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Different attitudes toward the book of James

With this message we begin the Life-study of the Epistle of James. Believers have held different attitudes toward this book. Martin Luther, the great reformer used by the Lord to begin the recovery, said that the Epistle of James was an "epistle of straw." However, certain Christians, especially some Chinese Christians, appreciate this book because it fits in with their ethical background, a background that emphasizes ethical and moral perfection. These Christians especially appreciate the book of James in the New Testament and the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. In the West, when the New Testament is printed separately from the Old Testament, it is often printed with the book of Psalms. But in the Orient, when the New Testament is printed separately, it often includes the book of Proverbs. It seems that Christians in the West like the Psalms, whereas Christians in the Orient like Proverbs.

According to the concept of some, the book of James is similar to the book of Proverbs. This similarity can be seen in the illustrations James uses in his Epistle: the surge of the sea (1:6), the flower of the grass (1:10), the sun with scorching heat (1:11). As we shall see when we come to chapter three, in dealing with the problem of the tongue, James uses twenty different items for his illustrations (3:3-12). In 4:14 James uses vapor as an illustration of human life, and in 5:7 he uses the illustration of a farmer waiting for his crop to ripen. These illustrations give the Epistle of James a proverbial character. Therefore, those who especially appreciate the book of Proverbs also appreciate this Epistle. As we shall see later in this Life-study, I also appreciate this Epistle, but I appreciate it for a very different reason.

A slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Epistle of James opens like this: "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." James was a flesh brother of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 13:55) and of Jude (Jude 1:1). He was not one of the twelve Apostles chosen by the Lord while He was on earth, but he became one of the apostles after the Lord's resurrection (Gal. 1:19) and the leading elder in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:2, 13; 21:18), reputed with Peter and John to be a pillar of the church, and mentioned by Paul as the first among the three pillars (Gal. 2:9).

In 1:1 James refers to himself as "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Here James ranks the Lord Jesus equally with God. This was contrary to Judaism, which did not recognize the deity of the Lord (John 5:18).

When James was with the Lord Jesus in the flesh, he probably did not listen to Him, and at least to some extent he may have despised Him. We find an example of this in John 7. But after the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, this flesh brother of the Lord Jesus became such a believer in Him that he regarded his elder brother as having the same rank as God. This was the reason James could speak of himself as a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

James clearly recognized the deity of the Lord Jesus. I admire James for recognizing that Jesus, his brother in the flesh, is God and for saying that he was a slave of God and of this One who is the Lord. This part of James' writing is wonderful.

The twelve tribes

In 1:1 James goes on to say, "To the twelve tribes in the dispersion: rejoice!" The twelve tribes here refer to the tribes of Israel. This indicates that this Epistle was written to Christian Jews, who had the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory (James 2:1) and were justified by faith (James 2:24), regenerated by the word of truth (James 1:18), and indwelt by the Spirit of God (James 4:5), and who were members of the church (James 5:14), awaiting the Lord's coming back (James 5:7-8). However, to call these believers in Christ the twelve tribes, as God's chosen people in His Old Testament economy, may also indicate the lack of a clear view concerning the distinction between Christians and Jews, between God's New Testament economy and the Old Testament dispensation, that God in the New Testament has delivered and separated the Jewish believers in Christ from the Jewish nation, which was then considered by God as a "perverse generation" (Acts 2:40). In His New Testament economy God no longer considers the Jewish believers as Jews for Judaism but as Christians for the church. They, as the church of God, should be as distinct and separate from the Jews as from the Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:32). Yet, James, as a pillar of the church, in his Epistle to the Christian brothers,

still called them the twelve tribes. (This may be the reason that he addressed the word in James 5:1-6 to the rich class among the Jews in general.) This was contrary to God's New Testament economy.

In 1:1 James did not address the believers among the twelve tribes; he simply addressed the twelve tribes. These twelve tribes are the Jewish nation. But on the day of Pentecost Peter called the Jewish nation a "perverse generation": "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40, lit.). This perverse generation was composed of the twelve tribes of Israel. Some, however, may point out that in 1:1 James addresses the twelve tribes in the dispersion. This dispersion must have included the scattering of the Jewish believers from Jerusalem by the persecution after Pentecost (Acts 8:1, 4). But surely not all those in the dispersion were Christian Jews. Therefore, it is nonetheless a fact that James uses a term given by God to His chosen people in the Old Testament economy. In the Old Testament dispensation God considered the Jews the twelve tribes. But on the day of Pentecost Peter, speaking through the Holy Spirit, considered them a perverse generation and charged them to be saved.

Was James wrong in addressing his Epistle to the twelve tribes in the dispersion? To be sure, he did not think this was wrong. However, as we have pointed out, this form of address may indicate that James was not clear concerning the distinction between Christians and Jews and the distinction between God's New Testament economy and the Old Testament dispensation.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32 we see three categories of people: "Give no occasion of stumbling both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God." Here we see that in New Testament times people were of three classes: the Jews — God's chosen people; the Greeks — the unbelieving Gentiles; and the church — a composition of the believers in Christ. This indicates that Jewish believers should be regarded as Christians for the church, which is distinct and separate both from the Jews and the Gentiles. Therefore, the Jews who were believers in Christ were part of the church and should not be classified with those Jews who were still part of the perverse generation. In the last chapter of his Epistle, James considered the recipients as members of the church. How, then, could he classify the members of the church with the Jews who were the perverse generation? This certainly indicates the lack of a clear view concerning God's dispensational economy.

(Excerpts from Life- Studies of James Message 1)

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Burdens for Church Prayer

- 2026 Targets, # of baptized:22; # of prayer meeting attendance:35; average Lord's Day and small group attendance:10% increase
- Spread the kingdom of God by preaching the gospel on the WVC campus and by Bible distribution in the community.
- Multiply the number of small groups for the increase and building up of the Body of Christ
- Perfect young working saints with shepherding families as containers for the next generation.
- Practice PSRP, BNPB, and vital small groups.
- Blending in the Body, by participating in conferences and trainings
- Establish and strengthen the church services, including children, YP, ushering, etc.
- Establish a prayer life individually and corporately
- Pursuing the truth and growth in life to live in the reality of the kingdom.

Announcements

- Life-study， James messages 1
- HWMR 2026 Summer Training Week 1
- 11/3 (Tue) 7:45pm, Prayer meeting in home by small group.
- 11/7-8 Working saints conference with br James Lee at FSCC. **11/7 (Sat) 10am-noon Childcare registration is needed (MSG 1)**, 7-9 pm (MSG2); **11/8 (Sun)** 9:30 am to noon (MSG3, one carload), **5-6:30 pm dinner fellowship with FTT trainees (sign-up needed, $15/person by 11/2)**, 7-9 pm (MSG4).
- 11/14 and 12/19 (Sat) 10-12 pm NorCal Churches with br Minoru on small groups
- 11/21 and 12/12 (Sat.) 10-12pm, South Bay Chinese Speaking saints corporate pursue - Pillars in God's Building), $50/person (lunch included), Mountain View
- 11/26-29 International Thanksgiving Conference at Denver CO
- **2026 NorCal Thanksgiving Conference Schedule**
- Message 1: 10:00 AM Friday, November 27
- Message 2: 7:30 PM Friday, November 27
- Message 3: 10:00 AM Saturday, November 28
- Message 4: 7:30 PM Saturday, November 28,
- Message 5: 10:00 AM Lord's Day, November 29
- Message 6: 7:30 PM Lord's Day, November 29
- https://www.norcalchurches.org/2026-thanksgiving-conference/
- 2/20/2027-2/21/2027 ICSC. Taipei.
  Registration deadline 12/31/2026
- 2027 Gospel calendar online order ($12 each by 10/31): https://www.livingstream.com/gospel-calendars/zh/gospel-calendars/99999558-2027-gospel-calendar.html
- 12/21-26 Semiannual Training, register by 11/1
- Financial Giving:
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