

**A PERSONAL  
VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY**

**JAMES**

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

The writer is identified as James. (He doesn't tell us so, but I've always heard that he is believed to be the brother of Jesus.) The following references would lend support to that supposition.

- Gal. 1:19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Paul recognized the Lord's brother as a leader in the church. This would give credence to his writings being considered valuable.
- Acts 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church.  
Acts 12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod in 44 AD. This epistle is dated much later.

He wants us to identify him as a servant of God (the Father) and the Lord Jesus Christ (the Son). The Greek for the word *servant* indicates a slave. It's interesting to me that he didn't just say Jesus or Jesus Christ but the "**Lord Jesus Christ.**" He is emphasizing the fact that he is in a position of submission.

Who is he writing to? The twelve tribes—Jews/Israelites—who are scattered abroad. Evidently this was a general letter to be shared with all Jewish believers in foreign lands.

**James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;** "Brethren" – We know he isn't saying that they are from the same physical family, but they are of the same nationality. It is also reference to the fact that all who claim Jesus as Savior are part of a spiritual family.

"joy" = cheerfulness, calm delight

Why would he say to count it all joy when you fall into divers (various, different kinds of) temptations? This is pretty cool since it parallels what I was studying in 1 Peter today when I was writing Dixie. This is the same thought as expressed in 1 Peter 1:6. What I wrote to her on that verse applies here: "It was interesting to check out the Greek for "temptations." The words used were putting to proof through trial or testing or temptation; an experiment. What is the purpose of an experiment? To test a theory or prove an accepted truth. These manifold (various types) temptations are necessary to reveal who we are and what we actually believe. They reveal the positive and weak areas of our lives—our strengths and/or areas of need/weakness."

Notice that the definition for *joy* references a calmness and serenity through the time of testing because you are focused on the end result identified in the next two verses.

**James 1:3 Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.**

James goes on to explain that we should "count it all joy" when our faith is tried (tested/proved) because it produces patience. I always think of patience as

enduring, but when I checked the Greek, it implied **cheerful** endurance. (And the measurement bar rises higher and higher.)

**James 1:4** But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

“perfect” work – reaching completion

“perfect and entire” – mature, complete in every part

My paraphrase – When you have learned to have cheerful endurance in the tough times, you will become a mature person, complete in every way, lacking nothing—the result: A joyful servant of Jesus Christ.

(7/09) Note from Wiersbe: “Let” denotes a surrendered life. Patience is the measure of maturity.

**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.

“Wisdom” – skill, cleverness, learning.....Webster: power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action based on knowledge, experience, understanding, etc.

Seems to me that the whole description of wisdom is involved in making decisions. This wisdom is based on knowledge (of which our best source is the Bible), experiences (both good and bad), and understanding (the base of which is God-given and is further built upon through reading, listening and observation).

James is saying that God will provide us with the necessary wisdom if we will just ask Him. (Just remember that the way He answers that prayer might not be how we expect.)

It’s also interesting that he says that God will give this to “all” men. Obviously, he is writing to fellow believers, and the verse does start with “if any of **you**.” It also seems obvious that only those who believe in God would approach Him to ask Him for wisdom. We also know from other scripture that the keys to answered prayer are “abiding in Him,” having His “words abide in you” and asking “according to His will.”

**John 15:7** If ye *abide in me*, and *my words abide in you*, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

**1John 5:14** And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing *according to his will*, he heareth us.

He won’t just give a little bit of wisdom—He will give liberally, abundantly, generously. He will never answer you by “upbraiding” you, using insult, taunting or reproach. You don’t have to fear that He will think your request stupid.

There is no equivocation in his statement—This prayer **will** be answered.

**James 1:6** 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.

**James 1:7** For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

**James 1:8** A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.

When we ask in faith, we are to ask confidently, without doubt.

“wavering” = to distinguish, to judge: —decide(1), discern(1), disputed(1), doubt(2), doubting(2), doubts(2), judge(1), judged(1), made distinction(1), made distinctions(1), misgivings(m)(2), pass judgment(1), regards as superior(1), took issue(1), waver(1).

Maybe the above entry from Strong’s on “wavering” will shed some extra light on the next couple of verses. I thought of wavering as maybe changing your mind or just doubting. It’s interesting that the root words mean to distinguish, to judge. *Faith* means we are confident, trusting implicitly on God’s answer or provision without passing any kind of judgment or having any misgivings regarding what the answer or provision is or how it is given. My tendency has always been to question God about how He is working in my life or the lives of those I love. Thankfully, He has helped me to almost overcome that tendency altogether.

I think that goes on to explain verses 7 and 8. Either we have faith in God or we don’t. Either we believe His word or we don’t. The Lord will only honor that prayer that is made in faith. My paraphrase for verse 8 would be: If a person isn’t sure about what he believes, how can you depend on him or believe him in other areas of his life. This reminds me of the importance of I Peter 3:15.

**1Pet. 3:15** But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be ready always to give an answer* to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

**James 1:9** Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

**James 1:10** But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

These are some hard verses. The only way I can make sense is to go back to verses 2-4. If you interpret “low degree” to mean poor (in contrast to rich, v10), then maybe the rejoicing is to come because of the exalted position in God’s kingdom you attain after “letting patience have its perfect work” (v4). Having faith in God in spite of “perceived” and/or “real” lack or want in our lives and believing that He cares about little old me, is a type of temptation. I think this poor/rich contrast can apply to any area in which we are comparing ourselves to others (i.e., money, talent, friends, intelligence, etc.).

Using the same logic, when the rich face “temptations,” times when they are brought low, it is cause for the same rejoicing—what it produces in their lives in the end. Why? Because physically---he is going to die; but eternally it will give reward—we will be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

**James 1:11** 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 man fade away in his ways.

The sun with the burning heat = temptations

“withering grass” = man

As the rich man goes thru the temptation and it has its perfect work, he realizes that his riches are nothing; they will be lost at his death.

**James 1:12** Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

The reward for the “man that endureth temptation” comes when he is tried (at the judgment seat of Christ). The Greek for the word “endure” carries with it the idea of patiently persevering under the weight or stress of the time of testing.

The reward for the person that endures--the crown of life, eternal life in the presence of the Father. This reward is promised to “them that love Him.”

Obviously, only those who love the Lord will be able to endure the temptations and let patience have its perfect work.

**James 1:13** 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:

**James 1:14** But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

Again, it is interesting that James is using different words that we have translated tempted(ation)(eth). The word in v12 is the one for putting to proof and the one in this verse is “causative, because, how, the fact that.” I’ve always preferred to use the word “testing” for what comes from God and the word “temptation” for what Satan puts in our path. (Yet in Job’s case, it was both.) The key is that God cannot be tempted with evil; He is holy and righteous. It would produce no desire in His being to go against His will. Man, on the other hand, can be tempted with evil because of his sinful nature, the lust of the flesh, and pride. God will not “put man to proof” through the use of evil (by appealing to our flesh or pride). It doesn’t even have to be Satan when we are “drawn away by our lust and enticed”; it is our own sinful nature.

(5/07) I found some old bible conference notes where Warren Wiersbe taught on the book of James. I wanted to include an excerpt from those notes at this point.

Here he talks of temptations. If we aren’t careful, trials can become temptations. What turns trials into temptations? God tests many to bring out the best in many, and the devil tempts many to bring out the worst in many. Trials turn into temptations when we start blaming God and looking for a shortcut method to get out of difficulty. Temptation is a bad way to do a good thing. It is a good thing to graduate from school; it is a bad thing to cheat to do it. A temptation is a shortcut to do a good thing. Every time we have fallen for temptation, it is because we have fallen for the bait.

**James 1:15** Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

The word *conceive* jumps out. In my mind it is the planting of the seed to bring forth fruit. If lust is given a chance to root itself in our being, it will result in sin. The consequence of sin is spiritual death.

**James 1:16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.**

Paraphrase based on the Greek for “err” --Do not wander, go astray, be misled, or be misguided my beloved brethren, members of my family in the faith.

**James 1:17 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.**

The first words that jump out at me are *good* and *perfect*. What is the difference? *Good* implies moral, honest, kind, things that are beneficial. *Perfect* implies that something has attained completion, without flaw or blemish, or mature (according to Webster and the Greek). I had always thought about the “without blemish” part, but not the part about being completed. The point being, that all the best things are gifts from above. What is above? It is explained in the next phrase, “cometh down from the Father of lights.” We know that this is God, but why the phrase “Father of lights”? The Greek does give some insight. The word for “lights” indicates revealing or making manifest and making known one’s thoughts. He is showing us who He is by the gifts that He gives us. He is love.

**1John 4:8** He that loveth not knoweth not God; *for God is love.*

(1/05) In reading through this verse again, I am now reminded of the One who gifts people with ‘every good and every perfect gift.’ He is the Holy Spirit.

**1Cor. 12:7-11** But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: **But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.**

The good and perfect gifts being primarily referenced are the gifts of the Spirit as described in Romans 12, 1Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. For so many years I connected these gifts with physical, material blessings. I believe that is also true, but the most valuable gifts—the gifts that can be described as good and perfect—are the gifts of the Spirit.

Another great truth—God has no variableness; He doesn’t change. He doesn’t even have a shadow of turning. Our shadow reflects our image, our position; His shadow never turns. His reflection is always the same. This is one of the key truths to me in interpreting scripture. Even though I admit that there are many truths that are put into question by other scripture (i.e., eternal security), I rely on the fact that God doesn’t change and He doesn’t lie. The perceived problem has to be something to do with man’s translation (admitting much change in the understanding of the meanings of words over the years, as well as the fact that some languages have more shades of meaning that we lump into one word—i.e., the word LOVE, which in Jesus’ time was expressed by 3 different words).

Sometimes the problem can be caused by our own closed minds and not being open to new leading by the Spirit. I am sure there are many other explanations.

**James 1:18** *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

I think this is still in the context of talking to fellow believers. How did we receive faith? Through the word. (**Rom 10:17**—Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.) As believers we are like the firstfruits of His creatures—the beginnings of a new kingdom born from a fallen creation.

I almost missed a crucial point—we are begotten, given new life, a new beginning, because of His will. **2Pet. 3:9** says, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that all should come to repentance.”

**James 1:19** *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:*

What wonderful advice!! Our natural tendency (or maybe I should say my) is usually to speak quickly, respond with a short fuse, and be slow to listen. I have really had to work at being a listener. I think I have developed the ability to be a good listener and to work with a much longer fuse, but I still have a lot of work to do on the “slow to speak” part. (11/05) The writer of Proverbs addressed this truth.

*Prov. 10:19* In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips *is* wise.

(11/05) I found a quote in the Believer’s Bible Commentary attributed to Epictetus that I liked.

“Nature has given to man one tongue, but two ears, that we may hear from others twice as much as we speak.”

By the way, the “wherefore” is important. Because God has given us so many good and perfect gifts and because we are representatives of His new kingdom, we should be all the more conscious of our representation and how it reflects on the Savior.

**James 1:20** *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

When we respond in our flesh, in anger or wrath, we are not reflecting the righteousness of God. In fact, we are reflecting quite the opposite.

**James 1:21** *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*

*Wherefore*—Since our goal is to work the righteousness of God (v20), we should “lay apart” (put aside, quit participating in) any type of wickedness or evil.

*Naughty*—worthless, good for nothing, corrupt, disobedient

*Filthy*—nasty, corrupt, polluted, impure, obscene, unclean, vulgar

When you look at the meanings of these words, it is very convicting to me. How much time in my life has been spent on things that are worthless, good for nothing, polluted, even vulgar (i.e., especially so called “entertainment”). I have made far too many compromises in my life. It’s interesting that James chose to use the word “superfluity,” meaning a super abundance of something, with the word *naughty*. We all try to avoid filthiness, but are often quick to justify “naughty” (therefore it is in more abundance in our life). Filthy sounds dirty; naughty doesn’t sound so bad.

When I looked up the word “engrafted” in the Greek, it said “innate, implanted.” Webster states that it is “to insert or introduce in such a way as to make a part of something.” Meekness is gentleness and humility. We are to receive the Word with gentleness (as opposed to in a defensive posture, ready to fight for and justify our way of living) and humility (in a posture of recognition of our need and desire to do whatever it takes to make it a part of our being). We are to receive the Word so as to make it a part of us, ready to apply its teaching to our lives. Why? For the salvation of our souls.

**James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.**

Following in context here, James is saying that we should be doers of the Word. (The Word doesn’t make justification for not striving for perfection). Matt 5:48 says that we should be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. Verse 4 above tells us that we should be patient that we may become perfect. We aren’t just supposed to listen to the Word and pretend that makes us good. We can’t even rest on the time we spend reading or studying the Word. We have to be **doers** of the Word if we want to reflect Jesus and the righteousness of God.

**James 1:23 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:**

**James 1:24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.**

James is using an object lesson here. He is comparing the one who hears the Word but doesn’t do the Word to a person who is looking in a mirror. You look in the mirror and get yourself presentable and go on about your business. You aren’t thinking about that reflection in the mirror as you go about your business. When we just listen to the Word and aren’t trying to apply it to our daily living, it’s like we forgot what we heard and go on about our business like it doesn’t apply to us. I think many “Christians” respond to the Word this way. They do the appropriate thing by going to church on Sundays or by reading a daily devotional, but they never really intend to “partake” of it and let it produce any changes in their life. They figure they are good enough. (I think I’ve gone through many such periods in my life--justifying decisions made by the fact that those words were for other times, people, and places. I chose only to absorb the words that were comforting and affirming and didn’t impact my choices so as to infringe in areas of desire or pleasure. That is one of my biggest regrets.)