



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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Lesson 1

James 1:1-8 Commentary New International Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

(James 1:1) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Most agree that James, the writer of this letter, was the brother of Jesus the Messiah, and James became the leader of the Christian Church in Jerusalem while most of the first original disciples served as missionaries outside Jerusalem. The Jews that were scattered (dispersed) around the world after the fall of the Kingdom of Israel (about 722 BC) and the fall of the Kingdom of Judah (about 587 BC) were called "the Dispersion." The final major dispersion of the Jews took place when, according to the prophecy of Jesus, the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. In Mark 13:1-2, we read: "As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' Then Jesus asked him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'"

Before and after the coming of Jesus, many Jews left Judea for business and other reasons. During the lifetime of Jesus, James, and Paul, more Jews lived outside Judea than in the former kingdoms. Wherever the Jews went as a community, they created synagogues in cities and towns. From

the Book of Acts, we learn how Christian missionaries first went to these synagogues to preach the good news about Jesus. Gentile God-fearers and Jews in many of these synagogues became Christians and joined with pagans converts to form churches in these places. Then, after persecution came upon the Christians living in Jerusalem, many Christians scattered around the world and preached the gospel wherever they went. From Jerusalem, James wrote his letter to these dispersed Christians and these new churches that he called “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.” Many of the places where dispersed Jews lived are listed in Acts 2: 5-11, for many dispersed Jews travelled to Jerusalem to celebrate on the Day of Pentecost. Probably several copies of James’ letter were sent to or circulated among various churches outside Jerusalem.

Though James was a brother of Jesus the Messiah, he did not claim that relationship as a badge of distinction that set him above others. He did not write, “Listen to me because I am Jesus’ brother.” Instead, he called himself a servant (or better, a “slave”) of the Lord Jesus Christ. The NASB translates the Greek word for servant or slave into “bond-servant.” In the NASB, we read, “James, a *bond-servant* of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.” In the Old Testament, a *bond-servant* or *bondslave* was one who freely chose to serve his master and family for the rest of his life because they loved him and he loved them and he believed them worthy to be served. James committed himself to serving only Jesus Christ, his Master, and Jesus’ family, the Church. James knew Jesus was worthy to be served as his Lord and Savior. James was not “double-minded.” He did not try to serve two masters. He did not serve himself part-time and Jesus part-time. As his God and King, James chose to serve Jesus Christ and God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit forever. For the sake of Jesus Christ, the Church, and a dying world that needed to hear and receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ, James became a slave to God the Father and Jesus the Messiah in response to their call to follow Jesus. In Colossians 4:12, Paul wrote of a *bondslave* and how he served the Church: “Epaphras, who is one of your number, a *bondslave* of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.”

(James 1:2) Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

James wrote to Christians in the Church as part of the family of Jesus, as adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, as fellow co-workers for the sake of the gospel. A “trial” in the broadest meaning is any difficulty, spiritual test, or temptation to do evil from the world, the flesh, or the devil that we may anticipate happening or be currently experiencing. A trial in a more limited sense can result in a judge or jury handing down a verdict of guilty or not guilty. As Christians, how we face trials is different from the way many other people face them. When we face a trial “of any kind” we can face it with “nothing but joy”! Why? Because we know that God our loving Creator and Father, and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, and the Holy Spirit our indwelling Guide and Helper, will work together to help us as we face all our trials—even before an unjust judge or jury. We find joy through God’s working within us and our working together with God as we encounter trials. We know God will eventually work out everything for our good here and hereafter. In Romans 8:28, we read: “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” We know that with God’s help we will pass the test, and we will only pass the test through God’s grace (God’s merciful guidance and power). We know we will pass the test because we trust God and the written Word of God, the Bible, the written Truth. Knowing in advance that we can pass the test with the help of God brings us joy! From where does our ultimate joy come from in times of trouble? The Bible tells us in Psalms 94:17-19, “If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence. When I thought, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.” Throughout all our trials, the steadfast love of God working within us will bring us joy.

(James 1:3) because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

In school, when we take a test, we think of a receiving a grade based on how well we have demonstrated to our teacher how much we have learned. A graded test can also show us where we need to spend more time in study. A

graded test can show us and others whether we are ready to perform a life-saving surgery, fly an airplane across an ocean, build a bridge over a canyon, or perform other important tasks reliably and safely. A graded test can benefit others and ourselves and make us ready to do what is best and right in various situations. We can receive a passing or a failing grade, and we can score high, low, or in the middle. If we truly want to learn and do our best, after we take a test, we will consider where we have fallen short, where we need to study more, and how we can practice more diligently and successfully what we have been learning to do better. For this reason alone, taking a test and receiving a grade can bring us joy.

By God's grace and through of our faith in Jesus Christ, we do not take our daily tests and face our trials or suffering alone. As Christians, God is within us and on our side: God is for us! Because God is for us, His children, God will help us pass our tests or help us do better next time when facing a trial. We can pray and trust Him in all circumstances (not just in a school classroom, but wherever we face afflictions, trials, and tests of any kind).

Furthermore, all our tests have a purpose. In this verse, James mentions one of the purposes of every test of our faith. The testing of our faith produces endurance. We can choose what attitude we will commit to every time we suffer for any reason. We can choose to face our sufferings, our trials, and our tests with joy and remember they will make us stronger spiritually if not also physically and better prepare us for the future. They will enable us to develop a closer, more trustful relationship with Jesus Christ, who also suffered and faced various trials. Each test we endure, we can endure joyfully knowing they will make us stronger and teach us new and better ways to point people to Jesus as our all-sufficient Lord and Savior. When we face trials and tests, Jesus does not expect us to endure these trials or take these tests alone; sometimes He will send other believers to help us endure the trial and pass the test. Then, we are prepared and strengthened to help others as others have helped us. Trials and tests give us the best opportunities to show forth our faith in Jesus Christ and His love and power in every situation. Some unbelievers will come to believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior when they see the difference He makes in the lives of believers, especially as they are undergoing trials and enduring.

(James 1:4) Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

When tried and tested, sometimes the most believers can do is endure their suffering. Or, keep on withstanding and standing as Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:13, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to *withstand* on that evil day, and having done everything, to *stand* firm.” When suffering, the followers of Jesus can keep on enduring and praying not knowing when the trial and test will end. Unlike in a schoolroom, we do not know how long our test will take or when our class in “Christ-like Endurance” will come to an end. The more an athlete trains and follows the directions of a competent coach, the stronger they become, the more they learn, and the better they compete. When they win their competition, they know their training and endurance had its full effect.

As Christians, we joyfully endure, because we know trials will help us mature spiritually until God has made us complete and prepared us for heaven. We joyfully endure knowing that we will eventually have all the spiritual tools and training needed to help others come to faith in Jesus or strengthen their faith in Jesus when they face trials. As Christians, the more trials we face and endure with His help, the more we can trust in Jesus, the more we can learn from our study of the Bible and other Christians, the more we can pray and grow spiritually, and the more our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior can grow. Jesus does not intend for anyone to remain a baby Christian; rather, He works in our lives to make us spiritual adults if we will cooperate and obey His teachings as our Chief, Coach, Commander for life, as our Lord and Savior. Jesus intends for us to serve Him and others His way and not our way. Sometimes our trials and tests will show us where we need to make changes, so we can follow Jesus more closely in the future instead of expecting Him to follow us wherever we go. In every trial, Jesus can empower and guide us, so we will lack nothing needed to serve Him in the world and prepare us for lasting joy in heaven.

(James 1:5) If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

To pass any spiritual test or endure any trial or affliction, we need wisdom in addition to the merciful guidance and power of God. Obviously, James wrote his letter to Christians who had suffered persecution, dispersion from their churches and homes, and martyrdom and death among other trials. To find the best way to endure and witness for Jesus Christ effectively during whatever trial or test we face, we need wisdom which the Holy Spirit will give us as we prayerfully study the Bible. The Holy Spirit will give us the light of understanding and the application we need for our situation as we read the Bible. We need the wisdom of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to know how best to face every trial and pass every test, to endure with steadfast faith and love when suffering, and to experience joy even during pain and loss. If we ask God humbly, God will give us wisdom and the fruit of the Holy Spirit when we ask Him. God will give us more wisdom than we need and exceed our expectations. God gives ungrudgingly. God does not begrudge or resent giving us good gifts with the thought that He will be losing something that He would rather selfishly keep. God's love for us motivates Him to give us exactly what we need. We are God's children, and our Father wants to see us mature and become more like His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. God wants to give us what is best for us and others in all our trials and afflictions.

(James 1:6) But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

To ask in faith means we fully expect God the Father to give us the wisdom we need and the guidance of the Holy Spirit we need to lead and empower us to defeat the devil's schemes, resist our unholy desires, avoid the temptations of the world, and develop a Christ-like character and spirit. To ask in faith means trusting that Jesus will do all we need done for us so we can endure to the end whatever comes our way. To ask in faith means we believe Jesus will enable us to pray and serve others during our tests and trials. With God's help, our trials will produce endurance. God will help us develop complete confidence in Jesus, a confidence that will prepare us for any trials yet to come. Otherwise, we will let our circumstances determine our thoughts and feelings and what happens to us rather than let the Lord

Jesus Christ work through us and show that all things work for our good.

The waves of the sea can be totally at the mercy of the wind, but Jesus showed that He can control the wind and calm the seas with a word of peace. When facing trials, tests, afflictions, and suffering, remember what Jesus did as described in Mark 4:37-41, “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’” We do not need to be tossed about by our circumstances, we can trust in Jesus who will always do what is best for us and all concerned.

(James 1:7) That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

(James 1:8) Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

The KJV and the NIV translate James 1:6, 7, and 8, as three separate sentences; whereas, the NRSV combines verses 7 & 8 as part of verse 6 into one sentence. Whether separated as two verses or combined as one, the meaning has not changed.

James 1:6 But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind;

(James 1:7, 8) for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Double-minded comes from the Greek word translated “double-souled.” Imagine two people with opposite views and different faiths living in the same body and often fighting one another. Imagine trusting in God sometimes and other times trusting in yourself and thinking you know more than God when it comes to deciding whether to believe in and obey

God or not. When doubters think it beneficial, they may trust and obey God sometimes, but they will never do so completely. Partial belief is unbelief. Partial obedience is disobedience. A doubter will never endure in a trial or pass a test that requires trust in God and obedience to God in all circumstances. A doubter is unstable; therefore, a doubter cannot be trusted with a place of responsibility in the church. A doubter will have misgivings about who Jesus is as revealed in the Bible. A doubter will refuse to believe that the Bible is true in all it affirms. A doubter will never be a trustworthy guide for Christians. One who doubts the love, goodness, power, words, and wisdom of God as revealed in the Bible probably does not and should not expect God to give them what they need. Certainly, they probably will not and should not expect God to give them what they need in times of trouble. God expects believers in Jesus Christ the Lord to exercise their faith and trust Him no matter the circumstances, and especially in times of trouble. Believers in Jesus Christ know they can ask God and receive wisdom and strength to endure in unchanging situations, for God will always work those situations out for their good and the good of others.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Who was James and who were the twelve tribes of the Dispersion?
2. How should a Christian respond when they face any kind of trial?
3. Why should the Christian respond to their trials in this way?
4. What is the ultimate purpose of our trials according to these verses?
5. What will God ungrudgingly give Christians when they ask Him? Why should Christians ask for this?

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