church over the centuries, the view that Mary remained perpetually a virgin became ever more influential.**

**The New Testament references to James as "the brother" of Jesus accordingly became controversial. Jerome argued that "brother" (Greek ἀδελφός [*adelphós*]) in these texts means "cousin." This view, usually called the "Híeronymian [ *Híerony'mian*: referring to church father, Jerōme, author of the Latin Vulgate ], became very popular in Roman Catholic circles. A major difficulty for this interpretation, however, is the entire absence from the New Testament that the Greek word *adelphós* [ ἀδελφός ] *could mean "cousin."* The use of this word requires that James and Jesus share at least one blood parent.**

**The "Epiphanian (ἐπιφάνεια)[2] view holds that James was the older brother of Jesus, born to Joseph and a wife before Mary. Finally, advocates of the Helvetian view insist that James was born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus. The close association between Mary and the brothers of Jesus implied in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 3:32; 6:3) might favor the Helvetian interpretation.**

**A. The Readers and Their Situation. *The Letter* reveals quite a lot about the people to whom it was written. First, they were almost certainly Jews. This conclusion, which is the scholarly consensus, is suggested by references to distinctive Jewish institutions and beliefs.**

[2] NOTE: ἐπιφάνεια (*epipháneia*) is spoken of the first advent of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 1:10). *Epipháneia* is used only by Paul for the second and future appearance of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13 [cf. Luke 1:78, 79]. (Spiros Zodhiates, gen. ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. [Chattanooga: AMG International, Inc., 1993], 644.

 

**The believers James addresses meet in a "synagogue" (2:2); they share with the author the assumption that monotheism is a foundational belief (2:19) and that the law is central to God's dealings with His people (1:21, 24–25; 2:8–13; 4:11–12); they understand the Old Testament imagery of the marriage relationship to indicate the nature of the relationship between God and His people (4:4). Many scholars would also cite the letter's address as evidence that the readers were Jewish. "The twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1) certainly appears at first sight to be a reference to the Jewish people who live in the "diaspora" (a transliteration of the Greek word that the New International Version translates "scattered among the nations").**

**But this initial conclusion is not so clear on closer examination. Intertestamental Judaism used the language of "the twelve tribes" to denote the true people of God in the last days—a usage that is also reflected in the New Testament. And since the early Christians came to understand that God's eschatological people included both Gentiles and Jews, James may have "transferred" the term from its original Jewish roots and applied it broadly to the church of his day. In a similar way, the word, διασπορά (*diasporá*), "which originally denoted those places outside of Israel where Jews had been scattered," could have here a spiritual sense: … this world as the place where Christians must live, apart from their true heavenly homeland.**

**However, while this interpretation is possible, the Jewish atmosphere of James, along with the probable early date of *The Letter*, makes it more likely that the reference is more literal. The word suggests that the people to whom James writes are living outside the confines of Israel and also implies that they are Jews. Like other Jewish authors before him, James sends consolation and exhortation to the dispersed covenant people of God.**

**The fact that the readers have been "dispersed" forced ( to live away from their home country [ see James 1:1*b* "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" ]), helps explain a second major characteristic of the readers of *The Letter*; their poverty and oppressed condition. Wealthy landowners take advantage of them (5:4–6); rich people haul them into court (2:6) and scorn their faith (2:7). One of the key purposes of the author is to encourage these suffering Christians in the midst of these difficulties, reminding them of the righteous judgment of God that is coming (5:7–11) and exhorting them to maintain their piety in the midst of their trials (1:2–4, 12). Some scholars find the key to *The Letter* at just this point.**

**B. Date. If we are right in identifying James the brother of the Lord as the author of *The Letter*, then it must have been written before A.D. 62, when James suffered a martyr's death. Some scholars think that *The Letter* was probably written very close to this date. They note the many similarities between *James* and *1 Peter*, and think that the problem of worldliness that surfaces repeatedly in the latter reflects a "settled" situation in the churches. But *The Letter* contains parallels with many Jewish and Christian books, dated all the way from 100 BC to AD 150. As we noted earlier, these parallels usually involve traditional teaching that was common stock among early Christians. The parallels with 1 Peter are all of this nature. Nor is it clear that the Christians to whom James writes have been settled in their faith for a long time. None of the problems that arise in *The Letter* is unusual among fairly young Christians.**

**Temptations to compromise one's faith with the world afflict the believer almost immediately after conversion; and this is especially true when the convert has been taken out of his or her original nurturing context, as the readers of this *Letter* had been.**

**V. Theology. Some people claim that James has no theology. The validity of that claim depends entirely on what one means by "theology". To be sure, James says little about many basic Christian doctrines. The person and work of Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the theological significance of the church, the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ—none is mentioned in James. But this kind of argument from silence does not carry much weight. James, like all the other *Letters* of the New Testament, is occasional, written in a specific situation and addressing specific problems. Failure to mention even some basic Christian doctrines is therefore not only not surprising but expected—and paralleled by other former parishioners about certain specific problems in their Christian practice.**

**He knows that they are acquainted with the basic doctrines of the church and does not need to go over them again. More serious is the charge that James fails to ground his teaching in Christology. Indeed, James mentions Jesus explicitly only twice (1:1; 2:1). So, if by "theology," one means a system of beliefs explicitly built on the person of Christ, then, indeed, *The Letter of James* lacks a "theology." But this definition of theology is much too narrow. If we expand the definition to include teaching grounded in an understanding of God and His purposes in the world, then James is thoroughly "theological." Appeal to God's person, the values taught in His Word, and His purposes in history undergirds virtually everything in *The Letter*. And while Jesus' person and work might be generally absent, His teaching is not. No New Testament document is more influenced by the teaching of Jesus than James.**

**And so, the judgment of [ L. T. ] Johnson [ in his *The Letter of James* ], while perhaps an overreaction in the other direction, is worth noting: "It is not far wrong to consider James one of the most 'theological' writings in the New Testament."**

**All this is not to deny that James is less theoretically oriented than, for instance, Paul. A practical pastor, James, we might surmise, does not have the theological genius and broad theological interests of Paul. In that sense, James is of course less "theological" than Paul. Yet even Paul, at certain points and for specific purposes, can write much like James does. Indeed, the closest parallel to the style of James in the New Testament is found in Romans 12:9–21, where Paul quickly touches on key components of the "sincere love" that believers are to exhibit. For the purposes he has at that point, Paul does not need to allude directly to the great doctrines that are taught elsewhere in Romans. This is the style that pervades all of *James*.**

**Furthermore, while the brevity and specific purposes of *The Letter* prevent us from sketching a "theology of James," we are able to note briefly the contributions James makes to certain specific theological topics.**

**A. God.** **If we define "theology" in its strictest sense—the doctrine of God—then theology is very important in James. For he frequently grounds his exhortations about appropriate Christian conduct in the nature of God. Three characteristics of God are especially important in *James*: His oneness, His jealousy, and His grace.**

**James is a monotheist. The ancient Jewish confession "there is one God" is cited as an example of correct doctrine (2:19), and he reminds his readers that "there in only one Lawgiver and Judge" (4:11). But especially striking is James's emphasis on God's oneness. While the translation is debated, 1:5 probably refers to God as "single," that is, having one intent, in His giving.**

**Christians can approach God confidently in prayer because He has a single and invariable purpose to give us what we need. The same point comes up again in 1:17, where God's constancy is cited as reason to conclude that He gives good gifts and would therefore would never tempt human beings to sin.**

**(End JAS25-03. See JAS25-04 for continuation of study at p. 31.)**

**James's focus on this point may reflect the teaching of Jesus, who encouraged his disciples to ask God for whatever they needed because God, like a father, always gives good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:7–11). James also cites the oneness of God as reason to conclude that all the commandments God has given must be obeyed (2:11). The undivided nature of God is especially important to James because it stands in direct contrast to the deepest problem of human beings: their tendency to be "divided" in their loyalties, wavering between God and the world (1:8; 4:4, 8). Christians, James implies, need to be like God to overcome this sinful tendency: firm, constant in purpose and affection.**

**A second characteristic of God highlighted in James is also very tradition: God's jealousy. To be sure, this characteristic is mentioned in only one verse of James, 4:5, and the sense of the verse is hotly contested. But we think it very probable that James here cites the scriptural teaching about the jealousy of God for his people as substantiation for his call to them to abandon their flirtation with the world. And although James refers to this attribute of God in only this one verse, it is central to the argument of The *Letter*.**

**Third, and in the same context, James refers to God's grace. In His holy jealousy, God demands the exclusive devotion of his people—a potentially fearsome and unattainable requirement. So, James assures his readers that the same God who makes such stringent and all-encompassing demands also "gives us more grace" (4:6).**

**B. Eschatology. James frequently warns believers about the coming judgment in order to stimulate them to adopt the right attitudes and behavior (1:10–11; 2:12–13; 3:1; 5:1–6, 9, 12). And he reminds them of the reward they can look forward to it they live pleasingly for the Lord (1:12; 2:5; 4:10; 5:20).**

**In keeping with early Christianity generally, James insists that the day of judgment and reward is imminent": "the Lord's coming is near"; "The Judge is standing at the door!" (5:8, 9). Some think that the early Christians held a view of imminence according to which they were certain that Jesus would return within a few years or decades at the most. But the language need not be taken so strictly. The sense of "nearness" that James and the other early Christians felt stemmed from two convictions: (1) now that the Messiah had come and the new age had dawned, the end of history was the next event in the divine timetable; and (2) that culmination of history could happen at any time.**

**James, in other words, motivates his readers to godly living not by insisting that the Lord *would* come at any moment but by reminding them that he *could*. All told, then, Jemes provides sufficient indication that he holds to the typical New Testament pattern of "fulfillment without consummation" that we call "inaugurated eschatology." It is within the tension of this "already … not yet" that we must interpret and apply James's ethical teaching.**

**IV. Structure and Theme. Our own proposal is to recognize several key motifs that are central to James's concern but to acknowledge that they are often mixed together with other themes. Specifically, the body of the letter (1:2–5:11) can be divided into five general sections. The first, 1:2–18, while having trials as the unifying motif, touches on several other subjects. The second section, 1:19–2:26, is marked especially by a concern for obedience to the word.**

**What, finally, merges as the central theme or purpose from these various exhortations? Or is there no overarching theme? Perhaps we would do better not to speak of a "theme" but of a central concern.**

**This, we think, can be discovered in the emotional climax of the letter, 4:4–10. Here James abandons his customary address "brothers" or "dear brothers" to castigate his readers as "adulteresses."**

> **The feminine form reflects the biblical tradition according to which the covenant between God and His people is portrayed as a marriage, with God's people in the role of bride. James is labeling his reader spiritual adulterers. They are seeking to be "friends with the world" and in the process are turning the Lord, who in His holy jealousy demands complete allegiance from His people, into their enemy. James makes the same point by warning the readers about being "double-minded."[1]**
>
> **Other interpreters have pointed out, James uses oppositions throughout his Letter to set before his readers a stark choice: they can decide to remain entirely loyal to the Lord by obeying His Word (1:121–25;2:14–26), following the "wisdom from above" (3:16), displaying "pure and undefiled religion" (1:27); or they can compromise their loyalty by an inconsistent lifestyle, manifesting the influence of "worldly" wisdom (3:15) and thereby "deceiving" themselves about their spiritual status (1:22). Basic to all that James says in his *Letter* is his concern that his readers stop compromising with worldly values and behavior and give themselves wholly to the Lord. Spiritual "wholeness," then, we suggest, is the central concern of the letter.**

3. The three theologians cited above have provided an overview of the *Letter of James*. I suggest that you invest some time in reviewing their commentaries. If you wish to read their exegeses of *The Letter of James*, their books are available from amazon.com. Go to that site and search under "books" one or all of the following editions:

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

   b. **A. T. Robertson**, Studies in the Epistle of James

   c. **Douglas J. Moo**, The Letter of James

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[1] Δίψυχος (*dípsuchos*) "in a general sense as an unstable person (James 4:8). Such a person suffers from divided loyalties. On the one hand, he wishes to maintain a religious confession and desires the presence of God in his life; on the other hand, he loves the ways of the world and prefers to live according to it mores and ethics. (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed.; gen. ed., *Spiros Zodhiates* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 473.

4. **Robert B. Thieme, Jr.**, pastor-teacher of Berachah Church at 2815 Sage Road, Houston, Texas 77056:

   a. Robert B. Thieme, Jr., (1918–2009), was pastor of Berachah Church from 1950–2003 and remains a significant voice of Christianity throughout the world. His diligent, expository teaching is based on the original languages of Scripture in light of the historical context in which the Bible was written. His innovative systems of vocabulary, illustrations, and biblical categories clearly communicate the infallible truths of God's Word. Pastor Thieme recorded more than eleven thousand hours of sermons and published more than one hundred books.

   b. Pastor Thieme graduated from the University of Arizona (Phi Beta Kappa) and Dallas Theological Seminary (summa cum laude). His seminary studies were interrupted by World War II military service during which he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel as a staff officer in the United States Army Air Corps.

   c. After completion of his graduate work in 1950, he became pastor of Berachah Church in Houston, Texas. His extensive training in Greek, Hebrew, theology, history, and textual criticism provided the foundation for his demanding professional life of studying and teaching the Word of God. R. B. Thieme, Jr., retired from the pulpit of Berachah Church after fifty-three years of faithful service.

   d. Pastor Thieme's audio & video recordings, his books and publications, his visuals, and diagrams may be ordered from R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, PO BOX 460829, Houston, TX 77056-8829. www.rbthieme.org

5. **Joe Griffin**, pastor-teacher at Grace Doctrine Church at 1821 South River Road, St. Charles, Missouri 63303.

   a. I began the study of Pastor Thieme's sermons by means of audio tape in 1971 in Alabama and moved, with my wife, Jo Henra, and three children, Shane, Shannon, and Shaefer, to Houston, Texas, in 1977 in order to attend his sermons, face-to-face, for his teaching schedule of seven hours per week including twice on Sundays.

   b. I completed my response to Pastor Thieme's Doctrinal Questionnaire in 1984 which, when approved, qualified me to be ordained as pastor by Pastor Thieme and the church's Board of Deacons which occurred in 1987.