

JAMES

Chapter 1

Greeting

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

1:1 *servant*. Humble title applying to Christians in general (Ac 2:18; 4:29) or, as here, to leaders (Ti 1:1). (TLSB)

twelve tribes. Jews scattered throughout the Mediterranean world. (TLSB)

Testing of Your Faith

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. 12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

1:2 *joy*. Confidence based on the assurance of hope in Christ (cf 1Pt 1:8–9). (TLSB)

brothers. James addresses the readers as brothers 15 times in this short letter. He has many rebukes for them, but he chides them in brotherly love. (CSB)

In the Book, “brother” always refers to a Christian who is living faithfully (cf 1:9).

trials. The same Greek root lies behind the word “trials” here and the word “tempted” in v. 13. In vv. 2–3 the emphasis is on difficulties that come from outside; in vv. 13–15 it is on inner moral trials such as temptation to sin. (CSB)

Gk *peirasmos*. Any challenging circumstances that befall Christians. Does not refer to being tempted, as in vv 13–14. (TLSB)

1:3 testing. Same as “trials” in v 2 (cf Lk 8:13; 22:28). (TLSB)

steadfastness. Translated “patience” in Lk 8:15. Cf Jas 1:12. (TLSB)

1:4 perfect and complete. Not sinless but mature, reaching the goal of faith: eternal life (cf v 12). (TLSB)

lacking in nothing. Not referring to material blessings but to a strong faith. Contrast with the person lacking wisdom in vv 5–8. (TLSB)

1:5 any of you. In Jas, “anyone” refers to struggling Christians who are being called back to faithfulness (cf v 23; 2:18). (TLSB)

wisdom. Enables one to face trials with “pure joy” (v. 2). Wisdom is not just acquired information but practical insight with spiritual implications (see Pr 1:2–4; 2:10–15; 4:5–9; 9:10–12). (CSB)

Ability to reach and implement proper decisions when facing challenges. (TLSB)

without reproach. God gives generously to all who ask in faith, whatever their past. (TLSB)

1:6 wave of the sea. See Eph 4:14. (CSB)

Without trust in God’s faithfulness, a person has no solid foundation. (TLSB)

1:7 Only in faith, which trusts in God’s provision, does one receive His blessings (cf Lk 11:9–13). (TLSB)

1:8 double-minded. Having two allegiances: God and the world (cf Lk 16:13). Such a person cannot persevere. (TLSB)

1:9–10 lowly brother... one who is rich.† Since James’s discussions of wisdom (vv. 5–8) and of the poor man and the rich man (vv. 9–11) appear between the two sections on trials (vv. 2–4 and v. 12), vv. 5–11 may also have to do with trials. The Christian who suffers the trial of poverty is to take pride in his high position (v. 9) as a believer (see 2:5), and the wealthy Christian is to take pride (v. 10) in trials that bring him low, perhaps including the loss of his wealth. (CSB)

The humble brother is contrasted with the rich person. Wealth brings certain privileges and is often seen as a sign of self-accomplishment. Yet Scripture frequently warns about the temptations associated with wealth, and those who trust in wealth apart from Christ are condemned (Mt 19:23–26). The Magnificat makes a similar contrast (Lk 1:46–55). (TLSB)

1:9 exaltation. Or, “exalted condition,” given by God (4:10). (TLSB)

1:11 pursuits. General behavior, or specifically the pursuit of wealth. (TLSB)

1:12 Serves more appropriately as a conclusion to vv 2–12, not the start of a new paragraph. (TLSB)

Blessed. See Jer 17:7–8; Mt 5:3–12; see also notes on Ps 1:1; Mt 5:3; Rev 1:3. (CSB)

David P. Scaer (*James: The Apostle of Faith* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983], 52) sees “the man” as Christ, especially because the word for *man* is “male” (*anēr*) and not “person”

(*anthrōpos*). Certainly Christ is the blessed man who best resisted temptation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

The rhythm of this verse reminds us of Psalm 1. To be blessed means that we are content, serene, and confident that He is still managing the world's business, confident that He manages everything for our ultimate good and confident that our life's story is guaranteed to have a happy ending. To be blessed means that we are aware that God intervenes in our lives to make good things happen for us. (PBC)

The Messiah was so closely connected with His people that the Jew believed he shared in all the benefits the Messiah earned. (Scaer)

remains steadfast – This is the same quality that Jesus praises and rewards in each of the seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. All believers need to grow in this kind of spiritual toughness, because we are under daily assault from Satan. (PBC)

trial - peirasmon, “trial.” This pericope from James contains six forms of this same root. This one is the sole noun; four are verbs and one is an adjective. It is the same verb used in the day's Gospel to tell of Jesus' temptation by Satan, the adversary. Believers are constantly under attack to turn from God. As becomes evident from vv 16–18, the greatest temptation is to be deceived about God and forget or reject the new birth he has given us through his Word of truth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

James does not identify the trials faced by these early Christians, but in this context, it seems that the lure of wealth was an issue (cf 4:13–5:6). (TLSB)

crown. The Greek for this word was the usual term for the wreath placed on the head of a victorious athlete or military leader. (CSB)

Symbol of eternal life with God. Parallels “perfect and complete” (v 4). (TLSB)

Scaer observes that this is the first use of this phrase in the Scriptures (Scaer, 53). It is echoed in Rev 2:10, where our Lord emphasizes faith in the face of temptation: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” It is eternal life in God's glory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

This epistle was written shortly after the persecution which led to the death of Stephen and the exile of Peter from Jerusalem. The reference to the crown of life as a theological term applying to eternal life could have taken on special significance, since Stephen in Greek means crown. (Scaer)

life. Eternal life, as the future tense of the verb (“will receive”) indicates. (CSB)

1:13 *tempted*. In vv. 13–14 the verb refers to temptations that test one's moral strength to resist sin (see note on Mt 4:1). (CSB)

The testings of vv 2–12 refer to external circumstances; the temptings of vv 13–15 refer to internal struggles against sin. (TLSB)

“Lead us not into temptation” does not mean that our Father might tempt us. It is a prayer that the Lord would successfully lead us through temptation, without being trapped. God’s testing (tempting) of Abraham must, of course, also be understood in this light. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

Luther: “[God] does not test in order that we may fear and hate Him like a tyrant but to the end that He may exercise and stir up faith and love in us. Satan, however, tempts for evil, in order to draw you away from God and to make you distrust and blaspheme God” (AE 4:132). (TLSB)

God cannot be tempted. Because God in his very nature is holy, there is nothing in him for sin to appeal to. (CSB)

If Jesus were only true God, he could not be tempted. He was tempted because he is also true man. Heb 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

tempts no one. While God indeed allows, and sometimes even may send hardships upon His children, His purpose in that is always good: to test their faith as genuine and to draw them closer to Him, away from this sick and dying planet. God never, ever wants His children to choose evil. (PBC)

1:14 *by his own desire* – Our temptation problem is not from God but really comes from within: cooking away in each person’s heart is a sinful self that will never be converted. It restlessly seeks to dominate our thinking and values. (PBC)

Temptation into sin comes from us, from our own fallen nature. It does not come from the Lord as some rabbis taught (see Martin Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971, 1979], 252). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

1:15 The three stages—desire, sin, death—are seen in the temptations of Eve (Ge 3:6–22) and David (2Sa 11:2–17). (CSB)

fully grown. As a mature faith results in a crown of life (v 12), so the ultimate result of unforgiven sin is death. (TLSB)

death. Sin consumes and destroys. (TLSB)

“Brings forth death.” The verb here, *apokuei*, appears only twice in the New Testament. Both are in this pericope (again in v 18). Here, sin brings forth death. There, the Word of truth gives us birth into new life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

1:16 *Do not be deceived.* Deception comes from the world, which has rejected God. This is best understood as the conclusion of vv 13–15, not the beginning of a new paragraph. (TLSB)

planasthe, “deceived.” Another word for temptation in this text. One might count six different words that speak of temptation and its work in this section of James. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

1:17 *Every good and perfect gift is from above.* God provides everything we need, including wisdom (v 5), exaltation (v 9), and new life (v 18). (TLSB)

Father of ... lights. God is the Creator of the heavenly bodies, which give light to the earth, but, unlike them, he does not change. (CSB)

Refers to God's creative work (Gn 1:3–5, 14–19). (TLSB)

That is, all that is beneficial for us and our salvation and everything that is complete are “from the Father of lights,” who created the sun, moon, and stars. Those heavenly lights we consider certain and reliable, but the Father is even more certain and reliable. “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal 3:6). “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn 1:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

The vocabulary of this section with its strong Christological terminology and salvific expressions indicates that James is speaking of God's plan of salvation in an abbreviated way. It could be paraphrased in this way: “The one perfect and good gift of salvation has already come down from heaven.” (Scaer)

Coming down is the theological term in the NT to describe the incarnation. (Scaer)

God steadfastness is like the stars. (Scaer)

variation or shadow - Trials and temptations test the believer's faith. James encourages perseverance. Yet the very temptations themselves present the believer with a problem. Is God tempting me? As *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (4.408–11) points out, Jewish rabbis had long struggled with this problem. The answer is not “God is tempting me” (v 13). Rather, every good and perfect gift comes from him who provides light and enlightenment, physical and spiritual light. Do not charge him with the evil that comes from man's disobedience. While the lights of the firmament created by him (Job 38:28) may vary and change, sometimes bringing light and sometimes causing shadows, the Father and Creator is not that way; he does not change. From him comes only that which is good and perfect. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Though the heavenly bodies change and move, God and His Word remain constant and sure. We can trust His promises. (TLSB)

1:18 *brought us forth.* Not a reference to creation but to regeneration (see Jn 3:3–8). (CSB)

Reference to new life in Christ through Baptism. Cassiodorus Senator (sixth century) notes: “By holy Baptism he declared us to be begotten, freely, not by meriting, so that by a new restoration we might be born into his family” (*Complexiones in epistulis Apostolorum* Jac 3, MPL 70, p 1377). (TLSB)

word of truth. The proclamation of the gospel (see 1Pe 1:23–25). (CSB)

“The Word of truth” seems to anticipate the fourth gospel, where Jesus is identified as “the Word” (1:1) and “the Truth” (14:6). It is not improbable that John in developing his unique understanding of Jesus as the incarnate Word and the Truth may have been influenced by James. The influence of James on the fourth gospel should not be discounted. (Scaer)

The Father's unchangeable, good, and perfect will not only created us, but also caused us to be born from above by the Gospel, the Word of truth (see 2 Tim 2:15; Jn 1:13; 1 Pet 1:23). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

firstfruits. See Lev 23:9–14. Just as the first sheaf of the harvest was an indication that the whole harvest would eventually follow, so the early Christians were an indication that a great number of people would eventually be born again. (CSB)

Best of the harvest, offered to God in sacrifice (Ex 22:29; 23:19). In the NT, Christians are the “harvest” of the preaching of the Gospel (TLSB).

This same Creator of lights has given us that which is good and perfect: new birth in Christ. In us he has begun his new creation through the Word of truth (1 Pet 1:23). This spiritual rebirth was clearly outlined by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3). He chose to give us birth, in contrast to man's evil choice which conceives and gives birth to sin, and full-grown sin gives birth to death (v 15). Such a newborn child of God does what is good and right, because God's seed (*sperma*) remains in him (1 John 3:9). He has been chosen by Christ to bear fruit (John 15:16), to be a kind of first fruits, even as the Word of truth (wisdom) is a kind of first fruit of God's creation (Prov 8:22, 35). Those who choose to do the will of God are evidence of the new creation of God. Paul uses the same image of the wave sheaf, the first fruits of the harvest (Deut 26:1–11), in 2 Thess 2:13. Elsewhere he applies it to Christ, “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). The first fruits are here; the complete harvest will surely come. Give thanks to the Father who is blessing us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

There is a debate between commentators as to whether the *eis to* phrase should be taken as purpose (God brought us forth that we should be) or result (God has brought us forth so that we are). The ESV has taken it as purpose. Lenski argues that it is a result (*The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966], 547–48). Lenski argues that once we've been brought forth by the Word of truth, we are already heirs, sons, and firstfruits. In his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* (LW 32:24), Martin Luther, however, takes it as purpose. He looks at it as a statement of what we will be eternally. “Firstfruits” refers to the first portion of the harvest dedicated to the Lord, which is a picture of Christ's people (see Lev 23:10; Rev 14:4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

creatures. Or, “creation.” All creation is restored in Christ, beginning with humanity (1Co 15:20–28). (TLSB)

1:1–18 James writes to struggling Christians who are facing many trials and temptations. Those who face such challenges may be tossed about (vv 5–8) and eventually destroyed by sin (v 15). Those who seek God's wisdom endure trials (vv 2–4) and become stronger. In Baptism, God gives His struggling children the crown of life not because of their strength but because of His grace. In that grace, we can follow Him and live confidently in this world of struggles and uncertainty. • O Lord, deliver me from my struggles, and grant me the gifts that come from You alone. Thank You for Your Son, Jesus, who has given me new life. Lead me in Your wisdom until I am raised to receive the crown of life. Amen. (TLSB)

Hearing and Doing the Word

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted

word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. 26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

1:19 *Everyone should be ... slow to speak.* Improper speech is discussed again in v 26 and 3:1–12. (TLSB)

The oldest manuscripts have the verb *histe*, “to know,” which could be either imperative, “know!” or indicative, “you have knowledge.” The NIV opts for the imperative: “Take note of this.” Reicke (*The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, The Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 1964] vol. 37, p. 20) cites the alternate reading *hōste* in the later Byzantine manuscripts: “Consequently, my beloved brethren.” In any event, the proverb stating that godly wisdom grows by listening rather than by aggressive or angry self-promotion echoes passages such as Prov 10:19; 11:12; 12:23; 17:27. True wisdom, which is now revealed to be in the Lord Jesus Christ, is manifested by attention toward others, not self-centeredness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Reicke sees behind these verses some neophyte Christians usurping the rein of the pastor. Their advice, evidently domineering, was becoming a source of anger to those who were addressed. If so, James’ exhortation is that all Christians should grow in God’s Word and wisdom by listening and then applying it to themselves (v 21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

1:20 Believers are credited with Christ’s obedience for their justification; God then calls and empowers them to live in His righteousness instead of the world’s pattern (Rm 6:1–5, 12–14; Ap IV 72; see FC Ep III 7–8). Though the latter sense is typical in Paul’s Letters, Jas and the Gospels typically use the first meaning (cf Mt 13:17; Lk 1:6, 75; 2:25; 23:50). (TLSB)

righteousness of God. New condition in which Christians live as the result of faith. (TLSB)

1:21 *meekness.* Instead of self-reliance, the willingness to receive God’s gift. (TLSB)

implanted. As a seed is planted into soil, so the Word of God comes from outside of us and produces a harvest of righteousness in our lives. (TLSB)

word. Pertains to both Law and Gospel; God’s Word makes us righteous and enables us to lead righteous lives. (TLSB)

put away - Therefore, he writes, divest yourselves. The same verb is used in Heb 12:1 to speak about taking off your clothes in preparation for a race. But here its object is all moral filth (*ruparia*, a word used only here, although the adjectival form is found in Rev 22:11). Further, divest yourselves of the prevalent evil, the vicious nature bent on doing harm to others, and in meekness (cf. Matt 5:5, “Blessed are the meek”) accept the Word planted in you (cf. Matt 13:3–9, 18–23, the parable of the sower). This Word saves your souls. Do not use it to attack and destroy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

1:22–23 Hearing God’s Word should lead to application of the Word (cf 2:14–26). A remarkably similar statement is made in Rm 2:13. (TLSB)

1:22 *the word* - The Word (of truth, v 18) is to be heard (also v 23). The reference may be to the public reading of Scripture. In John’s Gospel we are reminded that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. Those born of God see his glory, the glory of the one who raises sinners from death to life (John 1:12–14, 11:38–44). The Scriptures testify about him; the Word bears witness to the Word made flesh (John 5:36–40). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

In v 25 the Word is described as “the perfect law” (*nomos*), a word frequently used to denote the Torah (e.g. 1 Cor 9:8–9) and occasionally also to denote the Christian faith (Rom 3:27b). It is the Gospel, not doctrinal Law as opposed to Gospel (see the previous article, “Introduction to James”). The man who looks intently into God’s Word—and actually “does” it—will be blessed. This is an eschatological promise; Christians do not necessarily enjoy happiness and prosperity in this life, but are guaranteed blessing in the life to come. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Here refers to just the Law (TLSB)

1:22 *the word*. OT Scriptures, since the NT was still being written. (TLSB)

1:23–24 The mirror of the Word shows us our sin, but even more, it reveals the righteousness we already have in Christ. However, someone who leaves that perfect image by not living a righteous life as taught in the Word turns away from righteousness. “It is necessary to do good works. This does not mean that we merit grace by doing good works, but because it is God’s will” (AC XX 27). (TLSB)

1:25 *perfect law*. The moral and ethical teaching of Christianity, which is based on the OT moral law, as embodied in the Ten Commandments (see Ps 19:7), but brought to completion (perfection) by Jesus Christ. (CSB)

the law of liberty. This Word is perfect because it is from God and makes us perfect and complete (v 4; cf Ps 119:92–94). *law*. Here it means “Word” (cf vv 21, 22). (TLSB)

liberty. In contrast to the sinner, who is a slave to sin (Jn 8:34), obeying the moral law gives the Christian the joyous freedom to be what he was created for (see 2:12). (CSB)

1:26–27 The man who truly is religious will demonstrate this by acts of love and care. To be religious (*thrēskos*) ordinarily meant to perform diligently certain outward rites and forms ritualistically. James makes the same point that the prophets made: instead of outward ritual, the believer must act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God (Mic 6:7–8). Orphans and widows, who in Scripture often represent all persons in distress (Ps 68:5; 82:3), must be cared for. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

1:26 *religious*. Refers to the outward acts of religion: e.g., giving to the needy, fasting and public acts of praying and worshiping. (CSB)

In Jas, religion is not a set of beliefs or a movement, but the deeds that a person does because of his beliefs. Such actions may be in accord with God’s will (as in v 27) or, as here, sinful. (TLSB)

tongue. Cf v 19; 3:1–12. (TLSB)

deceives his heart. Deceives himself. The person who does not act righteously by controlling his tongue may consider himself righteous, but he is delusional; such behavior does not reflect the righteousness God has given. (TLSB)

1:27 *orphans and widows in their affliction.* Genuine righteousness seeks to serve others. Orphans and widows deeply need such help, and they were particularly singled out for God’s care (e.g., Dt 10:18; Hos 14:3; Lk 7:11–17) and the service of His people (Dt 14:29; 16:11; 24:19). (TLSB)

unstained from the world. In Jas, the world encourages values and behaviors that are opposed to God and His righteousness (3:6; 4:4) Thoughts and actions that come from God are “pure and undefiled”; those that do not come from God destroy the perfect righteousness He gives. (TLSB)

world. Not the world of nature but the world of people in their rebellion against and alienation from God (see 1Jn 2:15). (CSB)

1:19–27 James encourages Christians to return to the Word, take comfort in the Gospel, and live righteous lives focused on service toward others. We also know the kind of lives God calls us to lead. Yet too easily we turn away from that calling. God, who implanted His Word in us and justified us in Christ, now calls us to bless others. He honors us by using us to bring His love to all people, especially those whom the world ignores. • Thank You, Lord, for Your Word. Hold it continually before me, and bring me to hear it preached and taught. May it be rooted deep inside me, that it may transform me into Your righteous servant. Amen. (TLSB)