



TRIALS, TESTINGS, AND MATURITY

INTRO

Today, we begin our study of the book of James. The book is named after the author (1:1). MacArthur points out there were four men named James in the New Testament, but only two are realistic candidates for authorship. They are James the son of Zebedee and James the half-brother of Jesus. Since James the son of Zebedee (also known as James the Just) was martyred before the letter was written, the author must have been James, Jesus' half-brother and Jude's brother (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 7:5).¹ James was not a believer until after Jesus appeared to him and the disciples (1 Corinthians 15:7). In time, James became one of the pillars in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). As a respected leader, James was also in the heart of the debates at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13).

James wrote to "the 12 tribes in the Dispersion" (1:1). These were the Jewish believers who had been scattered in the persecution in Jerusalem, either from the outcry after Stephen's martyrdom or from the persecution of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12). The book was probably written between AD 44–49 (between Acts 12 and Acts 15), because it was written before the Jerusalem Council met in AD 49.² It was written specifically for the Jews who had already embraced Christ.

Wiersbe points out four essential themes that summarize the book of James:

1. We must be born again.
2. We must examine ourselves in light of God's Word.
3. We must obey what God teaches us, no matter the cost.
4. We must be prepared for extra trials and testings.³

Our phrase of where Christ is in the book of James is *Perfect Law* (James 1:25). Our freedom comes from looking in the perfect law of Jesus, not into the temple and its rituals and constant sacrifices. Matthew wrote that the *Perfect Law* is Christ (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 2:4; Hebrews 10:1).

TEACHING

James 1:1-8: James introduced himself as "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" and indicated there were Jewish believers in all 12 of the tribes of Israel (v. 1). Verses 2–4 open his discussion on testings and trials. Wiersbe uses these key words and ideas to express verses 2–5:

1. **COUNT** (v. 2): When going through trials, we should count it as joy or have a joyful attitude. Wiersbe defines the word count as "evaluate" and explains that in evaluating our lives, we can count the things that matter because they are from God.⁴
2. **KNOW** (v. 3): When we go through testing, we learn maturity and patience, and our faith is strengthened. Jewish believers would grow in wisdom in the Lord as they went through trials.⁵ *Nelson's Commentary* states, "The wisdom God gives is not necessarily information on how to get out of trouble, but rather insight on how to learn from one's difficulties."⁶
3. **LET** (v. 4): This growth only happens when we are willing to surrender our will to His.⁷
4. **ASK** (vv. 5–8): James continued about wisdom, telling his readers to ask God for it, if it was lacking in their lives and promising that God would give it generously (v. 5). However, he warned that they were to ask without doubts, because the doubter should never expect God to answer anything (vv. 6–7). James described the doubting believer as "the waves of the sea, up one minute and down the next."⁸

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005), p. 1879.

² MacArthur, p. 1879.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Exposition Bible Commentary: Hebrews* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1989), p. 336.

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 337.

⁵ Wiersbe, p. 338.

⁶ Earl Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1999), p. 1663.

⁷ Wiersbe, p. 339.

⁸ Wiersbe, p. 340.



Perfect Law

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James 1

Teaching Notes

To summarize, verses 2-3 say that trials and testing produce endurance. That means we can still expect trials and testing because that maturity is an ongoing process, and that endurance brings joy. The process brings maturity and wisdom, but if the wisdom is lacking, it can be requested. However, those who lack faith should not ask because God will not honor that. Verse 8 states that an indecisive man is totally unstable. *Nelson's Commentary* explains this as being “double-minded” or literally of “two souls.”⁹ That means, “If one part of a person is set on God and the other is set on this world, there will be constant conflict within.”¹⁰

James 1:9–11: Verses 9–11 give two illustrations of the rich and the poor going through these trials.

James 1:12–18: James explained that one who endured the trials would be blessed and would receive the crown of life God had promised (v. 12). Verses 13–18 explain “how to handle temptation.”¹¹ Temptations do not come from God (v. 13). Temptations come from man’s own evil desires and lead to sin and then death (vv. 14–15).

James 1:19–27: Testings are different and come from God, so we must be “quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger” in order to remain righteous before God (vv. 19–20). Therefore, when we remove moral filth and evil and instead humbly receive God’s Word, it can save us because it points to Christ (v. 21). Once we become hearers of the Word, we are to be doers of the Word as well (v. 22). If we are not doers, we are only looking at ourselves and our fleshly desires (v. 23). But the one who looks intently into the life of Christ and the Word of God, will be blessed in what he or she does (v. 25).

What then are we to do? We are to control our tongues so our religion is not useless, and we are not to deceive ourselves (v. 26). “Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (v. 27).

CLOSING

These last two verses are some of the most practical instructions for how to live out our faith—take care of the widows and orphans because they cannot take care of themselves.

⁹ Nelson’s Commentary, p. 1663.

¹⁰ Nelson’s Commentary, p. 1663.

¹¹ Wiersbe, p. 341.