

# James 1

Commentaries used: *Gospel Advocate NT Commentary (James)*, Guy N. Woods (excellent), *Beacon Bible Commentary (James)*

**Background:** There are at least three prominent men in the New Testament named James:

1. James the son of Zebedee and Salome, one of the original apostles

- Who was the brother of this James?** Apostle John
- Why is it unlikely that this James was the author of the book of *James*?** He does not identify himself as an apostle
- Think about the trouble that Paul had in establishing himself as an apostle
- It would have been natural for James the Apostle to have called himself an apostle
- Also, the Apostle James was killed by Herod in *Acts 12.1-2*

2. James the less, the son of Alpheus

- We know very little about this man, and it is unlikely that he was the author

3. James the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ (*Matthew 13.55, Mark 6.3, Galatians 1.18-19*)

- Does the author of James call himself the half-brother of Jesus?** No
- Why not?** The step-brothers of Jesus did not believe in him until after the resurrection (they were embarrassed of him – *John 7.5*)
- Also, he did not want to take advantage of his physical kinship with Christ
- There would have been all kinds of theological problems if he had played up his kinship with Christ
- What other half-brother of Jesus wrote a book in the New Testament?** Jude (See *Matthew 13.35* for list of the brothers of Jesus)
- How did this James function in the First Century church?** *Acts 15* – James was chairman of the Jerusalem conference, and it was James who seems to have made the final decision on the wording of the letter to the church at Antioch

Optional material:

**Application:** Read *Galatians 1.18-19* – several possibilities

1. That James was made an apostle (as Paul was)
2. The term for apostle was not being used in the official sense: Barnabas (*Acts 14.14*), Andronicus, Junias, others (*Romans 16.7*) – just means "someone sent out"

There are several Christian writers who wrote that James died because of his faith in Christ

- Book of *James*: the most practical book in the New Testament, very similar to the book of *Proverbs* in the Old Testament

## James 1.1-Introduction

**V1** – **What was the traditional first century way of starting a letter?** Name of writer, to whom it was written, a word of greeting

- Look at the letters of Paul for great examples of this pattern
- How does James identify himself in v 1?** Bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

- To whom was the letter addressed?** Twelve tribes dispersed abroad
- Literally to the Jewish Christians?** *Galatians 4.21-31* – Christians are the “Jews” in the mind of God (son of Sarah vs. son of Hagar)
- In other words, just being a physical descendant of Abraham meant nothing, but being a son of the promise meant everything
- There is nothing in this letter about dangers of going back to Old Testament, no special warning for Jewish Christians (nothing like the book of *Hebrews*)

### **Application:**

- Were there really 12 tribes?** No – 13 tribes (Joseph = Manasseh and Ephraim – *Genesis 48.17-22*)
- Why then do we call them the 12 tribes?** Levi did not have a land promise (there are 19 different lists of the 12 tribes in the Bible)
- “Dispersed Abroad” – “Diaspora” (the Assyrian and Babylonia Captivity in the Old Testament)
- Why were they scattered?** Persecution against the church
- Also, many converts were made on the Day of Pentecost in *Acts 2* (from 14-15 nations), so they were going home, etc.

### **James 1.2-4** – Dealing with suffering

**V2** – **What apparently was the state of the readers of this letter?** Persecution, distress, hardship (we learn more about this as the letter goes on)

- What is our attitude toward hardship?** We don’t like it, and we want out of it - we hate to suffer
- What did James say should be our attitude?** Joy
- This goes just the opposite of what the world tells us today
- The advertising world wants every need to be taken care of
- This is the most pampered generation in the history of America
- We have the feeling that life ought to be painless and sterile and without problems
- Americans are afraid that a germ might get on them and they might suffer a little
- So here is a radical idea: joy from distress

**V3** – **What is the value of hardship?** It is a test that produces endurance

- What do we call the kid who gets everything that he wants while growing up?** Spoiled brat
- Is he ever happy?** No, always crying (for more, etc.)
- God does not tempt us (*James 1.13*), but he does test us (*Genesis 22.1*)
- What is the result of that testing of our faith?** Endurance
- When we go through some awful experience, we are stronger because of it (sickness, handicaps, a birth defect, bad parents, etc.)
- When we break a bone, it is stronger at the break than it was before
- When we go through some church battle, we come out stronger; we are like tempered steel
- We are much better able to deal with later false teachers because of that experience
- Satan wants to destroy a congregation, because of the good that we are doing, but we have been made stronger
- But Satan will continue to attack us
- James did not say to just pray to God that the problem might be taken away

**-Rather, what was his first response?** To try to learn from the experience

**V 4 – What would it produce in us?** We will be perfect (mature) and complete

**-Acts 4.29 – Concerning the imprisonment of Peter and John, what did the church in Jerusalem pray for?** Strength, not release

**James 1.5-8** – Praying for wisdom

**V 5** – Maybe, the average Christians were saying at this point: "How can I get enough wisdom to do what James was talking about?"

**-What was James' answer?** Ask God for wisdom

**-What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?** Knowing the facts vs. knowing how to use the facts for good

**-To whom does God give wisdom?** To all Christians liberally

**-What has to be our attitude to ask God for wisdom?** Humility (that in itself is the beginning of wisdom) – there are people with high IQs who cannot humble themselves before God and are therefore not wise

**-Meaning “without reproach”?** He doesn't say to us, “Why are you so dumb? Why are you asking for wisdom again?”

**-God therefore gives us wisdom** – from the Bible and from experiences in life

**-This is not the "gift of wisdom"** (a gift of the Holy Spirit, as they had in the First Century)

**-Through his providence, these experiences** (like having teenagers, suffering, bad experiences) give us wisdom

## Poem: I Walked a Mile with Pleasure

I walked a mile with Pleasure;  
She chatted all the way;  
But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow,  
And ne'er a word said she;  
But, oh! The things I learned from her,  
When sorrow walked with me.

-Robert Browning Hamilton

-Ernest Hemmingway said, "Nothing bad can ever happen to a writer, because he can always write about it"

-Also: (in one sense) nothing bad can every happen to a Christian, because it will always give him wisdom

**V 6 – How should we ask God for wisdom?** In faith

**-What is the person like who does not ask in faith?** Like surf of the sea being tossed around

**V7** – **What about the person who does not ask in faith?** God will not answer his prayer

**V8** – **How does James describe that man?** Double minded and unstable

- Interesting:** the world today considers “doubt” to be a good thing, but James says that is the mark of an unstable person
- Review:** Some good will come from persecution – we should ask God for wisdom in dealing with it

**James 1.9-11** – The curse of wealth

**V9** – **What does the poor Christian have to be happy about?** That he is poor

- Incredible – another concept exactly opposite to what the world says to us today
- What is the real position of the poor person?** “High position”
- We seek to be rich, but look at what James is saying here
- How many really wealthy people have you known who were also faithful Christians?**
- For the writer of these notes, only one: A.M. Burton, who gave millions of dollars to David Lipscomb University and to many missions works of the church

**V10** – **What did James say about the rich man?** He has been humiliated (just opposite of the world’s view)

- Why is wealth considered to be a humiliating state?** Because that wealth can be taken away so quickly
- Wealth for a Christian would require using it for glory of God (might be very stressful)

**V11** – **How quickly can wealth disappear?** Like the flowering grass

- How long do flower blooms last?** A few days
- Why would wealth be bad for a rich person?** He would grow dependent on his money
- What did our Lord say on this subject? Read Matthew 6.28-30 and Isaiah 40.6-8**
- Consider the "curse" on the Kennedy family (JFK, JFK Jr. and plane crash, Robert Kennedy, etc.)

**James 1.12-18**

**V12** – **What did we call “blessings” in the New Testament?** Beatitudes

- A beatitude really is a statement on how we can be happy in this life
- On what person is the blessing given?** The one who perseveres under trial
- What will he receive?** The “crown of life” (eternal life)
- Is there a blessing to all who persevere under a lot of trials?** No, a lot of people suffer
- The promise is to those who love the Lord

**V13** – **What is tendency for us to do?** To say that God is tempting us

- Did people in the Bible ever blame God for sin?** Yes: Adam said “You gave me this woman!” (*Genesis 3.12*)
- What are we to pray for (regarding temptation)?** *Matthew 6.13* – *Lead us not into temptation...*
- What has God promised in regarding to temptation?** *1 Corinthians 10.13* – God will always

provide a way of escape

**V 14 – What is the real problem with temptation?** Lust that we have in our hearts as humans

-**What does this word “entices” suggest?** Satan advertises sin

-Beer commercials: "good old boys" getting together - they are not selling beer, they are selling friendship

**V 15 – Three steps to sin and our downfall?** Lust – sin – death (sometimes physical, always spiritual death)

**V 16 – How does James warn us here?** Do not be deceived

-**Application to "Once Saved Always Saved"?** Why warn people about being deceived, if there is no possibility of falling away from the Father?

**V 17 – What does James say about the good things that we enjoy in this life?** It all comes from God.

-The things that really bring us joy in life come to us from God (our marriages, our children, pets, food, lives, church membership, sunlight, beauty in nature, etc.)

-**Which lights?** Sun, moon, stars

-**Implication to astrology?** Don't worship stars, but worship the Father (the Creator of the stars)

-**Is there a variation with light in the sky?** Yes (planets moving, etc.)

-**Contrast with God?** No variation with God

**V 18 – How has God blessed us?** He gave birth to us by the Word of God and made us his first fruits

**James 1.19-25** – Being doers of the Word, and not just hearers

**V 19 – Three steps to controlling our tempers?** Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger

-A command, not a suggestion (See: *Proverbs 10.19* and *Proverbs 29.20*) – “must be”

-Remember that God gave us two ears and only one tongue – a great lesson there, but many people talk twice as much as they listen....

**V 20 – Meaning?** When humans get mad, it is not like the anger of God (He knows what he should do)

**V 21** – Notice what James calls sin: filthiness and wickedness

-Our world tries to soften the view of sin

-**Two steps to salvation, according to James?** Put sin away and receive the Word of God

-**What has to be our attitude toward the Word of God?** Humility

-According to Guy N. Woods, the Greek word for "filthiness" is from a root word “ear wax” (*Gospel Advocate NT Commentary (James)*, p. 84)

**V 22 – What did James tell us to be?** Doers, not just hearers

-Sometimes Christians need this – there will be some Christians who never do much for the church (except come and listen to sermons, etc.)

-**In what sense are they deluded?** Thinking they will be saved

-**Read Matthew 7.21-23** – We must do the will of Jesus to be saved – Please remember that James is not talking to the alien sinners here, but to Christians in the Lord's church.

**V 23-24** – **What comparison does James make?** Like a person who looks at himself in a mirror

- What happens?** He goes on to something else and forgets what he looks like
- Researchers have found that the average person would not recognize himself if he saw himself walking down the street
- We really don't know how we look (good for most of us)
- Some people hear the gospel and say, "Oh, that's good," and then go out and forget all that they learned in church

**V 25** – **What should we be looking at?** The perfect law

- Is there an imperfect law?** Yes: Old Testament
- Are we under a law today?** Yes: New Testament law
- Very important: Some claim that we are not under law, but grace**
- “Liberty” = free from all the minute commandments of the Old Testament (read *Leviticus* sometime) – we don't have to be perfect to be saved
- We still must do some things, but not like the Old Law
- The denominational churches claim to be liberal, but they bind little picky rules on their members (lighting candles, having masses, using human titles, instrumental music and rock bands, etc.)
- Let us not be guilty of binding popular things that are not found in the Bible
- Salvation comes from responsibility to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross

**James 1. 26-27** – True Christians

**V 26** – **What is worthless religion?** Not to bridle the tongue and to deceive the heart

- What is a bridle?** Goes in the mouth of a horse to control him
- Just the appearance of religion will not be good enough for God

**V 27a** – **Two parts of pure and undefiled religion?** Widows and orphans

- Note for "non-cooperation" churches: *1 Timothy 5.16* – widows can be taken care of out of the church treasury
- Therefore, so can orphans
- Does this verse tell us how to take care of the widows and orphans?** No, it is left up to the judgment of the congregation (the elders)
- It can be by adoption, by organized homes like Shults-Lewis, or in small group homes....
- The "non-cooperation" churches bind where the scriptures do not bind!

**V 27b** – Unstained (when we come into contact with dirt, we get dirty)

**What has James said in *chapter 1* that would encourage disheartened and persecuted Christians in the First Century?**

Revised 2013-01-28