










SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE

Consider It Pure Joy

# JAMES

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## Week One: Joyful in Trials

# JAMES 1:1–11

Our purpose in studying the first eleven verses of James is to reflect on why perseverance in testing is so important to becoming mature Christians, why we are to ask God for wisdom, and why Christians should be humble, no matter what level of respect they have in the community.

These first eleven verses are the first half of James’s overview or introduction to the instructions he is giving these first-century church communities. He touches on the most important topics that he will be coming back to and developing in chapters 2–5.

Scholars have noted the following pattern in the organization of these verses:

1. Salutation, or greeting (“James, a servant of God . . . To the twelve tribes . . .”).
2. Trials and temptations (“Consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials . . .”).
3. Ask for wisdom (“If any of you lacks wisdom . . . ask God . . .”).
4. Believers are humble (“Believers in humble circumstances . . . take pride in their high position . . .”).

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## WEEK 1, DAY 1

Absorb the passage in James 1:1–11 by reading it aloud several times until you become familiar with its verses, words, and phrases. Enjoy hearing the heart of James as he begins his message to his readers.

# WEEK 1, DAY 2

## JAMES 1:1-11

### The Setting

It is customary to begin the study of a biblical passage by asking questions about its historical, cultural, religious, and literary setting. James is a Jewish Christian writing to fellow Jewish Christians in the first century. These Jewish Christians are subjects of the polytheistic and pagan Roman Empire. They are most likely living outside of Israel in cities where they are the minority. Some may have grown up in these cities, but their lifestyle and customs are noticeably different from those of their neighbors. James uses the normal method of that time of communicating across distances through writing a letter.

The traditional date for the writing of this letter is between AD 40 and 62. During this time, James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem and served as a kind of bishop of the Jewish Christians. In AD 49 he moderated the Council of Jerusalem, which was called because of the tremendous response of gentiles to the gospel during the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. He agreed with Paul and Peter that gentiles should not have to become Jews to be Christians.

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### The Message

To discover the message of James 1:1-11, let us examine the passage verse by verse, essentially dividing it into eleven sections. **Below, summarize or paraphrase the general message or theme of each verse (following the pattern provided for verses 1, 2, and 11).**

#### 1. James 1:1

James is a servant of God and of Jesus Christ, and he is writing to Jewish Christians who are living outside of Jerusalem.

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#### 2. James 1:2

We are to consider trials as something to be happy about.

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**3. James 1:3**

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**4. James 1:4**

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**5. James 1:5**

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**6. James 1:6**

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**7. James 1:7**

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**8. James 1:8**

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**9. James 1:9**

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**10. James 1:10**

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**11. James 1:11**

The earthly significance of the wealthy or proud will not last forever.

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## WEEK 1, DAY 3

### What's Happening in the Passage?

As we notice certain emphases in the passage, we will begin to see how they are similar to or different from the realities of our world. The passage will become the lens through which we see the world in which we live today. In our study today, you may encounter words and/or phrases that are unfamiliar to you. Some of the particular words and translation choices for them have been explained in more detail in the **Word Study Notes**. If you are interested in even more help or detail, you can supplement this study with a Bible dictionary or other Bible study resource.

#### 1. James 1:1

This letter begins by identifying the writer as James, who considers himself a servant<sup>1</sup> of God and of Jesus Christ. He is writing to the “twelve tribes” who live in the Roman Empire outside of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2. James 1:2

James anticipates that his readers will experience unexpected trials.<sup>1</sup> Although joy is not the natural human response, they need to learn as Christians to receive all kinds of trials with joy.

#### WORD STUDY NOTES #1

<sup>1</sup> The word translated as “servant” is the same word used to mean “slave.”

This low status group is identified not by their parents or occupation but by whom they serve. Because of the context of this letter, this identification has a dual meaning of both identifying the author as humble but also to put him in the same category as Moses, who was a servant of God (Numbers 12:7).

<sup>2</sup> The identification of the readers as those who are “scattered among the nations” actually uses the technical term of “dispersion,” or “Diaspora,” which indicates that these Jewish Christians are not living in the traditionally Jewish areas of Judea and Galilee. They are most likely living in Greco-Roman cities and have noticeably different customs than their neighbors, which would cause them to need wisdom on how to live. It also indicates that they could be socially persecuted or ostracized by their neighbors who do not understand their customs.

#### WORD STUDY NOTES #2

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word translated “trials” here can mean trials or temptations. The Greek tense used for the verb “consider” means to *begin* to consider. James recognizes that seeing trials as something to be joyful about is an attitude that must be learned.

**WORD STUDY NOTES #3**

<sup>1</sup>The Greek word translated “testing” here is a different word from the one for trials or temptations. This word indicates the *process* of testing.

**WORD STUDY NOTES #4**

<sup>1</sup>The word translated “mature” in the NIV can also be translated “perfect.” This important word is also found in 1:17, “perfect gift;” in 1:25, “perfect law;” and in 3:2, “perfect one.” It is used in the Hebrew sense of fulfilling one’s purpose rather than the Greek sense (and our Western cultural understanding) of flawlessness.

3. James 1:3

The reason we learn to receive trials with joy is that, in the process of dealing with trials, we develop perseverance in our character.<sup>1</sup>

**Practice the above pattern to summarize the reality that is portrayed in verse 4.**

4. James 1:4<sup>1</sup>

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5. James 1:5

Christians can ask God daily for wisdom, knowing they will not be shamed by God for asking and that God will give the wisdom needed.

6. James 1:6

When a person does ask God for wisdom, they must be ready to act on that wisdom and not doubt God. Those who doubt God are like a wave in the middle of the ocean that goes wherever the wind blows. It has no purpose or direction, and other forces direct where it goes.

7. James 1:7

Response from God comes when one is completely committed to and has faith in God.

**Create your own brief summary or description of the reality portrayed in verse 8.**

8. James 1:8<sup>1</sup>

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9. James 1:9

The poor or humble have a high position with God because they understand that they need God in their lives.

10. James 1:10<sup>1</sup>

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11. James 1:11

Here James uses a proverb from nature to describe the life of the rich person. While they may rise to great heights and look really good for a while, their earthly lives are worth nothing and will eventually pass away.

**WORD STUDY NOTES #8**

<sup>1</sup> The word translated “double-minded” means, literally, “two-souled.” While this particular word is not found elsewhere in Greek literature before the epistle of James, the idea of two souls is found in Jewish traditional literature in commands that instruct believers not to come to God with a divided mind or heart.

**WORD STUDY NOTES #10**

<sup>1</sup> First-century people believed that the limitedness of resources meant that, if someone had more than was needed, they had taken what rightfully belonged to others. Therefore, the rich, by definition, were considered evil. Also, during the Syrian empire persecution about 160 years before Jesus was born, the poor were the ones who stood up to the Syrians, while the rich saw economic advantage in assimilating and cooperating with the Syrians. So the idea of the poor being righteous had carried over into first-century Jewish culture and thinking.



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## Discoveries

Let's summarize our discoveries from James 1:1-11.

1. As Christians, we should be identified by whom we serve: the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. All Christians will have unexpected trials in life, which they can learn to experience with joy because they know these will help them develop character and grow in faith.
3. As we encounter life, we have access to the full wisdom of God. All we have to do is ask and be willing to act on what God says to us.
4. Those who doubt God are trying to live in two worlds—one in which they follow their own desires and one in which they follow God's will. They will never be able to move forward in their lives with God.
5. Those who live for themselves might look good, but their lives are shallow and leave nothing of value when they are gone.

# WEEK 1, DAY 4

## Joyful in Trials and the Story of God

Whenever we read a biblical text, it is important to ask how the particular text we are reading relates to the rest of the Bible. The themes of being joyful in trials and asking for wisdom from God have an important place in the story of God. These themes are found in several other places in the Bible in a variety of contexts.

In the Old and New Testaments, the themes of trials that produce character and asking God for wisdom are numerous. Often the idea of the effect of trials uses the metaphor of smelting ore to produce the pure silver or gold metals. Of course, the most famous person to ask God for wisdom was King Solomon.

Places in the Old Testament where these themes are notably present include but are not limited to 1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 66:1-2, 8-12; Proverbs 9:10-12; and Isaiah 40:27-31. **In the space given below, write a short summary of how the trial and wisdom themes are utilized in each passage.**

1 Kings 3:5-12

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Psalm 66:1-2, 8-12

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If you have a study Bible, it may have references in a margin, a middle column, or footnotes that point to other biblical texts. You may find it helpful in understanding how the whole story of God ties together to look up some of those other scriptures from time to time.

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**Proverbs 9:10 12**

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**Isaiah 40:27 31**

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We also see these themes elsewhere in the New Testament, in the context of the work of salvation that God accomplished through Jesus Christ. **In the space given below, write a short summary of how the themes of trial and wisdom are utilized in the following passages.**

**Matthew 5:10 12**

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**Colossians 2:2 5**

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**2 Thessalonians 1:3 7**

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## WEEK 1, DAY 5

### James and Our World Today

When we look at the themes of trial and wisdom in James 1:1-11, they can become the lens through which we see ourselves, our world, and how God works in our world today.

**1. What do we see when we look at ourselves and our world through the lens of James's perspective of rejoicing in trials?**

Many people, including Christians, do not respond to troubles and trials with joy. Bitterness and complaint are much more common. It's more difficult to think of trials as opportunities to experience God's presence with us and develop character.

Following the above example, answer these questions about how we can understand ourselves, our world, and God's action in our world today.

**2. What do you observe about those around you who have gone through difficult times when seen through the lens of this text?**

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**3. We often desire to protect the children in our lives from difficult times (even if they aren't our own children). What does this theme of learning to rejoice in trials and the importance of developing character say to us about how we should be talking to the children in our lives about things that are hard?**

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4. How do you see godly wisdom differing from earthly wisdom in your life?

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5. James encourages us to ask for wisdom daily and then to be ready to do what God says without hesitation. What is the world's attitude about this way of life?

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## Invitation and Response

God's Word always invites a response. Think about the way these themes of trials and wisdom from James 1:1-11 speak to us today. How do they invite us to respond?

When we go through trials in our lives, God's Word invites us to trust in God's presence with us and consider the opportunities to develop character. God's Word also invites us to follow the examples of those who have trusted in God's presence and developed character when they went through trials.

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What is your evaluation of yourself based on any or all of the verses found in James 1:1-11?

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