

James 1 – Trials and Wisdom

This Book was one of the earliest Epistles, written in the mid 40s. It was written before any of the Gospels were written. The author is James. There are several men named James mentioned in the New Testament, but reliable tradition assigns this book to the one called James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55) and the brother of Jude (Jude 1), who led the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). The writer of this letter is the same James who received a special resurrection appearance of Jesus (1 Cor 15:7). This was probably when he got saved, because up to that time the brothers of Jesus seemed unsupportive of His message and mission (John 7:5).

When he finally followed Jesus, he followed with great devotion. Early history of the church says that James was such a man of prayer that his knees had large and thick calluses, making them look like the knees of a camel. It also says that James was martyred in Jerusalem by being pushed from a high point of the temple. Yet the fall did not kill him, and on the ground he was beaten to death, even as he prayed for his attackers.

Read James 1

Vs 1 What does James call himself? A bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing that this James was the half-brother of Jesus makes his self-introduction all the more significant. He did not proclaim himself “the brother of Jesus” but only a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was more than James’ brother; more importantly, Jesus was his Lord. Bondservant is an important word. It is the ancient Greek word *doulos*, and is probably better simply translated as slave. But a bondservant is a unique kind of slave. It is a slave that voluntarily serves! Notice he also calls Jesus Lord. Lord is also an important word. It is the ancient Greek word *kurios*. It simply meant the master of a *doulos*. Notice the little word “and” between God and Lord. In context, it means that James considered Jesus God.

Who is James writing to? The twelve tribes of Israel who are scattered around the known world. The “twelve tribes” is a Jewish figure of speech that sometimes referred to the Jewish people as a whole. By the way, this blows away the Church traditions of “the lost tribes of Israel”. Does this mean the letter does not apply to us “gentile” Christians? Certainly this letter applies to all Christians; yet James probably wrote his letter before Gentiles were brought into the church, or at least before Gentile Christians appeared in any significant number. Remember how early this book was written; before the Apostle Paul did the majority of his missionary journeys to the gentiles! In addition, in Galatians 2:8-9, James is mentioned as an apostle to the circumcised (Jews). So this letter was written to reach Jews who may not have been in Jerusalem during Jesus’ ministry.

Vs 2 This one little verse says so much. Let’s break down the Greek words;

My brethren – fellow believer

Count – consider or think

Joy – cheerfulness or gladness

Fall - so to fall into as to be encompassed

Various – all sorts of

Trials – A temptation of God by men (rebellion against God, by which His power and justice are, as it were, put to the proof and challenged to show themselves)

The Amplified translation has it this way; *Consider it nothing but joy [wholly joyful with no other emotion], my brothers and sisters, whenever you fall [are enveloped in or encounter into] various trials [or temptations].*

Vs 3 Why should we consider it nothing but wholly joyful when we are tested or tried? Because we have God’s Word (promise) the end result of the testing of our faith will be active endurance (patience). This means a frame of mind that endures under a load.

Vs 4 What does this endurance produce? Completeness! Patient endurance is a mark of the person who is perfect and complete, lacking nothing. The word “perfect” means *brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness, of full age, mature.*

Vs 5 – 8 What are we to do if we lack wisdom? Don't take this verse out of context! James is talking about trials that result in patience and maturity. Trials bring a necessary season to seek wisdom from God. We often don't know we need wisdom until our time of difficulty. Once in a time of trial, we need to know if a particular trial is something God wants us to eliminate by faith or persevere in by faith. This requires wisdom. In trials, we need wisdom a lot more than we need knowledge. Knowledge is raw information but wisdom knows how to use it. To receive wisdom, we simply ask of God, who gives wisdom generously, and without despising our request. The language here implies humility in coming to God. How are we to ask? In faith, without doubting God's ability or desire to give us His wisdom. List some attributes of waves; without rest, unstable, driven by the wind, dangerous. What is double-minded? It literally means two-souled. The man of two souls, who has one for the earth, and another for heaven: who wishes to secure both worlds; he will not give up earth, and he is loath to let heaven go. This man is like a wave.

Vs 9 – 11 What do you think these verses are saying? Let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his elevation [as a Christian, called to the true riches and to be an heir of God]. Let the rich glory in being humbled [by being shown his human frailty], because like the flower of the grass he will pass away. As the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. By faith in Christ the two are equals. How much better to put our life and our identity into things that will never fade! If a man is only rich in this world, when he dies, he leaves his riches. But if a man is rich before God, when he dies, he goes to his riches.

Vs 12 Why is a man blessed when he endures testing? After he has come through it, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. There is a special gift of blessedness from God to the one who can say "no" to temptation, thereby saying "yes" to God. Notice the motive for resisting temptation is because of our love for God. The passions of sinful temptation can only really be overcome by a greater passion, and that is a passion for the honor and glory and relationship with God.

Vs 13 – 15 Does God tempt man? No! Where does our temptation come from? Our lust. What happens when we yield to our lust? It leads to sin and sin leads to death. Satan tempts: God tries. But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial; and it may be a trial from God's side, and a temptation from Satan's side, just as Job suffered from Satan, and it was a temptation; but he also suffered when God allowed Satan to test him, and so it was a trial to him.

Vs 16 What deception is James talking about? Being deceived by thinking God is the cause of your trials. Satan's great strategy in temptation is to convince us that the pursuit of our corrupt desires will somehow produce life and goodness for us. If we remember that Satan only comes to steal, and to kill, and to destroy (John 10:10), then we can more effectively resist the deceptions of temptation

Vs 17 What truth do we learn about God? All good things come from Him and He is consistent, never changing.

Vs 18 What is this verse saying? The gift of salvation was given by God, and not earned by the work or obedience of man. It is of His own will that He brought us forth for salvation. And this salvation is the first fruits of creation, meaning the best of the "crop". Firstfruits in the Bible refers to the first and best portion of a harvest, income, or creation offered to God as an act of worship, gratitude, and acknowledgment of His sovereignty and provision. Lev 23:10–14 , 1 Cor 15:20

Vs 19 – 20 What does this verse say about anger? We can learn to be slow to wrath by first learning to be swift to hear and slow to speak. Why doesn't our wrath produce the righteousness of God? Our wrath almost always simply defends or promotes our own agenda.

Vs 21 Because our wrath does not produce the righteousness of God, what should we do? Get rid of all impurity and receive the implanted word of God (doing it with meekness and a teachable heart). The spiritual power of the word of God, when it is implanted in the human heart, it is able to save your soul.

Vs 22 – 25 What are we to do with the Word? Be an active hearer and an active doer of it. What if you hear the Word and don't do it? You are deceiving yourself into thinking you are right with God when you are not. Only those who hear and do (obedience) will be blessed. Matthew 7:24-27

Vs 26 – 27 How else can you deceive yourself? By thinking you are right with God (religious) but don't control your tongue (what you say). So what can you do that is pure and undefiled religion? Help widows & orphans and keep yourself unspotted (stained) by the world.