



## “The Brother Who Bowed”

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### Devotion and Discussion Questions

**Key Texts (TLV):** James/Jacob 1:1; Mk. 3:20–21; Mk. 6:3; Jn. 7:1–5; Acts 12:1–2, 17; Acts 21:17–20; Gal. 1:18–19; 1 Cor. 15:7–8; Jude 1

Most of us know what it feels like to want people to understand who we are. We want them to know our story, our background, our experience, our connections, and the reasons they should take seriously what we are saying. And honestly, there are moments when that feels reasonable. If someone has a title, a role, a history, or a relationship that gives weight to their words, it can be tempting to lead with that. It can be tempting to say, “Do you know who I am?” or “Do you understand why you should listen to me?”

That is part of what makes the opening line of Jacob so striking. If this is Jacob, the brother of Yeshua, then he had a connection to Messiah that none of us could ever claim. Paul identifies him as “*Jacob, the Lord’s brother*” (Gal. 1:19), and yet when Jacob introduces himself, he does not say, “Jacob, the brother of Yeshua.” He writes, “*Jacob, a slave of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, To the twelve tribes in the Diaspora: Shalom!*” (Jacob 1:1). Right from the beginning, Jacob shows us that his identity is not rooted in proximity, status, family connection, or prominence. His identity is rooted in surrender.

### 1. THE HUMILITY OF A MAN WHO COULD HAVE BOASTED

The letter opens with the name Jacob, or in Greek, Iakōbos. This is the name that has come into English as James, though it could just as easily have come down to us as Jacob. And when we ask which Jacob this is, there are a few possibilities in the New Covenant Scriptures. There was Jacob the brother of John, one of the Twelve, but Acts tells us Herod had him put to death very early on: “*He had Jacob, John’s brother, put to death with the sword*” (Acts 12:2). There was also Jacob the son of Alphaeus, listed among the emissaries, though he does not play a prominent role in the narrative. But the strongest candidate is Jacob of Jerusalem, the brother of Yeshua, known in later history as James the Just.

That makes his introduction even more powerful. Jacob was prominent in the early believing community. When Peter was delivered from prison, he told them, “*Go tell these things to Jacob and the brothers*” (Acts 12:17). When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, “*Paul went in with us to Jacob; all the elders were present*” (Acts 21:18). Jacob was clearly a voice of leadership and weight in the community. And yet, he does not introduce himself with prominence. He does not lean on his leadership, his reputation, or even his family connection to Yeshua. He simply says he is a *doulos*, a slave, a servant. Before he is a

leader, before he is known, before he is respected, Jacob wants to be understood as one who belongs completely to God.

## **2. THE SURRENDER OF A BROTHER WHO MET THE RISEN MESSIAH**

Jacob says he is *“a slave of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah”* (Jacob 1:1). That’s significant because Jacob had not always believed in Yeshua. Mark tells us there was a moment when Yeshua’s family heard about the crowds and went out to take hold of Him, saying, *“He’s out of His mind!”* (Mk. 3:21). John says plainly, *“For not even His brothers were trusting in Him”* (Jn. 7:5). So Jacob’s confession in this greeting is not casual. It is not just religious language. It is the language of a man who has been brought from unbelief to surrender.

Paul gives us a glimpse of what may have changed everything when he writes of the resurrection appearances: *“Then He appeared to Jacob, then to all the emissaries, and last of all, as to one untimely born, He also appeared to me”* (1 Cor. 15:7–8). Jacob may have come to believe only after the risen Yeshua appeared to him. And now, the brother who once did not believe does not say, “Yeshua is my brother, my equal, my family connection.” He says, in effect, “Yeshua is my Lord. Yeshua is my Master. I belong to Him.” That is the heart of true discipleship. It is not enough to be near the things of God. It is not enough to have history, familiarity, heritage, or religious language. The real question is whether we have bowed before Yeshua as Lord.

## **3. THE CALLING OF A PEOPLE SCATTERED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

Jacob writes, *“To the twelve tribes in the Diaspora: Shalom!”* (Jacob 1:1). This is clearly rooted in Jewish identity and exile. He is writing to Jewish believers scattered throughout the world, though that would not exclude the non-Jewish believers gathered among them. But in Jacob’s own view, he is addressing the twelve tribes, the people of Israel scattered in the Diaspora. These are believers living away from home, surrounded by pressures, temptations, instability, and hardship. They are trying to live faithfully as God’s people while functioning as strangers in a strange land.

That helps explain the practical nature of the letter. Jacob is not writing abstract theology disconnected from life. He is writing to scattered believers who need to know how to live with wisdom, endurance, integrity, prayer, confession, correction, care for the needy, and faith that actually works. His greeting even carries the idea of joy. The word translated as greeting is connected to joy, almost like “joyful greetings.” So from the opening line, Jacob is speaking as a surrendered servant to a scattered people, reminding them that exile does not erase calling, distance does not erase covenant, and hardship does not remove the possibility of joy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Jacob could have led with status, but he led with servanthood. He could have appealed to his natural relationship with Yeshua, but instead he bowed before Him as Lord. He could have written to scattered believers as though their exile defined them, but instead

he addressed them as the twelve tribes in the Diaspora and greeted them with shalom and joy. In one verse, we see humility, surrender, identity, and calling.

Are we trying to be known by something other than surrender? Have we allowed the pressures of being scattered, stretched, or out of place to make us forget who we are? If we've drifted, the call is to return to the place of yieldedness. Not "Do You know who I am?" but "Lord, I am Yours." Not "Yeshua is familiar to me," but rather "Yeshua is Master over me." If there is pride, lay it down. If there is unbelief, bring it into the light. If there is weariness from living in exile, receive His shalom again. Let's surrender our status, our defenses, our distance, and our self-importance, and say with Jacob, "I am a servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah."

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why is it significant that Jacob does not introduce himself as the brother of Yeshua, but as a slave or servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah?
2. Jacob had been close to Yeshua naturally, but still had to come to faith personally. What does that teach us about the difference between familiarity with spiritual things and true surrender?
3. How does Jacob's humility challenge the way people today often try to establish credibility, authority, or identity?
4. In what ways do modern believers experience life as "scattered" people or as strangers in a strange land?
5. What is one area of your life where you need to move from simply knowing about Yeshua to submitting to Him more fully as Lord?

### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

*Avinu Malkhenu*, Our Father, Our King, thank You for the example of Jacob, who did not cling to status, position, or family connection, but humbled himself as Your servant. Teach us to come before You with that same surrendered heart. Forgive us for the times we have wanted to be known by our titles, our history, our proximity, or our reputation more than by our belonging to You.

Lord Yeshua, we confess that You are not merely familiar to us. You are Lord. You are Master. You are Messiah. Help us to live faithfully as Your people, even when we feel scattered, stretched, or out of place. Fill us again with Your shalom and teach us to walk with joy, humility, and obedience.

*B'Shem Yeshua*, In the name of Yeshua, amen.