

# James, A Servant of God

The book of James begins with this statement: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting” (James 1:1 KJV).

James presents to us an unvarnished pioneer account on classic Christianity. He is right to the point. In his short letter of 108 verses, there are no less than 50 commands. Last week we met James. He is one of four men named James in the New Testament. This one was the brother of Jesus: “ ‘Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ So they were offended at Him” (Mark 6:3). James was one of four brothers and two sisters of Jesus who were fully children of Joseph and Mary. Jesus was born through the supernatural conception known as the virgin birth.

## James, the Brother of Jesus

James is the visible leader of the Jerusalem church. (Note that the apostle James dies in Acts 12:2.) “But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, ‘Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.’ And he departed and went to another place” (Acts 12:17).

James was a part of the commissioning of Paul to his missionary journeys: “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. *They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do” (Galatians 2:9–10).

James was the shepherd and pastor of the Jerusalem church at the Council to determine what to do about Gentiles coming to Christ: “And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, ‘Men *and* brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: “After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.” Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath’ ” (Acts 15:13–21).

James was the most prominent member of the Jerusalem church to whom Paul reported after his Third Missionary Journey: “On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present” (Acts 21:18).

## Looking Back at God’s Servants

What do Moses, Paul, Peter, and James all have in common with us, the tribulation saints, and the future inhabitants of heaven? God calls all of us His servants!

The word *servant* is used over 889 times in the Bible. It is a big concept. What would James think of when he called himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1 KJV)? Let’s look back and see who servants of God were.

The first instance we will look at is when God called Abraham His servant: “And the LORD appeared to him [Isaac] the same night and said, ‘I *am* the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I *am* with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham’s sake’ ” (Genesis 26:24). Abraham wasn’t perfect, yet in spite of his failures he was a man of faith, and God called him His servant.

Moses is called a servant of the Lord the second most often of anyone in the Bible. Look at Deuteronomy 3:24: “O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god *is there* in heaven or on earth who can do *anything* like Your works and Your mighty deeds?” A servant has a master, and Moses recognized that God was his Master. Joshua in his book called Moses by that term six times.<sup>1</sup> Throughout Scripture Moses is called God’s servant fifteen times.<sup>2</sup>

Scripture gives David the title of a man after God’s own heart, and he refers to himself as a servant of God: “Then David said, ‘O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake’ ” (1 Samuel 23:10). In all, David is called a servant of God sixteen times in Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

Solomon referred to himself as God’s servant a total of eight times.<sup>4</sup> God calls Nebuchadnezzar, Jacob, and Daniel His servants, and Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel God’s servant. Daniel also refers to himself as a servant of God.<sup>5</sup> Other great Old Testament heroes called a servant of God are Elijah, Jonah, Hezekiah, Job, and Isaiah.<sup>6</sup>

In the New Testament we find Paul referring to himself God’s servant. James, Peter, Jude, and John all say the same, and Paul calls Epaphras a servant.<sup>7</sup> Finally God calls all the redeemed His servants seven times in the book of Revelation.

The most comprehensive term for God’s people in the Scriptures is *servant*. The term *Christian* is used by the Word of God only three times. *Believer* is used two times. *Born again* is used three times. *Saved* is used thirty-nine times in the New Testament. *Converted* is used twelve times. *Disciple* is used 255 times in the New Testament, but in many of those references Jesus is using the term to refer to His disciples; outside of the gospels it used 28 times in Acts. *Follower of the Way* is used eighteen times.<sup>8</sup>

The Way is an interesting description of the life of the redeemed:

- *It is the Way of Christ*: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (John 14:6).
- *It is the Way of peace*: “And the way of peace they have not known” (Romans 3:17).
- *It is the Way of lostness recovered*: “He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness” (Hebrews 5:2).
- *It is the Way of holy access*: “The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing” (Hebrews 9:8).

- *It is the Way of newness and life:* “By a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:20).
- *It is the Way of error recovered:* “Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).
- *It is the Way of truth:* “And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2 Peter 2:2).
- *It is the Way of rightness:* “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Peter 2:15).
- *It is the Way of righteousness:* “For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Peter 2:21).

## Looking Forward at God’s Servants

One of the last descriptions of God’s people in the Bible is servants. Turn to Revelation and see what God says His servants will be like at the end of the world:

*Confident Servants:* “Then he said to me, ‘These words *are* faithful and true.’ And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 22:6).

*Holy Servants:* “Then a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!’ ” (Revelation 19:5).

*Trusting Servants:* “But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets” (Revelation 10:7).

*Singing Servants:* “They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: ‘Great and marvelous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O King of the saints!’” (Revelation 15:3).

*Suffering Servants:* “For true and righteous *are* His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants *shed* by her” (Revelation 19:2).

*Serving Servants:* “And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him” (Revelation 22:3).

## Looking Inward

Are you serving God this morning? Servanthood comes down to the basic principle of entrusting your life to God.<sup>9</sup> It is giving over our lives—our control, our resources, our direction, our hopes and dreams—to the Lord. The Scriptures give us the answers to the deepest questions in our lives. Among them are these four: What will my legacy be after I’m gone? What really counts in God’s sight? What about my children? What about my weaknesses?

*God's servants are entrusting their life's work to the Lord:* "Now the sons of Moses the man of God were reckoned to the tribe of Levi" (1 Chronicles 23:14). This is almost a thousand years after his life. What was he remembered for? Was it for the murmurings of the rebels, the near mob lynching, the rebellion of his sister and brother? No, he was remembered as God's man! Do you look at your life's task as being a man of God? The only enduring work is when you have entrusted it to God.

*God's servants are entrusting their service to the Lord:* "Because their [the Levites] duty was to help the sons of Aaron in the service of the house of the LORD, in the courts and in the chambers, in the purifying of all holy things and the work of the service of the house of God . . . and that they should attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, the needs of the holy *place*, and the needs of the sons of Aaron their brethren in the work of the house of the LORD" (1 Chronicles 23:28, 32).

We have a choice of two perspectives in life. The first is a mere earthly, temporal, me-centered mindset. The second is choosing to look at things the way God does. What were these men doing? God said they were tending to the holy things and the work of His house. What might they have said? "We are just sweeping up the dust and sand that those priests keep tracking in from this hot and unbearable wilderness. Oh, and all the desert bugs that sting us keep making nests in our equipment and cause problems. Yes, what a mess the hair makes from those hides God asked us to make the coverings of this tent out of. It keeps getting on the floor and the moths are eating the hangings. The flies and lack of ventilation with all the smoke from the incense and lampstand is almost unbearable, and I can't stand all the blood stains that we have to keep cleaning up." How do you see your tasks and situations in life? Do you look at them the way God does or merely from your limited and fallen perspective?

*God's servants are entrusting their children to the Lord:* "And of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons) He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel" (1 Chronicles 28:5). David had no less than nineteen sons.<sup>10</sup> Of these the first-born, Amnon, was murdered by Absalom; Absalom, the third-born, was executed for treason by Joab; and Adonijah, the fourth-born, was executed by Solomon for the treason as well! Who was to be king? The tenth son, Solomon. Who but God could sort all that out and plan perfectly? Have you entrusted your children to the Lord? Are they given over to Him? Their outcome is up to their willingness to obey. Just lead them to and show them the truth, and God will do the rest!

*God's servants are entrusting their frailties to the Lord:* "For we *are* aliens and pilgrims before You, as *were* all our fathers; our days on earth *are* as a shadow, and without hope" (1 Chronicles 29:15). We are weak, we fail, our bodies grow feebler each day we live, and time is running out unless we link up with God! There are two ways you can look at your life. Are you seeing your life as a caterpillar on its way to glorious metamorphosis or as a withering daylily headed to the compost pile? We need to see frailty as God's means for us to need and depend upon Him! In spite of your frailties and shortcomings, entrust your life to God as His servant.

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua 1:12-13, 15; 9:24; 22:4-5.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 8:53; 2 Kings 18:12; 1 Chronicles 6:49; 2 Chronicles 1:3, 24:9; Nehemiah 10:29; Daniel 9:11; Revelation 15:3.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 23:11; 2 Samuel 7:20, 25-29; 1 Chronicles 17:24-26, 21:8; 2 Chronicles 6:42; Psalm 27:9, 36:1, 86:2.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 3:7, 8:25-26, 28, 59; 2 Chronicles 6:16-17, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 43:10; Ezekiel 28:25, 34:24; Daniel 6:20, 9:17.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings 18:36; 2 Kings 14:25; 2 Chronicles 32:16; Job 1:8, 2:5; Isaiah 49:5.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1; Revelation 1:1; Colossians 4:12.

<sup>8</sup> Christian—Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16.

Believer—Acts 5:14; 1 Timothy 4:12.

Born again—John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:23.

Saved—Matthew 10:22, 19:25, 24:13; Mark 10:26, 13:13, 16:16; Luke 7:50, 8:12, 13:23, 18:42; John 3:17, 5:34, 10:9; Acts 2:21, 47, 4:12, 11:14, 15:1, 11, 16:30-31; Romans 5:9-10, 8:24, 10:1, 9, 13; 1 Corinthians 1:18, 5:5, 10:33, 15:2; 2 Corinthians 2:15; Ephesians 2:5, 8; 1 Thessalonians 2:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5.

Converted—Psalm 19:7, 51:13; Isaiah 6:10 (quoted in Matthew 13:15; Mark 4:12; John 12:40; and Acts 28:27); Matthew 18:3; Luke 22:32; James 5:19-20.

Disciple—Acts 1:15, 6:1-2, 7, 9:1, 10, 19, 25-26, 36, 38, 11:26, 29, 13:52, 14:20, 22, 28, 15:10, 16:1, 18:23, 27, 19:1, 9, 30, 20:1, 7, 21:4, 16.

Follower of the Way—Acts 9:2, 16:17, 18:25-26, 19:9, 23, 22:4, 24:14, 22.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Chronicles 23-29.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Chronicles 3.