

The Nature of Yeshua in the General Epistles

When many Bible readers turn to the General Epistles of James, 1&2 Peter, Jude, and 1-3 John, expositions on the nature of the Messiah do not tend to immediately come to mind. Most of us have turned to the General Epistles to instead receive some kind of moral or spiritual exhortation for daily living, and for resisting the insidious influences of sin. We turn to the General Epistles to be admonished about the need to be demonstrating good works or loving neighbor, not necessarily to be directed about the nature of Yeshua. Still, there are statements issued in the General Epistles about Yeshua, which necessarily require our attention as we evaluate whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is a created being, or if He is genuinely God and integrated into the Divine Identity. The traditional authors of the General Epistles were either the close disciples of the Messiah (Peter, John), or actually half-siblings (James, Jude),¹ and their descriptions of and ascriptions to the Master, do bear some importance—even if their primary intention was to address the character formation of First Century Believers.

James 1:1

“Opening Greetings”

“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.”

James the Just, author of the epistle, affirms that he is a servant “of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah,” *Theou kai Kurίου Iēsou Christou doulou* (θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δούλος) Here, there is a close association of the titles “God” (*Theos*, θεός) and “Lord” (*Kurios*, κύριος), with the latter used to refer to the Messiah, although in the Septuagint the title *Kurios* would most often render the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה). It may be safely assumed that with titles used to describe God the Father applied to Yeshua the Son, that the Divine Lordship of Yeshua is affirmed. A selection of commentators on the Epistle of James conclude that, in view of the titles present in James 1:1, that a high Christology is present:

- J.A. Motyer: “We have become accustomed to the standard English translation, *a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*. But the Greek could equally well sustain the rendering ‘a servant of Jesus Christ who is God and Lord’...Even...were it the case that [James] intended the meaning which the English versions express—that God and the Lord Jesus are co-owners of their ‘slaves’—yet it cannot have escaped his notice that his words were equally capable of ascribing deity to Jesus.

¹ If necessarily, do consult the entries for these letters provided in the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

But he did not alter them. Some, today, find themselves satisfied ‘to say...*He is “as-if-God” for me’*. But there is no ‘as if’ in James: Jesus Christ is *the Lord*.²

- Dan G. McCartney: “In this letter...James identifies himself simply as a ‘servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.’ Since James includes no definite or indefinite articles with these words, it is possible to read this phrase as ‘servant of Jesus Christ, God and Lord.’ But it is more likely that he is simply closely associating the two nouns: Lord Jesus Christ and God. In any case, we must remember that when a Jew put the words ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ together, the Lord in view could only be God (cf. 1:7, where ‘from the Lord’ means ‘from God’). No matter how the verse is read, James is setting forth a very high Christology, identifying Jesus not just as Christ (Messiah) but also as Lord, mentioned in the same breath with God.”³

The statement of James 1:1, “Jacob, a slave of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, To the twelve tribes in the Diaspora: Shalom!” (TLV), is perhaps something that most closely mirrors that of the Apostle Peter’s dynamic preaching in Acts 2:36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified.” There are those who take the construction *Theou kai Kuriou Iēsou Christou*, “of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah,” to actually be “of Yeshua the Messiah, God and Lord.” But perhaps more significant, is how the titles God and Lord are listed in such close proximity, with Yeshua the Messiah doubtlessly associated with one of them. As Douglas J. Moo concludes, “James’s view of his half-brother Jesus had undergone quite a transformation since the days they grew up in the same household together!”⁴

The statement of James 1:1, “From: Ya’akov, a slave of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah To: The Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora: *Shalom!*” (CJB/CJSB), could have made more of an effort of separating out God the Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, if James did not consider Yeshua to be integrated into the Divine Identity. All that would need to be seen for v. 1 to be an issue of James’ ministry as a servant, would be for him to have dropped the title *Kurios* or Lord, with him saying, “James, a bond-servant of God and of Yeshua the Messiah” (NASU modified). But instead, the Torah faithful, monotheistic Jew that James was, plainly sees him describe God the Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, by using titles which among his peers would have been reserved only for the latter.

James 1:13-15 **“God Cannot Be Tempted By Evil”**

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

In issuing an admonition to his audience to resist the lure of sin, James the Just makes it quite clear that a temptation to sin does not originate with God. As he communicates, “He himself tempts no one. But each one is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desire. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is full grown, it brings forth death” (James 1:13b-15, TLV). Even with demonic forces a likely factor in tempting

² J.A. Motyer, *The Message of James* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), pp 27-28.

³ Dan G. McCartney, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 78.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 49.