



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 1
James 1:1
“Introduction to James”

Study By
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Greek NT	Gute Nachricht Bibel	NRSV	NLT
Ἰάκωβος θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ χαίρειν.	Jakobus, der Gott und dem Herrn Jesus Christus dient, grüßt die zwölf Stämme des Gottesvolks, die über die ganze Welt zerstreut sind.	James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.	This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is written to Jewish Christians scattered among the nations. Greetings!

The Study of the Text:¹

The so-called “Letter of James” in the New Testament is one of the most controversial documents in the twenty-seven found in the New Testament. In terms of theological conflicts centered in a particular document of the New Testament, James would rank just behind the Book of Revelation in the controversies that have erupted over the almost two thousand years of interpretative history. These controversies began early on in Christian history with uncertainty over authorship that developed in the post apostolic church. Consequently James was later in gaining acceptance into the canon of the New Testament than many of the other documents.² At the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500s, James was at the center of the battles between Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic scholars often cited texts from chapters two and five in support of the sacramental system and the system of penance taught by the church and vigorously denied by Luther. Luther consequently relegated James along with a few other NT documents to the status of an appendix in his translation of the Bible into German.³ Later on James became controversial in Protestant church life especially over the faith and works emphasis in chapter two. Does James teach “faith plus works” or a “working faith” as requirements for salvation? If the former then he stands in direct contradiction of the teachings of Paul, especially in Romans and Galatians, concerning salvation through “faith apart from works of law.” That controversy still exists in contemporary church life today!

Over the almost fifty years that I have taught and preached from the book of James numerous times, I have experienced controversy from another angle. The intense demands of James for Christian commitment that expresses itself in clearly defined patterns of daily living do not sit well with most nominal Christians in today’s world. I have been verbally attacked more than once after preaching from this document because James utterly demolishes an ‘easy grace’ idea that is popular today. Fortunately I have never been fired from a church or a teaching position because of communicating the message of James. But seminary students have shared with me stories of this happening to them, and a professor friend in another school lost his job

¹With each study we will ask two basic questions. First, what was the most likely meaning that the first readers of this text understood? This is called the ‘historical meaning’ of the text. That must be determined, because it becomes the foundation for the second question, “What does the text mean to us today?” For any applicational meaning of the text for modern life to be valid it must grow out of the historical meaning of the text. Otherwise, the perceived meaning becomes false and easily leads to wrong belief.

²“There is no definite evidence of knowledge of the Epistle of James or even its name till 180; and the Western Church, with the sole exception of Hilary of Poitiers (d. 366), shows no knowledge of it until Jerome’s Vulgate (c. 383), after which on Augustine’s insistence it was admitted into the Roman canon. The Syrian Church was a generation later in overcoming her reserve. There is no evidence of any Syriac translation of any of the Catholic Epistles until the Peshitta (early 5th century A.D.)” [James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 39.]

³“After its recognition by the early Church Councils, the status of the Epistle of James remained unchallenged until the Reformation. While John Calvin accepted it with little question, Luther’s hostility, both notorious and ill-founded, has influenced most commentators since. The Council of Trent (8 April, 1546), by *decretum de canonicis* officially declared the Epistle of James ‘Holy Scripture.’” [James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 40.]

because of publishing articles on the demanding message of James regarding wealth and money in chapters two and five.

So we step into this document of the New Testament cautiously. There are theological mine fields that are found all over the text. Honest, serious study of this writing will challenge you to your limits with its unbending demands for honest commitment to God.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

All serious study of scripture raises this question first in order to focus on the most likely original meaning of the passage of scripture. This is essential, in large part, because these documents were composed by human writers in the first Christian century to be read by specific Christian groups in their world. The documents of the New Testament reflect a two-way communication between writer and readers, both of whom lived in the first century, not in our century. Only when a thorough assessment of that original meaning is completed are we in any position to say what relevance this passage may have to us living in the modern or post-modern world of today. Bypass this interpretive step and you will inevitably draw false conclusions about the meaning of any scripture text. The historical meaning imposes limits on the possible range of meanings for today that are essential to proper biblical interpretation.

One important aspect that we will discover about James, which is a major reason for the popularity of this document among Christians today, is that the paraenetical nature of virtually everything in the document past the first verse tends to narrow the cultural gap between the 'then' and 'now' meanings considerably. This makes for easier understanding of the text. But it sometimes lays a hidden trap for the modern reader when the cultural setting in a given text becomes dramatically different than in our world. One example of this is the harsh condemnation of the wealthy in chapters two and five. Liberation theologians have sometimes read this as a blanket condemnation of possessing wealth and thus a justification for a Marxist governmental structure in the name of Christianity.

Background:

Consequently we will explore in depth the background issues connected to each pericope, i.e., natural literary unit in the document. And both from a historical and a literary perspective. Off of this foundation we can then understand the words of the text both in their original meaning and in our world.

Historical Setting.

With the terms 'external' and 'internal' history some explanation is helpful.

By *external history* is meant the history of the copying of this passage up to the middle ages, when the copying of the Greek text of the New Testament diminished substantially with the ascendancy of the Latin Vulgate as the Bible of western Christianity. One of the foundational principles of biblical interpretation is to "establish the text." Because we do not possess any of the original copies of the twenty-seven documents that make up the New Testament, our only way of knowing what was first written is from copies that were successively made over the centuries. The earliest full copies of all these documents only go back to the fourth or the third centuries after their composition. A few highly fragmented copies of small portions reach back to the second century but together these comprise on a tiny fraction of the entire New Testament.

Over the centuries countless thousands of copies of these documents were meticulously hand copied by Christians in order to preserve and distribute the original language text of the New Testament. Beginning in the late 1800s modern scholars realized that variations in wording existed in the dozen or so ancient copies known to exist by the middle of the nineteenth century. About the same time the Biblical Archaeology movement exploded in the western world and through extensive exploration all through the Mediterranean world, and especially in the Middle East, an exploding number of ancient copies of pieces -- and rarely of all -- of the NT documents began appearing. By the middle of the twentieth century that number had grown to over 5,600 copies. The rate of discovery has greatly diminished now, but occasionally new copies are still uncovered and added to the list of existing manuscripts of the New Testament.

How to evaluate this huge number of copies became a major dilemma for biblical scholars. But early pioneers in this field of study in the second half of the nineteenth century began developing solid procedures for examining and evaluating all of the readings of any given passage in the New Testament. This field of

study has come to be labeled Text / Textual Criticism, meaning the objective examination of each existing copy of any passage to determine the range of variations of readings along with a carefully developed procedure for evaluating what was “the most likely original reading” of the text. Working in this field with expertise requires an enormous amount of training in a dozen or more ancient languages, a knowledge of not only classical and Koine Greek but detailed understanding of the many different ancient dialects of Greek, familiarity with the hand writing styles of different ancient copyists along with their particular version of short hand that was used to speed up the copying process et al. But out of this expertise and meticulous examination of all the known copies comes trustworthy scholarly conclusions about the original wording of each document of the New Testament. The results of such analysis are readily available in the two major printed Greek texts of the New Testament available today: *The Greek New Testament*⁴ and the *Novum Testamentum Graece*.⁵

Consequently in our analysis of each passage we will give consideration to the variations of wording that may have surfaced over the centuries in the copying of the Greek text. The text apparatus of the UBS 4th revised edition only lists variations that the editors considered important enough to impact the translation of the Greek text, while the text apparatus of the Nestle-Aland 27th rev. ed. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, through a complex abbreviation system, lists virtually every variation surfacing in the known copies of the passage. Primary attention will be given to the former, but attention will also be given to the Nestle-Aland Greek text as well.

The goal in doing this for our study is not to make you the reader an expert in the analysis process.⁶ Rather, it is to alert you to the existence of variations of readings in each passage with a non-technical explanation of the meanings of the variations. The ultimate outcome of this will be to increase your confidence in the wording of the original language text as the foundation for developing an interpretive understanding of the meaning of each passage of scripture.

The larger ultimate objective is to follow proper interpretive procedure by first establishing the precise wording of the original expression composed by the first century writers of the New Testament. Once this is completed, then detailed examination of that text becomes possible to do.

By *internal history* is meant the possible references to time and place -- often labeled temporal and spatial categories -- that are present inside the passage and allude to an historical event or movement in the first century. The levels of history in a text function in a two fold manner. Sometimes specific geographical references and named individuals provide direct access to first century historical patterns. At other times, allusions to social and religious customs become important indirect references that provide a historical framework for understanding the actions either described or mandated by the writer of the document. In either case, the more of this historical background we can learn, the clearer will be our understanding of the text.

One aspect to note about the book of James that sets it apart from everything else in the New Testament is the dominance of *paraenesis* in the content of the document. By their nature, moral and religious admonitions will not tend to be anchored exclusively in a specific history, either general or social. The social history factor, however, will more often than not be the more significant historical aspect in any given text in James. This is because what was considered proper or improper in social settings of the first century world may stand at odds with the sense of propriety in our modern world. In these instances especially, a clear understanding of the social background of such admonitions is critical for knowing whether the writer was confronting current social standards of his day, agreeing with them, or even modifying them from his own Christian perspective. This greatly aids the discovery of timeless truths that can then be legitimately applied to our world.

In our studies of James, careful consideration will be given to the signals of internal history that surface

⁴Aland, Barbara, Kurt Aland, Matthew Black et al. *The Greek New Testament*. 4th rev. ed. Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1993. This is mainly used in the English speaking world.

⁵Nestle, Eberhard, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 27. Aufl., rev. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993. This is primarily used in the non-English speaking world. The context of the scripture texts between the two printed Greek texts is virtually identical but the helps, especially the text apparatus, distinguish each text with special features not found in the other.

⁶If you have interest in learning more about this process, check out the training materials that I used over the years to introduce the procedure to fourth semester Greek students in the Greek 202 course room at cranfordville.com: <http://cranfordville.com/g202TxtCritStdy.html#Wk1>. More advanced is the online *Encyclopedia of New Testament Textual Criticism* by Rich Elliott: <http://www.skypoint.com/members/waltzmn/>

inside each passage. Where relevant these will be thoroughly examined as a part of the background understanding of the passage.

External History. In the letter *Praescriptio* found only in the first verse of the document, the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) did not regard any of the variations to be sufficiently significant to impact the translation of the text into other languages. Thus none are listed in the text apparatus in this printed Greek New Testament.



But this does not mean that variations in wording are not present in this beginning verse. In the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev ed), one variation of wording surfaces in a few late manuscripts.⁷ After the reference to God, θεοῦ, the word for father, πατρός, is added by a few late manuscripts so that the expression becomes “God, Father also of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The vast majority of manuscripts do not contain this added word, which only served to clarify the reference to Christ. Thus this additional word clearly was not in the original wording of the text.



Consequently we can be confident that the adopted Greek text in both the UBS and the Nestle-Aland printed Greek texts represents the original wording composed in the first century. This will be the established text that stands as the foundation for our study.

Internal History. The direct historical references in this verse will comprise the heart of our exegesis below, and so will not be treated here. Instead, the indirect allusions clearly present in this verse do need to be given treatment as background for understanding this verse. These overlap somewhat with the discussion of genre below, but we will separate out the historical factors from the literary aspects for the purpose of our discussion at this point.

The composition of documents in the ancient world obviously was done differently than in the modern world. Formal letters were virtually always dictated to a writing secretary who did the actual composition of the document. Regarding the book of James, modern scholarship has increasingly come to realize the distinctive nature of this document. It starts out like it is a letter with a standard *Praescriptio* at the beginning in the first verse. But immediately starting with the second verse, nothing else in the document reflects an ancient letter. There is no *Proem* nor *Conclusio* in the document. The contents of the document from 1:2 through 5:20 are not formed in any kind of ancient letter pattern.

Paul's Letter to the Philippians	
Praescriptio	
Superscriptio	Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δούλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
Adscriptio	πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους,
Salutatio	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.
Proem	Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνηα ὑμῶν. . .
Body	Γινώσκεις δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ μᾶλλον εἰς προκοπὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐλήλυθεν, ὥστε τοὺς δεσμούς μου φανεροὺς ἐν Χριστῷ γενέσθαι ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πᾶσιν, . . .
Conclusio	Ἀσπάσασθε πάντα ἅγιον ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ ἀδελφοί. . .

Ancient Letter on papyrus

To the contrary, this content even in translation reflects a tone somewhat along the lines of the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. And yet it is not just like Proverbs in content, idea presentation, language and style etc. When one becomes familiar with the ancient Jewish wisdom literary tradition that flourished especially in the four hundred years between the writing of the Old and the New Testaments, an identity for James begins to emerge. One of these documents, the *Wisdom of Sirach*, contains an impressive number of similarities to the book of James, even though it was written about two centuries before James. Although composed originally in Hebrew, a Greek translation was included in the Septuagint and was extensively used in Diaspora Judaism.⁸ Thus as a leader of Jewish Christianity, James drew heavily upon his Jewish heritage in presenting his ideas to the Christian community. Increasingly, modern scholarship has realized that it is out of that background that his writings should be understood. He reflects a Christian perspective from within the Jewish wisdom literary tradition that was influential in his

⁷* πατρος 429. 614. 630 pc (πατρός is added after θεοῦ in these manuscripts)

⁸For example, compare James 1:19 with Sirach 5:11.

James 1.19, let everyone be *quick to listen*, slow to speak, slow to anger; ἔστω δὲ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος *ταχὺς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι*, βραδὺς εἰς τὸ λαλῆσαι, βραδὺς εἰς ὀργήν

Sirach 5.11. *Be swift to hear*, but slow to answer. Γίνου *ταχὺς ἐν ἀκροάσει* σου καὶ ἐν μακροθυμίᾳ φθέγγου ἀπόκρισιν.

time. This surfaces not only in the concepts found in the document but also in the structural organization of those contents and the vocabulary.

Literary:

Not only must the student of the Bible give careful consideration to the historical aspects present in each passage, but equally important are the literary aspects as well. Understanding how the ancient writer put together his thoughts is an important part of the interpretive process. This includes noting the use of literary devices common in his time for expressing ideas (genre). Also concern for how a particular passage fits into the larger scheme of idea arrangement in the document is necessary (context). And finally, how are his ideas inside the passage assembled, especially in terms of primary and secondary ideas (structure). All of these facets together paint a detailed picture of the expression of ideas in a given passage. When we grasp how the writer accomplished this within the framework of his day, we can more confidently transfer those ideas over into our time within the framework of how ideas are typically expressed in the modern world in different cultures and languages.

Sometimes the pattern of idea expression in the ancient world has affinity with that in the modern world. But more often than not, considerable difference between the 'then' and the 'now' ways of expressing one's thoughts exists. Additionally, in both worlds considerable variation of idea expression across differing cultures, languages etc. exist as well. As anyone who has seriously studied a foreign language well understands, one's ideas are seldom ever expressed the same way in two different languages. Language simply mirrors culture, which itself is the primary source for shaping idea expression in every language, both ancient and modern.

Our challenge with James is to understand how a Palestinian Jewish man with Aramaic as his mother tongue could adjust to expressing his ideas in ancient Koine Greek for a Greek speaking Jewish readership who also understood both Aramaic and Hebrew. From inside the text of James we will seek clues to training and influences that helped bring this communication skill to the high standards that one finds in the Greek text of the document. Very little in the outside history of the person James signals that such skills were present in his life. It is the difficulty of accounting for this very fact that has caused doubts about the traditional identity of the writer of this document in the New Testament.

Genre:

When considering literary patterns that emerge from within a passage, careful analysis becomes essential. Although we will not go into the technical details, questions must be raised, such as what constitutes a literary pattern sufficiently to call it a genre? What was the communicative intent of this genre form? Repetitive patterns of idea expression in both the ancient and the modern world have developed as a signal of distinctive meaning for ideas. Precise meanings of words and phrases often are defined not just by their 'dictionary meaning' but more so by the literary form they surface in. For example, in 3:6 James uses the expression φλογίζουσα τὸν τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως, which literally is "setting on fire the wheel of birth." The dictionary meanings of these words make no sense at all. But when one realizes that actually James was using a figurative expression out of Greek philosophy that meant the duration of one's existence from birth to death, then the phrase becomes clear. The tongue envelopes our life in controversy from start to finish (using the figure of an athletic race to designate the totality of one's time on earth).

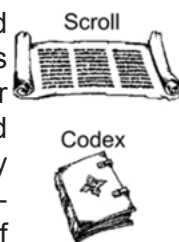
Ancient literary patterns functioned at a variety of levels in the literature of that time. This is found in the New Testament as well. At the broadest level the New Testament contains gospels, history, letters and an apocalypse. Inside the letter section are found those of Paul and the so-called General Letters beginning with James and concluding with Jude. Hebrews is placed between these two sections, but as a letter. Consistently all of the Pauline letters reflect the fundamental pattern of ancient letter writing. But with the General Letters and Hebrews greater variation from the dominant ancient letter form can be found. First Peter, Second Peter, Second John, Third John, and Jude all follow the ancient letter pattern closely. But Hebrews, James, and First John only contain one or two of the structural elements of ancient letters. In Hebrews, it is the *Conclusio* in 13:18-25. In James, it is the *Praescriptio* in 1:1. First John is questionable as to whether any element of an ancient letter is present. Perhaps a *Conclusio* is present in 5:13-21. But both Hebrews (1:1-3) and First John (1:1-4) began with a formal Prologue, which was more typical of an ancient philosophical tractate and

not found in the letters.

An important clue as to the intent of the author of Hebrews surfaces in 13:22 where he uses the label τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως, “word of exhortation,” to define the contents of this document. Careful background study reveals that this was a frequently used label to define a Jewish sermon or homily in written Greek language Jewish literature. Thus Hebrews clearly identifies itself as a sermon, rather than a letter. But it contains a very traditional letter conclusion in 13:18-25. First John, in contrast to Second and Third John, does not reflect letter patterns, and, given the formal Prologue at the beginning, this strongly suggests it was intended by the writer as a short religious tractate, rather than as a letter. The tractate form of writing was widely used in the ancient world for espousing some particular idea or set of ideas connected to a larger system of philosophy.

This leaves us with the dilemma of James. It only contains the letter *Praescriptio* in 1:1. Everything else possesses the clear tones of Jewish wisdom expression without any traces of being organized in standardized letter format. One of the most promising proposals to emerge in recent studies is that James represents an ancient Jewish Christian homily. But the wisdom tone of the material, in contrast to Hebrews, is derived from the document being a compilation of notes made from the preaching of James the Just in the Christian community in Jerusalem. Supporters of James determined -- either prior to his death or shortly after it -- that these gems of Christian wisdom needed to be preserved and distributed to Jewish Christians way beyond Jerusalem and Judea. Consequently the document comes together as sermon excerpts and a letter *Praescriptio* is attached for identification purposes,⁹ which was the universal intent of the *Praescriptio* of ancient letters.

At the small genre level, verse one forms perhaps the most traditional letter *Praescriptio* in the New Testament. All of Paul's letters follow the core structure of the letter introduction that contained three elements, but usually with substantial expansion of these elements. James 1:1 contains these elements with minor expansion in comparison. These are (1) identification of the letter sender or senders (= *Superscriptio*); (2) identification of the letter recipients (= *Adscriptio*); and (3) a word of greeting from the sender to the recipients (= *Salutatio*). This material was virtually never expressed in sentence form because it possessed the nature of a formula (A to B: howdy). Typically, it would be written on the outside surface of the scroll containing the contents of the letter on the inside, since one of its major functions was for identification of the document. Over the centuries of copying these documents, and particularly when the shift was made from a scroll to a codex (book type) format in the fourth century, this material then began to be copied at the beginning of the document on the inside as the identification of a new document in the collecting of the twenty-seven documents into a single book.¹⁰



⁹“If one wishes to explain the apparent contradiction of forms, it will be necessary to come to some type of a two-level hypothesis for the composition of the work. This same hypothesis may also explain some of the curious divergences in vocabulary (e.g. ἐπιθυμία in 1:13ff. and ἡδουσία in 4:1ff.), some of the conflict between the very good Greek in places and Semitisms in others, and some of the apparent disjointedness between topics in the epistle (even though the epistle does appear in the end to be a unitary work). The hypothesis is quite simple: the epistle is very likely a two-stage work. The first stage is a series of Jewish Christian homilies, sayings, and maxims, many of which would have been composed in Greek by a person who spoke Aramaic as his mother tongue, while others may have been translations. The second stage is the compilation of an epistle by editing these pieces together into a whole. As will be shown in the commentary, there are many places in which such a two-stage theory will enable the student to discover the redactional unity missed by such scholars as Dibelius, while recognizing the diversity of the materials and forms which he and others found.

“James the Just could well be the author of the first set of materials (the homilies) or the author of both stages (i. e. he put several of his own homilies together into an epistolary form). Then an amanuensis with considerable ability in literary Greek may have assisted the author in writing this work.”

[Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 12-13.]

¹⁰Several factors prompted this shift in format. Collecting 27 separate scrolls into a bundle was rather clumsy, and with their being written on papyrus writing material, this made the carrying of all these documents together more challenging. With the status shift of Christianity from *religio illicita* (illegal religion) to *religio licita* (legal religion) after emperor Constantine became a Christian the financial resources of Christian enabled the use of the more permanent writing material of tanned leather called parchment, which was typically folded and bound together in a book format. The Edict of Milan in 313 was a critical turning point for Christianity at this moment in time. Then in 380 AD the Council at Nicaea brought Christianity into favored status as the official religion of the empire. This meant state funding of the copying of the sacred writings of Christianity by professional scribes became possible.

Although the *Praescriptio* of James is shorter than those in Paul's letters, they do manage some expansion of the core elements. Calling attention to these elements is helpful to the understanding process. Usually the *Superscriptio* contained a listing of the sender's name and his title or rank of authority, which we have in James as Ἰάκωβος... δούλος. The *Adscriptio* identified the recipients of the letter either by name (if the letter was personal) or by some kind of group designation (if the letter was formal). The rather interesting designation ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ is found in James using a combination of religious oriented terms with geographical implications built into them. The *Salutatio* was the optional element that sometimes was blended into an extremely brief *Proem* as a health prayer wish. But in the letters of the New Testament the *Salutatio* is included separate from the *Proem* that follows. The dominant pattern in the ancient world for a greeting was the single word χαίρειν that James uses here and also in the short letter in Acts 15:23. These are the only two places in the letters of the New Testament where this standardized Greek greeting is used. Elsewhere modification and expansion of the *salutatio* are found.



Thus the literary form of James 1:1 is a very typical letter *Praescriptio* identifying the sender and the initial recipients of the letter. As an identifying marker placed on the outside of the scroll containing the contents of the document, this formula oriented expression sets up the source and targeted readership of the document.

Context:

As the outline below illustrates this text comes at the beginning of the document and carries with it a literary form completely distinct from the remainder of the contents of the document. Perhaps one reason for the *Praescriptio* being present as the only ancient letter form in the entire document is simply that it typically was written on the outside of the scroll for identification purposes. With the much later shift to the codex format it then began to be copied as the header to the document on the inside of the codex.

**STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT
Of James¹¹**

PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
BODY 1-194		1.2-5.20
<i>Facing Trials</i>	1-15	1.2-12
<i>God and Temptation</i>	16-24	1.13-18
<i>The Word and Piety</i>	25-37	1.19-27
<i>Faith and Partiality</i>	38-55	2.1-13
<i>Faith and Works</i>	56-72	2.14-26
<i>Controlling the Tongue</i>	73-93	3.1-12
<i>True and False Wisdom</i>	94-102	3.13-18
<i>Solving Divisions</i>	103-133	4.1-10
<i>Criticism</i>	134-140	4.11-12
<i>Leaving God Out</i>	141-146	4.13-17
<i>Danger in Wealth</i>	147-161	5.1-6
<i>Persevering under Trial</i>	162-171	5.7-11
<i>Swearing</i>	172-174	5.12

¹¹Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, *A Study Manual of James: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285. **Statements** indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual and also at the James Study internet site.

What one should conclude from this is reasonably clear: from this formula expression of identification we have some idea of who sent the letter and the people to whom it was sent. Apart from this opening statement we would be completely in the dark about these two matters.

One important introductory matter regarding the content of the document from 1:2 through 5:20 has to do with organizational structure and unity of ideas. The above outline reflects an important point that is often overlooked. Where individual pericopes are listed without a blank line between them, this format signals that the ideas in the two or more pericopes are closely connected to one another by repetition of either identical words or by synonyms. Sometimes this is reflected by short phrases also; e.g., ἐν μηδενὶ λειπόμενοι (1:4) -λείπεται σοφίας (1:5). But where blank lines are inserted between pericopes, this signals a shift to a new topic that more often than not possesses little or no connection to either what precedes it or what follows it.

One tip: if a commentary presents a detailed, logically developed outline of this NT document, you can be certain that the person writing this commentary does not have a clue about the meaning of the contents nor the background literary forms of Jewish wisdom writings which are essential for interpreting James. The ancient Jewish wisdom pattern of thinking and expressing ideas bears virtually no resemblance to modern western ways of logical thought expression. Often the value, or more often the *lack of value*, contained in a commentary can be detected immediately by simply taking a look at the outline of the document presented in the introductory materials of the commentary.

Repetition of words, phrases, or ideas is the primary way of detecting structural themes across a document. In a detailed analysis of James no single word outside of basic verbs consistently shows up across the entire document. The closest to such is the verb ποιέω with eleven uses, “I do / make,” which is used in 2:8, 12, 13, 19; 3:12, 18; 4:13, 15, 17; and 5:15. But for this to constitute some kind of theme, the direct objects of the verb would become important, but no one object is used with this verb more than twice and mostly just once.

What stands at the heart of the problem is culture, history, and theology. Since the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s most scholars have tended to interpret James while wearing Pauline glasses. That is, we try to understand James by expecting him to think and write like Paul did. But this is clearly not the case and it produces a false understanding of James whenever attempted. Although both were Jewish, their heritage in Judaism, in culture, and in training were substantially different from each other. Each early leader developed their own ways of thinking out of their particular background. Paul’s ministry centered on communicating the Gospel to the non-Jewish world, while the focus of James’ ministry was in Jerusalem and on Jewish Christians. With these very different ministry centers, one should not be surprised that their ways of communicating their ideas were substantially different from each other. Martin Luther and his Catholic opponents in the early 1500s did Christianity some horrific injustices by the way they pitted Paul and James against one another in their debates. The legacy of that conflict lingers in our world almost 500 years later.

What then do we do with the mostly disconnected contents of the document? Certainly we should not attempt to force them into some kind of structural outline built off of modern western patterns of thought progression. My proposal is to let them stand as they surface in the text itself. We must realize that James’ concern centered on living the Christian life. What he attempts to do in this document is to address a large number of situations in daily living where the Christian faith should have influence. Sometimes these topics are inner connected; at other times not. But they deal with very practical issues of Christian living day to day.

This organizational pattern is very Jewish in terms of the ancient world and reflects the label of Jewish homily specified in Heb. 13:22 for that document, τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως, and what Paul was invited to give in the Jewish synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, λόγος παρακλήσεως (Acts. 13:15). Added to this is the further reality that the contents of James most likely represents “the best of James’ preaching at Jerusalem” preserved for the benefit of Jewish Christians in the Diaspora. Thus the document is a collection of some of his spiritual insights thought to be helpful to Jewish believers who did not have the benefit of personally hearing him deliver his messages to the Christian community at Jerusalem. The document is then best un-

derstood as an anthology of excerpts from James' preaching to Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

Also, what we have in the Greek text is a translation of that preaching from the original Aramaic, that James used, into the Greek language for the benefit of Greek speaking Jews outside Palestine. But the text of James hardly reflects being 'translation Greek' as one can readily detect from other Jewish documents of that time, like First Maccabees. The editors of this material in James did a thorough re-write that reproduced James' ideas in both eloquent and natural literary Greek of a high quality. They "grecionized" James very profoundly in order to better communicate with the targeted audience. This high quality Greek expression underscored in the minds of the Greek speaking readers that this James was not an ignorant Jewish peasant who had little of value to say. Just the opposite came through from the Greek text.

Structure:¹²

The standardized format the the ancient Praescriptio provides the internal division of thought expression contained in the verse. This will be the basis for our exegesis of the text.

Exegesis of the Text:

Superscriptio.

Ἰάκωβος Θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος,
James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The identification of the letter sender follows a typical ancient pattern of specifying the sender by name and by title.

The personal name of the sender is Ἰάκωβος, James. What is uncertain about this is which James is intended. The Greek word Ἰάκωβος shows up some 42 times in the New Testament and refers to several different individuals who had that name.¹³ The Greek form Ἰάκωβος was derived from Ἰακώβ, Jacob, the Greek spelling of the Hebrew יַעֲקֹב. Thus one can easily understand why so many people in the New Testament surface with the name Ἰάκωβος.¹⁴

¹²In subsequent studies a block diagram of the Greek text in English translation will be presented here. The formula nature of the Praescriptio makes such a diagram unnecessary.

¹³**Ἰάκωβος, ου, ὁ** (Grecized form of the preceding Ἰακώβ [Jacob], W-S. §10, 3; EpArist 48; 49. Oft. in Joseph., even for the patriarch [s. Ἰακώβ]). In the spelling Ἰάκουβος: POxy 276, 5 [77 A.D.]; BGU 715 II, 11; 1 Esdr 9:48) **James** (for the history of this name s. OED s.v. James).

1. son of the Galilean fisherman Zebedee, brother of John, member of the Twelve, executed by Herod Agrippa I not later than 44 A.D.: Mt 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mk 1:19, 29; 3:17; 5:37; 9:2; 10:35, 41; 13:3; 14:33; Lk 5:10; 6:14; 8:51; 9:28, 54; Ac 1:13a; 12:2; GEb 34, 60; Papias (2:4).—ESchwartz, Über d. Tod der Söhne Zeb. 1904; JBlinzler and ABöhling, NovT 5, '62, 191–213.

2. son of Alphaeus (s. Αλφαῖος) also belonged to the Twelve Mt 10:3; Mk 2:14 v.l. (s. 6 below); 3:18; Lk 6:15; Ac 1:13b. This James is perh. identical with

3. son of Mary Mt 27:56; Mk 16:1; Lk 24:10 (s. B-D-F §162, 3), who is called Mk 15:40 Ἰ. ὁ μικρός, James the small or the younger (μικρός 1ab.—TZahn, Forschungen VI 1900, 345f; 348ff).

4. the Lord's brother (Jos., Ant. 20, 200), later head of the Christian community at Jerusalem, confused w. 2 at an early date; Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12; Ac 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; GHb 361, 7 (Lat.); probably Papias 2:4. This J. is certainly meant Js 1:1 (MMeinertz, D. Jk u. sein Verf. 1905; AMeyer, D. Rätsel des Jk 1930); Jd 1; and perh. GJs 25:1 in title and subscr.—GKittel, D. Stellg. des Jak. zu Judentum u. Heidenchristentum: ZNW 30, '31, 145–57, D. geschichtl. Ort des Jk: ibid. 41, '42, 71–105; KAland, D. Herrenbr. Jak. u. Jk: Neut. Entwürfe '79, 233–45; GKittel, D. Jak. u. die Apost. Väter: ZNW 43, '50/51, 54–112; WPrentice, in Studies in Roman Economic and Social Hist. in honor of AJohnson '51, 144–51; PGaechter, Petrus u. seine Zeit '58, 258–310; DLittle, The Death of James: The Brother of Jesus, diss. Rice Univ. '71; WPratscher, Der Herrenbruder Jakobus u. die Jakobustradition '87.

5. father of an apostle named Judas, mentioned only by Luke: Lk 6:16a; Ac 1:13c.

6. Mk 2:14 v.l. (s. 2 above) **the tax-collector is called James** (instead of Levi; s. FBurkitt, JTS 28, 1927, 273f).—HHoltzmann, Jak. der Gerechte u. seine Namensbrüder: ZWT 23, 1880, 198–221; FMaier, Z. Apostolizität des Jak. u. Jud.: BZ 4, 1906, 164–91; 255–66; HKoch, Z. Jakobusfrage Gal 1:19: ZNW 33, '34, 204–9.—EDNT. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 464.]

¹⁴Another interesting aspect of this name is how it has been brought over into different languages by Bible translators: James (English); Iacobus (Latin Vulgate); Jakobus (German); Santiago (Castilian Spanish); Jacobo (Spanish) / Jaime, Diego (other Span-
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Although many candidates appear, the one most often identified as the James designated in this document is James the Just, who was the brother of the Lord and the leader of the Christian movement in Jerusalem during the two plus decades prior to his martyrdom in the early 60s. Paul so identifies the James of Jerusalem as the Lord's brother in Gal. 1:19, Ἰάκωβον τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ κυρίου. The church father Origen (184/185 - 253/254) is the first to link this James to the document bearing James' name in his commentary *Commentarium in Epistolam ad Romanos* (IV, 8) in the early third century AD. For a variety of reasons, the other individuals with the name James drop out of consideration quickly on close examination.¹⁵ James the Just emerges as a revered Christian leader of Jewish Christianity and has the name recognition necessary to merit having his ideas preserved in the early church.

A major portrait of this James emerges from inside the New Testament out of Paul's writings, the book of Acts, and the Gospels.

From Paul's writings come some references in 1 Cor. 9:5; 15:7 and Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12. Brief comment on these is important.

1 Cor. 9:5, μὴ οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν, ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ Κηφᾶς; *Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?* Here James is included as one of the Lord's brothers who in later ministry traveled widely and also took their wives along with them on these ministry trips. That Paul implies here that James the Just traveled outside of Judea, or even Palestine, is very unlikely, since nothing in the New Testament or the early church traditions suggest that he did. The clearest insight gleaned from this reference is that James took his wife with him on his ministry trips and that he expected the host congregations where he traveled to cover the costs of his stay with them.

1 Cor. 15:7, ἔπειτα ὤφθη Ἰακώβω, εἶτα τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν, *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.* Paul in listing the resurrection appearances of Christ includes James as one of those individuals who received a private appearance from the risen Christ prior to Jesus' ascension back to Heaven. This is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.

Gal. 1:19, ἕτερον δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων οὐκ εἶδον, εἰ μὴ Ἰάκωβον τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ κυρίου, *but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother.* Paul identifies James both as the Lord's brother and as being in Jerusalem when he made his first visit back to the city as a Christian. Although at first glance Paul seems to list James as an apostle, the complex Greek grammar expression is better translated as "I did not see any other apostle (besides Cephas), but I did see James." At that point Peter was the leader of the apostles and James was the leader of the πρεσβύτεροι, the local house church leaders, in Jerusalem. For several reasons Paul only saw these two leaders of the Christian movement in Jerusalem during the fifteen day visit to the city.

Gal. 2:9, καὶ γνόντες τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι, Ἰάκωβος καὶ Κηφᾶς καὶ Ἰωάννης, οἱ δοκοῦντες στυλοῖς (Swahili).

"Contemporary readers may miss the literary richness associated with this name in the biblical tradition, since the English 'James' gives no automatic clues to its derivation from the Hebrew 'Jacob.' The English derives from the Old French 'Gemma' or 'Jaimes,' which equals the Spanish 'Jaime,' Catalanian 'Jaume,' and Italian 'Giacomo.' These, in turn, derived from the late Latin 'Jacomus,' a softening of the earlier Latin 'Jacobus' (see also German 'Jakobus'). The Latin is a straight transliteration from the Greek *Iakōbos*, which is itself a transliteration of the Hebrew *yaqōb*.²¹⁹ This letter from 'James,' therefore, is in reality a letter from 'Jacob,' whose role in the biblical story carries with it considerable symbolic weight (see Gen 25:26; Exod 3:6, 15; Isa 40:27; Mic 2:12)." [Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 92-93.]

¹⁵"Second, other candidates either fail to meet that level of recognition or disappear from the scene too quickly. James the son of Zebedee had high recognition value: he appears on all four lists of apostles (Matt 10:2; Mark 3:17; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13) and appears as one of Jesus' closest followers during his ministry (see Mark 1:19, 29; 5:37; 9:2; 10:35, 41; 13:3; 14:33). But Acts 12:2 reports his death by beheading under Herod Agrippa I. This James would have had to write before ca. 44 CE, which, while not impossible, seems less than likely, since this James' authority is not singled out by any source. Another *Iakōbos* is the 'Son of Alphaeus,' who also appears on all lists of the apostles (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), but who plays no role in the narratives. Even more obscure is James 'The Little' (*ho mikros*) who is briefly identified as a son of Mary and brother of Joses (Mark 15:40 = Matt 27:56; Mark 16:1 = Luke 24:10). Finally, there is the James who is the father (apparently) of Judas, who himself appears in apostolic lists (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13; but contrast Mark 3:18; Matt 10:3).²²⁰ James 'the Brother of the Lord' emerges with impressive clarity from among these candidates." [Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 93.]

εἶναι, δεξιὰς ἔδωκαν ἐμοὶ καὶ Βαρναβᾶ κοινωνίας, ἵνα ἡμεῖς εἰς τὰ ἔθνη, αὐτοὶ δὲ εἰς τὴν περιτομὴν, and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. When Paul made a subsequent visit to the city of Jerusalem during the Jerusalem Council meeting, he identifies James as one of the leaders in Jerusalem, along with Cephas and John. These men representing the local leaders (James) and the apostles (Peter and John) concluded an agreement with Paul and Barnabas regarding the directions of their ministries.

Gal. 2:12, πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἐλθεῖν τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν· ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον, ὑπέστειλεν καὶ ἀφώριζεν ἑαυτὸν, φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς, for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. Subsequent to the Jerusalem Council and prior to the beginning of the second missionary journey Peter made a trip to Antioch in Syria. He was doing fine in connecting to non-Jewish members of the church until individuals described as τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου, some from James, arrived at Antioch and convinced him to disassociate himself from non-Jewish members of the church. The question here is whether or not these individuals were dispatched by James or whether they were falsely pretending to be authorized by James. Earlier some individuals had come to Antioch falsely under a claim to having been sent by James (Acts 15:24), and the likelihood is that this group was doing the same thing. But they did have destructive influence over Peter at Antioch that brought down Paul's stinging, public rebuke of Peter before the entire assembly there (Gal. 2:11-14).

A clear picture emerges from Paul's references to James. James by the time of Paul's conversion, or else shortly afterwards, stood as the highly respected leader of the Christian movement in Jerusalem and as the leader of the local leaders of the various house church groups in the city. Paul understood him to be the Lord's brother who had received special consideration from the risen Christ with a private resurrection appearance. This James was married and took his wife with him on ministry trips.

From the book of Acts comes a similar picture of this James to that which Paul describes. He surfaces by name in Acts at 12:17; 15:13; and 21:18.

Acts 12:17. κατασεῖσας δὲ αὐτοῖς τῇ χειρὶ σιγᾶν διηγήσατο αὐτοῖς πῶς ὁ κύριος αὐτὸν ἐξήγαγεν ἐκ τῆς φυλακῆς, εἶπέν τε· Ἀπαγγείλατε Ἰακώβῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ταῦτα. καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐπορεύθη εἰς ἕτερον τόπον. He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, "Tell this to James and to the believers." Then he left and went to another place. When Peter was miraculously released from jail in the early 40s he immediately made his way to the home of Mark's mother where the disciples were gathered, but he did not enter the house. Instead, he gave an explanation of what had happened to him to the young servant girl named Rhoda at the front door with instructions to tell this to James and the others gathered inside the house. He then quickly departed, out of safety concerns both for the group and for himself. The insight to be gleaned here is that by the point Peter is acknowledging the leadership role of James over the church in Jerusalem. This event happened in the early 40s. What is not made clear in Acts is at what exact point James assumed this leadership role for the local Christian community in Jerusalem. Most likely his assuming such a leadership role is connected to the persecution of Christians by Paul in his Pharisee days, mentioned in Acts 8:1, in the early 30s. Although it took some time, the ministry of the apostles shifted gradually to a regional based ministry which gave rise to the need of designated local leaders. So sometime during the middle to late 30s this transition took place, and James became the leader of the local leaders of the Jerusalem church.

Acts 15:13. μετὰ δὲ τὸ σιγῆσαι αὐτοὺς ἀπεκρίθη Ἰάκωβος λέγων· Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ἀκούσατέ μου. After they finished speaking, James replied, "My brothers, listen to me..." In the meeting at Jerusalem, a general assembly of the church along with the apostles and local leaders began the meeting (vv. 4-5). It was followed by a private session of just the leadership in which Peter spoke to the group in behalf of the apostles, Paul and Barnabas reported on their activities, and James addressed the group as the presiding officer over the meeting. He spoke in behalf of the πρεσβύτεροι. Then in a reconvening of the entire Christian community (vv. 22-29), James spoke in behalf of the leadership of the entire group and of the church to announce the decision that was agreed upon in support of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in preaching to the Gentiles.

Clearly by this point about 47 to 48 AD James was the recognized leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem and was highly respected by the entire Christian community and also by the apostles.

Acts 21:18. τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ εἰσῆει ὁ Παῦλος σὺν ἡμῖν πρὸς Ἰάκωβον, πάντες τε παρεγένοντο οἱ πρεσβύτεροι. *The next day Paul went with us to visit James; and all the elders were present.* This narrative reference surfaces at the end of Paul's third missionary journey around 58 AD. When Paul and Silas and the others in the missionary team arrived in Jerusalem, the first thing Paul did was to arrange a meeting with James and the other local leaders of the Jerusalem church. From Paul's first visit (appx. 36 AD) to his last visit (appx. 58 AD) to Jerusalem as a Christian, the Acts texts is clear: the apostle valued his friendship with James and always sought to connect up to James whenever he came to the city. Clearly in his references to James in First Corinthians and Galatians, he respected James as a leader of this community of believers. To be sure, Paul did not bow down to James as his boss or superior in any way -- as he makes very clear in Galatians. But he felt that friendship with James was important and a valuable part of a united witness to the non-believing world.

From the gospels, we encounter only two mentions of this James by name: Matt. 13:55 and Mark 6:3. And these are parallel passages describing the same event: Jesus' rejection at Nazareth.

Matthew 13:55. οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός; οὐχ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ λέγεται Μαριὰμ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωσήφ καὶ Σίμων καὶ Ἰούδας; *Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?* In this reference of Jesus' teaching in his home synagogue at Nazareth, the people in their amazement over the insight into scripture that Jesus possessed raised a question about the family that Jesus came out of. In the listing of names, James is listed as one of Jesus' brothers along with Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Jude). Also mentioned but unnamed in the next verse are several sisters of Jesus as well. The implication of the raising of the question about Jesus' family is to imply that no one coming from a Jewish peasant family such as this one would normally acquire the profound spiritual understanding that Jesus had expressed in his teaching at the synagogue that day.

The insight to be gleaned for our purposes is to recognize more details about the family of James in terms of Mary and Joseph, along with his brothers and sisters, including Jesus.¹⁶ And the acknowledgement by the residents of Nazareth of the peasant status of this family in the little village in southwestern Galilee.

Mark 6:3. οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας καὶ ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσήτος καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος; καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ ὧδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς; καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ. *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.* This text in Mark is the source for Matthew's account in his gospel as well as for Luke in his narrative in Lk. 4:16-30. A couple of items merit noting in Mark's account since they appear differently in Matthew's account. Mark simply says Jesus is ὁ τέκτων, *the carpenter*, while Matthew words it ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός, *the son of the carpenter*. Joseph comes more directly into the picture in Matthew's account, than he does in Mark's account. Interestingly, Luke makes no mention of Jesus' family in his narrative. Secondly, Mark lists four brothers of Jesus -- Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσήτος καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος -- while Matthew mentions them in a different sequence -- Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωσήφ καὶ Σίμων καὶ Ἰούδας. And he spells Joseph, the second brother, differently than does Matthew: Ἰωσήτος rather than Ἰωσήφ. The shift in sequence does not seem to signify anything particularly important. Of greater importance is that both gospel writers label these men as οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ, *his brothers*, clearly indicating a blood kinship to Jesus through their common mother Mary. Additionally, Joseph is not mentioned by name probably because by the time of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry Joseph had already passed away. This would have been typical since Joseph was in his 30s when Jesus was born to Mary in her early teens. Some thirty years later when Jesus begins public ministry, Joseph would have long outlived the normal life expectancy for males in the ancient world that rarely extended beyond their late 40s. The biblical account does not even hint that Joseph lived beyond a normal life time of 45 to 50 years, which implies that he passed away a decade or more prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

During Jesus' earthly ministry his family was not overly supportive of His ministry. The synoptic gospel accounts make this very clear, and especially Mark who is more critical of their lack of support. The picture emerging in the fourth gospel is not positive either. Early on in Jesus' public ministry in Galilee they sought to restrict what Jesus was doing.¹⁷ But by the end of His public ministry his family seemed to have become

¹⁶The issue of later Christianity falsely claiming the perpetual virginity of Mary and thus claiming that these siblings of Jesus were not children of Mary is based on the heretical deification of Mary after the model of the female pagan goddesses of Greco-Roman culture and is clearly denied by the plain teaching of the New Testament.

¹⁷Compare Matt. 12:46-50 and Luke 8:19-21 with Mark 3:31-35 as one of the places where Jesus' family shows up negatively in the texts.

more positive about what Jesus was doing. It was the cross and the resurrection of Jesus that became the decisive turning point for them in their attitudes toward Him.

One other reference to this James by name inside the New Testament comes from the *Praescrptio* of Jude where the letter sender identifies himself as Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος, ἀδελφὸς δὲ Ἰακώβου, a *servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James*. These three individuals -- Jude, Jesus, and James -- were all blood kinship brothers to one another. But the spiritual connection to Christ took precedence over the physical kinship, and the blood kinship connection to James was appropriate since he was related to a respected leader in Christianity.

From the time of the church father Origen in the early 200s on, church tradition increasingly connected this James with this book by his name in the New Testament.¹⁸ In the modern era a wide variety of

Mk. 3:31-35. 31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” 33 And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

31 Καὶ ἔρχονται ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔξω στήκοντες ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς αὐτὸν καλοῦντες αὐτόν. 32 καὶ ἐκάθητο περὶ αὐτὸν ὄχλος, καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· Ἴδου ἡ μήτηρ σου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ σου ἔξω ζητοῦσίν σε. 33 καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτοῖς λέγει· Τίς ἐστὶν ἡ μήτηρ μου ἢ οἱ ἀδελφοί μου; 34 καὶ περιβλεψάμενος τοὺς περὶ αὐτὸν κύκλῳ καθημένους λέγει· Ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί μου· 35 ὃς γὰρ ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, οὗτος ἀδελφός μου καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν.

Matt. 12:46-50. 46 While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. 47 Someone told him, “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”c 48 But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” 49 And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

46 Ἐτι δὲ αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος τοῖς ὄχλοις ἰδοὺ ἡ μήτηρ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ εἰστήκεισαν ἔξω ζητοῦντες αὐτῷ λαλῆσαι. 47 εἶπεν δὲ τις αὐτῷ· Ἴδου ἡ μήτηρ σου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί σου ἔξω ἐστήκασιν, ζητοῦντές σοι λαλῆσαι. 48 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν τῷ λέγοντι αὐτῷ· Τίς ἐστὶν ἡ μήτηρ μου, καὶ τίνας εἰσὶν οἱ ἀδελφοί μου; 49 καὶ ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν· Ἴδου ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί μου· 50 ὅστις γὰρ ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς, αὐτός μου ἀδελφός καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν.

Luke 8:19-21. 19 Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. 20 And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.” 21 But he said to them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

19 Παρεγένετο δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡ μήτηρ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἠδύναντο συντυχεῖν αὐτῷ διὰ τὸν ὄχλον. 20 ἀπηγγέλη δὲ αὐτῷ· Ἡ μήτηρ σου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί σου ἐστήκασιν ἔξω ἰδεῖν σε θέλοντες. 21 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· Μήτηρ μου καὶ ἀδελφοί μου οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούοντες καὶ ποιῶντες.

Also **John 7:1-10.** 1 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. 2 Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. 3 So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; 4 for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” 5 (*For not even his brothers believed in him.*) 6 Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. 8 Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.” 9 After saying this, he remained in Galilee. 10 But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret.

7.1 Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα περιεπάτει ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ, οὐ γὰρ ἠθέληεν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ περιπατεῖν, ὅτι ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτεῖναι. 2 ἦν δὲ ἐγγὺς ἡ ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἡ σκηνοπηγία. 3 εἶπον οὖν πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ· Μετάβηθι ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ὑπάγε εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν, ἵνα καὶ οἱ μαθηταί σου θεωρήσουσιν σοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖς· 4 οὐδεὶς γὰρ τι ἐν κρυπτῷ ποιεῖ καὶ ζητεῖ αὐτὸς ἐν παρρησίᾳ εἶναι· εἰ ταῦτα ποιεῖς, φανέρωσον σεαυτὸν τῷ κόσμῳ. 5 *οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν.* 6 λέγει οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ὁ καιρὸς ὁ ἐμὸς οὐπὼ πάρεστιν, ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὁ ὑμέτερος πάντοτε ἐστὶν ἔτοιμος. 7 οὐ δύναται ὁ κόσμος μισεῖν ὑμᾶς, ἐμὲ δὲ μισεῖ, ὅτι ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἐστίν. 8 ὑμεῖς ἀνάβητε εἰς τὴν ἑορτήν· ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀναβαίνω εἰς τὴν ἑορτήν ταύτην, ὅτι ὁ ἐμὸς καιρὸς οὐπὼ πεπλήρωται. 9 ταῦτα δὲ εἰπὼν αὐτὸς ἔμεινεν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ. 10 Ὡς δὲ ἀνέβησαν οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν ἑορτήν, τότε καὶ αὐτὸς ἀνέβη, οὐ φανερώς ἀλλὰ ὡς ἐν κρυπτῷ.

^{18c}The traditional position on the authorship and date of James definitely appeared by AD 253 (the death of Origen) and established itself firmly by the end of the fourth century (Jerome, Augustine, and the Council of Carthage). From then until the sixteenth century James was generally accepted as coming from the hand of James the Just while he presided over the church in Jerusalem (roughly AD 40–62, the lower limit being the less clear). Luther, like Erasmus,³ attributed the work to another pious Christian named James due to internal evidence, but criticism of the epistle remained muted in the church until the rise of its modern criticism with De Wette in 1826.⁴ Three new major lines of thought appeared after him.⁵ [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 2.]

highly speculative viewpoints have emerged, as the chart on the right illustrates. The truth of the matter is that the early church linkage still stands as the most probable connection of any of these that have been set forth. But not until modern times has serious analysis of this viewpoint been conducted. Many questions are arisen that need answers, although some of these questions have less to do with James and the contents of the book than they do with modern theological controversies swirling around the book of James.

**JEWISH ORIGIN
pre-James the Just**

L. Massebieau 1895
F. Spitta 1896

post-James the Just

A. Meyer 1930
H. Thyen 1955
R. Bultmann 1955?
B. S. Easton 1957

non-Jacobean, but early

L. E. Elliott-Binns 1956

Listing of Authorship Views

**JAMES THE JUST
early (AD 40–50)**

R. J. Knowling 1904
T. Zahn 1909
J. B. Mayor 1910
G. H. Rendall 1927
G. Kittel 1942
W. W. Wessel 1953
A. Ross 1954
D. Guthrie 1964
J. A. T. Robinson 1976

no preference (AD 40–62)

J. H. Moulton 1907
A. Schlatter 1932
J. Schneider 1961
F. Mussner 1964
J. Michl 1968
J. Adamson 1976

late (AD 5–62)

W. H. Bennett 1901
R. St. J. Parry 1903
F. J. A. Hort 1909
J. Chaîne 1927
R. V. G. Tasker 1956
C. L. Mitton 1966
E. M. Sidebottom 1967
F. F. Bruce 1969
J. Cantinat 1973

**POST-JACOBEOAN
partial authorship**

W. O. E. Oesterley 1910
F. C. Burkitt 1924
W. L. Knox 1945
H. Windisch 1951?
E. C. Blackman 1957

**pseudonymous
authorship (AD 70–130)**

B. W. Bacon 1911
J. H. Ropes 1916
J. Moffatt 1928
B. H. Streeter 1928
J. Marty 1935
E. J. Goodspeed 1937
F. Hauck 1937
F. Young 1948
H.-J. Schoeps 1949
H. Windisch 1951?
A. H. McNeile 1953
R. Bultmann 1955
M. H. Shepherd, Jr. 1956
M. Dibelius 1964, 1976
B. Reicke 1964
W. G. Kümmel 1966
S. S. C. Marshall (Laws) 1968
W. Schrage 1973
S. Laws 1980

Taken from Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 4.

From my studies of James over the past forty years of ministry, let me put the following scenario on the table as a likely explanation of the background for the composition of this document. Critical assessment of the various other proposals can be found in numerous commentaries on James. I don't need to repeat those arguments here; they are readily available in these commentaries. Now for my reading of this that is with heavy influence coming from the work of Peter Davids in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* on James.

By the late 50s numerous tensions were exploding in Palestine connected in part to growing discontent with the Roman control of the Promised Land and the growing loss of self-control over their own land by the Jews. Internally, tensions were beginning to boil between Jewish peasants and Jewish aristocrats, especially over the stealing of family property in Galilee by aristocrats from Jerusalem. To make matters worse, the emperorship in Rome was becoming very unstable. The relatively positive early years of Nero's reign were now rapidly plunging into governmental chaos in Rome by the beginning of the 60s. After Herod Agrippa I died in 44 AD, a series of inept and corrupt Roman governors were assigned by Nero to rule over Judea: Antonius Felix, procurator (52-59 AD); Porcius Festus, procurator, (60-63 AD); Gessius Florus, procurator, (64-66). Open, armed revolt by the Jews against the Romans in Judea broke out in 66 AD.

In the middle of this explosive mixture lay the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem and the connected communities elsewhere in Judea. By the mid 50s the contours of Christianity were beginning to rapidly change, and not for the good in the minds of segments of this Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem. The Pauline mission throughout the northeastern Mediterranean basin was bringing a flood of non-Jews into the Christian faith. Unlike the early Gentile proselytes who became a part of the church, these new Gentiles were not converting to Judaism at all in their religious commitment to Christianity. The Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem was increasingly vulnerable to the criticism that it was becoming a major corrupting force inside Judaism. This in an atmosphere of extreme nationalistic patriotism that prevailed among the Jews during this time. Most of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem continued worshiping in the temple; continued attending the Friday evening sabbath services in the synagogues; continued practicing most all the Jewish customs of their religious and ethnic culture. In the eyes of most residents of Jerusalem these people were Jews who happened to belong to a subgroup devoted to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. But their willing-

ness to associate with non-Jews who were not proselyte converts to Judaism raised eyebrows with serious questioning of the legitimacy of this group. as Acts 11 illustrates earlier.

Although the credibility of the sources is very suspect, the collective consensus of later church leaders was that James was widely regarded by Jews generally in Jerusalem during this period of time.¹⁹ The book of Acts in chapters fifteen and twenty-one affirm the basic contours of this later perspective, but without affirming most of the details put forth in these later writings.

At some point -- most likely toward the end of James' life -- either James or else members of the Jerusalem Christian community became concerned that a written voice preserving the insights of the Jewish Christianity was of critical importance. Out of the Hellenistic Jewish side of that community (cf. Acts 6:1) came the efforts to collect and publish the insights of James the Just. Their concern was to get this message out to Jewish Christians living in Diaspora Judaism outside Palestine. And they desired it to be a λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως, a traditional Jewish homily of exhortation but written in eloquent literary Greek to reflect high standards and that this group of Christian leaders in Jerusalem, James in particular, were highly insightful spiritual leaders.

The developing chaos at Jerusalem with Jewish / Roman tensions that were reaching a boiling point created a highly uncertain future. Probably with James' permission -- and perhaps with his help -- these members began pulling together some of the more important spiritual insights they had heard him proclaim to the believers in Jerusalem over the years. Either just before, or perhaps soon after, his martyrdom at the hands of the High Priest in Jerusalem in 62 AD,²⁰ this material was put in finalized form and copies were sent out to different parts of the Jewish Christian world inside the Roman Empire.²¹ This material landed in the laps

¹⁹Jerome (c. 347 – 420), in his *De Viris Illustribus*, argued that James was not Jesus' brother but his cousin, son of Mary of Cleophas, "the sister of the mother of our Lord of whom John makes mention in his book."⁴³ After the Passion, Jerome wrote, the Apostles selected James as Bishop of Jerusalem. In describing James' ascetic lifestyle, *De Viris Illustribus* quotes Hegesippus's account of James from the fifth book of Hegesippus's lost Commentaries:

After the apostles, James the brother of the Lord surnamed the Just was made head of the Church at Jerusalem. Many indeed are called James. This one was holy from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor strong drink, ate no flesh, never shaved or anointed himself with ointment or bathed. He alone had the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies, since indeed he did not use woolen vestments but linen and went alone into the temple and prayed in behalf of the people, inasmuch that his knees were reputed to have acquired the hardness of camels' knees.⁴⁴

Since it was unlawful for anyone but the High Priest of the Temple to enter the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year on Yom Kippur, Jerome's quotation from Hegesippus indicates that James was considered a High Priest. The Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions suggest this.⁴⁵

Jerome quotes the non-canonical Gospel of the Hebrews: "Now the Lord, after he had given his grave clothes to the servant of the priest, appeared to James, for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour in which he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen from the dead.' And a little further on the Lord says, 'bring a table and bread.' And immediately it is added, 'He took bread and blessed and broke and gave it to James the Just and said to him, "My brother, eat your bread, for the Son of Man is risen from the dead.'"⁴⁶ And so he ruled the church of Jerusalem thirty years, that is until the seventh year of Nero.⁴⁶ (See Jerome and the Early Church Fathers.)

The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas confirms that James was an important leader, stating, "The disciples said to Jesus: We know that you will depart from us; who is it who will lead us?" Jesus said to them, "Wherever you have come from, go to James the Just, for whom heaven and earth came to be."^{47,48}

[“James the Just,” *Wikipedia.org*]

²⁰“According to a passage found in existing manuscripts of Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*, (xx.9) ‘the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James’ met his death after the death of the procurator Porcius Festus, yet before Lucceius Albinus took office (*Antiquities* 20,9) — which has thus been dated to 62. The High Priest Ananus ben Ananus took advantage of this lack of imperial oversight to assemble a Sanhedrin (although the correct translation of the Greek *synhedion kriton* is ‘a council of judges’), who condemned James ‘on the charge of breaking the law,’ then had him executed by stoning. Josephus reports that Ananus's act was widely viewed as little more than judicial murder and offended a number of ‘those who were considered the most fair-minded people in the City, and strict in their observance of the Law,’ who went as far as meeting Albinus as he entered the province to petition him about the matter. In response, King Agrippa replaced Ananus with Jesus, the son of Damneus.” [“James the Just,” *Wikipedia.org*]

²¹In the ground breaking commentary on James in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* series, Peter Davids makes a strong case for the post-martyrdom composition of the document. Davids, Peter H. *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. See page 22 for his final conclusion. His proposal is lengthy and very complex, but thoroughly covers all the bases in addressing issues that have arisen in

of churches largely in Anatolia where most of Paul's missionary endeavors had taken place. These Christian communities were heavily oriented toward Gentile believers, but in many places significant numbers of Jewish believers were present as well. The message of the document had relevancy to both groups, but was especially affirming and helpful to those with Jewish ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In our exegesis of the contents of this document we will explore implications of this perspective in regard to the meaning and initial application of the text.

The title of the sender is θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δούλος, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. In most formal ancient letters the name of the sender is followed by indication of his title or rank either in government or in society at large. This pattern was important for the letter sender to be able to assert his right to make demands on his targeted readers. Without such authority his demands could be easily ignored or rejected. But with clearly expressed authority by the sender, the rejection of his demands put the readers in peril and could lead to repercussions from the letter sender.

The *Superscriptio* follows the core pattern of ancient letters by providing the authorizing title of James for making demands on his readers. He was a δούλος, a slave. This does not sound very authoritative! But ironically it contains greater authority than the title of general, senator, or emperor. How? The concept of a slave does not suggest authority; in fact, just the opposite of it. But with the qualifiers of this term, θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, one begins to sense the distinctive meaning that δούλος acquires in this particular context.

But first a translation issues needs to be clarified. Two theoretical translations of this Greek phrase are possible: 1) servant of the God and Lord Jesus Christ, or 2) servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem stems from the absence of Greek articles in the phrase. Had the phrase read τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, translation option 2) would clearly be the intended meaning. But if it had read τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ dropping the second article τοῦ, then translation option 1) would clearly have been the meaning.²² Given a number of factors, translation option 2) is the much more likely intended meaning of the phrase.²³

So James claims to be first a servant²⁴ of God, that is, God's slave.²⁵ Conceptually the idea communi-

modern scholarship.

Although quite impressed by Davids' arguments, my inclination is to see the final edition of this composition closer to the time of James' death, and probably just before it in 62 AD.

²²This uncertainty did not exist in the early copying of the Greek manuscripts. The only question in the minds of a few later copyists was the relation of God to Jesus Christ. This was made explicit by the insertion of πατρός after θεοῦ so that the phrase translates "servant of God, the Father also of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Very late minuscule mss 429 (9th cent.), 614 (8th cent.), 630 (12th - 13th cent.) contain this change).

²³"In Greek it is possible to take both God and Lord as joint qualifiers of Jesus Christ, literally 'servant of God and Lord Jesus Christ,' resulting in the translation 'a servant of Jesus Christ, who is God and Lord.' It is doubtful, however, that this is the meaning intended here. The main reason is that it is extremely unusual in the New Testament to call Jesus 'God' in such a direct way (John 20:28 is an exception). In order to explain this difficulty and apparent awkwardness, some early manuscripts added the word 'Father' after 'God' so as to distinguish 'God' as 'Father' and 'Jesus' as 'Lord.' RSV and TEV both avoid the apparent awkwardness by translating 'of God and of the Lord ...,' making clear that two persons are involved." [I-Jin Loh and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Letter from James*, UBS handbook series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 7.]

²⁴"The term δούλος is by no means unusual on the lips of an apostle (e.g. Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1), coming as it does from Jewish literature (e.g. Gn. 32:10; Jdg. 2:8; Ps. 89:3 [88:4]; Is. 41:8; Je. 26:7; Am. 3:7). It is both an indication of humility, for the servant does not come in his own name, and of office, for the bearer of the title is in the service of a great king (cf. Mussner, 60-61)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 62-63.]

²⁵"The term *doulos* denotes literal bondage to the authority of another (Plato, Rep. 395E). Thus, the Israelites were 'slaves in the land of Egypt in the house of Pharaoh' (1 Sam 2:27 LXX). Religiously, it connotes the special relationship between God and humans defined in terms of possession (by God) and service (by humans). Thus, the declaration in Euripides, Ion 309, 'I call myself the slave of God' (*doulos tou theou*); thus the recognition of Paul and companions as 'slaves of the most high God' in Acts 16:17. In the Hebrew Bible, the term *ebed* is used to define such a religious relationship. The people Israel is called 'slave of the Lord' in LXX Pss 134:1; 135:22; Isa 49:3; and Ezek 28:25. The religious expression of slavery as dedication to God permeates the piety of the Psalms (see, e.g., LXX Pss 118:38, 76; 122:2; 133:1; 135:1; 142:12). In Isa 42:19, the Hebrew 'servant of the Lord' is rendered by the LXX in the plural as *douloi tou theou* ('slaves of God'), the only instance of this phrase in the LXX. The term *doulos* is, in turn, often attributed to those leaders who mediate between God and humans, such as Joshua (Josh 14:7; 24:30; Jdg 2:8), David (2 Sam 7:8, 25, 29; 1 Chr 17:4; LXX Pss 77:70; 88:4, 21; 131:10; 143:10; Ezek 34:23; 1 Macc 4:30), and Moses (LXX Ps 104:26,

cated by this is that of complete submission to the authority of God, thus suggesting humility rather than authority. But one must remember the Jewish heritage present here. A servant of God was a popular way for the Hebrew prophets to describe themselves, cf. Isa. 20:3; 44:26.²⁶ Thus through this connection to God came the authority by way of divine commissioning for them to speak in behalf of God with the very authoritative, “Thus says the Lord God...”. Out of this early Christian understanding of the divinely commissioned preacher of the God functioning parallel to the Hebrew prophets came the use of δούλος as one of the common titles in the letter *Superscriptia* in the New Testament: Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1; Rev. 1:1. These Christian leaders spoke authoritatively in their writings with the claim of being God’s servant. But at the same time inherently in the concept of δούλος is that this person never ever speaks out of his own authority, for as a slave he possesses no authority within himself. His authority always is the authority of the God who commissioned him to speak in God’s behalf. Here is where the humility factor in the term δούλος comes to the forefront.

But in a pattern very common in the New Testament letters, the sender claims authority to speak not only in behalf of God, but also in behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the phrase κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Lord Jesus Christ, is used.²⁷ Here Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ functions as the personal name, while κυρίου has a title function. Paul’s tendency is to speak of himself as servant of God and apostle of Jesus Christ. But with this James who was not one of the apostles, the Pauline pattern would have been inappropriate for him to use.

The concept here is that James claims to speak for both God and Jesus Christ. What is especially important in light of a few assertions that the document is inherently not a Christian writing, but instead a Jewish one, is that from the beginning the letter sender is claiming to speak under the authority of Jesus Christ. Only one coming from a Christian perspective would make such a claim. Additionally, the reference is to the κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Jesus is Lord, a term in the LXX reserved only for God. This additional title of deity attached to Jesus Christ even more strongly asserts the Christian perspective of the letter sender.

Adscriptio.

ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.

The designation of the intended recipients of this document has been a puzzlement to many readers down through the centuries. The clear Jewish orientation of both elements -- ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς and ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ -- seems to suggest at first glance that the document is targeting purely Jewish readers. But with the document also being written from a Christian perspective one would have expected the contents to focus on making a strong case for Christ as the promised Jewish Messiah. That is, it would be an evangelistic appeal to non-believers to convert to Chris-



42; Mal 3:24). Only once is the term applied to Isaac (Dan 3:35) or to the patriarchs as a group (2 Macc 1:2). More often, it is used of the prophets as messengers of Yahweh (Amos 3:7; Joel 3:2; Jonah 1:9; Zech 1:6; Jer 7:25; 25:4; Ezek 38:17). In the NT likewise, the term can be applied to Jesus (Phil 2:7) or to Christians generally (1 Pet 2:16; Acts 2:18; 4:29; Rev 10:7; 19:5; 22:3, 6). But it also appears as a title for Christian leaders, either in the form ‘slave of Jesus Christ’ (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1) or ‘slave of Christ’ (Gal 1:10). Only in Titus 1:1 is the title *doulos theou* also applied to Paul. According to one analysis (Sahlin, 1947), the odd designation of James as OBLIAS by Hegesippus (in Eusebius, HE II,23,7) is due to a scribal error, mistaking the Greek Δ for the Λ, thus yielding OBLIAS rather than the original OBDIAS. The name Obadiah, furthermore, means ‘slave of Yahweh’ in Hebrew. Such an explanation would make sense of Eusebius’ otherwise inexplicable supplying of the ‘Greek meaning’ of OBLIAS as ‘rampart (*periochē*) of the people and righteousness,’ for the beginning of the prophecy of Obadiah (‘slave of Yahweh’) in the LXX says that the Lord set out a ‘rampart’ (*periochē*) for the nations (*ethnē*). The link to this author’s self-designation is tenuous but possible.” [Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 167-68.]

²⁶In the LXX this came through as ὁ παῖς μου (Isa. 20:3), παιδὸς αὐτοῦ (Isa. 44:26), which is a virtual synonym of δούλος.

²⁷Where reference is made to Christ in the letter *Superscriptia*, the following patterns emerge:

Jesus Christ: Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1

Christ Jesus: 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Philm. 1; Col. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1

Lord Jesus Christ: Jas. 1:1

tianity. But even a quickly cursory reading of the contents reflects something entirely different. The assumption underneath the contents of the document clearly assume Christian commitment already, not potential consideration of Christian commitment. The document was written to Christians from a Christian perspective! So where does the Jewish angle come into the picture?

The answer to this question has taken different directions in scholarly expression. Some have tried to take the terms literally with the conclusion that the document is targeting only Jewish readers, and mostly without any Christian orientation. On the other end of the spectrum is the scholarship that concludes that this heavily Jewish phrase is being applied to Christians -- Jewish and Gentile -- in the sense of the church being the new Israel. The first of the two terms, ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς, more easily allows for this understanding, while this view strains hard to find a credible explanation for the second part, ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ. Why James would refer to Christians in general as Diaspora Jews is hard to understand. This requires entirely different explanations from the easy to understand terminology of First Peter ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς..., to [the chosen dispersed exiles in ... \(1:1\)](#).

Between these two ends of the interpretive spectrum lies a third option which can more easily account for the language of James in 1:1 in relationship to the orientation of the contents of the document. It is the view that the Jewish terminology is employed by James to a targeted readership who were Jews, but also Christians, and that they lived primarily outside Palestine in the Diaspora Jewish world. James over the years of ministry leadership in Jerusalem had enjoyed extensive contact with Jewish Christians who had this background heritage. From the very early beginnings of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Christian community did have members from differing parts of the empire who now made their home in Jerusalem. These Hellenistic Jews in the church by chapter six of Acts constituted an important segment of that community in the city. The larger segment of Hellenistic Jews living in Jerusalem enjoyed a synagogue oriented to their different background from that of the Hebraistic Jews who were native to the city; it was called according to Acts 6:9 the Synagogue of the Freedmen, which probably was Paul's 'home synagogue' in Jerusalem during his Pharisee days.

James then is understood to be targeting Hellenistic Jewish Christians who lived outside of Palestine and who enjoyed much in common with the Hellenistic Jewish Christians that were a part of the Christian community in the city of Jerusalem. My personal conviction is that this document not only targets this segment of early Christianity, but that the Hellenistic Jewish part of the church in Jerusalem played the pivotal role in bringing this document together for distribution to churches scattered across the empire where Jewish Christians made up segments of the local Christian communities. This is based upon both the literal meaning of the key terms and the literary setting of 1:2-5:20 that paints a supportive picture of the intended readers of this document.

The key terms ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς and ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ merit some consideration.

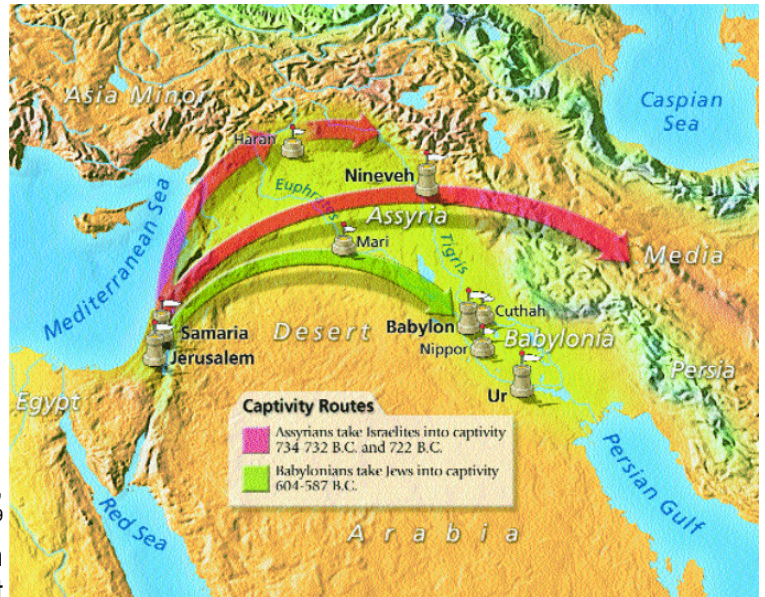
ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς. This phrase, [to the Twelve Tribes](#), clearly alludes to the twelve tribes²⁸ of ancient Israel. The combination of φυλαί and the number δώδεκα is found in several New Testament references designating the nation of Israel: Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30; Rev. 21:12. The most natural meaning here in James is that same designation. When Peter uses a series of labels that originally specified the Israelite people and

²⁸φυλή, ἥς, ἡ (φῶλον 'race, tribe, class'; Pind., Hdt.+).

1. a subgroup of a nation characterized by a distinctive blood line, *tribe*, of the 12 tribes of Israel (Diod S 40, 3, 3 δώδεκα φυλαί of the 'Judeans'; LXX; TestAbr A; cp. AscIs 3:2 τὰς ἐννέα ἡμισυ θυλάς; TestBenj 9:2; Demetr.: 722 Fgm. 6 Jac.; Jos., Ant. 11, 133) **Hb 7:13; Rv 7:4**; 1 Cl 43:2ab, 4; GJs 1:1; 6:3; AcPl Ha 8, 3. Certain tribes are mentioned by name: Ἀσήρ **Lk 2:36**. Βενιαμίν **Ac 13:21; Ro 11:1; Phil 3:5**. Ἰούδα **Rv 5:5**; cp. **Hb 7:14**; all the tribes **Rv 7:5-8** (except that, according to ancient trad., Manasseh takes the place of Dan, since the latter is the tribe fr. which, because of Gen 49:17, the Antichrist is alleged to come [WBousset, D. Antichrist 1895, 112ff; s. Iren. 5, 30, 2; other reff. Charles, ICC Rv I 208f]). Of Mary ἦν τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυὶδ GJs 10:1b; cp. vs. 1a. αἱ δώδεκα φυλαὶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ **Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30**; cp. **Rv 21:12**; B 8:3ab; πᾶσαι αἱ φ. τοῦ λαοῦ GJs 24:3; in imagery **Js 1:1**; Hs 9, 17, 1f.

2. a relatively large people group that forms a sociopolitical subgroup of the human race, *nation, people* (X., Cyr. 1, 2, 5; Dionys. Hal. 2, 7) πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς (Gen 12:3; 28:14; Ezk 20:32) **Mt 24:30; Rv 1:7**; 1 Cl 10:3 (Gen 12:3). W. synonymous expressions (TestAsh 7:6 χώρα, φυλή, γλώσσα) πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, φυλὰς καὶ γλώσσας 2 Cl 17:4; cp. **Rv 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6**.—B. 1317. DELG s.v. φῶλον. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1069.]



re-applies them to the believing community in 2:9, the term ‘twelve tribes’ is not one of these terms.²⁹ If the term here refers to all of Christianity, then this is the only place in the entire New Testament

and in early Christian writings where this expression δώδεκα φυλαί has this meaning. This reality of the lack of usage elsewhere argues strongly against attributing such a figurative meaning to it here.³⁰ It is better then to take the term at face value as alluding to Jewish people. The clear Christian orientation of the contents of the document will modify this understanding slightly to center on Jewish Christian people.

ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ. The term for Diaspora defines the location of the dispersed peoples.³¹ As the above map illustrates, the dispersion of the Jewish people by the first Christian century had been extensive, especially in the eastern parts of the Mediterranean world. This dispersion originated initially with the Babylonian exile of the southern kingdom by 587 BCE to the eastern fertile crescent. In successive waves, Jewish captives in Judea were carried from 604 to 587 BCE to Babylonia in resettlement. Because of the favorable treatment that the Babylonians gave captive peoples who had been resettled in and around Babylon, the Jewish people thrived in captivity there. When the opportunity to return back home to Judea came several decades later, the majority of them opted to continue living in Babylonia rather than return to a war devastated homeland that offered few of the luxuries they enjoyed in Babylonia. Over time these Jews adapted to local culture and developed a very different way of living, even though most retained adherence to their Jewish religious heritage. During the subsequent centuries these ‘exiles’ began to spread out to other parts of the middle east, and eventually into the Mediterranean world, in the eastern section especially. Thus most of these ‘dispersed Jews’ traced an ancestry back to Babylon more than back to Jerusalem. The massive resettlement of ancient Anatolia partially with Jewish settlers from the eastern fertile crescent after the Battle of Ipsus (308-301 BCE) by Seleucus I greatly solidified his control over this former territory of Antigonus,

²⁹**First Peter 2:9.** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Ἦμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλεῖον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ἡμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστόν αὐτοῦ φῶς·

³⁰Only in the *Shepherd of Hermes* in the early second century in one of his so-called visions (*Similitudes* 9.17.1ff.) does he use the term δώδεκα φυλαί to mean symbolically all the nations of the world, but not Christians.

³¹**διασπορά, ἄς, ἡ** (s. διασπείρω; Philo, Praem. 115; Plut., Mor. 1105a; Just.) LXX of dispersion of Israel among the gentiles (Dt 28:25; 30:4; Jer 41:17; s. also PsSol; TestAsh 7:2).

1. state or condition of being scattered, dispersion of those who are dispersed (Is 49:6; Ps 146:2; 2 Macc 1:27; PsSol 8:28) ἡ δ. τῶν Ἑλλήνων *those who are dispersed among the Greeks* **J 7:35.**—Schürer III 1–176; JJuster, *Les Juifs dans l’Empire romain* 1914; ACausse, *Les Dispersés d’Israël* 1929; GRosen, *Juden u. Phönizier* 1929; KKuhn, *D. inneren Gründe d. jüd. Ausbreitung: Deutsche Theologie* 2, ’35, 9–17; HPreisker, *Ntl. Zeitgesch.* ’37, 290–93 (lit.); JRobinson, *NTS* 6, ’60, 117–31 (4th Gosp.).

2. the place in which the dispersed are found, dispersion, diaspora (Jdth 5:19; TestAsh 7:2). Fig., of Christians who live in dispersion in the world, far fr. their heavenly home αἱ δώδεκα φυλαί αἱ ἐν τῇ δ. **Js 1:1.** παρεπίδημοι διασπορᾶς **1 Pt 1:1.**—Hengel, *Judaism II* index. DELG s.v. σπείρω. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 236.]

another of the generals of Alexander the Great who took over his empire after his death in 323 BCE. And this resettlement brought a huge Jewish influence into the area of modern Turkey that would continue to grow and expand for many centuries. This Jewish presence there provided a major foundation for Paul's missionary activities.

By the beginning of the Christian era, the Jewish Diaspora was concentrated in -- but not limited to -- both Asia Minor in the northeastern Mediterranean world and to Alexandria Egypt in the southeastern Mediterranean world. Far more Jews lived in these regions than did Jews in Palestine back home. The Egyptian branch of the Jewish Diaspora exercised considerable more influence over events in Jerusalem and Judea than was the case with the Asia Minor branch. But enormous wealth flowed from both these regions into the coffers of the temple in Jerusalem through the so-called temple tax imposed on every Jewish family universally.

Given the additional fact that the Greek term διασπορά possesses only a literal and not a figurative meaning in its New Testament usage, the better alternative is to understand the term as a literal geographical reference rather than a spiritual reference. This literal geographical meaning also lies in the background of ancient Jewish uses: (LXX) Isa. 49:6; Ps. 146:2; 2 Macc. 1:27; Ps. of Sol. 8:28; (Pseudepigraphal) Judith 5:19; Testament of Asher 7:2.

When taken literally and given the history of the Jewish Diaspora at this time, the targeted readership would then primarily be the Jewish Christians in both Asia Minor and Alexandria Egypt. The beginnings of Christianity in Egypt are traditionally dated back to 43 AD and the work of John Mark.³² This is based on a statement by the fourth century church historian Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*. This most likely is legend more than historical fact. We do not know many of the details of the beginning of Christianity here, but that it was well established is clear so that by the third century AD Christianity in Alexandria was rivaling that in Rome for dominance over western Christianity. The spiritual leader in the city was considered the most influential Christian leader in all of Africa during this period. Combined with the well documented huge Jewish population in the city by the beginning of the Christian era, it is a reasonable conclusion that Jewish Christians existed in the city by the middle of the first Christian century. Jewish pilgrims who converted to Christianity on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem were said by Luke to include folks from [Egypt and parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene](#), **Αἴγυπτον** καὶ τὰ μέρη τῆς Λιβύης τῆς κατὰ Κυρήνην, in Acts 2:10. This may very well signal the beginnings of Christianity in Egypt, and Alexandria in particular.

This understanding of a widely dispersed targeted readership over large regions of the Mediterranean world is supported by the highly generalized nature of the admonitions that comprise the content of the document. The very isolated historical allusions, e.g., in 5:1-6, refer to events taking place in Palestine where the sender lived, rather than to elsewhere in the territories where the readers lived.

Thus we will explore the text meaning in 1:2-5:20 under the assumption of the materials reflecting James' preaching originally to the Christian community in Jerusalem but this preaching having been translated and adapted to Jewish Christians living elsewhere and mostly in the eastern regions of the Mediterranean world.

Salutatio. χαίρειν, [Greetings](#). In the first century Greek speaking world when one met a friend on the streets, one of the oral greetings traditionally spoken was χαίρειν, "Hello."³³ This was labeled an ἀσπασμός, a greeting, and was spoken to friends and family along with a traditional kiss on the cheek in greeting the other person. The shaking of hands, commonly done just about only in the US as a greeting, was not done in the ancient world. The shaking of the right hands was a symbolic action formalizing an agreement between two parties, as is reflected in Gal. 2:9.

³²"The History of Christianity in Africa began in the 1st century when Mark the Evangelist started the Orthodox Church of Alexandria in about the year 43.² Little is known about the first couple of centuries of African Christian history, beyond the list of bishops of Alexandria. At first the church in Alexandria was mainly Greek-speaking, but by the end of the 2nd century the scriptures and Liturgy had been translated into three local languages." ("Christianity in Africa," *Wikipedia.org*)

³³See **2 John 10-11** for first century expression of this: "10 Do not receive into the house or [welcome](#) anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; 11 for [to welcome](#) is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person."

10 εἰ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ταύτην τὴν διδασχὴν οὐ φέρει, μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν καὶ [χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε](#). 11 [ὁ λέγων γὰρ αὐτῷ χαίρειν](#) κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ τοῖς πονηροῖς. Literally the Greek states "to say χαίρειν" to the false teacher at the front door of the house.

Out of this oral background practice came the use of the same word *χαίρειν* for the *salutatio* in the greetings of ancient letters. This was the standard practice where Greek was spoken and written. But it was not the exclusive practice in ancient letter writing. Enlargements of this greeting reflecting both Greek and Jewish practices typify the *salutatio* sections of Paul's letters: grace (*χάρις*) and peace (*εἰρήνη*) are his main words of greeting. The noun *χάρις* is derived from the verb *χαίρω* (*χαίρειν* is the infinitive) and thus reflects the Greek side. The noun *εἰρήνη* translated the Hebrew word for peace, *שָׁלוֹם* (*shalom*), and thus reflects the Jewish side.

Interestingly, only two letters in the entire New Testament reflect this very Greek oriented greeting of *χαίρειν*: James 1:1 and James' letter to the church at Antioch in Acts 15:23. The Pauline pattern dominates elsewhere among the NT letters. Usually this is seen as a further connecting link between the James of the letter here and the James who functioned as the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

What is equally important for interpretation is the role of the *salutatio* in ancient letters. Formalized friendships played a very important role in ancient society across the board culturally and linguistically. Important to the maintaining of those friendships was giving and receiving greetings. This lies behind the so-called greetings sections of many of Paul's letters. But in the *salutatio* section, the sharing of a greeting signaled to the letter recipients a friendly intention for the letter by the sender. The desire of the sender was to begin the letter on the basis of established friendship with the recipients, who hopefully would be more receptive to the contents of the letter. This would be true even when the sender proceeded to severely criticize his readers, as is the case with Galatians (cf. 1:1-5).

Thus this document coming from James to Jewish Christians scattered around the Mediterranean world had the intention of helping these believers not only to understand the Christian life better but also to live it more consistently. James wanted that understood from the outset.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

How does the book of James connect up to us as believers living in the twenty-first century? More particularly, what relevance from the first verse of this document exists to us today?

Given the numerous controversies that have been generated from the contents of the document over the centuries we might be inclined to avoid this document. But James stresses greatly the importance of believers getting along well with one another in passages like 1:19-21; 3:1-12; 4:1-12. When disunity erupts over the interpretation of the book, perhaps something important in the book is being missed. Besides, so much spiritual wisdom is contained in the document for the Christian life that this book becomes very valuable for deeper understanding of how to please God in our daily living. The contents of the book then draw us to the document and invite us to probe its insights deeper. One other insight that is important and that we hope to illustrate repeatedly in our studies is how to function as a Christian while living in a culture dramatically different from the one back home. Foreign residents living a long way from their homeland have a document in the New Testament that speaks to some of their distinctive issues.

The relevance of the *Praescriptio* to us comes at two levels. Informationally we need to understand as much as possible about the background of this document so that our interpretation of it stays on track and does not veer off into divisive personal speculation. This is where and why most of the controversies over the centuries have originated. From a spiritual insight level, there is a great deal we can learn about servant ministry alluded to in this verse. We need to recognize distinctive spiritual needs of differing ethnic groups inside the church that can and should be addressed. The significance of friendships among believers needs to be rediscovered among modern believers. The New Testament world through the window of James 1:1 can teach us much here.

1. Describe the background circumstances that prompted the writing of this document.

2. Who was the James that is identified as the letter sender?

3. What does servant ministry mean in light of James 1:1?

4. Why was a letter addressed primarily to Jewish Christians in the New Testament?

5. What role do friendships play in your relationships with other believers?