

## General Comments on the Epistle of James

Authorship is traditionally attributed to [James the Just](#), the [brother of Jesus](#), who was prominent in the early Church (cf. Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3, Acts 12:17, Acts 15:13-21, Acts 21:18, Gal. 1:19, Gal. 2:9-12), and also witnessed the resurrected Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7). There isn't any good evidence to argue against his being the author.

The brief introduction in 1:1 with no salutes suggests the intended readers knew who the author was, and given his prominence among the ecclesia, that fits the known conditions. James was clearly a prominent member of the ecclesia at Jerusalem, and he is widely considered to be the [Bishop](#) of the ecclesia there. Paul's statement in Gal. 1:19 might suggest he was an apostle, but there is nothing elsewhere to suggest he was numbered among the Twelve.

Why don't we talk about James more? He appears to have been at odds with Paul over how much they should observe the Law of Moses (cf. Acts 21:18, Gal. 2:12), and Paul won that argument. Martin Luther considered it to be "[an epistle of straw](#)" and moved it to the back of his canonical arrangement, purportedly because it was not written by apostle, but it is commonly believed it was because of the text's emphasis on works. Any church that emphasizes Grace over works will tend to avoid James. And his exact role in the early Church is unclear.

According to Josephus, he was martyred:

When therefore Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead; and Albinus was but upon the road. So he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus who was called Christ, whose name was James: and some others; [or, some of his companions.] And when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned ([Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 20, Chapter 9, Section 1](#)).

The translation of his name to James is inaccurate, as a better translation would be Jacob. The reason his name was anglicized to James is lost to history. The earliest known translation of the name in English to James is [Wycliffe's Bible](#), so it did not have it's origin with the 1611 KJV. The Oxford English Dictionary entry for "James" lists the etymology as:

Etymology: < Old French James (Gemmes, \*Jaimes) = Spanish Jaime, Provençal, Catalan Jaume, Jacme. Italian Giacomo < popular Latin \*'Jacomus, for 'Jacobus, altered from Latin Ia'cōbus, < Greek Ἰάκωβος, < Hebrew ya'ăqōb Jacob, a frequent Jewish name at all times, and thus the name of two of Christ's disciples (St. James the Greater and St. James the Less); whence a frequent Christian name.

So it appears to have been changed from Greek to Latin to French to English.

With respect to content of composition, the text is a series of exhortations on specific topics which we would assume the ecclesia was having problems with. However, there are undercurrents throughout each exhortation. For example, in ch. 1, the blatant theme is that of persevering through trials (v. 2, 12). The underlying theme is these trials are given to humble the individual (v. 9, 21), get them to rely on and trust in God (v. 5, 13, 17), and therefore render them fit for eternal life (v. 12).

Again, note in the discussion in 2:1-13 while the blatant topic is the sin of being a respecter of persons, the underlying thought James is ferreting out is what is the person's motive for behaving in this manner (2:4)?

He does the same in 2:14-26 where the blatant themes are faith and works, when what he is really addressing is hypocrisy. This occurs throughout the book.

Thus, when we read this text, we should be keenly aware this is not simply a collection of staid sermons. It is a careful analysis of human behavior in a religious context. People do things for reasons, and James is interested in discovering, perhaps exposing, people's motives and psychology when it comes to sin and righteousness.

Among the New Testament writings, this is the closest thing to a General Conference address by a General Authority.

The fundamental message is they should be united by living Christ's teachings (cf. John 13-16). The letter identifies what things are preventing them from being united as an ecclesia and perfected as individuals. Note James uses the terms "brother" and "brethren" [Gr: *adelphos*] seventeen times (cf. 1:2, 1:9, 1:16, 1:19, 2:1, 2:5, 2:14, 2:15, 3:1, 3:10, 3:12, 4:11, 5:7, 5:9, 5:10, 5:12, 5:19). His intent is to emphasize their being a family who should care for one another and treat each other

with love, rejecting worldliness and hypocrisy.

The letter closely follows Jesus' teachings in the Gospels, with parallels as follows:

2:1-13	Matt. 5:46-48
2:14-26	Matt. 7:21-27
3:1-12	Luke 6:13-15
3:13-18	Matt. 5:3-11
4:1-10	Matt. 6:24
4:11-12	Matt. 12:36-37
4:13-17	Matt. 6:28-34
5:1-6	Matt. 6:19-21
5:7-11	Matt. 24:13
5:12	Matt. 5:37
5:13-18	Matt. 21:21-22
5:19-20	Matt. 18:15

There are also numerous references to Old Testament passages and imagery as well, which will be addressed in the comments on the individual chapters. James' use of the well-known teachings of Jesus and the Hebrew Scripture ties in well with the opening address in 1:1 aimed at the tribes of Israel. James' audience is Jews and members of other tribes of Israel among the Jews at large.

The main topics addressed in this letter can be broken down as follows:

- 1:1 Introduction
- 1:2-27 The purpose of trials
- 2:1-5:6 Lack of unity, between people and within a person
  - 2:1-13 The respecter of persons (between people)
  - 2:14-26 Hypocrisy in religion (within a person)
  - 3:1-12 Defilement by the tongue (within a person)
  - 3:13-4:12 On Contention
    - 3:13-18 Heavenly wisdom (within a person)
    - 4:1-10 Pride and contention (between people)
    - 4:11-12 Don't condemn others (between people)
  - 4:13-5:6 On riches
    - 4:13-17 Wealth and pride (within the person)
    - 5:1-6 Greed and exploitation (between people)
- 5:7-18 Summary
- 5:19-20 Closing

A review of the LDS Edition KJV footnotes shows numerous translation corrections from the Greek, as indicated by the "GR". The KJV stumbles a number of times in this book, obscuring the author's intended message. I recommend using a modern translation like the Revised Standard Version (RSV) or New American Standard (NAS) in parallel with your KJV with this text.

## Comments on James 1

As noted above, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the role of trials in one's life. While James exhorts the person to persevere in trials, he is also examining the different possible reactions a person can have to them and why. They can confess their lack of wisdom and ask for help (v. 5), or they can blame God for their apparent misfortune (v. 13). Why would they fail to ask for help or blame God for their apparent difficulties? Because they have little or no faith (v. 6-8), and/or are filled with lust and sin (v. 14-18).

The text can be arranged as a parallelism, and doing so exposes James' points more clearly:

- A - (v. 2) Rejoice in trials
- B - (v. 3-4) How to respond to trials
- C - (v. 5-8) Be unwavering and faithful
- D - (v. 9-11) The rich wither like grass
- A - (v. 12a) Blessed are those who endure temptation
- B - (v. 12b-15) How not to respond to trials
- C - (v. 16-17) God is unwavering and faithful
- D - (v. 18-21) The meek are fruitful
- E - (v. 22-27) Embrace authenticity, reject hypocrisy

The poetical arrangement above is a simplification. See below for a more detailed presentation on a text that was deliberately structured by the author.

The subjects touched on in this chapter are later discussed in greater detail in 2:1-5:6, and then again summarized in 5:7-18, a few for example:

Patience	1:3		5:7-8
Wisdom	1:5	3:13-18	
Riches	1:9-11	4:13-5:6	
Contention	1:19-20	4:1-11	5:9
Hypocrisy	1:22-24	2:14-26	
Defilement	1:26	3:1-12	5:12

As such, ch. 1 serves as the main thesis of the ensuing book.

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

v1 A standard introduction identifying the author and the audience. Note who James is addressing, and also note the complete absence of any reference to Gentiles throughout the entire letter.

<sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

<sup>3</sup> Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. <sup>8</sup> A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

<sup>9</sup> Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: <sup>10</sup> But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. <sup>11</sup> 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.

V2-11 Rejoice when you experience different trials (v. 2), because these trials lead to your perfection (v. 3-4). If you do not understand how to deal with your trials, ask God and he will give you the wisdom to deal with them (v. 5). But you must be faithful and fixed in your convictions, because those who lack conviction will not receive wisdom (v. 6-8). Let the member of the ecclesia who is not rich or powerful rejoice in the Lord's promise to lift them up to Him (v. 9), while the wealthy and powerful men wither and die (v. 10-11).

v2 "divers temptations", the IV/JST emends this to "many afflictions". Modern translations typically render it "many kinds of trials" or "various trials".

v3-4 These two verses present a series of steps explaining how adversity and trials lead the believer to perfection. Here is how the NASB renders these verses:

<sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

<sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Producing a syllogism of:

Test of your faith produces endurance,  
Endurance produces a perfect result,  
-----

You are a perfect result.

The implication is trials and adversity are necessary and required to get a perfected individual. This is the opposite of the steps in v. 14-15.

v4 The verse is clearly referring to the doctrine of exaltation, also referenced in the "crown of life" in v. 12, and see also v. 9, 18.

v5 The context of this verse is that of one who is experiencing trials per v. 2-3. James encourages the individual to ask God to shed light upon the individual so they may understand why they are experiencing these trails. Note James explicitly states God "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not" to mitigate any idea that God is mean, vicious, or capricious, as the unfaithful one would accuse as in v. 13.

It is common for people to turn on or away from God when things don't go as they please. Here we are exhorted instead to turn to him and ask him to help us understand the struggles we face.

v8 "double minded man", who is this person? The person with all of the negative descriptions in this chapter, e.g., v. 10-11, 13-15, and especially v. 24, 26. See also 4:8 for the same term. The Greek here is [\*dipsychos\*](#), unique in the NT to this book, meaning divided in interests, or wavering, or doubting.

v9 "low degree", i.e., humility.

v10-11 For the imagery of grass drying up in the heat of the sun, cp. Hosea 13:3-15, Isa. 40:6-8, Matt. 13:5-6, John 15:6. James is deliberately invoking the imagery of these other passages and contrasting it with the first fruits of v. 18 and the implanted word that saves souls in v. 21.

Those among the ecclesia who are faltering in their support of each other and the ecclesiastical bureaucracy are falling away and James likens them to the obvious parallels in the Hebrew Scriptures and in Jesus' teachings. The failure of these wealthy

v11 "so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways", the NAS renders this "so also the rich person, in the midst of his pursuits, will die out." The wealthy man continues pursuing his business and worldly pursuits until he too dies, just like everyone else.

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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: <sup>14</sup> But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

<sup>16</sup> Do not err, my beloved brethren. <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

<sup>19</sup> Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: <sup>20</sup> For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

v12-21 The one who faithfully endures trials is blessed with exaltation (v. 12). Do not blame God for your weakness in trials and temptations, because it is not Him testing you (v. 13). A man's sins are his own fault and lead to his death (v. 14-15). Make no mistake (v. 16), all of God's gifts are good, and unlike men, he is entirely faithful and reliable (v. 17). It is the Lord's desire to make us His own by giving us eternal life (v. 18). To receive eternal life, we must repent and be sanctified (v. 19, 21), because being a natural man is not God's way (v. 20). In humility, we can have the Lord's words planted in us, which will save us (v. 21).

v12 "blessed is the man that endureth temptation", the IV/JST emends this to "blessed is the man that resisteth temptation".



Modern translations render this "endures trials" or "endures temptations".

v13 Here, James insinuates Job's character, as this is precisely what Job accused God of, cf. Job 19:6, Job 24. Note the example of Job and his being reproved by the Lord (cf. Job 38:1-2, Job 40:1-2, Job 40:6-9) to his benefit (cf. Job 40:3-5, Job 42:1-6) are employed in 4:11.

James uses Job as an example because the purpose and nature of suffering is discussed and explained in that book, and James is discussing the same subject. See Job 33 for Elihu's explanation of the purpose of affliction, which is to humble the individual, agreeing with James' message.

v14-15 These verses comprise a series of steps which are the opposite of those in v. 3-4. Here the man falls prey to his own shortcomings, failing to self-correct, and it leads him to destruction, instead of perfection and eternal life.

v17 In contrast to the men of v. 6-8, the Lord is faithful.

v18-21 "firstfruits...engrafted", in contrast to the rich man who withers and dies in the heat of the sun in v. 9-11, this repentant man who undergoes the sanctification process is fruitful and productive, grafted in the true vine. James is using the imagery from Matt. 13:8 and John 15:5.

<sup>22</sup> But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. <sup>23</sup> 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: <sup>24</sup> For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

<sup>25</sup> But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

<sup>26</sup> If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

<sup>27</sup> Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

v22-27 James admonishes the reader to not only hear the word of the Lord, but to live according to what that word teaches (v. 22). Anyone who doesn't do what he has been taught is like

someone who checks their appearance in a mirror, but then quickly forgets as soon as he walks away (v. 23-24). But, the one who reads the Scriptures and does what they say will be blessed (v. 25). Anyone who seems to be pious, but they cause problems with their words, their appearance of worship is pointless (v. 26). The kind of worship the Lord is interested in is helping widows and orphans, and avoiding the sins of the world (v. 27).

v23 "in a glass", i.e., a mirror.

v26 "seem to be religious...this man's religion is vain", a better translation would be "seem to be pious...this man's ceremonial worship is meaningless". The way we use the word "religion" today is abstracted away from the person's behavior as a series of beliefs or ideas. This is not what James is referring to, as he is interested in the person's behavior.

"bridleth not his tongue", cp. 3:1-12, 5:12.

v27 "visit the fatherless and widows", a statement taken directly from the Law of Moses, cf. Exod. 22:22, Deut. 10:18, Deut. 24:19-21, Deut. 27:19. Persons such as these were easily neglected and oftentimes exploited because of lack of integration in a family-based society, hence the Lord's particular concern in their well-being.

## Poetical Arrangement of James 1

<sup>1</sup> James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

A - <sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials];

B - <sup>3</sup> Knowing this, that  
the trying of your faith worketh patience. <sup>4</sup> But  
let patience have her perfect work, that  
ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

C - <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> For let not that man think that  
he shall receive any thing of the Lord.  
<sup>8</sup> A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

D - <sup>9</sup> Let the brother of low degree  
rejoice in that he is exalted:  
<sup>10</sup> But the rich,  
in that he is made low:  
because as the flower  
of the grass  
he shall pass away.  
<sup>11</sup> 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.

A - <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man that endureth temptation [trials]:

B - for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life,  
which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

<sup>13</sup> 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:

<sup>14</sup> But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

<sup>15</sup> Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin:  
and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

C - <sup>16</sup> Do not err, my beloved brethren.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

D - <sup>18</sup> Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,  
that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

<sup>19</sup> Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be  
swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

<sup>20</sup> For the wrath of man  
worketh not the righteousness of God.

<sup>21</sup> Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and  
the superfluity [abundance] of naughtiness [wickedness],  
and receive with meekness the engrafted [implanted] word,  
which is able to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup> But be ye doers of the word, and  
not hearers only,  
deceiving your own selves.

<sup>23</sup> 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 [mirror]:

<sup>24</sup> For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and  
straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

<sup>25</sup> But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and  
continueth therein,

he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work,  
this man shall be blessed in his deed.

<sup>26</sup> If any man among you seem to be religious [pious], and  
bridleth not his tongue, but

deceiveth his own heart,  
this man's religion [ceremonious worship] is vain.

<sup>27</sup> Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this,  
To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and  
to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Copyright © 2023 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.