



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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Lesson 1

James 1:1-8 Commentary New Revised Standard 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 in the Dispersion: Greetings.

Most agree that James was the brother of Jesus the Messiah, and he became the leader of the Christian Church in Jerusalem while the disciples served as missionaries outside Jerusalem. The Jews that were scattered around the world after the fall of the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah were called "the dispersion." As other Jews left Judea for business and other reasons, in the time of Jesus more Jews lived outside of 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 Gentile 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 as an honor or as a badge of distinction that set him above others. 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." A bond-servant in the Old Testament was one who freely chose to serve his master and his family for the rest of his life because they loved one another and he believed them worth serving for the rest of his life. James had committed himself to serving only Jesus Christ for as long as he lived, because they loved one another and Jesus was worthy to be served as Lord and King. James was not "double-minded." He did not try to serve two masters. As his Lord and Savior, James chose to serve only Jesus and God the Father 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 and Jesus the Messiah in response to their call.

(James 1:2) My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy,

James wrote to Christians in the Church as part of the family of Jesus, as brothers and sisters, as fellow co-workers for the sake of the gospel. A "trial" in the broadest meaning is any difficulty, test, or temptation that we anticipate or experience. A trial in a more limited sense results in a judge or jury handing down a verdict of guilty or not guilty. As Christians, how we face a trial is different from many other people. When we face a trial "of any kind" we can face it with "nothing but joy"! Why? 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 and they will work out everything for our good (see Romans 8:28). We know that with God's help we will pass the test. We know we will pass the test because we trust God and the written Word of God, the Bible. 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." In Romans 8:28, the Bible reminds us: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

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

When we take a test, we think of a receiving a grade based on how well we have demonstrated what we have learned. A graded test shows us where we need to spend more time in study. We can receive a passing or a failing grade, and we can score high, low, or in the middle. We learn where we need to study and practice more diligently what we are learning. Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we do not take our tests alone. As Christians, God is with us and for us and is helping us pass our tests when we pray and trust Him. 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) and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

When tried and tested, sometimes the most believers can do is endure and 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 and the more they learn. 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 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, the more we trust in Jesus, the more we learn from our study of the Bible and other Christians, the more we pray and grow spiritually, the more our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior grows. 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, 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. In every trial, Jesus can empower and guide us, so we lack nothing needed to serve Him in the world and prepare us for heaven.

(James 1:5) If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

Obviously, James wrote his letter to Christians. To find the best way to endure and witness for Christ effectively during whatever trial or test we face, we need wisdom, which the Holy Spirit gives us today as we prayerfully study the Bible and He bestows the light of understanding and application. 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 a steadfast faith and love when suffering, and to experience and manifest joy even in the midst of 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 will not give us any good gifts with the notion that He will be losing something that He would rather keep for himself, for God gives ungrudgingly. God's love for us motivates Him to give us exactly what we need as His children, for our Father wants to see us mature and become more like His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

(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;

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 to endure to the end whatever comes our way and that Jesus will enable us to pray and serve others in the process. Our trials that produce endurance will help us develop complete confidence in God and Jesus, a confidence that will prepare us for any trials yet to come. Otherwise, we will let our circumstances determine what happens rather than the Lord Jesus Christ working through us to show that all things work for the good of us.

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

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. 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 in all circumstances. A doubter is unstable; therefore, a doubter cannot be trusted with a place of

responsibility in the church. A doubter can doubt who Jesus is as revealed in the Bible. A doubter can 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 even in unchanging situations.

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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