

19. In Scripture there are several applications of the term “first fruit” and they must be addressed individually:

One of Israel's feasts appointed by Jehovah was the feast of first-fruits. The feast centered about the waving of a sheaf<sup>3</sup> of first-fruits which was waved before Jehovah at the time of harvest. It was a representative sheaf and contemplated all the sheaves of the whole harvest, since unto Jehovah must thanks be given for the increase which sowing and reaping secured. The term *first-fruits* is used variously in the Bible and each one of several applications should be considered:

**CHRIST.** Twice is Christ said to be First-Fruits and that in His resurrection. Christ as one glorified in His resurrection human body is the Antitype of the Old Testament wave sheaf.

**1 Corinthians 15:20** Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

**v. 23** But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that, those who are Christ's at His coming. (p. 153)

**BLESSINGS.** A foretaste of what awaits the child of God in glory, the blessings which are now realized by the believer because of the presence of the Spirit constitutes what is called first-fruits. These blessings are referred to as “having the first-fruits of the Spirit” in Romans 8:23.

**FIRST BELIEVERS IN A LOCALITY.** When the gospel is first preached in a locality there are those who believe and become the first-fruits of that locality.

**1 Corinthians 16:15** Now I urge you brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints).

**ISRAEL.** Jeremiah stated: “Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 2:3a).

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<sup>3</sup> “Sheaf (עִמָּר), used as a unit of measurement of grain). The reaper with his sickle goes ahead and cuts the grain; then it is gathered into bundles by workers who follow, and the bundles are tied into sheaves. Such sheaves were used as a form of offering in the Levitical system of sacrifices (cf. Leviticus 23:10–12). Probably they were sheaves of barley, the first crop to be harvested each year in Palestine. They were used as the thank offering for the first fruits of the harvest” (J. H. Paterson, “Sheaf,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976], 5:378).

As Israel is the first in order of the unfolding of divine purpose for this world, that people became a first-fruits on an extended scale of the whole divine program. It will be observed how warning is given here to all peoples respecting the grievous punishment that shall fall on those who persecute Israel. (p. 154)

REVELATION 7 AND 14. Twice is reference made in Revelation to a company numbering 144,000. In the first instance (Revelation 7:1–8) they are identified as from the tribes of Israel. These individuals are sealed with the protective and selective seal of God. In Revelation 14:1–5 this same company—being sealed, their number cannot be increased or decreased—are seen to be the first-fruits of the coming kingdom age wherein the King shall reign from Zion. (p. 154–55)

EARLY CHRISTIANS. Christ alone is the First-Fruits in heaven. James, however, declared: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” James 1:18). This declaration recognizes both the sovereign election of God—for it is by His own will that He was directed—and the fact of the regenerating power of the Spirit. The latter is achieved by the agency of the Word of Truth. That the ones said to be begotten are first-fruits can be pressed no further than that they were first in order among the vast company of redeemed belonging to the Church which no man can number.<sup>4</sup> (p. 154)

20. That final highlighted sentence addresses the principle that the Jewish Diaspora in the decade of A.D. 40 is the first fruits of Church-Age believers.
21. We established in James 1:1 that the audience James addresses in his epistle is the “twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.” The word “dispersed” is the Greek noun **διασπορά** (*diaporá*): “to scatter abroad.”
22. The progeny of the diaspora James addresses continue to be “scattered” and theirs will potentially remain so for generations to come until the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.
23. We have recently reviewed the origin of the erroneous doctrine of limited atonement. Its birthplace was Alexandria, Egypt, and its most influential figure was Cyril of Alexandria (375–444).

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<sup>4</sup> Chafer, “First-Fruits,” in *Systematic Theology: Doctrinal Summarization*, 7:153–55.

24. Both were on the same track, but Cyril's definition was more precise than that of Nestorius who made too fine a point in his desire to distinguish the two natures. The details are presented here:

Cyril remained a chief citizen of Egypt, and in his struggle with Nestorius he was in some ways a political as well as a religious leader. The conflict concerned not only doctrinal matters; it also reflected the Egyptian's fear that Constantinople might come to dominate them. The religious argument involved the relation of the divine and human within Jesus Christ, Cyril emphasized the unity of the two in one Person, while Nestorius so emphasized their distinctness that he seemed to be splitting Christ into two Persons acting in concert. The conflict came to the fore over Cyril's insistence that the Virgin Mary be called Theotokos (Greek: God-bearer) to describe the intimate union of the two natures in the Incarnation. Nestorius refused to accept such terminology and their dispute was referred to a general council at Ephesus in 431.

Papal recognition of Cyril's council was eventually obtained, however, and Nestorius was banished as a heretic. Even so, the dispute continued, and peace in the church was only restored in 433, when Cyril accepted a statement, representing a compromise with Antioch, that emphasized the distinctness of the two natures within the one Person of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

25. Nestorius made a mistake in his argument of describing the hypostatic union as "the unity of two Persons acting in concert" when the better phrase would have been "the union of two essences acting in concert."
26. This brouhaha served to distract from the major issue at the school at Alexandria whose hermeneutical approach to Scripture was allegorical while that at Antioch was literal.
27. The conviction of Nestorius for heresy resulted in the hermeneutic at Alexandria being favored over that at Antioch and adopted by the Roman Catholic Church.
28. This resulted in a millennium of erroneous, heretical, and false doctrines becoming orthodox throughout Europe, a situation that was not addressed until Martin Luther challenged the theology when He posted his 95 theses at Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517.

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<sup>5</sup> *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. (2010), 3:830.

29. It was only by means of the Reformation that order was once again restored to the biblically confirmed system of interpreting the Word of God: literal, grammatical, historical.
30. From this hermeneutical approach emerge doctrines established by text analysis as opposed to a system of allegorical imputation of multiple levels of meaning. The signal difference between the two is exegesis as opposed to eisegesis. These twain never meet.

**James 1:18** Having been decreed in eternity past, He regenerated us by a spiritual birth by the word of truth, namely the gospel, for the purpose of being the first fruits of His creatures. (EXT)

**James 1:19** This you know [ IM #10 ], my beloved brethren. But everyone must be [ IM #11 ] quick to hear; slow to speak and slow to anger; (NASB)

1. We have two imperative moods in this verse. They require that believers take responsibility for what their relationship with each Member of the Trinity requires of them.
2. The subject addresses the responsibilities of believers in the assembly of the local church.
3. Most of the Epistles of the New Testament were written to either the congregation of a local church or its pastor:
  - Paul wrote Romans to “all who are beloved of God in Rome.”
  - He wrote the two Corinthian Epistles to “the church of God which is at Corinth.”
  - Galatians was an encyclical “To the churches of Galatia.”
  - Ephesians “To the saints who are at Ephesus.”
  - Philippians “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.”
  - Colossians “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae.”
  - Paul wrote the two Thessalonian Epistles “To the church of the Thessalonians.”
  - He wrote both Epistles to Timothy, “To Timothy,” and one to Titus, “To Titus.”
  - James’s Epistle was written “To the twelve tribes” of the Diaspora.

4. If believers are to serve God they must acquire an inventory of directives by which they perform their responsibility to Him in the manner and process He requires.
5. James 1:19 begins with the perfect active imperative of the verb **οἶδα (oída)**: “Know this!” The perfect tense is a definite perfect with present meaning which stresses the continuance of results through present time, translated, “Keep on knowing this!”
6. The active voice means that James’s audience is to produce the action of attending the local church. Attendance, however, is not enough, so there are house rules that must be observed in order to insure an environment of learning.
7. James then identifies those who are the recipients of this command, “My beloved brethren.” This phrase refers to fellow believers in the royal family of God.
8. What follows are directives on what believers are commanded to do regarding their obligations in the royal family of God. Before doing this, the believer must first join a local church.
9. Once done, there are three directives: (1) “quick to hear,” (2) “slow to speak,” and (3) “slow to anger.” The importance of the structure of this verse and its purposes need analysis.
10. The verse begins with the perfect active imperative of the verb **οἶδα (oída)**: “Know this!” In its form, **οἶδα** can be either the perfect imperative or the perfect indicative. Advocates of the perfect imperative say that James calls attention to what follows in the passage. Here’s the rationale:

The imperative is preferred for a number of reasons. (1) It is consistent with the style of James, who uses the imperative more than any other New Testament writer, especially when opening a new paragraph. (2) James makes his appeal to his readers’ knowledge elsewhere in the form of a rhetorical question (4:4: “do you not know?” and 2:20 “do you wish to know?”), not with an indicative statement. (3) The other two occurrences of the form (Ephesians 5:5; Hebrews 12:17) may be indicative, but each is introduced by a causal γάρ [gár (for)], which is not the case here with its absolute, stand-alone appeal for the readers to know what follows. (4) In other uses of “beloved brothers,” James calls attention to what follows, which is more consistent with the imperative usage (1:16; 2:25). (5) In these passages, James is fond of using what linguists call a “meta-comment” that is not necessary to the sentence but calls attention to what is about to be said (“do not be deceived”; “listen”; also “above all things” in 5:12). (p. 182)