

James 25-04-13a

Greetings, welcome to Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 13th of April, 2025, my mom's 91st birthday. There are visitors in wishing her well and going to and from, and there will probably be traffic in and out of the sanctuary here during the course of our first lesson especially.

We continue this morning our study in the book of Jacob, Yacobu, otherwise known as James, the one that comes right after Hebrews. We have attacked the first verse and a half here and we're gonna continue at that point and move into the substance of the letter. We have discussed the authorship, the traditional ascription, which you're always on safe traditional ground to go with is the half brother of the Lord, James of Jerusalem, sometimes called James the Just for reasons that go back to the earliest centuries.

This letter was not well-known and was not included in the earliest lists of canonical New Testament books. It wasn't listed until later. I think that's because copies of it didn't really turn up and begin to circulate until well after the apostolic age.

And when it was found, the people who originally received it were all dead, gone and blown away. And they figured, well, this must be Jerusalem James, but there is no hard evidence from anywhere other than tradition that begins in the second and third centuries after Christ that James the half brother of the Lord is the author. I, as I have said before, I personally believe that James the brother of John, the son of Zebedee is the author.

It is not as important to know which personage as to understand its content. And we're gonna move into the content this morning. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we'll begin.

Father, it is such a privilege to have the blessing of fellowship and the benefit of spiritual gifts that you have distributed in our group, in our midst. We're grateful for the encouragement, the prayers, the example, the ongoing journey that we undertake together to walk the narrow road that leads through the straight gate to life. We thank you for the privilege of interceding on each other's behalf of practicing the one another's in that inner circle of Christian love.

We thank you for the encouragement we find in your word and the powerful application of it that comes through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit. We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ, our savior. We thank you for his example of faith and obedience in human flesh, demonstrating for us that it is possible to live a life that is pleasing in your sight, that glorifies you, that accomplishes your plan and purpose.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that those goals will be accomplished in our lives, that we will continue to shine as reflected light of your glory to draw others to you through the Lord Jesus. And that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified. We ask it in his name.

Amen. Looking at our passage, let's read the first couple of verses. Yacobi James, a bond servant, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes, which are scattered abroad, greetings.

We've covered the first several words here, especially the idea of bond slave. The slave has no intrinsic worth, merit, or value in the Roman world. His status, the extent to which he is regarded or listened to or responded to in commerce or in any other venue depends entirely on who his master is.

So when James here says, and the Greek word order, as we saw last time, is Yacobi of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, slave. Those are his bona fides, whichever one of the scriptural or even unmentioned James's we have from New Testament days, the bona fides, the authority of this letter is as delivered from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ by a faithful slave, James or Jacob. It is addressed to the 12 tribes.

We talked about this a little bit last time. It's kind of hard to find the 10 lost tribes. Why? Because they're lost.

They scattered, they intermarried, they disseminated and were integrated into other cultures. And for someone to say, I am of the tribe of Zebulun or I am of the tribe of Naphtali or one of the other lesser known tribes, the 10 Northern tribes that went out in 721 BC with the Assyrian captivity and occupation and dissemination of those Northern tribes who famously tolerated Ahab and Jezebel as their king and queen, Elijah and Elisha ministered in that Northern kingdom, but it all came to an end in 721. And they've had a very difficult time tracing their lineage.

There was no cohesive worship or culture or civilization for those 10 Northern tribes after that time. So fascinating that the remaining two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who survived until 586 with Nebuchadnezzar, went into the 70 years of captivity, returned. You have the books of Ezra and Nehemiah with that identity.

And so the land becomes known as Judea and Samaria is the remainder of what was the Northern kingdom, but it isn't Israel, it's Samaria. And so only Judah and Benjamin really, and the Levites managed to retain their identity and a knowledge of their lineage. So why, I'm all leading up to this question and here it is, why is this addressed to the 12 tribes? It has to do with an ongoing sense of national identity.

People might not know what tribe they are specifically from, but then and in the century since, all the way down to the present, they know they're Jews. They know they are of the lineage stock of Jacob through Isaac and through Abraham. They know their heritage as the covenant people of God.

Many of them today are atheistic or only traditional Jews or cultural Jews, but they are imbued with a sense of identity. And the easiest way to appeal to that identity, to remind someone of

their heritage is to say, you're the 12 tribes. So it is sort of like saying you're an American.

It doesn't really matter which state you're from or even a territory. If you say my fellow Americans, the similar term was brethren of the 12 tribes. This also tells us that the author is himself, not a Gentile, but a Jew.

What we do know with certainty, when he begins verse two, saying my brothers, just having mentioned the 12 tribes, he is both a Jew and a Christian because he is a bond slave of God, that's his Judaism, and the Lord Jesus Christ, that's his Christianity. How many of us have more than one identity? If you have served in the Marine Corps, you were and are and will always be a Marine. If you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are a believer.

If you were born, raised, reared, fetched up in Oklahoma, you are and will always be an Okie. If you're from the North, you will always be a Yankee. If you're from Texas, you will always be a Texican.

And you can have multiple identities that come into play depending on the context. Go down to a Texas OU game, you quickly figure out which side of the field you should be sitting on because that is identity day. The school that you attended, your alma mater, is definitional for many people and so on.

Here, these people widely scattered in the Roman Empire have retained their Jewish identity first and foremost, but they are also now Christians. So our introduction in verse one of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, slave is an appeal to brothers of two different kinds. They are cultural, racial, national, inheritance wise, Jewish brothers and sisters, and they are Christian brothers and sisters.

As we have seen in recent studies, you can take the example of the pastorals. Many of the things that Paul said to Timothy and to Titus are specific to a pastor, but we look at it as, if my gift is different than pastor, these principles, these calls, these charges, these responsibilities and opportunities, challenges and potentials apply. It's a different gift, but it's the same paradigm.

It's the same type of life to which we are called. Same thing here. Most of us, to my knowledge, are not Jewish.

There may be some heritage back in the woodpile somewhere. You can get these 23andMe or MyHeritage, MyFamilyTreeDNA or whatever places, they can find some of your forebears back in the woodpile, but we wouldn't typically respond if someone said, are there any Jewish people in the audience? Are there any people from any of the 12 tribes? We would say no, but there are other identities that call to us and that unite us in addition to our Christian faith, and we recognize that we are multifaceted. It's important for what is about to follow that the variety that exists within the unity, he doesn't say fellow Israelites counted all joy.

He says to the 12 tribes, each tribe has a different history, a different prophecy attached to it

from the original Jacob, the original Yaakov, and it is so startling when you read this in Greek to see Yaakov to the 12 tribes. It immediately takes you back in time to the father of the nation, Jacob, and his appeal to each of his sons, the prophetic word that he delivered on his deathbed, including the half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons, but it is steeped. It is an immediately Jewish Christian letter.

And once he identifies the audience, it isn't to the Jews in Jerusalem. This would be James the just, James of Jerusalem, James, the half brother of the Lord, who was leader in the Jerusalem church and was submitted to even by the apostle Peter, which is surprising when you look at acts, Peter isn't the leader of the Jerusalem church. What did Jesus say when Jesus asked him, who do you say that I am? What did Peter reply? You are the Christ, the son of the living God, God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are the Lord Christ. You are the son of God. And what did Jesus reply when he said that? What was Jesus response to that great confession? You are Peter, you are this rock and on this rock, I will build my church.

Wouldn't it have been an elegant fulfillment of that metaphor and that symbolism for Peter to be in fact, the leader of the Jerusalem church. He is in Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus charged his disciples, you shall be witnesses unto me, where? In Jerusalem and Judea, as well as Samaria until the end of the age.

But Peter is not leading. Peter is advising. Peter is sort of speaking when spoken to.

Who speaks for the Jerusalem church, the original mother church of all of Christianity, who is its leader? James, the half brother. Why? Can you find anywhere in your Bible where the Lord Jesus, it says he appeared to his brother after the resurrection. Does it say he appeared to his brother and said, take charge of the church? Does it say you are now the replacement 12th apostle? Does it say you will have inspiration both to lead and to guide and to write scripture? There is a strong reservation in scripture about paying attention to people because of their status or their standing.

And we will see it even in this letter. Jesus said, if you get invited to a feast, don't go to the head of the table, go to the foot of the table and wait to be invited up. God is no respecter of persons, not birth, not relationships, not are you a Jew or are you a Gentile in this age? It isn't a factor to be considered.

On what merit does James, the just, Jerusalem James become a leader of that church? What is the basis? Did he accompany the Lord Jesus? Did he hear the three and a half years of intensive teaching that was given to the other disciples, especially the top three, Peter and Yaakov and Yohanan, Peter, James, and John, who got the advanced classes and the extra credit questions? He wasn't there. Why is he the leader of the Jerusalem church? People figured he's as close to Jesus as you can get because he was raised in that family. He didn't even believe in the Lord Jesus until after the resurrection.

It says his brothers did not believe in him, but then Jesus appears to him. He's listed, I think, by Paul in one of the resurrection listings for appearances. What is the point? It is not sufficient to use human criteria to establish authority.

The authority of this letter is that it is delivered by a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is specifically addressed to the 12 tribes. Why? I think because it's early.

The only objection of any merit against the authorship by James, the son of Zebedee for this letter is, well, haven't you read Acts? You get along to chapter 10 and 11, and it says that Herod slew James, the brother of John, with the sword, and so he died too early to have written a letter. He died in 44 AD. AD 44 is how you're supposed to say it.

AD 44. That's 11 years by the latest date of the crucifixion and resurrection. In 11 years, he didn't have time to sit down and write a letter, but during his lifetime, had the gospel spread to the Gentiles? Had Paul been confronted on the Damascus Road? Had Peter seen the sheet let down with the animals in it? Had the Jerusalem Council taken place? What do we do about these Gentile believers who are receiving the Holy Spirit? None of that had taken place.

So what would you expect from a letter written in the first decade of Christianity? Not to people in Jerusalem, but what about the Jews who aren't here? What can we say to them? They have heard, the word has been spreading. These people have been going. So it is to the 12 tribes which are scattered, the 12 tribes of the dispersion.

What kind of dispersion is this? Why are they dispersed? This is a great question. Why are they dispersed? People tend to think, well, that Christian persecution has already begun. It's kind of like Saul hounding people out of Jerusalem and they're going to Antioch and they're going to Damascus and they're being spread because the Romans are starting to persecute Christians and feed them to the lions and so on.

That is not this. Turn with me to John chapter seven. Keep your finger in James if you want to, but go back to John chapter seven.

Jesus is confronting those who are rejecting him and turning away from him. You see this in John chapter six, when he talks about eating my flesh and drinking my blood. And he says in verse 61 and 62, does this offend you? What if you should see the son of man ascend where he was before? And then you come to chapter seven and Jesus says, I'm not going to be here for long.

In verse 33, John 7, 33, Jesus said to them, I shall be with you a little while longer and then I go to him who sent me. You will seek me and not find me. And where I am, you cannot come.

We have other scripture that says, you will seek me and find me when you search me and you will not find me. You will not find me when you search for me with all your heart. Jesus said, you will seek me and not find me.

And where I am, you cannot come. There is a window of opportunity. Now is the appointed time.

Now is the day of deliverance. Now is the day of salvation. There is a day when the door of the ark swings shut and no amount of protests and histrionics on the outside reopens the door.

But look at the next verse. When he says, you'll seek me and not find me, where I am, you cannot come. What did the Jews say? The Jews said among themselves, where does he intend to go that we shall not find him? Does he intend to go to the dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What is this thing that he said? You will seek me and find me and where I am, you cannot come.

So notice that during Jesus' lifetime, there is already a dispersion of the Jews. What is the cause of this dispersion? This is a fulfillment of God's prophetic word. If you turn back to Deuteronomy, I'll just give you a few of these.

The Old Testament is rife with these, but Leviticus 26.33. Let's just look at one or two of these. Why would God's people be scattered? Leviticus 26.33. If after all of this, verse 18, if you do not obey me, I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power.

I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. Your strength will be spent in vain. Your land shall not yield its produce.

If you walk contrary to me, verse 21, I will bring on you seven times more plagues. Verse 27, after all this, if you do not obey me, but walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you in fury. I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.

You will eat the flesh of your sons. You will eat the flesh of your daughters. Think about the 12 tribes.

What happened to the 10 northern tribes in the Assyrian crisis? What happened in Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar came in? All 12 tribes went out under judgment, starvation, under siege. I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, cast your carcasses on lifeless forms of your idols. My soul shall abhor you.

I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation. I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas. Notice, you can try to sacrifice to me.

You can try to come back and recover. It is too late. I will not hear or smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas.

I won't hear your prayers. I will bring the land to desolation, verse 32, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be amazed at it, astonished at it. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you.

Your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. Then the land will enjoy the Sabbaths that you

failed to give it. You can write these down.

We don't have time to turn to them, but you can also see this in Leviticus 26, 41. Deuteronomy 4, 27. Deuteronomy 28, 25.

Again, in Deuteronomy 28, 64. Deuteronomy 30, verse one. Deuteronomy 32, verse 26.

It's in Nehemiah. It's in Esther. Turn to Psalm 44, verse 11.

Wish we had time to look at all of these. I really dislike giving lists of verses, but it makes the point. If you've read the one in Leviticus, you will just find it emphasized and repeated.

Psalm 44, verse 11. This is a song of the sons of Korah. If you look at the superscription to the chief musician, it's a masculine, a contemplation.

Look down at verse nine. You have cast us off and put us to shame. You do not go out with our armies.

You make us turn back from the enemy, and those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. You have given up like sheep intended for food and have scattered us among the nations. You sell your people for nothing and are not enriched by selling them.

Discipline, national judgment. Now, why are we reviewing it? You know this to be true. You know the history of these captivities and the fate suffered by the nation, but think about the people that are getting James' letter.

I wasn't in Israel in 721 BC. I wasn't in Judah in 586 BC. I didn't worship idols and make high places.

Our people have been scattered for generations. We've been living off in these other parts of Asia and Asia Minor and the Roman Empire and scattered places. Some are down in Egypt and some are in what was formerly Moab and Edom and clear back to where Daniel and his friends were in Chaldea and what it became later, the Persian area.

Not everybody came back in the days of Esther. So that wasn't me. How can I be held accountable for that? We're not always the cause of our circumstance.

You can't trace it back and say, well, here's where I messed up and that's why I am in stress, why I'm in difficult circumstances. It is a part of life that we sometimes inherit. It is what it is because that's what we were born into.

That's what we encounter through no fault of our own. It could be something that happened on the part of others. It can be national movements, forces beyond our control, situations well outside of cause and effect from any decisions, priorities, goals, or values that we hold or express.

It's just calamity. It can be weather, it can be warfare, it can be something that happened in the distant past. James is writing to these people from the 12 tribes and they have inherited for generations the effects and the judgments that took place a long time ago.

There's a sense in which you could say, it's not your fault you are a Jew in the dispersion. It's not because you came to faith in Christ. It isn't just because you are Jewish personally.

It's because your ancestors had a covenant relationship with God, they broke that covenant. God judged them according to what he prophesied and told them he would do. And these are your however many great grandparents that got dispersed and now you are born and raised and live in this foreign area.

You're not in Israel anymore. Every Jew, in other words, doesn't get a fresh start in the land of Israel and once they fail, are then driven from the land. It isn't their fault that they're dispersed.

It isn't their fault that they are persecuted. It isn't their fault that they are under hardship. They didn't pick their ethnicity.

They didn't pick their Jewishness. It is what it is. It's from a secular point of view, from a human perspective, it's the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

It's viewed from a human realm as happenstance. Today, people are born into all different kinds of areas, backgrounds, ethnicities, economic statuses, different families with different priorities and it's extremely various. If you're taking notes, write the word down.

The circumstances that are beyond our control vary. They differ from person to person, situation to situation. So when James writes this letter, this is such a carefully crafted introduction.

I'm delivering a message because I am a bond slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am delivering this message to you, hounded, persecuted, scattered Jews of every kind of economic status. Some of you are doing well, some of you are doing poorly.

Some of you are near, some of you are far. Some of you have family support, others do not. You're of every shape, size, description, stripe, feather.

The Lord only knows what your specific situation is. The one thing that is true of you is you have the heritage of relationship to God and now relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what defines you, not the variegation of your circumstance, not the ups and downs of your economic standing, of your gifts, your abilities, your opportunities, your potentials.

None of that defines you. You know what defines you? Relationship to God through Christ. It's early days and you are the first.

You are the first fruits to believe in Christ because he's a Jew and the gospel comes first to the Jews. You've got first crack at it even though you are far away from Israel. The message is

coming to you and your responsibility is to respond on that basis.

So what does he say? The next word there is greetings. It doesn't even mean greetings. It doesn't mean hello.

This is a word, chairein, C-H-A-I-R-E-I-N. I spell it for you so that you will notice the C-H at the beginning, the R in the middle and the N. I know people that have a derivative of this name as we speak. It means, it is an infinitive.

This is the infinitive form. This is to do a thing, to swim, to run, to walk, to drive, to travel, to sleep, to rejoice. That's what it means.

Typically, when you isolate one like this, we convert it from an infinitive to a gerund, to an I-N-G word. So this is essentially be rejoicing. That's what it means.

Be rejoicing. Chairein, C-H-A-I-R-E-I-N, chairein. Why do I emphasize that? People scattered all over the place as a result of God's judgment on their ancestors and on their nation, on their heritage, often don't find that to be a rejoicing situation.

I don't see a lot of joy in my circumstances. I don't see that this is a good thing. You're telling me to rejoice, I don't see it.

Let me tell you my problems. Let me sketch out for you my situation and my circumstances. You wanna know what it's like to be a dispersed Jew out here amongst the Gentiles without a strong sense of community, without real opportunities, being discriminated against on a regular basis just because of an accident of birth that I couldn't control? Rejoice? What do you mean? So what comes next? My brothers, I'm with you.

I'm related to you. I know your situation. I too am Jewish.

I too believe in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are brethren. We are related.

We know each other. We are sympathetic. We're for each other.

We're on the same team. My brothers, that's why he starts with this. He's appealing to their sense of community and endeavoring to get them to pay attention on that basis.

Just hear me out. I know you don't think this is a great situation, but hear me out. My brothers, my brethren, this counts the sister in as well, you know, the old usage where the masculine gender is used comprehensively, universally for everyone.

My brethren, count it all joy. What does this not say? What if he had reversed this somehow? And he said, my brethren, rejoice when this happens. Did you notice there's an intervening word there because this is another form of his greeting word.

This is also C-H with an R in the middle. This is a form of kaira, kairane, kairane. Rejoice.

So when it says, count it all a rejoicing, count it all joy, he's only used a couple of words after he used this word initially. Rejoicing to you, be rejoicing. But now he says, my brothers, count it all joy.

And it's a very important word. Circle the word count. He doesn't expect them to feel joyful.

He doesn't expect them to look at tough circumstances and get excited and celebrate. This is not an emotional process. This is a calculation.

The word here translated count. Have you ever heard them talk about people who are ruling something and they say it's a hegemony. The top dog is the hegemon.

There's a hegemony, there's a rulership, there's an oversight. That's the verb here. A judge issues a ruling because he is the legal authority and lawyers understand this.

When the judge rules and issues a verdict or either sustains or denies an objection, he's doing hegemony. He is the hegemon in the courtroom. And he looks at some statement, some aspect of the case, some argument that one or the other attorneys is trying to raise, some examination of the witness, somebody objects, he rules.

He looks at it objectively, he compares it to the law or to his standards for the courtroom and he either sustains it or he overrules it. But he hegemonizes it, he rules. That's the word here.

When you fall, as it's going to say, into various trials, rule it, decide, I'm going to rejoice about this. I'm going to look at this as a positive. This is going to be glass half full.

So you can say consider, account, but you're ruling, you're taking authority over this situation, you decide. Decide to view it is a great colloquial translation. My brethren, decide to view it as an occasion for joy.

It's a decision, not a feeling. Decide to consider it an occasion to joy when you fall into various trials. Remember the various circumstances of the 12 tribes and all of these widespread destinations from generations gone by? Remember that variety? Our word poikilos here is appealing to that variety.

He says you can be in all different kinds of situations and circumstances. They can be stressing you six ways to Saturday because you're Jews, but regardless of the stress, regardless of what variety of challenge and test and stress, you decide to consider it an occasion for joy. Make that decision.

Do that accounting. Be the judge that overrules the objection and decides this is going to be okay. This is a part of God's plan.

God's in his heaven, and I am going to rejoice that God has considered me worthy to face this challenge. I'm the hegemon here, and I'm going to account it an occasion for joy, even though from the outside, it looks like a grievous test. Well, that's as far as we've gotten so far.

That is enough to chew on for some time. To take charge of circumstances in our soul by the grace of God through the word and the spirit gives us the power to see our lives and our circumstances from a divine perspective, and from that perspective, we adjudicate, we judge, we rule this situation an occasion for joy because God is going to reveal himself. God is going to demonstrate his grace and his faithfulness.

God is going to make provision. God's going to fulfill his promises. God is going to give us and others an occasion for prayer and to celebrate answered prayer.

God is in his heaven, and God is at work to will and to do for his good purpose, and these momentary light afflictions working for us an eternal weight of glory. I choose to view it as an occasion for joy. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to pick up and see what kind of thing we should adjudicate as an occasion for joy. That's coming up in the next part of the verse.