

James – Introduction

Date – Between A.D. 34 and 40. James is the earliest book written in the New Testament.

Author – James, the half-brother of Jesus.

Audience – The phrase ‘*to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad*’ clearly marks the audience as Jewish. Because James makes no mention of Gentiles it is possible that the letter was written prior to the Gentile outreach in Acts. James is addressing the true, spiritual Israel because at this time believing Jews constituted the entire Church.

Purpose – To encourage proper behavior in times of trial. James 1:19 is a clear purpose statement for the letter: “...*let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.*” The letter was intended for public reading and is basically a speech or sermon, cast in written form.

Understanding the context and background of James is very helpful in interpreting controversial passages such as 2:14-26.

Zane Hodges records the following insightful words:

“It should be kept in mind that if James was written before Paul’s Gentile work began, then the famous passage in 2:14-26 can hardly be an effort to refute, or correct, any form of Pauline theology. The repeated effort to relate the epistle to some kind of faith versus works controversy is misguided and has led more than one commentator into an interpretive cul-de-sac!”

Verse 1

James, a bond-servant – The Greek word is *doulos* and speaks of willing servant-hood.

Paul: Romans 1:1 – *a bond-servant of Christ Jesus*

Philippians 1:1 – *bond-servants of Christ Jesus*

Titus 1:1 – *a bond-servant of God, and apostle of Jesus Christ*

Peter: 2 Peter 1:1 – *a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ*

Jude: Jude 1 – *a bond-servant of Jesus Christ*

The Bond Servant Ceremony – Deuteronomy 15:12-17

Our redemption is described by three Greek words in the New Testament. The word *lutroo* means that we are liberated and set free! Lewis Sperry Chafer states:

“Christ will not hold unwilling slaves in bondage.

All this is typically anticipated in Exodus 21:1-6 (cf. Deut. 15:16-17). A slave set free by his master was wholly free; but he could voluntarily remain as the slave of the master whom he loved. The new voluntary relationship was sealed by the master piercing the ear of the slave with an awl. Thus, according to type, the Christian is set free, but is privileged to yield himself wholly to the One who redeemed him.”

The critical question that every believer must answer is, “**Who are you going to serve?**”

Joshua 24:15, “...*choose for yourselves today whom you will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*”

Psalms 100:2, “*Serve the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful singing.*”

Matthew 6:24, “*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other...*”

Matthew 23:11-12, “*But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.*”

John 12:26, “*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.*”

Romans 7:6, “...*we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.*”

Revelation 22:3, “...*the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him;*”

“You’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You’re gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

Bob Dylan – 1979