

1. James 1 of a Verse by Verse Study of James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter

The book of James, by content and tone, seems to follow immediately after the teachings of Christ and closely reflects those teaching in many instances. James, the brother of Jesus, seems to be the author. Therefore, these notes will seek to unify around the teachings where James is either reiterating or elaborating principles taught by Christ in the gospels, most notably in the Gospel of Matthew, which was also written with the Jewish Christians in mind.

1:1 *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*

James identifies himself as the servant of God and of the Lord. This James is James, the brother of Jesus.

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

Greetings.

The authoritative tone of the letter indicates James, the brother of Jesus, wrote it. This is the same James identified in Matt 13:55-56, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" When Peter was reporting his imprisonment in Acts 12:17, he referred to James in a manner that implies one with a leadership position, "17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. 'Tell James and the brothers about this,' he said, and then he left for another place."

In Acts 15:13-18, when the controversy surrounding the circumcision of Gentiles came up, James spoke with authority, and the church received him as one with authority to speak:

"Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this." In this same discussion, James defined the group to whom he was later to write this letter:

as it is written:

16 "After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things'

18 that have been known for ages.

The *twelve tribes scattered among nations* refers to the Jewish Christians composing a part of the remnant, which with the Gentiles, constitutes the church of Christ.

When Paul returned to Jerusalem, he treated James with deference in Acts 21:18-19, "The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry."

Paul referred to James with deference, referring to him, along with Peter and John, as a pillar of the church in Gal 2:9-10:

9 James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. 10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Trials and Temptations

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

These Christian brothers, who suffered many trials, were, perhaps, like the Jewish Christians in Acts 8:1-4:

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

The direct recipients of this letter are Christians from the *twelve tribes scattered among nations*. The Lord had forewarned them of their persecution and trials from the beginning in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5:10-12:

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

To persevere and overcome is the object of James' encouragement. In the parable of the sower, Jesus spoke of one kind of lost seed as one who falls away because of trouble and persecution Matt 13:21: "21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away."

One Who Asks for Wisdom

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

The wisdom spoken of here is the wisdom to know right and to do right. In Matt 11:16-19, Jesus taught this kind of wisdom:

16 "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

17 "'We played the flute for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." ' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

Luke 1:17 speaks of John the Baptist's wisdom as the wisdom of the righteous: "17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Such wisdom was characteristic of the Lord from his early youth. Luke 2:51-52 teaches, "52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

The power of this wisdom will overcome adversaries according to Luke 21:15, "For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict." God gives us the treasures of wisdom and knowledge according to Col 2:2-4:

"2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The wisdom and philosophies of the world can never help us. Paul wrote in Col 2:8, "8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." In 1 Cor 1:20-21, Paul contrasted the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of the Father:

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

No Differences between Those of High and Low Position

9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

Christians are not to be high and mighty; but neither should those Christians of low esteem and poor estate self-righteously condemn those of high position. Neither riches nor status allows one to be elevated above others in the church. Christians are equal and great in the church. According to Mary, the mother of Jesus in Luke 1:52-54, God planned it to be this way:

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,

Jesus taught that, Christians should seek his treasures in heaven in Matt 6:19-21:

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Christians are all equal and the same before God their Father. Matt 20:16 teaches: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Persevering and Standing the Test

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

This passage reflects the example of Jesus when he overcame the trials and test of the devil in the wilderness. The end of preserving for Christ and his Christians is the crown of life. The sequence that leads one unto spiritual death starts with faithful Christian confronted with trial or temptation. God does not tempt us; but our own evil desires tempt us.

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

John summarizes these evil desires in 1 John 2:15-17:

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

These evil desires and their role in the sin of man find themselves in the examples of Adam and Eve (Gen 3) and in the example of the temptations of the Lord (Matt 4). The sequence of the fall is clear. The road to spiritual death is clearly marked.

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

The Lord declared every good and perfect gift in the Beatitudes in Matt 5:3-12

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Lord described our birth through the word of truth to Nicodemus in John 3:5-8

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Just as the road to spiritual death is clearly marked, so also, the road to spiritual life is clearly marked in the **word of truth**.

Listening and Doing

19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Christians cannot follow the path to spiritual life if they are angry or hateful. Anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. We cannot achieve this righteous life if we are encumbered with moral filth and evil. The word, planted in us, can save us.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

To listen to the word and to do it blesses us in what we do.

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

The Lord taught that to be religious we must control our tongues in Matt 12:34-37:

For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks . 35 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

The Lord also taught that we must be benevolent in our lives toward others in Matt 25:31-46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Finally, the Lord also taught that we must be free from the pollution of this world in Matt 6:33, "33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."