

James 1:1-18 ~ Trials and Temptations ~ Leader's Guide

1. Who was the author of this letter? (Matt 13:55, Mark 6:3, Luke 24:10, Gal 1:19)

James, Jesus' brother. There are three (and possibly four) James in the New Testament. Two were apostles: James, the brother of John (Matt 4:21-22, 10:2, Mark 3:17, Luke 5:1-10) who was killed by Herod (Acts 12:2) and James, the son of Alphaeus (Matt 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15). Interestingly, the name "James" was not the actual name of these men; some say it was **James** but most scholars agree that it was something closer to **Ya'akov** in Aramaic. Ya'akov is a fairly common name and usually becomes Jacob. But it has also undergone metamorphosis, becoming James in English, Santiago in Spanish, and Jacques in French. Because the translators of the King James version of the Bible wanted to please the king and get his approval for the translation, they translated at least three of the men named Ya'akov into James.

2. When did James become a disciple of Jesus? (1 Cor 15:7)

Sometime after Jesus' resurrection. Prior to that, James is mentioned only as Jesus' brother and not a disciple or church leader.

3. What stature did he have in the early church? (Acts 1:13-14, 12:17, 15:13, 21:17-19)

James was a leader of the church at Jerusalem. At the first Pentecost, it is simply noted that the apostles gathered together along with some women and Jesus' mother and brothers. (Acts 1:13-14). However, after several of Paul's journeys, he mentions James in a leadership context, especially in Acts 15:13 where James states the position of the church regarding Gentiles coming to salvation in Christ's name.

4. To whom was he writing this letter? When? Why?

James wrote his letter to early Jewish Christians residing in Gentile communities outside of Palestine. Some commentators say it was also to Christians everywhere, but the reference to the twelve tribes and the use of the Hebrew title for God ('Lord Almighty' in verse 5:4) suggests it was written to a Jewish Christian audience. It was written approx. 49 A.D. prior to the Jerusalem Council held in 50 A.D. His purpose was to expose hypocritical positions and to teach right Christian behavior. It also expresses his concern for persecuted Christians who were once part of the Jerusalem church.

5. Notice the three themes; hardship, perseverance, and wisdom. What does James say is the purpose for hardship? (James 1:2-3, Romans 5:1-5, 1 Peter 1:3-9)

Note that James doesn't say, "if" you face trials, but "whenever" you face them. He assumes that we will all have trials and can profit from them. The point is not to be happy when you face pain, but to have a positive outlook ("consider it pure joy") because of what trials can produce in our lives. James tells us to turn our hardships into times of learning. Tough times can teach us perseverance.

6. What does he tell us about perseverance? (Romans 2:7, 8:24-25, 2 Cor 6:3-7, 2 Peter 1:3-9)

It leads to maturity and completeness and eventually to eternal life (Rom 2:7). Paul enlarges on this in 2 Cor 6:3-7 where he says that persevering in trials leads to purity, understanding, patience, kindness, and love. Peter points out that perseverance is part of a process; that it is one step we must go through to demonstrate that our faith is genuine.

7. Where does he tell us to seek wisdom? (James 1:5, Job 28:28, Ps 111:10, Prov 2:6 and 29:15, 1 Cor 12:8, Col 3:16. Also see first four chapters of Proverbs)

First of all, by wisdom, James is speaking not about knowledge, but rather the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances and about "practical discernment.". When Christians need wisdom, the first place to turn is to God in prayer. God is willing to give us wisdom, but we will be unable to receive it if our goals are self-centered rather than God-centered. Although wisdom originates with God, it comes to us in many ways: as a gift from God (Prov 2:6, Dan 2:21), as a gift from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:8, Eph 1:17), starting with a fear of the Lord (Job 28:28, Ps 111:10), from listening to the wise (Pr 1:2, 13:20), from discipline (Pr 29:15), from admonishing one another (Col 3:16), and from research and education (Eccl 1:13, 17, 7:25)

The first four chapters of Proverbs speak about wisdom, exhorting us to embrace it (Prov 1:8-33), describing the moral benefits of wisdom (Prov 2:1-22), describing its further benefits (Prov 3:1-35), and pointing out that wisdom is supreme (Prov 4:1-27).

8. How should we treat doubt? (Ps 33:4, Matt 21:21-22)

James says we must believe and not doubt. For the Lord is faithful (Ps 33:4) and, as Jesus said, will answer the prayers of those who believe (Matt 21:21-22)

9. What is the “spiritual contradiction” raised in vs. 9-11? (See the parable of the sower in Mark 4:3-20 for Jesus’ words on this subject.)

The poor person should take pride in his high position, the rich person should take pride in his low position. This means that a poor person should be glad that riches mean nothing to God, otherwise he would be considered unworthy. Similarly, a rich person should also be glad that money means nothing to God because money is easily lost. By taking pride, James may mean that a wealthy Christian is to take pride in trials that bring him low, perhaps including the loss of his wealth. In Jesus’ parable, a rich man might be likened to the seed which came up and produced a beautiful flower, but was then scorched and withered by the sun because it had no roots.

10. In what should we take pride? (vs 9, Romans 15:17, Gal 6:4)

Although James says to take pride in your low position, it’s kind of an oxymoron to take pride in humility. In Romans, Paul says he glories in his service to God, but then says in his letter to the Galatians that you can take pride in your actions as long as you test them against the teachings (law) of Christ (and presumably, find them satisfactory against that test). Paul also boasts about God-fearing churches (2 Cor 1:14, 7:4, Php 2:16) and boasts “in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:31) as does Jeremiah (9:23-24) and David (Ps 34:2, 44:8). All of the other references to pride in the Bible—and there are many—speak of it as sinful and warn against it.

11. What is the difference between God’s view of wealth and the world’s view?

Wealth, power, and status mean nothing to God but the world attributes much importance to them and honors those that have them. If your wealth, power, and status were gone, what would you have left? You would have what is in your heart and that, not your bank account, and that is what matters to God and endures for eternity.

12. What is the difference between a “trial” and a “temptation”?

According to the dictionary, a trial is “a test of faith, patience, or stamina by suffering or temptation.” A temptation is “an enticement to do something wrong by promise of pleasure or gain.” It is “the act of tempting, especially to evil.” Temptation comes from evil desires inside us, not from God. It begins with an evil thought and becomes sin when we dwell on the thought and allow it to become an action. People who live for God sometimes wonder why they still have temptations. Does God tempt them? No. God tests people but he does not tempt them by trying to seduce them into sin. But God does allow Satan to tempt people

in order to refine their faith and help them grow in their dependence on Christ. Don't ever confuse temptation with God's testing your faith as a way to strengthen it.

13. Where do temptations come from? (Matt 4:1, 18:7-9, Mark 9:42-50, 1 Cor 7:5)

Certainly from Satan (Matt 4:1, 1 Cor 7:5), but also from inside yourself (Matt 18:7-9), from other people (Mark 9:42), taking the easy way (Matt 7:13-14), pride in yourself (Gal 6:1), persecution (1 Thess 3:4-5), and riches (1 Tim 6:9).

14. How should we deal with temptation? (Matt 4:1-11, 26:41, Luke 22:40, 46, 1 Cor 10:13, Heb 4:15, 2 Tim 2:22, 1 Peter 5:8)

Know the word of God and look to it for strength (Matt 4:1-11), pray and call upon the Lord (Matt 26:41, Luke 22:40, 46 2 Tim 2:22), know that God and Jesus are standing along side of you (1 Cor 10:13, Heb 4:15, Eph 6:11), and be alert to temptation so you can recognize and resist it(1 Peter 5:8).

15. How would you summarize the first 18 verses of James? What actions are called for?

In the Christian life, there are trials and temptations. Successfully overcoming these adversities produces maturity and strong character. Don't resent troubles when they come. Pray for wisdom and God will supply all that you need to face persecution or adversity. He will give you patience and keep you strong in times of trial