

If his readers orient to his messages, then they will reconstruct their souls. Their capacity to live under grace will enable them to become effective participants in the advance of the Christian faith.

Therefore, James's mission is to attack legalism, lust-patterns, mental, verbal, and overt sins, and address the issue of capacity righteousness as compared to imputed righteousness.

## II. James: Chapter One

**James 1:1** James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. (NASB)

1. The epistle begins with a salutation by James which introduces himself and acknowledges the book's intended recipients.
2. We have already done the work of identifying the five men of the New Testament named James and determined that the writer of this Epistle is the eldest natural-born son of Joseph and Mary, the half-brother of Jesus, and an apostle of the Lord.
3. James, however, references none of these bona fides but instead cites what he considers his more important qualification: "a bond-servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ."
4. This is a man whose early youth occurred in the shadow of his older half-brother Jesus. He was aware of who Jesus was during his public ministry. He knew about his crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection.
5. Through all of these events that captured the imagination of his Jewish brethren, James and his other three brothers remained in unbelief regarding the Messiahship of Jesus.

**John 7:1** After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him.

**John 7:3 -** Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing.

**v. 4** "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."

**v. 5** But not even His brothers were believing in Him.

6. James did not consider it important to lay claim to royalty, borrow from his half-brother's fame, or flaunt his title. The issue for every believer is service which is the vocation of a bond-servant.
7. The word that is translated "bond-servant" is the noun **δοῦλος** (*doúlos*): one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another. Metaphorically, it refers to voluntary service.<sup>3</sup>
8. This word is used by James to describe his relationship with his God-Man, half-brother:

The Greek word for "servant" here is *doúlos*, which in Greek literature had a very negative connotation. However, James was not thinking in terms of the Greek concept, but in terms of the Old Testament concept, which was far more honorable. For example, in the *Septuagint*, this very word is used of Moses and other messengers of God, like the Prophets, who exercise spiritual authority. He is using the term in the sense of the Jewish usage that gave him spiritual authority as a messenger of God. The word also has the concept of bond-slave. The bond-slave in the Mosaic Law was a slave who became a permanent slave on a voluntary basis, not because he had to become one. James was a bond-servant of two masters. First, of God, meaning the Father, and second, of the Lord Jesus Christ, meaning God the Son.<sup>4</sup>

9. What the word *doúlos* makes crystal clear is we are born into this world as a *doúlos* under the Greek conception. We are slaves to our sin nature and unable to personally extricate ourselves from its desires.
10. When we believe in Christ for salvation and eternal life, God extricates us from the slave market of sin into His eternal love where, through spiritual growth, we become His willing *doúlos*.
11. Whether a person remains a perpetual slave to his sin nature or a bond-servant of God is determined by his decision to either accept or reject the love of God through His offer of Jesus Christ as the eternal solution for his sins.
12. These competing options were presented by Elijah to the people and the prophets of the Northern Kingdom:

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<sup>3</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, gen. ed. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 1993), 483.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Messianic Jewish Epistles* (Tustin, Cal.: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 211.

**1 Kings 18:21** Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word. (NASB)

13. Elijah’s plan was to assemble the people in order to offer proof before their own eyes that the only real God was Jehovah and that the images of Baal were nothing.
14. The people had syncretized the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Baal and had deluded themselves into thinking there was nothing blasphemous about the arrangement.
15. Elijah would not have won the approval of twenty-first century Progressives by the way he addressed the assembled throng. He had no concern for politically-correct approaches.
16. Instead, he hits them with a prepositional phrase **עַד־מָתַי** (*‘ath mathay*). The preposition *‘ath* is a reference to a time period while the interrogative adverb *mathay* also references a time element. Together they are translated, “How long.”
17. The Jews of the Northern Kingdom had allowed themselves to drift into rituals associated with the heathen worship of Baal. Their absence from the true rituals of Judaism allowed their mentality to buy the lie that the god of the heathens was the same God of Israel but by another name.
18. Recently, we saw this same idea discussed in this country. Impromptu theologians still contend that Allah of Islam is just the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew and Christian word Jehovah.
19. Elijah’s opener, “How long,” bodes a warning that time is running out on their freedom to make a decision between one system of worship or the other.
20. The prophet challenges their vacillations between the two objects of their worship with the word “hesitate,” which is the Qal active participle of the verb **פָּסַח** (*pasach*): “to limp; to bounce back and forth.”
21. Elijah’s choice of words reveals a mind-set that staggers and stumbles from one object to another thus indicating reversionism, instability, and cosmic-system modus operandi.

(End JAS1-01. See JAS1-02 for continuation of study at p. 11.)

22. The people of the Northern Kingdom were in physical slavery, not as much from King Ahab, but more so from his domineering wife Jezebel; their soul slavery remained loyal to the lust patterns of their sin natures.
23. Most of the citizens of the Northern Kingdom were probably believers in Messiah, but in such a case their submission to their sin nature put them under the justice of God to whom their allegiance should have been directed.
24. This idea is what James addresses next: “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the response Elijah solicited from the Jews of the Northern Kingdom: “If the Lord is God, follow Him.”
25. Interestingly, the word “follow” is the Qal imperative of the verb **הלך** (*halach*): to walk. It is used metaphorically for the facilitated behavior patterns of one’s life, i.e., wheel-tracks, in this case, of righteousness.
26. Elijah then offers an obvious alternative: “but if Baal, follow him.” The very same Qal imperative verb *halach* occurs here, this time indicating facilitated wheel-tracks of wickedness.
27. The prophet’s intent with his imperative moods is to force these Jews into making a decision one way or the other: “Stop vacillating back and forth between worshipping the Lord and worshipping Baal!”
28. In his epistle, James will emphasize capacity righteousness and its application to life and circumstances.
29. As one grows in grace, he will, over time, go through a process. He will begin to alter his frame of reference so that previous decisions that were wrong are systematically replaced by biblical ideas that are right.
30. Yet, it is one thing to know *what* to do, but quite another when it comes to *doing* it. There is the well-worn phrase broadly misapplied in James 2:20, “faith without works is dead.” A good expanded translation for that verse would read, “doctrine resident in the soul but without application to life and circumstances is ineffectual.”

31. It was verses like this that were no doubt among those that caused Martin Luther to critique the Epistle as being “right strawy.” James is not a strawy thing but quite powerful when analyzed in context.
32. When analyzing Scripture, it is imperative to always know what time it is. Until James put pen to parchment, there was no inspired text of the New Testament. At the time the Epistle was written, there were precious few Gentiles who had believed in Jesus as Messiah.
33. The biblical knowledge possessed by Jewish believers was centered primarily on the teachings of the Tanakh. There was no Church-Age doctrine in circulation. James is going to address the same issue that faced the Jews in 1 Kings 18, “How long halt ye between two opinions?”
34. Zane Hodges offers insight about the current Zeitgeist at the time the Epistle was written:

James makes no reference to the Gentiles, nor does he show any awareness of the kind of evangelism typical of the Pauline mission. This suggests the possibility that James was written at a date prior to the Gentile outreach recorded in Acts.

If the traditional date of James’s death (A.D. 62) is correct, the epistle cannot have been written later than that. Instead, the absence of any concern with the issues raised by the conversion of Gentiles, suggests the possibility that the latter might be dated as early as the middle or late 30s. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Paul) could have taken place in A.D. 34, leaving about a year, or a little more, for the events of Acts 1–9. In that case James could plausibly be dated as early as A.D. 34. As (John A.) Robinson has noted, “there is nothing in James that goes outside what is described in the first half of Acts.” We may add that nothing in the epistle goes beyond Acts 1–9.

If James is regarded as quite early, before the spread of the Gospel to the Gentile world, we can understand the phrase “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” accordingly.

A close study of the early chapters of Acts shows that the Christians did not yet regard the Church as an entity distinct from Israel in purpose and character. That enlightenment was to come later through Paul and through the other *holy apostles and prophets* of the early Church.

Interestingly, the letter of James contains no reference to church leaders of the kind we would now call “pastors.” Although elders are mentioned (5:14), the only reference to teaching suggests that this activity was so far from being a function reserved for certain men that James must warn his readers that *not many of you should become teachers* (3:1). This fact, too, fits as early a date as we might reasonably postulate.

In conclusion, therefore, we suggest that the Epistle of James was a pastoral letter written to the dispersed Jewish believers of Palestine, probably at a time *before* Paul’s initial mission to the Gentile world, i.e., *to Arabia* (Gal. 1:17). This would suggest a date closely approximating A.D. 34 or 35. On this view, James is by far the earliest New Testament document that we possess. (Galatians, the next book written, can be dated about A.D. 49.)<sup>1</sup>

35. As already mentioned, percentagewise James has more imperative moods than any other book in the New Testament with 59. This fact is illustrated by James Varner:

Our author’s language is heavily marked on its surface level by a surprisingly large number of Greek imperative verb forms. Readers have always recognized the heavily hortatory character of James’ style throughout the book. James performs these exhortations by utilizing a total of fifty-five imperative verb forms, plus four imperatival future forms. These imperatival forms in James form a higher ratio of imperative forms to total words than in any other New Testament book:

James, 3.387%: 59 of 1,742 words as compared to  
1 Timothy, 2.828%: 45 of 1,591 words, 2 Timothy 2.746%:  
34 of 1,238 words, 1 Peter 2.494%: 42 of 1,684 words, and  
Colossians, 2.149%: 34 of 1,582 words. (p. 52)

Not only are there a higher number and also a higher ratio of these imperatives in James than in any other New Testament book, but the imperatives are also distributed throughout the five chapters rather than grouped in one hortatory section.

The relatively balanced distribution of imperatives in James is unlike some other New Testament books in which the hortatory sections are clearly separate from the indicative sections.

The rhetoric of exhortation found in James, however, does not consist of random or unconnected commandments. These imperatives are usually accompanied by explanations or reasons. (p. 53)

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<sup>1</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character through Testing*, eds. Arthur L. Farstad and Robert N. Wilkin (Irving, Tex.: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 10–12.

Second, by being associated from the early days of canon-consciousness with the other “catholic” or “general” epistles, the nature of James as a sort of circular epistle must also be recognized. This is reflected not only in its salutation to “the twelve tribes who are in the Diaspora,” but is also evidenced by the fact that the situations addressed are general and typical, rather than specific and local.

The Letter of James has the most essential characteristics of an ancient letter: (1) a sender; (2) recipient(s); and (3) a greeting—all of which is found in 1:1. Only commands are issued and no requests are made. These last features distinguish the letter from ancient letters and are consistent with what might be called a general letter, and because it is written to more than one recipient, they indicate its general encyclical nature.<sup>2</sup> (p. 54)

36. Varner indicates the introductory verse has three sections beginning with the sender which we have established is James, an apostle and the half-brother of Jesus, but who describes himself a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.
37. The recipients of the letter follow. It is an encyclical distributed “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.”
38. It is primarily directed to Messianic Jews that have been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire whose ancestors were among the Diaspora that suffered under the several fifth-cycles of discipline of priest nations Israel and Judah.
39. The word “dispersed” is the noun **διασπορά (diasporá)**: “The state of dispersion in which many of the Jews lived after the captivity in Chaldea, Persia, and chiefly in Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor.”<sup>3</sup>
40. The final element is the word “greetings,” the present active infinitive of the verb **χαίρω (chaírō)**: “greetings.”

**James 1:1** James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes of Israel among the Diaspora outside Judea. Greetings. (EXT)

**James 1:2** Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials. (NASB)

1. “Consider it all joy” is the introduction to the book, so if we stopped here we would be in delusion about what follows throughout the Epistle.

<sup>2</sup> William Varner, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary: James*, gen. e. H. Wayne House (Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2014), 51–54.

<sup>3</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “διασπορά,” in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 440.