

James

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James 1:1-4

Vs. 1

- In a typical first century letter the writer would want to establish his credentials and credibility. Paul would state that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. A secular writer would state that he is the son of so and so and either serves in this military unit or is a veteran. Here James does the same thing but does so by stating that his only credentials and all of his credibility comes from being “a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”. Jude is the only other New Testament writer who likewise uses the Greek word “*doulos*” to describe the Master/slave relationship with God and Christ. But what then does the word really mean?
- First, it carries the weight of absolute obedience. A *doulos* is the absolute possession of his master. There is only one law he is to follow and this is the word of his master. He has no rights of his own. He is to give his master his unequivocal and unhesitating obedience. He has no value of his own, only in that he is the slave of *THAT* master. His only value comes from who his master is. There were slaves who spoke on the floor of the Roman Senate because of who it was they were speaking for and were respected as such. Such a slave is a mere extension of the master Himself.
- Second, *doulos* shows absolute humility. He is a slave who gives no thought to personal rights, self, pride, or privilege, but only thinks of his service to his master. This is the self-descriptive word from one who has totally lost himself in the life of Christ.
- Third, it shows absolute loyalty. Here is one who has no other agenda, no other interests, other than his service to his master. What he seeks to gain, how his own life is advanced is never considered. All that matters is pleasing the master through his obedience.
- We mentioned in the introduction to James that the Old Testament had been translated into Greek by the end of the 3rd century BC and the beginning of the 2nd century BC. This translation is known as The Septuagint or LXX, the Roman numeral for 70; so called because it is said that there were 70 translators, thereby the work’s full name is “The Translation of the Seventy Interpreters”. In this translation the phrase “*doulos of God*” is used to describe Moses (1 Kings 8:53; Daniel 9:11; Malachi 4:4) as were Joshua and Caleb (Joshua 24:29; Numbers 14:24) and the great Fathers such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 9:27). Even Job was assigned the title (Job 1:8). The prophets Isaiah, Amos, Zechariah, and Jeremiah were all known as “the *doulos of God*” (Isaiah 20:3;

Amos 3:7; Zechariah 1:6; Jeremiah 7:25). With this title James is making the point that the greatest title anyone can be given in the Kingdom of God is that of “slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ”.

- The letter is addressed to “the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad”. “The Diaspora” is the phrase used to describe the millions of Jews who lived outside The Holy Land, throughout and even beyond the borders of the Roman empire. Such an address may be only to the Jews who were also believers in Jesus as the Christ, which James himself was. But it is more likely that the greeting is to the whole Christian church, for by this time the church had come to see itself as the true Israel (Galatians 6:16). Throughout the Old Testament it is not just heritage that makes a person a child of God but rather it is what is in their heart. So when the Jews refused to accept the responsibility and mission God had given them to be a “Kingdom of Priests” (Exodus 19:6) and “a light to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6) and then had ultimately rejected Jesus as Christ, Lord, Messiah, and Savior, then the name “Israel”, meaning “the people of God”, passed over the Jews to the Church (Romans 9). The true children of Abraham are not those who can trace back their family tree, but those who have the same heart as Abraham. The true Israel then is not found in race, but faith.
- Finally, James uses the secular word “*chairein*” for “greetings”. The only other two places in Scripture where this word is used are in Acts. In Acts 23:26 a Roman officer is writing to the governor asking for safe passage for Paul. And the other is in Acts 15:23 where James and the elders of the Jerusalem church sent a letter throughout the whole church, just as James has done here. Rather than using a Christian greeting like “Grace and Peace” as Paul commonly did, James sent a very general greeting for a very general audience.

Vss. 2-4

- Written like a true *doulos*, for only a true *doulos* would say that suffering for the master was a joy! And who would be more qualified to say this at this point than James. He had been with the Jerusalem church since The Ascension and from the death of Stephen in Acts 7 to the writing of this letter some 30 years later James’ church had known nothing but persecution. Recall, that it was for the relief of the suffering of the Jerusalem church that Paul collected the offering from the European church on the Third Missionary Journey.
- Vs. 2: some translations use the word “temptations” rather than “trials”, but trials is more correct. The word here is “*peirasmos*” meaning “a testing pushing toward an end”. So this is not about seduction into sin or struggling with sin, but strengthening and purifying. Again, in the Greek Old Testament it’s the same word used when the Queen of Sheba came to test the wisdom of Solomon or when God tested Abraham with Isaac. Living in the light is a declaration of war against the darkness and as the

darkness battles back there will be testing. Who has a better chance in battle: soldiers who have been well tested in combat already or those who have never been in combat before? The darkness always seeks to draw us in, take our faith from us. But what the darkness intends for our pain God intends for our strength. Therefore, the Christian should not complain about life's trials but rejoice in them, for each time as we emerge from battle God has reshaped us to look more and more like Christ.

- Vss. 3-4: This testing produces “endurance/unswerving constancy/ steadfastness”. The word here is “**hupomone**”. The word is often translated “patience” but that really falls short. The word carries with it the idea of bearing very difficult/heavy things but then turning them to greatness, to glory. As we have said before, that the Christians often died singing in the arena drove the Romans crazy. There is one story of a Christian being burned alive and as he was burning, he was smiling. “What have you got to smile about?”, came a voice. “I saw the glory of God”, he said, “and I was glad.” And let us remember, it is not on our own strength that we can turn trials and suffering into victory and joy, but it is through the power of the Spirit of Christ within us that gives us every drop of strength we need.
- The result of this is that we fulfill Matthew 5:48 and become perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. Such trials act as a refiner's fire, cleansing all of sin's impurities from us. When we meet insult with grace, injury with mercy, malice with forgiveness, and trials in general with joy...all through the power of the Holy Spirit...then we truly are our Father's children in every way.
- Not only are we perfect, we are also complete. If something is perfect, what more would you add? What else does it need? It is perfect. It is complete. This is the same word used to describe the animals brought to the Temple for sacrifice: perfect, without blemish.
- “Lacking in nothing” – In Greek the word for deficient points toward an army that is defeated or an athlete that failed to meet their goal. Here, as we successfully and joyfully handle all of life's trials by the power of the Spirit, we are never defeated, we have reached our goal. Whether in life or death, we live victoriously every day.