

# Whose Slave Are You?

## Bringing Faith Down To Earth—Part 1

*James 1:1*

### Introduction

The Bible is made up of 66 God-breathed books. At least 30 of them are short enough to read in 30 minutes or less.

The Book of James is that kind of Book. It's small, easily read in 20 minutes or so, but it contains life-changing truths.

In fact, so many truths that this little Book is really impossible to outline. He races from one topic to the next. One author cataloged nearly 30 different topics which James addresses.

But each topic is addressed in practical terms – with down to earth language. James writes with gut level reality and here's why.

Much of the New Testament Epistles deliver the **precepts** of our faith; James is passionate about the **practice** of our faith.<sup>i</sup>

The Apostle Paul most often deals with **what we believe**; James is going to deal with **how we behave**.

And he literally leaves no stone unturned. It's as if he is determined to miss nothing.

He doesn't just come into the living room of our lives, where we've been expecting company and everything is dusted and vacuumed. Just don't look in the coat closet. No, James is going to look in every closet and riffle through every drawer. He's going to pry into our private lives; he's even going to have the audacity to examine our checkbooks and tell us they prove our true priority. He's going to listen to our prayer requests list and comment on what we're really after.

The Spirit of God through the book of James is going to give us something like an annual physical examination. How many of you are putting one of those off? I am. I feel fine. My doctor told me a couple of weeks ago I was due for my second colonoscopy. I am convinced those are unbiblical. They can't be right.

James is going to take us into the Divine examination room and listen to our hearts; he's going to make us open our mouths and say "ah" while he examines our tongues. He's going to go

deeper still and untangle our motives and explore our thoughts.

And just about every time you go to the doctor, you leave with a little piece of white paper on which the doctor has scribbled something unintelligible. And you take it to the pharmacist who has the gift of interpretation. There's something you've gotta take, something to apply, something to do.

In this little Book of James there are 54 imperatives in the Greek language – that means, 54 phrases or words that end in an exclamation point.

One author called James a "Do this! Do that!" book, which, taken to heart, will dynamically affect our lives on every single level."<sup>ii</sup>

**You see, James is primarily after for one thing:**

- **turning precept into practice;**
- **awareness into application;**
- **belief into behavior**
- **going beyond exegesis into the ethics of living.**

This is the point of James. John Bunyan wrote in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, "The soul of religion is the practical part." John Wesley, the founder of Methodism wrote in the late 1800's, "The problem of all problems is getting Christianity put into practice."<sup>iii</sup>

That's why you have 54 imperatives; you have 54 prescriptions from Doctor James. While most physical examinations are concerned with how we are growing old, James is concerned with whether or not we are growing up – in the faith.

So at the outset we need to say, "Lord, we offer to you the key to every door in our hearts and every closet of our lives; we will not put up any signs anywhere that say, 'Do not enter.' We acknowledge your right to enter every corner and look in every cupboard and we ask that You not allow us to remain unchanged as a result of our study through this transformational book, called James." And all the people said, Amen!

Now, my plan for us is to study through and finish this entire Book in this one school year – and all the people again said, Amen! I knew you’d be supportive.

So with that in mind, take your Bibles and turn to **James chapter 1** and follow along as I read at **verse 1, “James...”** Stop.

We don’t have to hurry – got a whole school year. In fact, what you will discover in just the first few words of James is the key to putting into practice the entire Book of James.

In fact, applying to our lives what he says in verse one allows us to say what he dares to say in verse two. You can’t have verse two unless you have verse one. You can’t have chapter two or three or four or chapter five unless you’ve nailed down the truth of chapter one and verse one.

So, as we cover most of verse one today, I want to point out three things.

### 1. His Signature

First of all, I want you first to notice James’ signature. Whenever any of us today writes a letter or an email, we usually sign it at the end.

Whenever you get a letter, you immediately go to the end of it to see who signed it. The custom of ancient times was to sign letters at the beginning.<sup>iv</sup>

The New Testament mentions five different men named James who lived in the first century. If you research each of the men, you end up with only two really good candidates. One of them was the Apostle James the brother of John – the sons of Zebedee.

They were given the nickname by Jesus in **Mark 3:17** as the “sons of thunder”.

This particular James was however the first of the 12 Apostles to be martyred in A.D. 44 by Herod Agrippa’s order, which rules him out of being the author of this little Book.<sup>v</sup>

The centuries old view on authorship, and even today, the view of evangelical scholars is that the James who wrote this book was, James, the half-brother of Jesus, which means that something dramatic had transformed the heart and life of James.

Matthew’s gospel informs us that as Jesus began His ministry, none of his siblings believed His claim to be the Messiah. In fact, it was more than unbelief; they were offended at His claim. **Matthew 13:55** as Jesus visits His hometown of Nazareth, and the Jews said, effectively, “Who is this guy claiming to be the Christ – the Messiah?”

***Is this not the carpenter’s son? Follow this – is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas – or Jude? And His sisters, are they not all with us . . . and they all took offense at Him.***

In other words, the people who were offended by Christ’s claim to be God’s Son were not only the people in the village of Nazareth, who knew Joseph the Carpenter, Jesus’ father, but also the brothers and sisters of Jesus – they are mortified.

In fact, Mark’s gospel tells us that when Christ’s kinsman – that is, His own family – heard that he had launched this public ministry and had called disciples to follow Him, Mark writes, ***“they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘he has lost His senses.’” (Mark 3:21)*** You could translate it, “they thought He was out of His mind.”<sup>vi</sup>

They’re actually going out to interrupt the public ministry of Christ, saying to people around them, “we’re really sorry about this, but our brother has obviously lost His mind.”

John’s Gospel adds to that, ***“For not even His brothers were believing in Him.” (John 7:5)*** Now obviously, if you hold to the clear statements in these verses that Jesus had half-brothers and sisters, siblings born to Mary and Joseph, you have another issue on your hands, right?

Yes you certainly do. The Roman Catholic Church has labored to redefine the words of scripture in order to uphold the belief that Mary was a perpetual virgin – that she never had any more children.

So James could not be the half-brother of Christ; the second born son to Mary, but the first born son to Mary and Joseph.

The Roman church believes that Mary was not an ordinary mother and housewife – that she was unique among all human beings. In fact, in 1854 the Pope declared that Mary never sinned – this is their papal doctrine called the Immaculate Conception – that Mary was born without original sin and she never sinned her entire life.

All of these views are necessary, of course, to allow the Church of Rome to exalt the Virgin Mary to her present status as the sinless co-mediator and co-redeemer with Christ as well as exalt celibacy over marriage.

Then comes along James and four other brothers, and so the Roman Church has offered up a couple of answers to this problem.

One answer is that James and the others weren't literally brothers and sisters of Jesus, they were cousins.

They would point out that the word "brother" or "brethren" is an expression of affection and endearment, used in the church as we refer to our brothers and sisters. The problem is, the Greeks were smart enough to have a word for cousin and a different word for brother or sister. Plus that word for brother – adelphos – (αδελφος) is never once used in the Bible to describe a cousin.<sup>vii</sup>

Keep in mind that the church knew nothing of this theory until the fourth century when a church leader named Jerome produced it – and most scholars are quietly aware that his writings were produced for no other reason than to promote the growing exaltation of Mary.

The second view is that these were either cousins of Jesus or that Joseph had been married before and had all these kids when he took Mary to be his wife.

There's not a shred of evidence anywhere for this view. The fact that Joseph disappears from the scene – evidently dying of disease or an accident – so that Christ on the cross gives the care of Mary to John the Apostle instead of Joseph being there to care for her clearly indicates that Joseph has passed away. There is simply not one verse telling us that Joseph was a widower with six kids.

On the other hand, there is clear scripture that Mary was not a perpetual virgin and that she had more children.

By the way, the reason I'm spending so much time on this issue is not so much to take on Roman Catholic tradition, but to eventually get to the point where you can understand why James' life and his first recorded words in scripture following His conversion to Christ are so incredibly dramatic.

In *Matthew chapter 1*, the angel Gabriel has come to Joseph to tell him that Mary has not been unfaithful during their betrothal period and that she's pregnant by virtue of the Spirit of God.

The middle part of *verse 20* says, ***Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.***

In other words, Mary is still a virgin – she has conceived by the miraculous work of God the Spirit – which means Jesus will not have an earthly,

biological father – which then means He will not have the sin nature of the human race – which is passed down by the father from generation to generation.

Notice *verse 24*. ***And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son . . .***

How clear is that? Until she gave birth – you can translate that "until *after* she gave birth to a Son."<sup>viii</sup>

If you want to make James out to be the cousin of Jesus, you've still got a problem here with Mary's perpetual virginity.

Now if you go over to *Luke's Gospel and chapter 1*, you have another word that clearly indicates there are more children coming.

Chapter two informs us that Mary and Joseph are finally in a Bethlehem cave – or a cattle stall outdoors – where she is going to deliver Jesus – notice *verse six*. ***While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7. And she gave birth to her (what?) . . . she gave birth to her firstborn son.***

She gave birth to her *prototokos* (πρωτοτοκος) – her first-born; which is a Greek word that is never used of a woman delivering only one child. Firstborn means the first child to be born to that mother.

My wife can tell you when she delivered our twin sons that Benjamin was her *prototokos* – her firstborn son – why? Because there was another son coming and 2 ½ minutes later her second born son was delivered.

Firstborn here, means Jesus Christ wasn't the second born or the third born, which would destroy the doctrine of the virgin birth of our Lord, prophesied by Moses and Isaiah and even the angel Gabriel. He was the first son to be delivered by Mary.

Now, in *Matthew 13:55* we're given the names of Jesus Christ's half brothers – in customary order by age; ***James*** is first in the list, indicating he was Mary's second born son, then came ***Joseph, Simon, and Judas – or Jude***. Matthew mentions ***His sisters*** without naming them.

So you have four half-brothers and at least two half-sisters: which means you have a single mother raising, for at least several years, seven children. If she had a child every two years, when Jesus Christ died in his early 30's, the youngest child would have still been a teenager.

My admiration for Mary isn't lessened by the truth, it's increased. While we don't slip over into false doctrine, it causes me to appreciate her even more.

Add to that the fact that while she believed the claims of her son, without fully understanding them, none of the other children grew up believing in Him.

In fact, John's Gospel tells us that they mocked Christ. John seven his brothers accused Him of doing what He was doing to simply make a name for Him and gather a following.

Listen, for years, this home was filled with turmoil over the claims of Christ. There was no a moment's peace. Christ knew nothing of his closest family members understanding Him and believing in Him. He was ostracized from his own brothers and sisters. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief long before He hung on a cross.

His home life had been one of turmoil and drama. Add to that the fact that their family was poor and there were at least seven children if not more before Joseph evidently died, leaving Mary a widow and a single mother.

Maybe you can identify with Mary and the pressure of being a single mom with very little money, or perhaps you are discovering today that you are fellowshiping with the sufferings of Christ because of your own family. You happen to belong to a family that doesn't believe the gospel and doesn't appreciate your faith one little bit . . . never a word of encouragement . . . never a moment of understanding.

You're surrounded by brothers and sisters and extended family members and never the joy of genuine fellowship with any of them . . . the only thing you can talk about is the weather or football . . . as soon as the conversation turns spiritual, the conversation is turned off.

Maybe you've have never heard the encouragement of a mother or father or a sibling for your walk with God – your love for the Word of God – you're desire to please Christ – in fact, they think you've lost a marble or two. Take heart from an inside view of this particular home.

So how do you go from listening in as James and the other siblings mock Christ, thinking Jesus is out of his mind, trying to interrupt His public ministry to take Him away for His own protection – how do you go from that to the Book of James and the role of James who will serve as

the first pastor of the church of Jerusalem – and a fellow martyr who like Paul the Apostle was martyred during the reign of Nero?

James wasn't even at the scene of Christ's crucifixion – none of the brothers or sisters is there – only Mary and a handful of others.

The family was probably all back at the house saying, "We wish Mom would wake up to the truth . . . this is ridiculous, she's up there on that hill and we've got a storm coming - Jesus was not the Messiah and that cross proves it forever." That's what they're probably saying back at the house. So what happened to James?

One verse says it all. Paul is writing to the Corinthian believers in **chapter 15 of First Corinthians**. He is telling specific events that occurred related to the passion of Christ. He writes in **verse 3. *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. 4. And that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. 5. And that He appeared to Cephas – that is Peter – then to the twelve. 6. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now (alive), but some have [died]; 7. Then He appeared to James.***

Then He appeared to James . . . to James. Can you imagine that meeting? "Hi my brother . . . it's true; everything I told you I was, I AM."

Evidently, from what we know of James the believer, he must have responded like Thomas who declared in the presence of the resurrected Christ, "My Lord and my God."

As far back as you can go in church history, the predominant belief was that the resurrected Lord commissioned his brother into ministry who would become the leader in the church of Jerusalem.

This James would go one to become the author of a little letter we're introducing today, 2,000 years later, which encourages us all to get real with our faith.

This James would go on to become a martyr for his commitment to the truth that Jesus Christ was more than a carpenter's son – He was God the Son.

By the way, for those of you who wished you'd become a Christian earlier in your life – you're troubled by what you wasted or time you lost. Can you imagine what James could have regretted?

For years he had eaten at the same table, shared the same house, played in the same backyard, slept in the same room, attended the same synagogue school and wrote out the same Hebrew homework and he watched the development of his amazing older brother who never seemed to do anything wrong. And it was all lost on him.

Listen, he could have lived the rest of his life in bitter regret, but the truth of Christ's resurrection changed everything – just as it has for you.

In fact, after James came to know Christ as Sovereign Lord, he would become known as a man who so closely communed with Christ. He was nicknamed Camel Knees. Eusebius, known as the first church historian who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Caesarea, talked about the leathery knee caps that James developed from spending so much time on them in prayer.<sup>ix</sup>

Don't miss this – he's praying to his half-brother he now knows is God incarnate, the Messiah, and the Lord of all that is and is to come.

So don't miss the significance of this signature that begins *James 1:1*. It symbolizes the radical transformation of a man that had once laughed at Christ but now lived for Christ.

May your signature symbolize the same. Wherever people read your name, may they think of someone who loves and lives for Jesus Christ, the resurrected Son of God.

Now let me show you not only his signature, but his status, back in James 1:1.

## 2. His Status

His signature reveals to us his identity. His status reveals to us his priority.

Notice *verse 1*, “James, the Lord's half-brother!”

Let me try again; “James, the chairman of the Jerusalem Council, who directed the development of church to welcome Gentiles from every nation!”

How about...

- “James, the man who grew up in the same house with Jesus, the Messiah!”
- “James, one of the few who received a personal visit from the resurrected Lord!”
- “James, an apostle, personally commissioned by Jesus Christ.” or
- “James, the pastor of the largest church in the world!”

All of the above statements are true! But none of that is mentioned; the only statement mentioned is – *James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

James says, “You wanna know what my highest privilege is in life? I am a bondservant of God.”

The Apostle Paul would refer to James as the Lord's brother in *Galatians 1:19*, but James preferred to speak of Himself as a servant.<sup>x</sup> The word for bond-servant in this text is the word, *doulos* (δουλος), which literally means, slave.

The verb form of *doulos* means “to bind”. James then is bound to Christ as a slave is bound to his master.<sup>xi</sup>

To the Greek world, this was a term of degradation; but not to the believer. To the Greeks, as to any culture, freedom, autonomy, and being your own boss was the highest status in life. Success in life was not serving, it was in having servants.

Paul would refer to both he and Timothy as slaves (*Philippians 1*). Peter referred to himself the same way in *2 Peter 1* as did *Jude* in the first verse of his letter.

For the genuine believer, the word says it all. *Doulos* communicates ownership, possession, allegiance, dependence, subjection and loyalty.<sup>xii</sup>

The reason the average Christian isn't applying the genuine faith found in the Book of James is because he has replaced the idea of the Christian surrendering to Jesus Christ as Master with the idea that if you come to Jesus you're going to have your best life ever . . . it's going to be a wonderful life!

One perceptive author wrote recently, Jesus Christ is now a coach with a good game plan . . . He's a source of empowerment; a helper for the morally sensitive to become better. Christ came to improve our existence and He is a resource for what we have already decided we want.<sup>xiii</sup>

So we sell Christianity with the message that people really ought to try Jesus – because life's great with Jesus!

So people try Jesus out until they hit a bump in the road and they say, “Hey, I thought you said He had a wonderful plan for my life.”

- A miscarriage isn't wonderful!
- Bankruptcy isn't wonderful!
- Sickness isn't wonderful!
- A cheating spouse isn't wonderful!

- The death of a child isn't wonderful!
- Suffering persecution for Christ isn't wonderful!

"I guess Jesus isn't working out."

You see, the reason the average church in America has stopped studying the Book of James is because they can't get past *verse 2* that talks about joy in trials. What kind of wonderful life is that?

They can't get past *verse 2* because they have no conception of *verse 1*. Ladies and Gentlemen, Christianity is an invitation to become a slave to God . . . and He will *own* you.

In fact, the very ingredients of salvation come out of the first century slave culture:

- **You have been chosen (Ephesians 1);**
- **you have been bought out of the slave market and you no longer belong to yourself (I Corinthians 6);**
- **you are subject to His will and control (Philippians 2);**
- **you are called to give an account (2 Corinthians 5);**
- **you are regularly chastened and/or rewarded by Him (Hebrews 12).**
- **And one day you will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful doulos – well done, good and faithful slave." (Matthew 25:21)<sup>xiv</sup>**

The gospel has become twisted to fit the autonomy of the human heart. The message today is that Christianity should be accepted because it's better than any other thrill ride on the planet.

The truth is we need to proclaim the freedom from sin for those enslaved to sin and then on the other hand we need to declare that Christianity is an entirely different kind of slavery.

This is the balance of Paul's gospel message when he wrote, ***Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin . . . or of obedience. But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed . . . But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in . . . eternal life. (Romans 3:16-22)***

Here's the truth – whether they know it or not, everyone is a slave to something. Everyone serves some master. The question is *whose slave are you?*

As you move through verse two and throughout this Book, the only thing that would ever challenge us to apply any of it is that we are categorically reminded in the very first verse that we are not the master of our lives, we are the slaves of God.

I mean, why would you ever allow God to change the way you talk, or plan, or spend your money, or dream your dreams or relate to someone else, or accept tribulation – why would you ever do any of that for God?

You won't . . . unless He owns you. That just doesn't fit the status symbol of our generation. Christians are slaves to God! That isn't going to sell very well.

This past week I went into the Verizon Cell phone store – right up here next to Bob Evans. I know where places are by restaurants that serve biscuits and gravy.

*I was trying to get my daughter's cell phone to work. Now this is our family plan – which basically covers my three girls – my wife and my daughters. I have an iPhone for the sake of my calendar and as you know, Verizon services Blackberry's, not iPhones. It's very competitive – there's not a lot of love in this fight. So I usually don't pull out my iPhone while I'm in there.*

*Well, I stood there waiting in line, watching the screens as they flashed all the advertisements for why you needed to buy a Blackberry and why anybody with an iPhone is an idiot, and up on the screen came the words – I think, "I am free" and then a little later the words flashed up there for just a second or two, something like, "Never ignored."*

*By the way, I went back later in the day because I thought that would make a good illustration and I would take some pictures and then put them up on the screens in here so you could see them. What a great illustration of the spirit of our age which is all about image and status.*

*So I drove back and went in. The sales lady said, "What brings you to Verizon today?" I said, "Well, um, I saw some advertisements on your screens earlier today . . . do you think it would be okay if I took some pictures of them with my, um, iPhone?"*

*She said, "I don't think so!" Then she went over to the manager and started pointing back over at me. So I walked toward her and whispered, "That's okay . . . that's okay" and I left.*

But I got the commercial, and this is not some kind of slam on you people who have Blackberry's . . . that's *your* problem.

Frankly, it's all the same advertising for the iPhone and the Blackberry and the Droid X. "If you buy this – you've got instant status. You're going to be free and you will never be ignored."

We want that! That's good advertising . . . that'll sell. You'll never be ignored and you'll be free!

**James says, "Here is my status – I am not a free man! I'm the slave of God . . . and I might go through life being ignored."**

Now, who exactly was it that James belonged to? We've noted his signature and his status, now look at his Savior.

### 3. His Savior

This little book begins, *James, the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

In the Greek New Testament James does not include definite or indefinite articles with these words – he simply strings together titles. You can more literally translate it, "James, the slave of Jesus Christ, God and Lord."<sup>xv</sup>

This verse became one of the strongest texts describing the unity of the Godhead and the deity of Jesus Christ. He is called by James, both God and Lord. In fact, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century when Athanasius was defending the deity of Jesus Christ against the heresy of Arius who was teaching, among other heresies, that Christ was *a* god – a teaching that has been repackaged in the Jehovah's Witness and Mormon teaching.

It was James chapter 1 and verse 1 that Athanasius used to topple the arguments of Arius and deliver a blow to his false teaching!

James writes, as perhaps only the half-brother of Christ could write with such authority – "I grew up in the house with Jesus and watched him mature into manhood, but I'm here to tell you that He is no mere mortal; in fact, "I am a slave of Jesus Christ, who is God and Lord." Wow!

With verse one in mind, we're ready to surrender to the mastery of Our Lord's plan that will invariably take us into verse two.

Hudson Taylor was used uniquely and mightily by our Lord in taking the gospel into the interior of China in the 1800's. He was a quiet, unassuming man who had walked with God and served God for 50 years in China. When he was in Australia, he was invited to speak at a large church and when he arrived, it was packed and with standing room only. The moderator introduced Hudson Taylor, now an old man, with eloquent, well chosen phrases as he referred to the mighty work and accomplishments of this missionary. He ended his introduction by referring to Taylor as "our illustrious guest." Quietly Mr. Taylor stood there for a moment and then he said, "Dear friends, I am the servant of an illustrious Master."<sup>xvi</sup>

Sounds a lot like James . . . I hope it will sound a little more like us, as we go through this divine prescription by Dr. James on how to translate faith into life.

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- i From Thomas Constable's online commentary on James, 2010  
(soniclight.com/James), p. 3
- ii R. Kent Hughes, James (Crossway Books, 1991), p.16
- iii Frank E. Gaebelien, The Practical Epistle of James (Chanel Press, 1955), p. 15
- iv Adapted from Spiros Zodhiates, The Work of Faith (AMG Publishers, 1981), p. 13
- v William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 9
- vi Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament  
(Regency, 1976), p. 95
- vii Barclay, p. 17
- viii John Phillips, Exploring the Epistle of James (Kregel, 2004), p. 22
- ix Hughes, p. 16
- x D. Edmond Hiebert, James (BMH Books, 1992), p. 52
- xi Zodhiates, p. 15
- xii [www.gty.org/resources/sermons/80-355\\_A-Life-Without-Loose-Ends?Q=slave](http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/80-355_A-Life-Without-Loose-Ends?Q=slave)
- xiii Michael Horton, Christless Christianity (Baker Books, 2008), p. 19, 24
- xiv [www.gty.org/resources/sermons/slave](http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/slave)
- xv Dan G. McCartney, Baker Exegetical Commentary: James (Baker Academic, 2009), p. 78
- xvi Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: Volume 2 (OMF International, 1996), p. 493