

***“James: A Slave”***

March 18, 2012

Text: James 1:1

**It surprises many Xns to read in Exodus 21 that God allowed  
His Hebrew people to buy/keep slaves.**

But there were some great differences between that institution  
and the oppressive form of slavery that was at the root of  
the American Civil War, 150 years ago.

When a Hebrew man became so poor that he could no longer  
survive economically, he could sell himself as a slave.

But Exod 21:2 said=> *“If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall  
serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out  
as a free man without payment.”*

It was possible, however, that a man’s life as a slave was actually  
far superior to the life he had once led as a freeman, so he  
opted to remain as his master’s slave permanently.

He might even have been permitted by his master to marry  
and have children, which he’d have to leave behind,  
if he left.

Ex 21:5=> *“If the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my  
wife and my children; I will **not** go out as a free  
man,’ / then his master shall bring him to God, then  
he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And  
his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he  
shall serve him permanently” (5-6).*

**This morning we will begin a new study in the book of James.**

Our text today will be James 1:1.

**[James 1:1]**=> “*James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.*”

James introduces himself in the first verse as=> “*James, a **slave** of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Your Bible (like mine) reads, “James, a bond-servant....”

That is a polite mistranslation of the Gk word *doulos*,  
which really means slave—not servant.

The Gk language had a ½ dozen words for “servant,” and  
*doulos* was not one of them.

But to avoid association w/ that grotesque practice which  
incited our Civil War, most translators translate  
*doulos* with the less-offensive term “bond-servant.”

James thought of himself the way that man w/ an awl-pierced ear  
in the OT thought of himself—as a permanent slave.

But James’ Master was God & the Lord Jesus X, whom he  
loved, & whom he considered it a privilege to serve.

**Today we will introduce ourselves to the Epistle of James,  
using the 4 phrases in James 1:1 as our outline=>**

\* James            \* A Slave of God & of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
\* To the Twelve Tribes Dispersed Abroad       \* Greetings

## **1) James**

1<sup>st</sup> century scrolls were rolled up, & writers included their names  
at the beginning of their letters, so readers wouldn’t have to  
unroll the whole scroll to discover who a letter was from,  
looking for a signature at the end.

**Although several James are mentioned in the Gospels, most scholars believe that the writer of this epistle was most likely James the natural ½-brother of Jesus.**

This is the James mentioned in Mt 13:55=> *“Is not this [Jesus] the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, **James** and Joseph and Simon and Judas?”*

James' name appears first here, so he was prob. older than the other three.

But Jesus was the oldest of the 5, who had all grown up together in Joseph/Mary's home.

Jesus Himself would say in Mt 13:57=> *“A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household”* because that's what had happened to Him.

Jesus' 4 younger ½-brothers could not come to grips with the reality that He was the long-awaited Messiah.

In John 7, they even mocked Him, taunting Him, that He should go to Jerusalem to be “discovered” as the X=>  
*“Depart from here, & go into Judea, that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing / For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world” (7:3-4).*

In the next verse John explains=> *“For not even His **brothers** were believing in Him.”*

You have to wonder if the jealousy created by growing up w/ a perfect older Brother hadn't blinded them to the truth.

They refused to believe in Jesus, even mocking Him, & that blocked them from becoming His brothers in a spiritual sense.

Jesus said=> *“Whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My **brother** and sister and mother”*  
(Mt 12:50).

**Then everything changed after Jesus’ death/resurrection.**

I Cor 15:7=> *“He appeared to **James**, then to all the apostles.”*

During the 40 day period between X’s resurrection & His ascension, He appeared-to/met-with various groups of people.

But He met with His brother James alone, and it must have been a life-changing experience for James.

When X’s disciples met together in the Upper Room shortly after His ascension, His brothers were there, gathered w/ them, because they too had now believed.

James became a key leader w/i the Jerusalem church so quickly that when Peter was miraculously released from prison by an angel in Acts 12, he told his fellow believers (12:17)=>

*“Report these things to **James** and the brethren.”*

James had suddenly become the man to whom such important events were to be reported, first.

When Paul visited Jerusalem soon after his conversion, he met with those who were *“reputed to be **pillars**”* of the Church, whom he lists in Gal 2:9 as=>

*“**James** and Cephas and John.”*

James' name even comes before Peter's here.

In Acts 15, James seems to be the one presiding over the Jerusalem Council, the one who draws the conclusion God was now including Gentiles in the Church, and the one who drafts the letter to all the churches, w/ that conclusion in it.

When Paul went to Jerusalem after completing his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, Acts 21 says=> *"The following day Paul went in with us to **James**, and all the elders were present"* (21:18).

Although James had blundered by not recognizing Jesus, his own 1/2-Brother, as the Messiah before His crucifixion, he made up for lost time after meeting w/ the resurrected X.

Not only was he a key leader in the Jerusalem church, his letter (*The Epistle of James*) extended the influence of his ministry far beyond that city's boundaries.

He wrote to those who were "encountering various trials."

So this epistle may represent his effort to reach out to the Jewish Xns from his own flock at Jerusalem who had been driven out of that city by persecution.

According to Josephus, James himself was martyred in A.D. 62.

The life of James illustrates the truth that Jesus' grace is available even to those who have disappointed/mockd Him most.

No one can disappoint us like our own family members.

Yet Jesus graciously set aside His own disappointment w/ James, & did a wonderful work in his life.

Having seen this letter's writer, now let's look at its recipients=>

## 2) To the Twelve Tribes Dispersed Abroad

**This phrase refers to Israel as a people, and James was writing specifically to Jewish Xns.**

*“The twelve tribes,”* considered together, constituted the entire nation of Israel.

Jesus had told His 12 Apostles=> *“In the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging **the twelve tribes of Israel**”* (Mt 19:28).

Paul also used this same phrase to identify Israel.

In Acts 26, he told Agrippa=> *“I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; / the promise to which **our twelve tribes** hope to attain”* (26:6-7).

**But there was a complication=> The 12 tribes had split into 2 separate nations, & each nation was taken into exile.**

The northern 10 tribes to Assyria, in 722 B.C.

The southern 2 tribes to Babylon, 140 years later.

Though many Jews from the Southern Kingdom (Judah) returned from exile, the 10 tribes of Northern Israel never did.

They’d intermingled w/ Gentile nations and most had lost track of which tribe their family was originally from.

But earlier, when Northern Israel had first fallen into idol worship, before they were sent into exile, many of its Levites had gone south to worship the true God, in His true Temple, in Judah.

And 2 Chron 11:16=> *“Those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD God of Israel, followed them to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers”* (& many must have stayed).

So even after the division of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, and even after both kingdoms had been taken into captivity/exile, there was still a sprinkling of every tribe, in Judah (thus, “the 12 tribes” still existed as remnants).

That’s why in Lk 2:36, the prophetess Anna can be identified as a member of the tribe of Asher;

And Paul as a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

**The Jews always have been, & still are, “*the twelve tribes*,” but they have been dispersed by various conquerors.**

The Assyrians/Babylonians/Romans all deported many Jews, & multitudes of Jews fled in AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem.

Others emigrated voluntarily, pursuing their own personal/business/trade interests in foreign countries.

When the H.S. fell on the Church at Pentecost, and Xns began “speaking in tongues,” glorifying God in languages they had never learned, Jews visiting Jerusalem from all these other lands began to say:

*“How is it that we each hear them in our **own language** to which we were born? / Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,*

*Pontus and Asia, / Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, / Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our **own tongues** speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:8-11).*

Their “*own tongues*” were the languages of all these foreign lands to which the ancestors of those Jews had been dispersed.

**James wrote his epistle to dispersed Jews, but primarily to Xn Jews, many of whom were driven out of Jerusalem by other Jews, because of their faith in Jesus.**

James seems to be writing as a pastor who is concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of people in his flock, many of whom have been forced to flee to distant lands.

**Let’s look at a brief overview of his concerns, which he was writing about to his dispersed flock, and which we will be learning about in our study of *James*.**

Chapter 1 deals with the inner spiritual needs of individual Xns.

- \* He begins by addressing their attitude toward the suffering they are having to endure.
- \* Then he’ll deal w/ personal wisdom as a blessing from God; and praying w/ faith rather than doubt (1:5-8).
- \* He’ll talk about glorying in one’s circumstances (1:9-11).
- \* He will encourage his readers to persevere under trial, promising them the crown of life as a result (1:12).



- \* Then James will delve into the problem of temptation, particularly the temptation of lust (1:13-15).
- \* On the flip side, he'll go into God's good gifts (1:16-18).
- \* In verses 19-20, he'll address the problems of anger and the use of the tongue.
- \* Being doers and not merely hearers of the Word will be the theme of the next 6 verses.

As you have prob. noticed, *James* is a very practical book.

While the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter provides practical helps in dealing with spiritual weaknesses w/i ourselves, the rest of the book is focused on our relationships w/ others.

- \* This theme actually begins in the last verse of chapter 1, where James refers to "*pure and undefiled religion*" as caring for the helpless—widows/orphans.
- \* Then he will broach the subject of showing favoritism and partiality toward wealthy/influential people.
- \* Next he will take the command "*Love your neighbor as yourself*" and explain it in very practical terms, as the outflowing of one's heart-attitude towards others.
- \* This will bring James to an examination of true faith. He'll say that real/living faith produces godly/caring deeds, and compassionate help toward those in need.
- \* Much of chapter 3 will explore the effects of our words on other people as a result of our spiritual condition.

- \* He'll end chapter 3 w/ a discussion of godly wisdom.
- \* Chapter 4 will start out=> "*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?*" & he'll answer that at length, relating it back to our relationship w/ God.
- \* Then James will show us the wisdom of submitting everything we plan to do, to the will of God.
- \* Chapter 5 will go into the issue of money, and the believer's attitude towards it.
- \* It will also teach us about patience/endurance.
- \* Chapter 5 will end with a segment on prayer, and a segment on pursuing those who stray away from X.

Throughout this book, we see a clear pattern of practical teaching, & clear indication of James' heartfelt concern for Xns.

### **3) Greeting**

**James' greeting is the most terse greeting in the entire NT.**

It's simply that=> the word "*Greetings.*"

This is the infinitive form of a word that means "Rejoice!"

And maybe James had some of that in mind, but I doubt it.

This was merely the common secular word for "Hello!"

E.g. when Claudius Lysias sent Paul to Governor Felix, the letter of transmittal started out=> "*Greetings.*"

It's polite, but innocuous.

When the Jerusalem Council sent out the letter declaring its findings/conclusions, it too began with “Greeting” (prob. because James wrote that too).

Contrast this simple one-word salutation w/ one of Paul’s=>

*“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (II Thes 1:2).

James didn’t have Paul’s (or anyone else’s) example to follow, because he was the earliest NT writer, so he just conformed to the standard letter-writing practices of his time.

**This is one of the reasons why we think the epistle of *James* was one of the earliest (if not the earliest) NT book written—even earlier than the Gospels.**

Most scholars date this book AD 49, some as early as 44.

The epistle’s early dating may explain why James writes it to Xn Jews—not Gentiles/Jews.

Most Xns in those earliest days of the Church were Jewish, because at first there was only 1 church, & it was at Jerusalem.

This book of *James* seems to have preceded the Council of Jerusalem (AD 49).

Till then the church didn’t officially recognize that Gentiles could be saved as Gentiles, w/o first becoming Jews.

But James’ words are just as applicable to us who are Gentile Xns, as they were/are to Jewish Xns.

#### **4) A Slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**This, as I see it, is by far the most significant phrase of the entire opening.**

As I mentioned at the outset, James is calling himself a slave, not merely a servant.

If James had been concerned w/ impressing his readers, he could have introduced himself as the brother of Jesus.

Or as the leader of the church at Jerusalem, or as the man who had presided over the Jerusalem Council.

But James takes the exact opposite approach (the humblest possible) calling himself a *slave* of his ½ brother & of God.

In the original language, he actually puts “*slave*” at end of the phrase=> “*of God & the Lord Jesus X, a slave.*”

**The word “*slave*” implies total/utter subservience to a master.**

It is a permanent relationship of servitude due to the master’s ownership & absolute authority over his slave.

James was totally dependent on God, and because he equated his earthly ½-Brother with God, he was totally dependent on Jesus as well.

According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, the foremost authority on the meaning of NT Gk words, the service of a *doulos*=>

“Is not a matter of choice for the one who renders it, which he has to perform whether he likes it or not, because he is subject as a slave to an alien will, to the will of his owner.”

Whereas servants were hired, slaves were owned.

While servants had some choice about which master they would choose to work for, slaves had no such choice, no self-autonomy, no personal rights.

In his book *God Is Proof Enough*, Walter Wurzburcher explains the implications of slavery for the believer=>

“To be a slave of God... involves more than merely being His servant. Servants retain their independent status. They have only specific duties and limited responsibilities. Slaves, on the other hand, have no rights *vis a vis* their owners, because they are deemed the property of the latter.”

Slaves were considered the living property of their masters.

Yvon Thebert describes the legal status of a slave in Roman society=>

“[The slave] was equated with his function and was for the master what the ox was for the poor man: an animated object that he owned.... The same idea is a constant in Roman law, where a slave is... sold by the same rules that governed a transfer of a parcel of land or included with tools or animals in a bequest.”

When James described himself as “*a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*,” that is how he was defining himself w/ regard to the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> Persons of the Godhead.

**You might be thinking, “How extraordinary/admirable it was for James to willingly accept such selfless/lowly status!”**

It may be admirable, but in reality, it’s not extraordinary.

Every Xn having become freed from sin has become God’s slave, and should view himself in that light.

Jesus Himself fully understood the subservient nature of slavery, & yet He taught believers that we are God’s slaves.

Lk 17:7)=> “*Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field,*

*'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? / But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, & properly clothe yourself & serve me until I have eaten & drunk; & afterward you will eat & drink'? / He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? / So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves [unmeritorious *douloi*]; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'*" (17:7-10).

I Pet 2:16 says=> *"Act as free men, & do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as **slaves** of God."*

There is spiritual freedom only for those who have  
been emancipated from slavery to sin by  
becoming slaves of God.

When the H.S. came into the Church at Pentecost, He indwelt the  
slaves of God=> those who had believed in Jesus X, as  
their Savior/Lord, surrendering their will to His.

Peter said this event fulfilled the prophecy of Joel=>

*"EVEN UPON MY **BONDSLAVES** [douloi—every Xn], BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT"* (Acts 2:18).

We who believe are slaves also of Jesus X, because He purchased  
us w/ His blood out of our slavery to sin, making us His  
own slaves.

X was referring to us, when He said=> *"A disciple is not  
above his teacher, nor a **slave** above his master"*  
(Mt 10:24).

And like the slaves with a hole in their ear, our slavery is voluntary, because we love the Master we serve, and our lives belong to Him.

It comes as a shock to believers in the “modern gospel,” that X hasn’t saved us to fulfill all our wishes, make us wealthy, or help to achieve self-actualization—but rather to serve Him.

In their view, He is our slave (or at the very least, our servant), standing by attentively, just hoping we’ll include Him in our lives by letting Him do something good for us (a genie-in-a-bottle Jesus).

But in reality, every time we speak of Jesus as our *Lord*, we imply that He is our Master, and if He is our Master, we are His slaves, who serve Him out of love.

This has always been the understanding of true Xns.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Polycarp wrote to the Philippians=>

“Bind up your loose robes & serve as God’s **slaves** in reverential fear/truth.”

Ambrosiaster (4<sup>th</sup> cent.)=> “The one who is liberated from [the Law], dies & lives to God, becoming His **slave**, purchased by X.”

These are just 2 of the many early-church references to our being slaves of God, purchased/redeemed w/ the blood of Jesus.

Believers are followers of Jesus X, who came to earth, wrapped a towel around His waist, & served, not waiting to be served. And now we follow His example, serving Him.

We always will.

Rev 22:3 says of our eternal home, New Jerusalem=>

*“There shall no longer be any curse; & the throne of God & of the Lamb shall be in it, and His **slaves** shall **serve** Him.”*

In Jn 12:26, Jesus said=> *“If anyone **serves** Me, let him **follow** Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”*

If you refuse to follow/serve/obey X, don't call yourself Xn, because you've been deceived about what that title means.

He leads & we follow, because we are His slaves.

It's not a slave's prerogative to object/question what his master asks of him, but simply to follow/serve.

It's not our business to invent new doctrines or become creative about our service, but simply to follow His example of service.

He was tempted; we too are tempted, & we resist the temptation, following His example.

He preached the truth and showed loving concern for other people; & we do the same, even if to only 1 person.

He suffered mockery/rejection, & we are to do likewise for His name's sake.

In fact, He said=> *“Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. / But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 10:32-33).



If the slave denies His Master here/now, the Master  
will deny the one who should have been His  
loyal/faithful slave, when it matters most.

But the good news is, that just as Jesus was honored by God  
when He returned to heaven, God will honor us as well.  
Jesus sat down at the right hand of His Father in glory, &  
we will sit w/ Jesus on His throne, reigning with  
Him.

When He returns, we will come with Him, still following  
Him as His slaves, but now as we follow, we will be  
revealed w/ Him in His glory.

## ***“James: A Slave”***

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Text: James 1:1

1. It surprises many Christians to read in Exodus 21 that God allowed His Hebrew people to buy and keep slaves; but there were some [12 great] differences.

Ex 21:2, 5-6

### **[James 1:1]**

**Today we will introduce ourselves to the Epistle of James, using the four phrases in James 1:1 as our outline...**

#### **\* James**

2. Although several James are mentioned in the Gospels, most scholars believe that the writer of this epistle was most likely James, the natural half-brother of [12 Jesus].

Mt 13:55, 57; Jn 7:3-4, 5; Mt 12:50; I Cor 15:7; Acts 12:17; Gal 2:9; Acts 21:18

3. Although James had blundered by not recognizing Jesus (his own half-Brother) as the Messiah, before His crucifixion, he made up for lost time after meeting with the [24 resurrected] Christ.

#### **\* To the Twelve Tribes Dispersed Abroad**

4. This phrase refers to Israel as a people, and James was writing specifically to Jewish [22 Christians].

Mt 19:28; Acts 26:6-7; II Chron 11:16; Acts 2:8-11

5. James seems to be writing as a pastor who is concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of people in his flock, many of whom have been forced to [10 flee] to distant lands.

#### **\* Greeting**

6. James' greeting is the most [12 terse] greeting in the entire New Testament.

II Thes 1:2

#### **\* A Slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**

7. James is calling himself a [12 slave], not merely a servant.

Lk 17:7-10

8. You might be thinking, “How extraordinary and admirable it was for James to willingly accept such lowly status!” In reality, [12 every] Christian, having become freed from sin, has become God’s slave.

I Pet 2:16; Acts 2:18; Mt 10:24

9. Believers are followers of Jesus Christ, who came to earth, wrapped a towel around His waist and served, not waiting to be served; now we follow His example, [16 serving] Him.

Rev 22:3; Jn 12:26; Mt 10:32-33

10. Just as Jesus was honored by God when He returned to heaven, God will honor [6 us] as well.