

# James 1

## Exegetical Notes

**Introduction - James 1:1**  
**The Test of Perseverance - James 1:2-12**  
**The Test of Temptation - James 1:13-18**  
**The Test of the Word - James 1:19-27**

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

James introduces his book simply by stating his name, relationship to God, and the recipients of the letter. James most likely was the half-brother of Christ (see New Testament Survey notes for a discussion about James' identity). He identifies himself as the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, a note of humility since he was Christ's earthly half-brother. The recipients of the letter are identified as the Jews who are scattered (*diaspora*) throughout the world.

From this we can determine that this book will be very Jewish in nature. There is no reference to a church, but reference is made to synagogues. The examples of faith in chapter two are taken straight from the Jewish scriptures. and many terms used in the New Testament like justification, sanctification, and redemption are not used.

Many outlines have been offered for James. Some say it follows the form of the Sermon on the Mount, others see it as a somewhat disjointed collection of thoughts put down by someone more accustomed to speaking than writing. The course taken in these notes is to see James as being composed of a series of tests of true, saving faith. If the New Testament teaches us anything, it teaches that salvation produces a changed person. By looking at the changes in ones life, one can determine if they have true, saving faith or not.

### ***Test 1 - Perseverance in Testing***

**2** My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

**3** Knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience

**4** But let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

The true Christian's attitude towards trials is one of joy knowing that God is perfecting him.

### **Sources of Trials**

<b>The World</b>	<b>John 15:18-25</b>
<b>The Flesh</b>	<b>2 Corinthians 10:5; 1 Corinthians 9:27</b>
<b>The Devil</b>	<b>2 Corinthians 4:7-18</b>
<b>Sin</b>	<b>1 Peter 4:15-16; 1 Peter 3:17</b>

Note the difference in the Greek words *peirozmos* and *dokimazo*. *Peirozmos* means a test with the intent of failure, *dokimazo* means a test with the intent of finding that of which to approve. Verse 2 and 3 really states that the various tests (*peirozmos*) have as a result the proving (*dokimazo*) of our faith.

“Knowing”, *ginosko*, refers to experiential knowing, not head knowledge. We know that trials produce endurance not because we were told that by someone, but because we have personally experienced the endurance in our own lives as the result of our testings. This same thought is found in Romans 5:3-5 which reads, “*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*” Tribulations here is *thlipsis*, or squeezing. Proving is *dokimazo*. Patience is *hupomena*.

What are the results of trials and testings. I see two revealed in the New Testament.

#### 1) Maturing

When we are confronted with the various trials we encounter in life, we are matured in Christ. We learn to trust God, we learn patience, and our faith is strengthened. James 1:4 teaches us this.

#### 2) Glorification

The ultimate end of suffering is glorification. There are two aspects of this, our glory, and God's glory. The more we suffer in this life, the more we can glorify God in the next.

God's divine prescription, which we can call the spiritual law of glorification, is

“AFTER suffering THEN glorification”

**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.

There was a real difference between the Greek and Hebrew concept of wisdom. To the Greeks it was abstract and disconnected from life. To the Hebrews, it was directly connected with one's everyday conduct. Compare with James 3:13 and 17. Compare also with the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8 and 9.

God is the ultimate source of true wisdom. We see this in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 where Paul compares earthly wisdom with divine. God is also a God of plenty. He does not “dole” out his wisdom a little bit at a time. The only real qualification God puts on the seeking heart is one of true desire. God delights to grant wisdom to the seeker.

In context, however, the wisdom being spoken of here is the wisdom to understand the real purpose of our trials and how our enduring them will bring about God's glory. When faced with trials we can confidently ask God for guidance knowing that he will give it. We are not left alone to face our trials by ourselves without the knowledge of God's guiding hand.

**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.

Always ask in faith. Faith activates the power of God in our lives. The word wavering is *diakrino*, to judge between two things hence doubt. I think James is trying to say that we must seek God's wisdom out of a heart of faith, not trying to relate God's wisdom to our own. The word “driven” is *animizo*, to be driven by the wind. It is interesting to compare this concept with Ephesians 4:13-14 where Paul states that one of the marks of spiritual immaturity is to be driven by every passing wind, *anemos*, of doctrine.

Whenever we are faced with trials, it is easy to waver between what God says and what we think. We often find ourselves relying on our own wisdom or the advice of others rather than

to the perfect will of God as revealed in the Bible and prayer. Instead of leaning on our own understanding, we need to go to the source of true wisdom and understanding in faith, knowing that God will provide.

**7** For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.

**8** A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Doubt and unbelief stifle the power of God. This is made evident by Matthew 13:57-58 where Christ was inhibited by the unbelief of the people in Galilee of performing many great works. Another good example is the woman cured of the issue of blood in Matthew 15:21-28. Even though Christ put up many barriers, she would not alter her belief that he could heal her. In fact, the few times Christ told anyone they had "great faith" was to Gentiles! In contrast, the disciples were the "O ye of little faith" gang.

Faith is a muscle. And as a muscle must be exercised, so must faith. When we ask of God and expect an answer, our faith is strengthened. Note that true faith is active, not passive.

Some interesting words in these two verses is "doubleminded" and "unstable". The first word is from the Greek word *dipsucha*. It means "two minds". A man with little or no faith has two minds. One believes God, and the other doubts. In contrast, we are to be singleminded. The word "unstable" is from the Greek word *akatastatos*. It is the same word used in Luke 21:9 for "wars and commotions", in 1 Corinthians 14:33 where it is translated "confusion", and James 3:16 where it is translated "confusion". A doubleminded man is always confused. He never knows what to believe.

#### Sources of Wisdom

##### 1 - Fear of God

***Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.***

##### 2 - Christ

***Colossians 2:3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.***

##### 3 - Prayer

***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.***

##### 4 - Scriptures

***2 Timothy 3:15-17 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.***

**9** Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted;

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

**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 may fade away in his ways.

James now turns to one of the major ways in which men lean to their own understanding, and that is they put confidence in their riches. Many times we today lack faith in God because we have covered all the contingencies. This does not mean that it is evil to have insurance or a “safety net.” Rather it means that it is evil to place our ultimate confidence in our riches or nest egg, and omit God from the equation.

The person who has little is blessed in the sense that he must depend on the Lord for deliverance in trials. He does not have a large amount of resources at his disposal. The rich, however, have a tendency to depend on their wealth or power and not on God.

James’s point here is that riches will not help a person when they are going through trials. All the money in the world will not restore broken health or give joy where there is none. Dependence on wealth is foolish, since it can not provide those things that are truly important.

Thus, the first test of true faith is how one handles trials in ones life. Do those trials tend to push one away from God, or do they cause one to develop a deeper and more personal walk with God?

### ***Test 2 - Blame in Temptation***

**12** Blessed is the man that endures temptation, for when he is tried, he shall received the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him.

**13** Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

**14** But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.

**15** Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

The second characteristic of true believers is that they understand the real source of temptation in their lives and deal with it appropriately. Unbelievers tend to deflect all blame for sin away from themselves; nothing is their fault. They come up with excuse after excuse for their sin blaming everyone, including God, and never seeing that the true source of their sin is themselves.

On the other hand, true believers endure, *hupomena*, testings because they know that when they have been fully tried, *dokimos*, they will receive the crown, *stephanos*, of life. This crown should not be seen as a peice of metal, but as life itself. One of the things that enabled believers through the centuries to face the worst tests, even to the point of death, is that they knew that they would have eternal life, regardless of what happened to them on earth. The reward, or crown, was life itself!

What then, is the source of temptation? James negatively states the source as not being God. There were two possible words to use for “of” in verse 13, *upo* and *apo*. *Upo* is used when making a direct link between two objects whereas *apo* was used in referring to indirect links between two objects. James’ point is that God is not only not the direct source of testing, but he is not even the indirect source of temptation. The word for temptation here is *peirasmos*, not *dokimazo*. God may test, *dokimazo*, to prove our faith, but he never tempts, *peirasmos*, us to do evil.

### The Sources of Temptation

**The World - 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Timothy 4:10**

**The Flesh - Romans 7:23-8:6**

**The Devil - 1 Peter 5:8, James 4:7**

### The Channels of Temptation

**Lust of the flesh**                      **our fleshly desires, sensuality**

**Lust of the eyes**                      **money, possessions**

**Pride of Life**                      **our own ego**

**Note that this pattern is followed in the temptation of Jesus found in Matthew 4:1-11:**

**Lust of flesh** - “make these stones into bread” Jesus depended on God's provision

**Lust of the eyes** - “all the kingdoms of the world” Jesus waited for God's timetable

**Pride of Life** - “cast thyself down” Jesus depended on God's affirmation of his ministry

In verses fourteen and fifteen we find the progression of temptation. James uses two fishing terms to illustrate this. The word translated “drawn away” is *exelkominos*, and means “to lure or draw away with bait,” and the word translated “enticed” is *deleazomenos*, and means “to trap or catch with bait.” We are drawn away into sin because of the fleshly desires, *epithumea*, within ourselves. Our fleshly desires cause us to seek fulfillment outside of the boundaries that God has set. Therefore, the true source of temptation is not external, but internal. Satan may tempt us, as well as the world, but their temptations work because of the fleshly desires that dwell within us.

### The Progression of Temptation

**Step 1 - We are drawn away by our own lusts**

**Step 2 - A lust dwelled on becomes sin**

**Step 3 - Sin “having been fully formed” brings forth death**

### Overcoming Temptation - Some Suggestions

- 1. Submit to God's power in our lives - we cannot overcome temptation in our own power - to try to is to fail**

***James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.***

***Phil 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good favour.***

- 2. Use the makairos (short dagger) of the Spirit which is the rhema (specific saying) of God Memorize verses relating directly to your area of temptation - God will use these powerfully when we are tempted.**

***Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.***

3. **Abstain from areas of weakness. If we have a weakness in the area of lust - stay away from pornographic materials and questionable television programs.**  
***1 Thessalonians 5:22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.***
4. **Remember we are accountable to God.**  
***2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that every man may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.***
5. **Find someone to be accountable to. Bear one another's burdens. If we have someone checking up on us, it is a strong deterrent to sin.**  
***James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed.***  
***Galatians 6:1-4 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.***

**6. Renew our mind by spending time getting to know God and his word.**

***Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed, by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***

***Ephesians 4:22-24 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And that ye put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.***

**16** Do not err my beloved brethren.

**17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.

**18** Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

These three verses intimately fit with the preceding thoughts about temptation. Whenever we are tempted to do evil, we can rest assured that we are not being tempted by God. Why? Because first of all God does not tempt with evil, even remotely, and secondly as we see in these verses, for God to tempt us, he would be working against the very work he started in us.

God is the source of every good thing. Therefore, he cannot be the source of evil. For God to tempt men to do evil would be working against his very nature. He does not consist of light and shadow, but is consistently holy and perfect. He is unchanging in his nature and response towards sin.

Also, he begat us with the word of truth. This point should not be underestimated. The very reason Christ came into the world to die was to deal with our sin problem. Why would God give the most precious gift he could, his very own Son, and then turn around and tempt us to do evil? For God to cause man to sin would be contrary to his nature, his work, and the very reason he sent Christ into the world. It is a ridiculous thought for anyone to think that God is the cause of sin, not only in the universe, but specifically in their own life.

**Test 3 - Response to the Word**

**19** Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

**20** For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

Test number three is an important test. It is the test of response to the word. If anything should characterize the life of a Christian, it is their attitude towards the Bible. True believers do not see the Bible as a book full of suggestions, or just another opinion, but as essential rules of life.

As believers, we need to be quick to hear the word, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Many would like to talk much more than they want to listen. They desire to be the bigshots and the teachers, but reluctant to hear those things that God would have them know.

**21** Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

The word translated “superfluity of naughtiness” is *hruparion*. Medically it was used to refer to wax that had built up inside a person’s ear so as to prevent hearing. If there is anything regarding the Bible, it is that whenever one has a lot of sin and baggage in one’s life, their ability to hear and respond to the word of God is impeded.

#### **Some Things That Inhibit Hearing**

- 1. Sin - James 1:21**
- 2. Rebellion - Ezekiel 12:2**
- 3. Refusal to hear - Zechariah 7:11**
- 4. Turning to apostates and false teachers - 2 Timothy 4:3-4**
- 5. Low view of God and Scripture - Jeremiah 6:10**
- 6. Satan inhibits hearing - Matthew 13:19; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4**
- 7. God's judgement - Luke 8:18; Acts 28:27**
- 8. Lack of salvation - 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 8:47**

#### **Blessings Which Accompany Hearing**

- 1. Wisdom to take God's Word and apply the principles to everyday life  
Matthew 7:24-25**
- 2. Fruit - Matthew 13:23**
- 3. Salvation - Romans 10:14**
- 4. Blessing of God - James 1:25**
- 5. Instruction - 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

**22** But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only deceiving your own selves.

**23** For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.

**24** For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

What should our true response to the word be? It is summed up in one word, “obedience.” For the believer, our only true response should be immediate obedience to the word of God. Unfortunately, many take the Bible as just another opinion that can be weighed with every other opinion.

If we do not obey the word, we deceive ourselves. We are likened to a person who beholds their face in a mirror, note some things that need to be taken care of, and neglect to do anything. As a result, when they leave the mirror, they forget all about how they looked.



### Common Attitudes Towards Scripture

#### 1. Academic only

The person who adopts this view sees the Bible as just another ancient document with no relevance for today. This is the approach taken by the vast majority of liberals today. A good example of this in scripture is Paul's confrontation with the Greek philosophers on Mar's Hill found in Acts 17:18-34.

#### 2. Scoffers - 2 Peter 2:3-6

This person is not content to allow scripture to be relevant for others, instead, he must scoff at those who believe it. This person usually cannot accept the Bible because it goes against a preconceived notion or mindset that he is not willing to forego. For example, the uniformitarian cannot accept the creation or the flood since catastrophes cannot happen in the uniformitarian world.

Another rough thing for this person to accept is that there is a transcendent deity they will be accountable to. That is a heavy concept that they do not wish to face.

#### 3. Rejection

This is the person who allows the scripture to be ok for others, but not for me. "If you want to believe the Bible that great for you, but it is not for me". The word for this person is NEGLECT. They may not scoff at the scripture, but they do not treat as holy the things of God.

A good example of rejection is Agrippa in Acts 26.

#### 4. Despiser - Hebrews 10:26-29

This person despises the Word of God. They are usually caught up in this life and in their own mindsets that they have little time for the things of God. They are like the king Jehoiakim who burned the scroll of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 36:23.

#### 5. Hatred - Proverbs 1:29-31

Another form of despise. These people hate God and the things of God.

#### 6. Neglect - Hebrews 2:3; Acts 24:25

This person is too busy with this life to give the things of God any thought at all.

**25** But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Those who obey the word of God receive God's blessings. Most think that obedience to God is a cumbersome and weighty duty that precludes all joy, fun, and laughter. This is exactly the opposite of reality. Believers who obey the word do miss a lot of fun, like hangovers, drunkenness, post-drug letdowns, venereal disease, and a host of other consequences of the "fun" of sin. What is missed, however, is replaced by a peace and joy that transcends any temporary pleasure sin could offer.

### Common Excuses For Disobedience

**“That does not apply to me”**

**“That's right God, those other people are awful. Knock them one on the head for me”**

**“So, nobody's perfect”**

**“Well, so I have a little problem there. But I am really strong here and here etc.”**

**“It really is not that important compared to other things”**

**“I am not ready to obey yet”**

**“I really don't think it says that!”**

**26** If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

**27** But pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

James now turns to three primary examples of how one should respond to the word, namely the tongue, treatment of others, and holy character.

In verse 26, the word used for religious, *threskeia*, refers to the external rites and liturgy. What truth! James is saying that external liturgies mean nothing unless they are backed up by a godly life. The word for bridleth refers to a bit and bridle for a horse. The same word is used again in chapter 3 regarding the dissertation on the tongue. The idea is that a truly godly man will control his tongue. A good insight here is that the tongue is UNCONTROLLABLE if left on it's own. The word “vain” is *mataios*, worthless. Religious activities are worthless unless backed up by a controlled tongue and a godly life.

The second way in which one exhibits their response to the word is in regards to visiting the fatherless and widows. True Christianity always reaches out. Unfortunately, we have allowed the government to take over this job for us. It is a sad thing to note that cults and systems of belief which deny the word of God are often better at treating those less fortunate than true believers.

Finally, one exhibits a true response to the word by keeping themselves holy. The word “unspotted” is *asplou*. I think the idea behind this word is that we are to keep ourselves separated from the world to such an extent that we will not have any of it cling to us. The word “keep” is “to guard”.

An empty professor's attitude towards religion is one of externals, not internals. As long as the outer trappings of religion and piety are in place, the lifestyle and heart mean nothing. Christ condemned this attitude towards religion more that any other thing in his earthly ministry. A true believers attitude is one of obedience and conformance, from the inside out. Hypocrites perform religious duties to be seen of men, true believers do right whether one sees them or not.

**Hypocrisy: Pharisee Style**

- 1. They enforce their religion on others, but do not practice it themselves - Matthew 23:1-4:**
- 2. External piety is emphasized. The attitudes of the heart mean nothing - Matthew 23:5-12.**
- 3. Close the kingdom of God to others - Matthew 23:13.**
- 4. They are greedy and use their religion for their own ends - Matthew 23:14.**
- 5. They proselytize to make other converts who are worse than they - Matthew 23:15.**
- 6. The holy things of God are meaningless. The mundane things of men are elevated - Matthew 23:16-22.**
- 7. Minor items are major issues. Eternal things are relegated to lesser importance - Matthew 23:23-26.**
- 8. They are whitened sepulchures. They appear good but are full of evil and hypocrisy - Matthew 23:27.**
- 9. They cannot stand the truth and kill for a lie - Matthew 23:28-36.**