

# James

## *Lesson 1*

### *James 1:1 – 2:26*

**James 1:1** James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.

The recipients of this letter are the “twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.” The letter is written to all the Christian Jewish believers who are descendants of the bloodline of the twelve sons of Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

Before the writing of this letter, Saul, a young energetic Pharisee led such a strong persecution against the Christian Jews that a large portion of them fled the towns of Israel and established very strong settlements in Rome, Alexandria, Cyprus and cities in Greece and Asia Minor. History calls these people the “Jews of the Diaspora”. Saul, whom we now call Paul, sought to persecute and strike fear in the hearts of as many Christian Jews as possible. Because these Christian Jews ran for their lives in those early years of the Church, James, the leader of the Church in Jerusalem sends this letter to encourage them and to handle a specific problem circulating in their midst.

Two groups existed within the Jews of the Diaspora and each had a different language. The Western Diaspora in Italy, Greece and Asia Minor spoke Koine Greek. The Eastern Diaspora spoke Aramaic or Syriac. However, in both instances, regardless of their language, their legalistic Jewish background of adhering to the letter of the Old Testament Law had crept back into their belief causing them to struggle with the grace of the LORD and the teachings of the Church. James decides to write to these Christian Jews in Koine Greek; however, he writes in a very definite Hebraic tone with Hebrew sayings and idioms.

**James 1:**<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,<sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.<sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James understands the struggle of the Christian Jews who are living in the countries outside Israel. These countries are full of false religions, all sorts of debauchery, and temptations of every kind. Many of these Christian Jews once followed Jesus around the countryside of Israel spellbound by His every word. They know His teachings first hand and yet, they now struggle with trials in their new surroundings away from the strong leadership of the twelve Apostles.

First, James wants them to know that these various trials have a grand purpose. The purpose of these trials is to produce a “perfect result.” This “perfect result” proves that as Christian Jews they lack absolutely nothing. Nothing in their new culture can offer anything of worth. Neither can anything in their past religion of following the Law offer anything of worth. They lack nothing.

Second, James wants them to consider the various trials with all “joy.” In other words, the trials are going to come upon them in order to produce the perfect result of knowing that they lack nothing because their lives are in the hands of their LORD and Savior.

**James 1:**<sup>5</sup> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup> *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Struggling through various trials requires a great deal of wisdom. In reality, wisdom often comes through our failures in those various trials. When the trials come, James encourages the Christian Jews to seek God for wisdom and He will guide them to the right answers. However, they cannot ask God for wisdom and at the same time delve into the possibilities of some false thoughts or false religions. The Christian Jews whom James addresses have justifiably had a better start in the LORD than anyone else. They watched Him; they heard Him first hand. They are not far enough away from the resurrection to dare call it a myth. They know it is a fact and He has changed their lives for all eternity. James wants them to hold on to that which they know to be true and seek answers from God for that which they do not know. But they cannot seek to live in both worlds. They cannot look to the ungodly world for their answers because they will not find the will of God there! Living with a foot in both worlds brings only heartache.

**James 1:**<sup>9</sup> But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; <sup>10</sup> and *let* the rich man *glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

Money and wealth are not everything as some might think. In this example, James gives comfort to the Christian Jew who is living abroad in a very meager lifestyle. Trials exist every day for them in just putting food on the table and paying the bills. On the other hand, the wealthy man of this world has no trials in paying the bills or putting food on the table, yet he has a worse trial stemming from his pursuits! We do not see it here, but the Hebrew mindset would have seen it

clearly. The God of the believer of humble circumstances is the “true God” of salvation. The god of the wealthy man is “his pursuit” for more wealth. The first God leads to eternity and the second god leads to destruction.

**James 1:**<sup>12</sup> Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

James tells the Christian Jews of humble circumstances to look forward to the blessing that will come when the LORD meets them Face to face, presents them with crowns and promises that forever there will be no more trials to persevere.

**James 1:**<sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.<sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.<sup>15</sup> Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.<sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.<sup>17</sup> Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.<sup>18</sup> In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.

Using a different word, James addresses temptations. Where trials involve all the aspects of the daily grind of life which allows everyone to show living proof of who God is and Whom we trust for our salvation, temptations involve those things which cause a person to run and hide from God knowing that He will not approve of their actions, deeds or thoughts. God does not tempt anyone into anything and God cannot be tempted by anyone to do anything. It is just not the way He operates. God does not lead the Christian Jew into sin nor does He place sinful opportunities within his grasp. Sinful opportunities come to the Christian Jew through the evil which dwells in this world; good things come to the believer from God. Bad things present themselves to the Christian Jew from the evil world. Wisdom from God is needed in order to know what must be done when the world dangles an opportunity in front of a believer. Does the sin entice us to embrace it, knowing that its end is destruction? Those acts of sin are wickedness that must be avoided. The Christian Jew, because of his position in the LORD, has a place of glory and prominence above every other creature. When James uses the term “first fruits”, he is speaking of that position and place of glory above all other creatures.

**James 1:**<sup>19</sup> *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger;<sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.<sup>21</sup> Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

How do we acquire the wisdom of God in times of temptations? How do we acquire the wisdom of God as we struggle with the trials of daily life? It is done by opening our ears to hear, shutting our mouths to stop talking about it and by keeping our propensity for anger in check. In addition, James tells the Christian descendants of the twelve tribes to rid themselves of all filthiness and wickedness and to flood themselves with the word of God. Wisdom comes from the Word of God and brings salvation to the soul of every man.

**James 1:** <sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. <sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Just immersing yourself in the word of God is not enough. You cannot spend your life drinking in the knowledge of the Scripture without putting it into practice. Some of these twelve tribes are evidently more saturated with the world than with the word of God. Even though they look at the word each week in worship, they continue to operate each day of their lives as if the word of God has not transformed them. No doubt, some of these Christian Jews are causing some of the same problems which Paul addressed to the Galatian churches. Some of these Jewish believers have been engulfed in religious activities that bring no good to the kingdom of God. They are proclaiming their religious thoughts to the church with an unbridled tongue, slow to listen to reason, quick to speak their minds and quick to show the fury of their anger in the Church. They called it "religion" and the unbridled tongue is the main problem. James responds by saying true religion is found in how you visit the orphans who have no families, visit the widows who are in distress, and do not fall into sinful wickedness through the lusts of the world.

**James 2:** <sup>1</sup> My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an *attitude of* personal favoritism. <sup>2</sup> For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, <sup>3</sup> and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," <sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised

to those who love Him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? <sup>8</sup> If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. <sup>11</sup> For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

James' point in this paragraph is that within the Church there should never be a distinction between classes of wealth or lack of wealth. In the Church, every seat is a place of honor and it is a privilege to enter its doors and worship the LORD as heirs of the kingdom and promise. Showing favor to one person over another because of their wealth is in itself committing sin. The royal law, which Jesus taught and Paul uses when addressing the Galatians, is "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF". In other words, we must treat everyone the way we would treat ourselves. Who is our neighbor? This word is extremely broad in scope. It means those who are of our family, those of our tribe, those of our neighborhood, those of our city and those of our country. In other words, as believers we are to treat everyone we interact with "in the same way we want to be treated". It can be said like this! "If you are nice to everyone in the world but you are hateful to your spouse or children, you do not understand true religion!" Mercy must triumph in all relationships!

**James 2:** <sup>14</sup> What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? <sup>17</sup> Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. <sup>18</sup> But someone may *well* say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. <sup>20</sup> But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.<sup>24</sup> You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.<sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?<sup>26</sup> For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

James continues to discuss about what real religion is in the life of the Christian Jew. He is person who practices what he learns from the word of God. He does not leave in Church what he learned in Church. He takes it to the streets where he lives. When a brother or sister is in need and he has ample supply, he helps that person and does not just send him on his way with a blessing and a lonely "I'll pray for you!" In the example of Abraham and Rahab, James makes the point that their belief in the LORD was readily seen in their actions and daily walk of life. Many examples of how Abraham put action to his faith are found in the Scripture, yet, with Rahab little is known about her life. For all that Rahab had done in her life, all the sinful wickedness that she had indulged in, her belief in the true God and her actions to help the spies of the twelve tribes found in Joshua 2:1-21, Joshua 6:17, and Joshua 22-25 confirm that the LORD had changed her life. For the Gentile looking at this example, James might have been better served by leaving Rahab's story out. For the Jews however, Rahab's story is well known and brings great power and meaning to James' letter.