

# Epistle of James

## Chapter 1

### Background on James (1:1)

1. James opens with a simple but appropriate description of who he is.
2. He identifies himself as a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. A bondservant is a voluntary position representing complete submission to the Master.
4. While no other information is given, most scholars believe that this James is the Lord's half-brother (Matt. 13:55-56).
5. James and the other half-siblings of Jesus were not believers in Him as the Messiah before the cross (Mark 3:31-35, John 7:1-5).
6. Jesus appeared to James personally after His resurrection as referenced by Paul (1 Cor. 15:7).
7. James' prior unbelief, like Paul's, did not disqualify him from becoming a respected leader in the church (Gal. 2:9, Acts 15, 21:18-19).
8. Tradition holds that James was martyred in 62 A.D. by the hands of the Pharisees who allegedly threw him down from the temple and then beat him with clubs while he prayed for them.
9. James was Jewish, and he focuses on obedience to God as an extension of the Mosaic Law. In five chapters he gives more than fifty imperatives for believers to follow.
10. The audience James writes to are the twelve tribes scattered abroad. Direct descendants of Jacob continued to hold tribal identities and distinctives well into the New Testament period (not lost).
11. James writes to Jewish believers who need to know how to live. Unbelievers are not his focus.
12. James' letter is a call to spiritual maturity in the midst of issues believers were facing.

### Outline of James – Becoming a Mature Believer

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|---|-----------|
| 1. Godly patience leads to maturity                               | 1:2-18    |
| a. During trials and testing of faith (external)                  | 1:2-11    |
| b. In the midst of personal temptations (internal)                | 1:12-18   |
| 2. Central Point – swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath | 1:19-20   |
| 3. Swift to hear (and to apply the Word of truth)                 | 1:21-2:26 |
| a. Responding to God's word by engaging in good works             | 1:21-27   |
| b. Hearing God's word to show complete impartiality               | 2:1-13    |
| c. Hearing God's command to integrate faith and works             | 2:14-26   |
| 4. Slow to speak  | 3:1-18    |
| a. Control over the tongue  | 3:1-12    |
| b. Respond in meekness with wisdom from above                     | 3:13-18   |
| 5. Slow to wrath  | 4:1-5:12  |
| a. Resolving conflict in humility and in submission to God        | 4:1-10    |
| b. Proper judgement of wrongdoing avoids speaking evil            | 4:11-12   |
| c. Boasting is arrogant and fails to honor God                    | 4:13-17   |
| d. Patient endurance is greater than riches                       | 5:1-12    |
| 6. Essential instructions for the mature believer                 | 5:13-20   |

## Godly patience leads to maturity (1:2-20)

1. During trials and testing of faith (1:2-4)
  - a. James addresses his instructions to his brethren, fellow believers.
  - b. James is not exempt from the testing of his faith in trials. He experiences the same things as all the brethren do.
  - c. Believers are instructed to consider it all joy when faced with any and all trials.
  - d. Trials are permitted or orchestrated by God in order to test our faith in Him.
  - e. Successfully enduring through the testing period will always result in an increase in our patience.
  - f. Christian patience is a learned and developed character trait.
    - i. Patience is essential for the Christian.
    - ii. Patience is developed through trials if we let the trials work on us.
    - iii. Patience is a by-product of trials against our faith.
  - g. Believers must not fight or resist against the testing and trials. Rather, we must let the trials do their intended work and produce greater level of patience in us.
  - h. Patience in and through trials have a necessary perfecting work in us.
    - i. With trials producing patience we move towards true maturity (perfect).
    - ii. Without trials, or without demonstrating patience in trials, we have no hope of becoming mature believers in Christ.
2. When we lack wisdom or knowledge (1:5-8)
  - a. When we lack wisdom, we are to seek God and His word for answers.
  - b. In faith, we must ask God for wisdom on things we don't understand, especially in periods of trials or persecution.
  - c. God gives wisdom to all who seek Him
    - i. Liberally (bountifully)
    - ii. Without reproach (insult or reviling because we have asked).
    - iii. Wisdom will be given, but notice the timing and means are not described.
    - iv. The one asking for wisdom must ask in faith without doubting.
  - d. Asking for wisdom while doubting or lacking in faith is unwise and unfruitful.
    - i. One who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.
    - ii. Believers must anchor their faith and hope in God if they are to receive from Him.
    - iii. The one who doubts should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.
    - iv. Asking God for wisdom while doubting in Him or His goodness reveals us to be double-minded (both believing and unbelieving) and unstable (lacking the firm foundation every believer must have) in all our ways.
3. In seasons of prosperity and scarcity (1:9-11)
  - a. The lowly (poor or afflicted) are instructed to glory in his coming exaltation (spiritual rewards that can't be measured in earthly ways).
  - b. The rich person is to model true humility in this life, knowing that all the riches he has will pass away.
    - i. As the flower of the field has only temporary beauty, not eternal.
    - ii. It will burn up in extreme heat and wither as the grass does in the same conditions.

- iii. The value of riches, like the temporary beauty of the flower, all perish in time.
  - iv. The rich man is likewise destined for a humbling experience at some point in this life or in the life to come.
- 4. Patience in the midst of temptations (1:12-18).
  - a. The man who successfully endures temptations is blessed.
  - b. Passing tests of temptations are met with God's approval.
  - c. God offers us the crown of life to those who love Him enough to endure temptations and still hold firmly to faith in God and in salvation in Christ.
  - d. Unlike trials which test our faith (external), God does not cause our temptations.
    - i. No one should ever claim to be tempted by God.
    - ii. God is never tempted by evil, and He does not tempt anyone to choose evil.
    - iii. Temptation comes to us when we are drawn away by our own desires and are enticed to do what God has commanded us not to do.
      - 1. God did not tempt Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3).
      - 2. God did not tempt Satan to seek his own glory in defiance of God (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezk. 28:11-17).
    - iv. When temptation and desire are conceived in the heart, they will then give birth to sin out of the heart.
    - v. Full-grown sin, without salvation in Christ, brings forth eternal death and judgment.
  - e. As Christians, we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by lies of the world and Satan.
    - i. Sin is of man's own evil desires. Satan exploits those desires. God does not.
    - ii. God is responsible for every good gift and every perfect gift, by His standards, not ours, comes down from the Father of Lights with who there is no variation or shadow of turning.
    - iii. God has no dark recesses of His character or personality. He is pure, perfect and holy light. He does not create evil. He does not cause evil. He does not tempt anyone to do evil.
    - iv. If we blame God for sin or evil, we are deceived.
  - f. Mankind was created to show all of creation how good and righteous God is.
    - i. God brought forth Adam and Eve by His own good will.
    - ii. Mankind was created on Day 6 by the word of His truth.
    - iii. Mankind was created to be a kind of firstfruits over all creation, made in His perfect image.
    - iv. Therefore, what God created was good; when mankind was added to all that God had created in the creation week, God then declared creation to be very good (Gen. 1:31).
    - v. Conclusion:
      - 1. God allows trials (even by allowing wicked and evil people to prosper and succeed) in order to bring to full maturity those who believe in Him.
      - 2. No one, including believers, unbelievers, or spiritual forces of darkness, can rightly claim that God caused them to do evil. Evil occurs as created beings rebelliously draw away from God and from His perfect righteousness.

3. Being fully complete and lacking nothing of the Lord's will is God's true desire for those who love Him.
4. Believers must understand and accept these truths during trials and temptations if they are to become mature in their faith.

**Central Point of James – Be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath (1:19-20)**

1. With a proper understanding of trials and temptations, we are called to respond to all circumstances with mature, godly character in all situations.
2. James gives us a strong and effective way to approach every situation we will ever face.
  - a. Believers must be swift to hear (receive God's words of truth).
  - b. Slow to speak (consider our words and be conformed to God's words before speaking).
  - c. Slow to wrath (Godly wrath only comes from God; the wrath of man does not produce or model the righteousness of God!)

**Our first response: be swift to hear and to apply God's word of truth (1:21-2:26)**

1. Responding to God's word by engaging in good works (1:21-27)
  - a. Believers are to lay aside all filthiness and the overflow of wickedness.
    - i. Understand that these thoughts and responses did not come from God.
    - ii. The same does not please God in any way.
  - b. Receive, with meekness (mild, gentle and humble disposition), the implanted word.
    - i. Implanted indicates that we must receive the word from those God has entrusted to communicate it to us (prophets and apostles).
    - ii. Even when God liberally gives us wisdom (1:5), that wisdom will always conform to His written word. We must not believe that we can speak God's truth in a way that contradicts the word He has implanted to the world by special revelation.
    - iii. It is only God's true word that is able to declare the truth of salvation to our souls.
  - c. Being swift to hear also means being doers of the word, not just hearing them.
    - i. Those who only hear the word, but do not put it into action are deceiving themselves.
    - ii. Those who fail to apply what they hear are like a man who can see his appearance in a mirror, but without the mirror immediately forgets what kind of man he was. This is more about understanding our true nature and character and not really about visual recognition. Believers must not be "forgetful hearers."
2. A doer of the word will look into the perfect law of liberty (New Testament) and will actually do what the law of liberty says to do. This one will be blessed by God in what he does.
3. Religion and following rituals are not what saves us, nor do they please God.
4. Failing to bridle our tongues is ungodly as it defames the name of Christ in our speech.
5. Pure and undefiled "religion" takes the same actions God calls us to take.
  - a. Visit orphans and widows to help them in their troubles.
  - b. Keeping oneself unspotted from the sins of the world.