

### The Testing of a Believer's Faith

#### James 1:1-12

James 1:1-12 - *"James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. <sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. <sup>9</sup> Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, <sup>10</sup> but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. <sup>11</sup> For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*

#### Background Notes

The first verse of the chapter leaves no doubt that James is the author of this epistle. But the question is... which "James"? Was it James the apostle, the brother of John? Or was it James, the half brother of our Lord? James the apostle was martyred in 44AD by Herod Agrippa I - you can read about that in Acts 12. All evidence indicates that this epistle was not written before 44AD, so we believe that the author of this epistle was James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus.

Mary and Joseph had other children after the virgin birth of our Lord. In Mark 6:3 we read that the people of Nazareth said of Jesus, *"Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary the brother of James, Josephus, Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"* So the Lord definitely had half-brothers and sisters. They were not cousins, as some churches teach, but half-brothers and sisters who were born after the virgin birth of our Lord. James, the half-brother of our Lord, was one of these children.

At first James, the author of this epistle, did not believe in Jesus as the Christ. John 7:5: *"For even his brothers did not believe in him."* Later, however, there came a change of heart and James became a believer. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:7 that the Lord made a special appearance after his resurrection to his earthly brother James, and in Acts 1:14 we read that the brothers of Jesus were gathered together in the upper room with the disciples and other believers. James the brother of our Lord went on to become a leader in the church of Jerusalem, and according to Acts 15 he presided over the first church council held in Jerusalem.

So we believe this was the “James” who wrote the epistle of James. Notice in verse 1 that he humbly referred to himself as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” What a change in his life, from skeptic to servant! Maybe this has been your experience -- once you were a skeptic, but now you’re a believer and serving the Lord. Or maybe you’re still a skeptic, and if so, I hope that our study of this epistle will convince you that Jesus is the Lord and that He is your only means of salvation. Commit your life to Christ, and you, too, can become a servant of the living God.

Notice how the deity of Christ is implied in verse 1: “*James, the bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...*” The Lord Jesus was placed on the same level as God Himself, because **Jesus is God**.

The epistle of James is specifically addressed “*to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad...*” These “scattered tribes” would have been Jewish believers who were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. Obviously, however, the content of the epistle of James can be applied to all believers at all times.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The testing of our faith results in maturity.

Verses 3-4: “*The testing of your faith produces patience. And let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing.*” The idea in the phrase “*perfect and complete*” is **maturity** -- not sinless perfection! Let me ask you... do you want to be a mature Christian? Then thank the Lord for trials and tribulations that test your faith! It is impossible to be a mature believer apart from trials, so that’s why we can be joyful when we fall into various trials (v2).

The idea here is not that we’re to jump up and down and say, “Praise the Lord! I just had a car accident!” Or “I’m happy because my house just burned down” or “I just lost my job.” No. The idea here is that believers can be joyful in any circumstances, because we know that God is in control and that this trial is not by chance. In fact, we can be sure God is using any trial to test our faith so that our faith will become stronger, and we will become mature believers.

Don’t get the idea that God is sitting up in heaven plotting how to “tighten the screws” and make us hurt and unhappy. No, God is our loving Father, and he knows just what kind of test will strengthen our faith and make us more mature. 1 Corinthians 10:13 assures us that God will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are individually able to bear. So whether it’s a big test of faith, such as discovering that you have cancer or losing a close friend, or the small tests of faith, like not making the team (for you young people) or not getting the job you wanted -- **all** tests are designed to make us more mature. All of us are going through tests of our faith - some big, some small – and the testing of our faith results in maturity.

Verses 9-11, about the prosperous brother and the not-so-prosperous brother, are examples of being joyful regardless of our circumstances. If God gives you the trial of being poor and lowly in life, you can rejoice because you are exalted in God’s kingdom. You are a joint heir with Christ! If, on the other hand, you are well-off... you too can rejoice. Notice, not to rejoice in your riches (v10) – but you can rejoice in adopting a humble attitude towards money that comes with knowing

that you will die and that you can't take it with you. Now that's the attitude of a mature believer. I trust that all of us have that humble and thankful attitude toward the abundance of material blessings that we enjoy. So a Christian can rejoice regardless of circumstances because the testing of our faith brings spiritual strength and maturity.

## 2. The testing of our faith results in reward.

Verse 12: *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation or perseveres under trial. For when he has been approved you will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him."* Notice that the blessing is pronounced upon the person who endures the trial of faith, not the person who runs away from the trial. So when trials of faith come our way, let's not pretend they don't exist, and let's not become bitter and angry with God for allowing them. Let's endure and persevere in faith through the trials and learn the lessons that God has for us -- and we'll become mature believers as a result.

That's easier said than done, however - especially if the trial is long, maybe even life-long. But a reward is promised to those who persevere: the crown of life. Is this "crown of life" the abundant life that Christ offers to the believer now, or is it the believer's life forever in heaven? I think the "crown of life reward" refers primarily to our life in heaven. So exactly what is the "crown of life" in heaven? I think we could put it this way... in heaven, every believer's "cup of joy" will be filled -- but there will be different sized cups! The size of your cup in heaven is partly determined by how you persevere through the trials of your faith here on this earth. As you persevere in the testing of your faith, your relationship and appreciation of the Lord's love and grace is enlarged in a way that is impossible apart from trials -- and this large cup of appreciation will be part of your life forever! What you learn of the Lord's love and grace under trials in this life cannot be learned in heaven, because in heaven the testing of your faith is over. If you want to enlarge your cup and thus receive the crown of life, that time is now, and that privilege is **now**. Do we love and trust the Lord enough to endure the testing of our faith? The testing of our faith results in reward.

## Practical Application

### We can be wise - if we wish!

We can be wise if we wish -- and we don't mean by this that we can be wise if we make a wish. No, we can be wise if we wish to be wise. Verse 5: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach and it will be given to him."* In context here, remember: the wisdom that is needed has to do with understanding the trials with which God tests our faith. This is a great promise -- God guarantees that He will give us an answer concerning our trials! He may not give us **all** the answers, or tell us everything we would like to know, but He will give us insight and wisdom and understanding as to why He is allowing a certain trial in our lives.

However, we must come to Him and ask Him with a proper and right attitude. As we see in verses 6-8, we're not to question God's ways and demand, "Why me, Lord?" We're not to doubt His love and care and goodness. If we doubt

God in times of trouble, we're unstable believers, like wave of the sea tossing during the storm (v6). And if we doubt, we will not receive wisdom as to our trials. But God will give us answers and understanding if we come in humble faith and ask Him our questions with the right attitude. Isn't that a great promise? We can be wise - if we wish.