



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Slave to Slaves

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*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:
Greetings. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and
sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds
(James 1:1-2)*

Doulos and Douloi

James 1:1—James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

James... We have already discussed the person of James and not much more needs to be said about who he was as a man, as a member of Jesus' family, and as the pastor of the Jerusalem church. But, it is good to consider what he calls himself—a servant.

He describes himself as a servant of God and Christ. He does not portray himself as “the” servant of God, nor does he claim any particular office in the church. He chooses to be silent about his apostleship, his family connection to Jesus, his standing as one of the main pillars of the New Testament Church. What immediately stands out is his humility. He is simply a servant.

James refers to himself using the term *doulos*, which means bond-servant, or slave. A *doulos* is one born as a slave, and not an *andropodon*, who was one who was made a slave. We ought to remember that we, who are in fact called to be *douloi* (plural of *doulos*), are born into our service. When we receive the new birth of Christ we are born as *douloi*.

To be a *doulos* of man is not an honor, but to be considered a *doulos* of God is an honor. In the Old Testament the patriarchs were called servants of God. So were men like Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Isaiah, and Daniel. In the New Testament Paul, John, Peter, Timothy, Epaphras, and, yes, Jesus were all known as *douloi* of God. *The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go (Acts 3:13).*

The honor of being a servant is not the honor of who you are, but who you serve. Those who do not serve God serve a lie rather than truth. *They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and*

worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen (Romans 1:25)

Joshua warned about not serving the true and living God, but practicing idolatry. *If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you (Joshua 24:20).*

Instead he admonishes us to follow his example and serve God. *But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:15).* The children of God are called to be faithful servants.

The Twelve Tribes

To the twelve tribes... At first glance we might think James is writing to Jews in general as his readers are described as the twelve tribes. However, it is obvious by the epistle that he is writing primarily to Jewish Christians.

The terminology of twelve tribes is used metaphorically as a name for the people of Israel. He is not addressing the literal representatives of the actual twelve tribes in the sense of family descent. For the most part, any accurate tracing of the twelve tribes had been muddled by the conquests of foreign invaders. Obviously some either knew or claimed a certain tribe, but one's ancestry was often unclear.

Remember ten of the tribes of Israel were carried away by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Some escaped to the south to live in the area called Judah which was occupied by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The southern inhabitants were conquered by Babylon in 586 B.C. and most of them were relocated to the east. The people of Israel were allowed to go back and re-settle their homeland as is described in the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

...scattered among the nations...

The Greek term used here is one that has been transliterated into English. The term is *diaspora*. Technically this term refers to the scattering of the Jews among the peoples of the world.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425

STAFF: MONDAYS, 12:00 NOON, CHAPEL

North Carolina

James

This *diaspora* started centuries before Christ and continues thousands of years later to today. The NIV has translated the Greek "...in the diaspora..." to read "... scattered among the nations..." Please note the NIV is taking some liberty here and James does not mention the word "nations" and the original language only says "*in the diaspora.*"

James uses the *diaspora* terminology, therefore, in a narrower sense. Here he addresses not all Jews; just those who had believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

This Christian diaspora was partly due to persecution, but also due to the fact that the Jews were already scattered, and many of them had come to believe in Jesus. We read in Acts 2 about those Gentiles and Jews from other lands who were present in Jerusalem for Pentecost. That day 3,000 were added to the church! More were added from day to day.

Greetings:

Once again the original Greek gives us some additional nuance to James' message. The term he uses is *chairen* which means "rejoice or "be glad." This term was a standard form of greeting in New Testament era letters, but James uses a particular form here and this same form is found as the greeting of his letter to the Gentiles in Acts 15. Since the form of the word *chairen* is particular to both places we have more evidence of James authorship of this epistle.

James gives us a hint of what he will say in the very next verse. He speaks of joy

James 1:2—Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

Or, "Consider it **all** joy." Either way we are to think of trials as opportunities to develop joy. It may seem harsh or strange, but James uses the verb "consider" in a command form. He is not suggesting that we take a step back, and from some detached vantage point, philosophize about how trials can lead to joy, rather, he is commanding us to think this way. He is telling us how we ought to think about trials! He is commanding us to see all of life, both triumphs and trials, as ways we can grow in the likeness of Christ.

This approach would never be recommended as a pastoral way to counsel someone through grief, but really, this is what James is doing. James is not saying trials and problems are sources of joy. That would be odd, to say the least. He is telling us that the Lord will use all of life to bring about spiritual maturity.

More about this in the next lesson...

Think about this...

- Do you consider yourself a slave (or even a bond-servant) of Christ?
- How does that intersect with the biblical idea that Christ is our brother, or we are the children of the Father?
- Who has the greater right to avoid the term *doulos*, James or you?
- Do you recognize the honor of being a *doulos* of Christ?
- If you are not a *doulos* of Christ then you may be a *doulos* of sin.

Romans 6:20-22—When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

How can we relate to the Dispersion?

- Believers of Jesus Christ are not in their home country now. We are pilgrims and strangers

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth (Hebrews 11:13).

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul (1 Peter 2:11).