

James Chapter 1

James 1:1 "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

We see in this very first verse, that James did not mention the fact that he was the half-brother of Jesus in the flesh.

He was so humbled by the fact that, he had not immediately realized who Jesus was.

He, like Mary, was the family of Jesus in the flesh, but he fully realized that Jesus was his Lord.

He calls himself servant, that we see in the verse above, to show his total submission to the service of the Lord.

At the time James wrote this, the twelve tribes had not returned to Israel.

James, at the resurrection of the Lord, had submitted himself to not only salvation through Jesus, but had dedicated his life to His service.

It is easy to understand why James did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah at first, because they were raised together as children.

“Twelve tribes”:

A common New Testament title for Jews.

When the kingdom split after Solomon’s reign, 10 tribes constituted the northern kingdom, called Israel and Benjamin and Judah combined to form the southern kingdom, called Judah.

After the fall and deportation of the northern kingdom to Assyria (722 B.C.), some of the remnant of those in the 10 northern tribes filtered down into Judah and came to Jerusalem to worship (2 Chron. 29, 30, 34), thus preserving all 12 tribes in Judah’s land.

Although tribal identity could not be established with certainty after the southern kingdom was led captive by Babylon (586 B.C.), the prophets foresaw a time when God would reconstitute the whole nation and delineate each person’s tribal membership once again (Isaiah 11:12-13; Jer. 3:18; 50:4; Ezek. 37; Rev. 7:5-8).

“Scattered Abroad”:

The Greek word diaspora, which literally means “through a sowing” (John 7:35), became a technical term referring to Jews living outside the land of Palestine (1 Peter 1:1).

Besides the expulsions from the land by the Assyrians and Babylonians, many Jews were taken to Rome as slaves when the Romans conquered them (in 63 B.C).

In addition, during the centuries leading up to Christ's first coming, thousands of Jews drifted out of Israel and settled throughout the Mediterranean world.

But James primary audience was those who were scattered because of persecution.

Verses 2-3

In this epistle on Christian living, James opens with a most crucial topic: the trials of life.

These verses describe the various testings, whether from the world and Satan, or from God, into which godly Christians fall.

These "negative" experiences are to be accepted with great joy, not for the sake of the trial itself but because of the positive work God can accomplish through the testing.

The words (that are both in verses 2 and 3; temptations and trying), are often regarded as virtually being synonymous.

If this were true, then trials themselves would produce spiritual maturity.

But they do not.

Often, testings make Christians bitter instead of better, with no spiritual growth occurring.

The Greek word for "trying - (dokimion), might be better translated as "approving."

It is not merely one's presence in such trials, but one's victory over them that brings spiritual growth and maturity.

Those Christians whom God can use the most are those whom God has bruised the most.

James 1:2 "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;"

"Count it all joy":

The Greek word for "count" may also be translated "consider" or "evaluate".

The natural human response to trials (see below), is not to rejoice.

Therefore the believer must make a conscious commitment to face them with joy.

“Brethren”:

Believing Jews among those scattered.

“Temptations”:

Also meaning trials and this word connotes trouble, or something that breaks the pattern of peace, comfort, joy and happiness in someone’s life.

The verb for trials means “to put someone or something to the test,” with the purpose of discovering that person’s nature or that thing’s quality.

God brings such tests to prove and increase, the strength and quality of one’s faith and to demonstrate its validity (verses 2-12).

Every trial becomes a test of faith designed to strengthen: If the believer fails the test by wrongly responding, that test then becomes a temptation, or a solicitation to evil.

James gets right to the subject of his letter in this verse.

There was much persecution in the church in this day.

James just says to face the problems that arise and grow from those problems.

James speaks to them as brothers in Christ.

It is difficult to see when we are facing temptations, but there is a lesson to be learned in each one of them.

Jesus faced every temptation when he went to the mountain and fasted forty days and nights.

The main lesson to be learned in the temptation is that God will help us face the problem.

He will see us through, if we will place our trust in Him.

1 Corinthians 10:13 "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God [is] faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear [it]." Knowing that we are to grow through this temptation should bring us joy."

James 1:3 "Knowing [this], that the trying of your faith worketh patience."

“Trying”:

This means “proof”, or “proving”.

Patience or endurance:

Through tests, a Christian will learn to withstand tenaciously the pressure of a trial until God removes it at His appointed time and even cherish the benefit.

Now we are looking at one of the benefits of temptations.

Most of us are not patient at all, before we are saved.

If we are to take on the likeness of Christ, then we must also become patient.

We see a very good example of this in Job in the Old Testament.

He faced great temptation and patiently waited for an answer from God.

The end of the temptation was victory for him.

James 1:4 "But let patience have [her] perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

“Perfect”:

Not a reference to sinless perfection (3:2), but to spiritual maturity (1 John 2:14).

The testing of faith drives believers to deeper communion and greater trust in Christ, qualities that in turn produce a stable, godly and righteous character (1 Peter 5:10; Gal. 4:19).

The natural response to adversity is to escape it.

But God uses trouble to mature His people.

When we pray, we usually want to see an instant answer to our prayer.

We are not instantly transformed into that perfect Christian that we all desire to be, and our prayers are many times not answered immediately either.

There is a growing process to become the person we want to be.

Ephesians 4:13 "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:"

When we are saved, we have just entered the path that leads to righteousness.

We grow in the Lord and His righteousness as we are instructed in His Word.

We then must apply the instructions that we have learned to practical living so we then become that full Christian.

The Bible says that we must be fed milk and honey, until we grow into the mature Christian who can handle the meat of the Word.

We will see the victory, if we patiently wait for it.

James 1:5 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all [men] liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

“Wisdom”:

James’ Jewish audience recognized this as the understanding and practical skill that were necessary to live life to God’s glory.

It was not a wisdom of philosophical speculation, but the wisdom contained in the pure and peaceable absolutes of God’s will revealed in His Word and lived out.

Only such divine wisdom enables believers to be joyous and submissive in the trials of life.

“Ask of God”:

This command is a necessary part of the believer’s prayer life (Job 28:12-23; Prov. 3:5-7; 1 Thess. 5:17).

God intends that trials will drive believers to greater dependency on Him, by showing them their own inadequacy.

As with all His riches, God has wisdom in abundance (see Romans 11:33), available for those who seek it.

This verse is not a blanket promise of wisdom for any situation.

In the context of life’s trials, it probably speaks of the believer being granted;

- (1) Wisdom as to the reason for his trials; and
- (2) Wisdom to endure them.

Wisdom is a gift from God.

Knowledge is accumulated learning.

The best way to grow in the Lord then, would be to pray that God will give you the gift of wisdom and understanding.

Ask God for the Holy Spirit to be your Teacher and Guide.

Then study the Word of God, and grow in the Word, and in experience.

God is very willing to give good gifts to His children who ask.

When we ask, we must believe that we receive, and we shall have what we ask.

God does not just indiscriminately pour out wisdom on everyone.

We must pray and ask, and then we will receive it.

God is not like man that would remind you constantly that he had given you a gift.

God attaches no strings to the things He gives us.

He gives them to us, because He loves us.

James 1:6 "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed."

“Ask in faith”:

Prayer must be offered with confident trust in a sovereign God.

“Not wavering”:

This refers to having one’s thinking divided within himself, not merely because of mental indecision but an inner moral conflict or distrust in God.

“Wave of the sea”:

The person who doubts God’s ability or willingness to provide this wisdom is like the billowing, restless sea, moving back and forth with its endless tides, never able to settle.

It is useless to pray and ask for something, if you do not believe you will get an answer from God to that prayer.

Faith is what causes the prayer to be answered.

When Jesus healed the sick, He said, your faith has made you whole.

Mark 11:24 "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive [them], and ye shall have [them]."

James 1:7 "For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."

This is speaking of the man that wavereth.

His faith is not constant.

His faith is like the tree that falls over when the slightest wind comes.

He says he believes, but he does not believe in his heart.

The following is what Jesus said to the man who came to him for help for his son.

Mark 9:23 "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things [are] possible to him that believeth."

Now we see the correct thing to do, if we see that our faith is wavering.

Mark 9:24 "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

He believed, but he wanted Jesus to help him believe even more.

This type of faith is honored by the Father, because the desire of our heart is to believe.

James 1:8 "A double minded man [is] unstable in all his ways."

"A double minded man":

A literal translation of the Greek expression that denotes having one's mind or soul divided between God and the world.

This man is a hypocrite, who occasionally believes in God but fails to trust Him when trials come, and thus receives nothing.

The use of this expression (in 4:8), makes it clear that it refers to an unbeliever.

This is speaking of an unstable person, who cannot make up his mind.

He really does not truly believe anything.

His heart is not right with God.

Verses 9-11

At first sight, these verses seem unrelated to the larger theme of life's trials.

Yet money is a common cause of trials and “double-mindedness” (unreliability).

James is teaching us here to adopt a non-materialistic worldview.

Wealth is meaningless in the face of certain death.

Rather, we must focus upon God’s view of exaltation and lowliness.

Both positions are true of all believers.

But the lowly need to be encouraged that they are exalted before God, whereas the exalted need to hear a message of humiliation.

Compare Paul’s statement (in 1 Corinthians 7:22).

Verses 9-10 “Brother of low degree ... the rich”:

Trials make all believers equally dependent on God and bring them to the same level with one another by keeping them from becoming preoccupied with earthly things.

Poor Christians and wealthy ones can rejoice that God is no respecter of persons and that they both have the privilege of being identified with Christ.

James 1:9 "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:"

“Rejoice”:

Or glory.

This word refers to the boasting of a privilege or possession; it is the joy of legitimate pride.

Although having nothing in this world, the poor believer can rejoice in his high spiritual standing before God by grace and the hope which that brings (Romans 8:17-18; 1 Peter 1:4).

You do not have to be rich or even thought of highly in the community, to come to Christ.

Christianity is for whosoever will.

Brother means that he is a believer in Christ.

He may have a lowly task to do here on the earth, but that has nothing to do with his position with Christ.

Brothers in Christ are all the same in the sight of God.

They all have the same Father.

Christians are sons of God.

There are no class distinctions in Christ.

James 1:10 "But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away."

“He is made low”:

Refers to the rich believer who is being brought low by trials.

Such experiences help him rejoice and realize that genuine happiness and contentment depend on the true riches of God’s grace, not earthly wealth.

This is really speaking of those who trust in riches.

When we die, we do not take earthly riches to heaven with us.

The only wealth we have in heaven is the wealth we stored there while we were yet on the earth.

The rich man and the poor man came into the world naked, and they shall not carry anything with them when they leave this world.

The poor man will be brought up to the level of the rich, and the rich will be brought down to the level of the poor.

Our body, that we live in here on the earth, is not our eternal body.

This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

We will be changed, made suitable for heaven.

Our earthly body is like the grass; here today and gone tomorrow.

James 1:11 "For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways."

“Grass ... flower”:

A picture of Palestine’s flowers and flowering grasses, which colorfully flourish in February and dry up by May.

A clear allusion to (Isaiah 40:6-8), which speaks of the scorching sirocco wind that burns and destroys plants in its path.

This picture from nature illustrates how divinely wrought death and judgment can quickly end the wealthy person's dependence on material possessions.

It is best not to put your trust in earthly possessions that pass away.

We just use them for a little while on the earth, and then they pass on to someone else.

Our earthly body is not made for eternity.

It is just a house we dwell in here on the earth.

This is not speaking of the Godly rich, but of those who have ways that cause them to be rich.

This is speaking of those who are thinking, not of life eternal, but life in the here and now.

The rich, who put their trust in their wealth, have no future with God.

James 1:12 "Blessed [is] the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

“Endureth temptation”:

This means those who persevere patiently and stand firm under trial, victoriously passing the test of such pressure, will receive due reward for their faithfulness.

The “crown of life” (mentioned here and Revelation 2:10), is the special crown for martyrs.

In this context, endureth also describes the passive, painful survival of a trial and focuses on the victorious outcome.

Such a person never relinquishes his saving faith in God.

Thus, this concept is closely related to the doctrine of eternal security and also the perseverance of the believer.

“Blessed”:

Believers who successfully endure trials are truly happy.

“Tried”:

Meaning passed the test.

The believer has successfully and victoriously gone through his trials, indicating he is genuine because his faith has endured like Job's.

“Crown of life”:

Best translated “the crown which is life”.

In the ancient world, the term “crown” refers to a wreath of flowers presented to winners in athletic games and to special awards bestowed on statesmen, soldiers and distinguished citizens.

Here, it denotes the believer’s ultimate reward, eternal life, which God has promised to him and will grant in full at death or at Christ’s coming.

At the judgment seat of Christ, this promised crown will be awarded both to the martyrs and those who are victorious over severe temptations, persecutions, and adversities through both faith and dedication.

Mankind understandably may look on tragedy as the curse of God, as Job’s friends did.

Trials are, however, the means through which God’s blessings can come, where a person’s endurance in and the victory over trials bring God’s blessings.

Christians therefore, are not instructed to seek avenues of escape, God desires that they mature in the situation rather than move from it (Romans 5:3-5; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

He does however, promise to provide an escape if the testing becomes unbearable (1 Cor. 10:13).

God’s people need to meditate more on (James 1:12 than 1 Cor. 10:13).

The reason for this, and why God allows trials in the lives of His people, is revealed in the Mosaic Law: “That he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end” (Deut. 8:16).

In this life, we have temptations, trials, and tribulation.

It is not the temptation that ruins the man, but his attitude toward the temptation.

We should willingly endure whatever temptation comes our way, like the good soldier of Christ that we profess to be.

Those who live and overcome the temptations they suffer, have awaiting them a crown of life.

Revelation 2:10 "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast [some] of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

If we love Him, we will keep His commandments.

We will stay firmly rooted in Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

We will be built on the Rock that cannot be moved.

1 Corinthians 2:9 "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

James Chapter 1

1. Who was the probable writer of James?
2. Why did the author speak of him as half-brother?
3. Name some of the men called James in the Bible.
4. Which James was killed soon after the resurrection of Jesus?
5. When did James, the brother of Jesus, become a Christian?
6. Why was James chosen to be the head of the church in Jerusalem?
7. What was different about the way Paul looked at Christianity, and the way James looked at it?
8. Why was there this difference, really?
9. Why was James taught the Jewish law?
10. Who was this letter addressed to?
11. Can the Christians value from it?
12. When was it written approximately?
13. Who does James call himself in the first verse?
14. Even though James was Jesus' half-brother, James still accepted Him as his _____.
15. Why had James not accepted Jesus as Messiah immediately?
16. What advice did James give these believers about their problems?
17. Why should we joy in temptations?
18. The trying of your faith worketh _____.
19. How do we become a full Christian?

20. How can we get wisdom?
21. What is knowledge?
22. Who should be our Teacher and Guide?
23. What two things should we grow in?
24. How are we to ask for wisdom?
25. Those that waver are like what?
26. If thou canst believe, _____.
27. What is double-minded speaking of?
28. How are Christian brothers, rich are poor, alike?
29. What is our shortness of physical life compared to in verse 10?