

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.² (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.”³
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.

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

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

2. But the verse continues with the phrase, “when you encounter various trials.” Well, some of you are going to consider James full of various trials with solutions that will be considered worse than the trial itself.
3. James starts off the New Testament with fifty-nine commandments for application. This occurs in the absence of the doctrinal developments that are to follow in the Epistles of Paul, Peter, Jude, John, and the writer of Hebrews.
4. Among the Epistles, the messages may be generalized according to the subject of each:

Paul’s letters may be classified as follows: (1) eschatological (1 and 2 Thessalonians), (2) soteriological (Galatians, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians), (3) Christological (Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians) (4) ecclesiological (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), and personal (Philemon). James is ethical; Jude is polemical; 1 and 2 Peter are pastoral; 1, 2, 3 John are pastoral; and Hebrews is largely polemical.⁴
5. Among the subjects presented by the writers, James’s is the only one that stresses ethics. You will remember in our study of Peter’s sermon to the Jews of Jerusalem that according to the Aristotelian structure of Classical rhetoric the first element of persuasion is **ἦθος (*ēthos*)**: “ethics.”
6. Ethics refer to the possession of personal integrity, the discipline of adhering to values, standards, virtue, and rectitude based on biblical mandates and principles.
7. The purpose of the Epistle is to establish these mandates as divinely ordained followed by application and production in one’s spiritual life.
8. Spiritual growth develops an inventory of divine standards followed by the wisdom necessary for proper application which includes timing.
9. Solomon mentioned a few of these in his essay on timing in Ecclesiastes 3. He introduced his examples with this prologue, “There is a time for every event under the sun” (3:1).
10. The word “time” is the Hebrew noun **עֵת (*‘eth*)** and the concept of its use by Solomon is described by Franz Delitzsch:

⁴ C. W. Carter, “Epistle,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tinny (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 2:338.

The author means to say, if we have regard to the root signification of time—(1) that everything has its fore-determined time, in which there lies both a determined point of time when it happens, and a determined period of time during which it shall continue; and (2) that every matter has a time appointed for it, or one appropriate, suitable for it.⁵

11. The principle regarding Solomon's use of time has to do with the divine decree. In human history, there is nothing that is not known to God in eternity past and all of man's decisions and their extended consequences are determined by it to occur.
12. These volitional decisions have consequences based on original intent. They are from the source of divine viewpoint or of human viewpoint.
13. God has instituted systems into the environment in which man functions. Birth starts each person's temporal journey and death ends it. In the process, he is sustained by food. To maintain good health one must plant when it's time to plant and uproot when it's time to do so.
14. The believer's participation in this drama places him in the contest called the Angelic Conflict. How he fights that war and doing so successfully depends on his ability to discern, decide, and employ the right thing to do.
15. Solomon noted how life is a cycle of events. It is true of the creation itself and it is true of the machinations of men. The former he observed in Ecclesiastes 1:5, "The sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place it rises there again."
16. The human condition is a replication of the same things done over and over again as the writer notes in verse 9, "That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun."
17. The mystery of life for the believer is to acquire the knowledge of how to deal with these ever-changing yet ever-reoccurring circumstances. The key to the mystery is wisdom which is acquired by study, retention, and application of biblical truth.

⁵ Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. G. M. Easton (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 255.

18. Let's go back to Solomon's observation of "a time for every event under heaven." In Ecclesiastes 3:3 he writes, "A time to kill and a time to heal." What the Sixth Commandment prohibits is murder, the Hebrew verb **רָצַח** (*rasach*): "premeditated murder."
19. Quite the contrary is the Hebrew verb **מָוַת** (*muth*) with refers to killing the enemy in combat. For example, in 2 Samuel 23, we have the roll call of David's Mighty Men, one of whom is Ábishai who was chief of the Thirty. His slaying of three-hundred enemy combatants is described in:

2 Samuel 23:18 Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief of the thirty. And he swung his spear against three hundred and killed [**חָלַל** (*chalal*): to slay the enemy in battle] them, and had a name as well as the three.

20. Also in Ecclesiastes 3:3, Solomon writes, "A time to tear down and a time to build up." When a person places his faith in Christ for salvation, he becomes a new creature in that he is supplied with a human spirit to which the Holy Spirit teaches doctrine.
21. Under the principle of the filling of the Holy Spirit, the believer's soul is deconstructed with regard to human viewpoint, human good, and evil while being built up by replacing these things with the eleven categories of systematic theology.

Romans 12:2 Stop being molded to this world, but be transformed by the renovation of your thought, so that you may prove what the will of God is, namely, the good, the well-pleasing, and the complete. (EXT)

22. What follows are circumstances that occur in every person's life but the underlying message is for the believer to address each with the right timing. For example, there is a time to weep and a time to laugh.
23. The question that arises is, over what should one weep and over what should one laugh? The answer is systematically altered based on one's spiritual growth.
24. Verse 5 councils for, "A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones." You must clear the ground before you can build upon it. This ties in with the "tearing down and building up" in verse 3.
25. Materialistically, these stones may be regarded as ordinance. There is a time to launch the weapons of war and a time to build up the nation's arsenal of weapons.

26. Verse five gets into one of the cultural standards that vary among societies: “A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.” The word “embrace” is the Hebrew verb **חָבַק** (*chavaq*) which describes hugging and kissing.
27. Way back in the twentieth century, the cultural standard for “shunning embracing” was opposition to PDAs, public displays of affection. The twenty-first century’s deviation might be described as PGSs, public groping and smacking.
28. There seems to be a gross misunderstanding among so many among our citizens that the right to do or say something does not always mean it is the right thing to do or say.
29. When standards of behavior guided by virtues and values established under principles of divine viewpoint are shunned in favor of anything goes, the warp and woof of a free society is gradually ripped asunder.
30. In verse 7, Solomon challenges us to pay attention to the environment in which we find ourselves, “A time to be silent and a time to speak.”
31. In the lilting verse of Proverbs 25:11, Solomon writes, “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.” (NASB)
32. The royal family honor code, established by Paul’s writings in Romans 12–13, should become the believer’s internal critic regarding what standards of behavior he should adopt and apply.
33. The context of Solomon’s guidelines reveals that the sovereignty of God and the free will of man coexist by divine decree.
34. This principle is the subject of Paul’s statement in:

Ephesians 2:10 We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (NASB)
35. “Good works” is a term that describes the production of the believer. Production is application of divine thought that leads to action, mentally, verbally, or physically.
36. The “good works” are primarily identified in Scripture by imperative moods and, as we have noted, occur fifty-nine times in the Letter of James.

Overview of the Letter of James:

1. In light of Solomon's dissertation on time, the divine decree, and human application, the Letter of James was written at just the right time.
2. James writes from Jerusalem, a city ruled by the legalistic rulers of the Sanhedrin: סַנְהֶדְרִין (*Sánhedrin*), συνέδριον (*Sunédrión*), the highest Jewish tribunal made up of 71 members. This body ruled the legal and spiritual lives of the Jewish people.

According to Josephus and the New Testament, the acting high priest was as such always head and president. Caiaphas is president at the trial of Our Lord, and at Paul's trial Ananias is president. On the other hand, according to the Talmud, the Sanhedrin is represented as a judicial tribunal of scribes, in which one scribe acted as "prince," i.e. president, and another as "father of the judgment chamber," i.e. vice-president.

The whole history of the post-exilic Judaism circles round the high priests, and the priestly aristocracy always played the leading part in the Sanhedrin. But the more the Pharisees grew in importance, the more were they represented in the Sanhedrin. So in the time of Christ, the Sanhedrin was formally led by the Sadducean high priests, but practically ruled by the Pharisees.

In the time of Christ the Great Sanhedrin at Jerusalem enjoyed a very high measure of independence. It exercised not only civil jurisdiction, according to Jewish law, but also, in some degree, criminal. It had administrative authority and could order arrests by its own officers of justice (Matthew 46:47; Mark 14:43; Acts 4:3; 5:17 f; 9:2). It was empowered to judge cases which did not involve capital punishment, which latter required the confirmation of the Roman procurator [Pontus Pilate] (John 18:31). But, as a rule, the procurator arranged his judgment in accordance with the demands of the Sanhedrin.⁶

3. The legalism that leavened the souls of the people was inculcated by teachings from the Talmud, along with its commentaries, is known as the Oral Law:

Talmud. Legal code whose compilation extended over almost a thousand years. The Talmud interprets biblical laws and commandments, and branches out into many fields of knowledge.

⁶ Pete Levertoff, Sanhedrin," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 4:2689.

The Talmud is composed of two basic divisions the Mishnah and the Gemarah. The Mishnah is mainly the interpretation of the biblical laws as handed down over the generations as the “Oral Tradition.” The Gemarah represents a commentary on the Mishnah by a group of later scholars, the Amoraim.

The Mishnah had its origin in the period following the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity (537 B.C.). Ezra the Scribe is believed to have founded the Great Assembly—a supreme Jewish religious and legislative authority. Out of the Great Assembly arose a group of men, called Scribes. The Scribes represented the official copyists of the Bible and taught its laws. They were followed by the Tannaim, sages who continued for several generations to develop methods of interpreting the laws contained in the Bible. The discussions, arguments, ordinances, and interpretations of the Tannaim are known as the Oral Tradition, as distinguished from the Written Law—that is, the Bible itself.⁷

4. It is not from the Pentateuch that the Jews were instructed but from centuries of “discussions, arguments, ordinances, and interpretations” that were passed down, generation by generation,” so that in the Scribes, primarily Pharisees, determined the spiritual life of the Jews.
5. In the midst of all this legalism are Jews who are tasked with the objective of transforming their modus operandi away from the legalistic version of Judaism as interpreted by the Oral-Law mavens at the Sanhedrin over to the grace-orientation mentality of their newly adopted Christian way of life.
6. James is going to stress many Jewish sins, that is, those that were typically committed by Jews and newly Jewish converts especially. These included, quite obviously, legalism as well as hypocrisy, arrogance, love of money, and a number associated with sins of the tongue.
7. The emphasis that James will employ will focus on application with resultant production: learn divine viewpoint, apply its principles to the exigencies of life with production that results from divine viewpoint.
8. Here are some of the things that James will discuss under the principle of timing:

(End JAS1-02. See JAS1-03 for continuation of study at p. 21.)

⁷ Naomi Ben-Asher and Haim Leaf, eds., “Talmud,” in *The Junior Jewish Encyclopaedia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1996), 303–304.