

Bible Study book of James Chapter 1

Author: **James, a leader of the Jerusalem church**

Audience: **Jewish/Christian – (Twelve Tribes)**

Theme: **James emphasizes that God enables a life of faith that works itself out in action, especially with mercy for those most vulnerable.**

- **Early Date (AD 44–49):** Most traditional scholars date the letter before the Jerusalem Council of AD 49 (described in Acts 15). [1, 2]
- **Lack of Gentile Conflict:** The book addresses Jewish Christians ("the twelve tribes scattered among the nations"). It does not mention any conflict or rules regarding Gentile believers. This absence suggests it was written before the major debates about Gentiles entering the church.
- **The Author:** Church tradition and internal evidence attribute the book to James, the half-brother of Jesus and a primary leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was martyred around AD 62.

The author of James simply identifies himself as “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). Because James the disciple was an early martyr (Acts 12:2), the likely candidate for the authorship of this epistle is James, the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19). A skeptic at the time of Jesus’ ministry (Mark 3:21; John 7:5), he converted after witnessing the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7). James later became a prominent figure in the church (Galatians 2:9).

James participated in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, delivering a speech in support of Paul (Acts 15:13–21). This is significant due to alleged contradictions between James and Paul, particularly regarding justification by faith (James 2:14–26; cf. Ephesians 2:8–9). The truth is that the teachings of Paul and James are complementary. While we are declared righteous through faith alone (Paul’s emphasis), our faith is intended to yield good deeds (James’ emphasis). Paul also emphasized the importance of good conduct resulting from faith in the gospel, aligning with the letter of James (see Ephesians 4:1).

Bible Study book of James Chapter 1

James's letter is filled with famous phrases and quotations that often make their way into Christian conversation:

- Faith produces steadfastness.
- God cannot be tempted.
- Every good and perfect gift comes from above.
- Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.
- Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.
- Even the demons believe—and shudder!
- Faith apart from works is dead.
- Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Outline

- I. Salutation (1:1)
- II. Endures Trials and Temptations (1:2–18)
 - a. Growing Through Trials /Joy and Patience in Trials (1:2–4)
 - b. Wisdom from God (1:5–8)
 - c. Proper Perspective on Poverty and Riches (1:9–11)
 - d. Understanding Temptation (1:12–15)
 - e. Awareness of the Father's Goodness (1:16–18)
- III. Consists of Doing, Not Just Hearing (1:19–27)
 - a. Qualities Needed (1:19–21)
 - b. Be Doers of the Word (1:22–25)
 - c. Pure and undefiled Religion (1:26–27)

Bible Study book of James Chapter 1

Week One: Read James Chapter 1:1-27

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Video [Chapter 1 Book of James](#)

[James 1](#) opens the letter by stating three key themes ([1:2–11](#)): trials in the Christian life, wisdom, and riches and poverty—then restating them in [1:12–27](#). Running through them all is the letter's central concern: "faith that works," with a focus on practical matters related to the Christian's way of life.

James urges believers to meet trials with joy, because trials are the arena in which and the process through which something good develops: trust in the reliability and the goodness of God. This requires wisdom, which gives people the capacity to understand the world in light of God's Word and purposes; believers need it to rejoice in trials.

Temptation is different. It comes not from God but from within each person who, until their body is redeemed, has a bent toward evil. Far from enticing people to evil, God showers blessings on his people.

Finally, James insists that hearing God's word is not enough: to hear and not to take action is to lie to oneself. True religion means caring for widows and orphans, who in most ancient cultures had neither direct means of support nor automatically dependable legal defenders.

I. Salutation (1:1)

- James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, greets the twelve tribes scattered abroad.

1:1 Though James could have identified himself by his influential role in the Jerusalem church ([Gal 2:9](#)) or his kinship with Jesus ([Mt 13:55](#)), he instead calls himself a “servant”—a title that speaks of both his submission to God the Father and the Lord Jesus as well as his divinely delegated teaching role in the tradition of Moses ([Dt 34:5](#)). James is probably writing to early Jewish Christians who were scattered outside Jerusalem by persecution ([Ac 8:1](#); [11:19](#)). He employs Old Testament language (“the twelve tribes”) as a way of encouraging the letter’s recipients that they belong to the true people of God. The letter’s formal introduction (“Greetings”) is found elsewhere within the New Testament only in two letters that are included within the narrative of Acts, one of which is also from James ([Ac 15:23](#); [23:26](#)).

Bible Study book of James Chapter 1

II. Endures Trials and Temptations (1:2–18)

A. Growing Through Trials /Joy and Patience in Trials (1:2–4)

- Count it all joy when facing various trials.
- The testing of faith produces steadfastness (patience/endurance).
- Let steadfastness have its full effect so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

1:2–4 Regardless of the number and variety of trials faced by the letter's recipients, James *commands* these early Christians to reckon such trials as pure joy. Why? Because a sovereign God is working through these difficulties to produce in believers the character quality of endurance or perseverance. This transformation is all part of God's master plan to increasingly conform his people into the image of his Son ([Ro 8:29](#))—a work that will not be fully complete until we stand glorified in his presence ([Ro 8:30](#)). No Christian faces any difficulty apart from the loving stewardship ~~superintendence~~ of the Heavenly Father.

B. Wisdom from God (1:5–8)

- If anyone lacks wisdom, ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault.
- Ask in faith, without doubting.
- The doubter is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed; a double-minded person, unstable in all ways, should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

1:5–8 In this broken world, believers face many difficulties and sorrows. How is it possible to remember the Lord's good and sovereign purposes when facing such trials? The gift of divine wisdom is needed, and James reminds us that God is not a giver who scolds or gives halfheartedly or changes his mind. God generously, with unwavering intent, gives wisdom to those who ask. God does not demean or reproach us because we are needy and frail. In approaching God in prayer, however, one thing is necessary: faith. James contrasts the constancy of God the giver with the erratic doubter. Here James employs one of his many memorable images: the tossing of an unpredictable and erratic sea billow as a picture of the one who doubts God. James is not commanding the believer to work up some sort of extraordinary belief that God will answer a prayer in some specific way. The faith that is required is to believe that God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is all-good, all-loving, and all-powerful, and he wants to give us wisdom to

Bible Study book of James Chapter 1

view our trials from his perspective. If we have lingering fears and doubts, God is pleased with our honest confession and cry for help, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” ([Mk 9:24](#)).

C. Proper Perspective on Poverty and Riches (1:9–11)

- The lowly brother should take pride in his high position.
- The rich should take pride in his humiliation, because like a flower of the field he will pass away.
- The rich man fades away in the midst of his pursuits.

[1:9–11](#) A common trial in this life—and one for which we need divine wisdom to receive under God’s sanctifying sovereignty—is economic privation. Though the world often views a poor person with disdain, God welcomes the poorest Christian believer as an adopted son or daughter, seated “in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” ([Eph 2:6](#)). Wealth can be an even greater trial, as Jesus frequently warned ([Mt 19:23–24](#)). The wealthy believer must embrace their role as a humble slave of Christ. The rich person should remember that riches are fleeting and not find their comfort or hope in them ([Jas 1:10–11](#); [1Ti 6:17–19](#)). Christianity turns worldly values on their head—exalting the humble and humbling the exalted.

D. Understanding Temptation (1:12–15)

- Blessed is the one who endures temptation; he will receive the crown of life promised to those who love God.
- God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.
- Temptation comes from one’s own desires, which entice and drag away.
- Desire conceives and gives birth to sin; sin, when full-grown, brings forth death.

[1:12–15](#) The truly “good life,” and the one approved by God, is not the pain-free life but is instead a life of Christian faithfulness and perseverance through trials. God has given his people great promises as a means of encouraging us through the dark valleys of this broken world. One such promise is the crown of life (or “life as your victor’s crown,” [Rev 2:10](#))—that is, Christians can look forward to God crowning us with eternal life in his presence. When facing temptation to sin, a Christian should remember that God is sinless and never tempts someone to sin. Although demonic or worldly influences may tempt us, the culpability for succumbing to temptation rests with us. Christians must fight against a sin nature—indwelling sinful impulses that must be resisted by the power of the Holy

Bible Study book of James Chapter 1

Spirit. Christians should remain strong in the face of temptation because they could easily fall into the sticky mire of sin. A life lived in unrepentant sin is the highway to death and hell. Thankfully, God's Holy Spirit convicts Christians of sin and enables their repentance and restoration. It is much better, however, to resist initial temptation and avoid the devastating effects of sin in our lives and the lives of those around us.

E. Awareness of the Father's Goodness (1:16–18)

- Do not be deceived: every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change.
- Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.

1:16–18 Temptation does not come from God, but good gifts certainly do! The first such divine gift is salvation. God is constant, reliable, and unwavering in his gracious saving work, something that James picturesquely contrasts with the waxing and waning of the moon or the movement of the sun and stars through the sky (i.e., the “shifting shadows” of the “heavenly lights”). James writes, “[God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth” (v. [18](#)). We see three truths here. First, one's salvation is ultimately the work and choice of God. Second, salvation comes about through a spiritual rebirth. The apostles insist that a true follower of Jesus must be “born again” ([Jn 3:7](#)). Third, the “word of truth,” or the gospel, is the instrument that the Holy Spirit uses to bring about spiritual life. Those who experience this new birth are described as “first-fruits” of all God created. They are the visible token of God's renewing work, which anticipates his transformation of the entire cosmos ([Ro 8:22–23](#); [Rev 21:3–5](#)).

III. Consists of Doing, Not Just Hearing (1:19–27)

A. Qualities Needed (1:19–21)

- Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.
- Human anger does not produce the righteousness of God.
- Put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

B. Be Doers of the Word (1:22–25)

Bible Study book of James Chapter 1

- Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
- A hearer who does not do is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror and then forgets what he was like.
- The one who looks into the perfect law of liberty and perseveres, being a doer, will be blessed in his doing.

C. Pure and Undeified Religion (1:26–27)

- If anyone thinks he is religious but does not bridle his tongue, his religion is worthless.
- Religion that is pure and undeified before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

[1:19–27](#) Transitioning in his typical staccato style, James offers timeless wisdom on sinful anger and hasty speech (vv. [19–20](#)). He then broadens out the exhortation, calling on believers to “get rid of all moral filth” and cultivate the implanted Word of God (v. [21](#)). For the genuine Christian, the Word of God has a lasting and growing presence in their life. Verse [22](#) provides a succinct summary of many themes in the letter: “Do not merely listen to the word [of God], and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” Superficial, nominal, non-transforming faith is not saving faith. Just as a mirror reveals what our faces look like, so the Word of God reveals who we really are and calls us to repentance, faith, and obedience. “The perfect law that gives freedom” (v. [25](#)) is the Old Testament Scriptures as fulfilled and interpreted by Jesus (cf. [Mt 5:17](#)). True freedom is found in obedience to Jesus, something that is only possible for the Spirit-empowered, born-again believer. True religion, warns James, is not a matter of thinking oneself to be religious. True religion, in God’s eyes, is keeping away from wickedness (e.g., evil speech, various moral pollutions in the world) and aligning oneself in word and deed with the priorities of God (e.g., caring for those in society who face the direst material circumstances).

A Key Theme (James 1:22):

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

Resources

NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible

[TGC Knowing the Bible: James](#)

[Bible Gateway Book of James](#)

Life Lessons From James by Max Lucado

NIV Application Bible