



# CAPITOL COMMISSION

## Faith Tried and Found True

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*James 1:1-12. I trust you enjoyed some time away from the office this summer. My family and I made a few trips together, and I remained busy with various projects and travel. It's good to be back with you.*

*We will resume our staff Bible studies and focus on the book of James. It is a short epistle, very practical in nature and easy to understand. Each Monday at 12:30, we will meet in the Stratton Building, Room 205-N. I look forward to seeing you there...*

Christians of ages past were well acquainted with Heaven. They suffered and mourned, yet rejoiced in the hope of what await. Each persecution brought a new wave of trials for the early church. Many believers were killed. Though stung by tragic losses, those who survived so often etched in the catacombs vivid reminders of eternity. The early church was characterized by an intense longing and found hope for today in a glorious tomorrow.

*“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” — 1 Corinthians 15:19*

Christians today have little in common with their ancestors. Unprecedented wealth and leisure has drawn their gaze downward. Why look upward to the future when one can have his heart's desires here and now? Believers refer to Heaven when evangelizing and attending funerals, but little more is said. It would seem that Heaven is hardly considered a real and exciting place. While struggling with the hardships of living in a fallen world, hope is hindered when the future is forgotten.

James' epistle is not about Heaven. It is a book about trials. Pain and hurt are inescapable (cf. Job 5:7). There is nothing good about experiencing sickness, financial upheaval, rejection or the loss of a loved one. Captivated by this life alone, trials are nothing more than intruders, and pain seems entirely out of place. Yet, God's people must have an eternal perspective, one so ingrained that it affects how they endure each day (cf. Jas 1:12).

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**“WHEN A MAN DOES NOT KNOW WHAT HARBOR HE IS MAKING FOR, NO WIND IS THE RIGHT WIND.” — SENECA**

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For a believer to experience tragedy and to see nothing more than the tragedy itself is tragic. God wastes nothing. He uses all to sanctify His child and works to prepare him for the enjoyment of an eternal home (cf. 2 Cor 4:16-18).

James urges us to have a heavenly perspective. See the big picture of trials, one that spans beyond days and years into forever. Heaven is the Christian's harbor, not earth, and God uses the headwinds His people face to push them onward towards the shore.

### JAMES, TO THE DISPERSION (1:1)

The Lord's siblings rejected Him throughout His earthly ministry (cf. Matt 13:55; John 7:3-5). That their older brother could be the long-awaited Messiah of Israel was ridiculous. Yet, when Jesus rose from the dead and spoke, things changed. James believed (cf. 1 Cor 15:6). He was not one of the original apostles, but in the decade that followed, James rose to lead the church in Jerusalem.

Within 15 years of the Resurrection (between A.D. 44-49), James penned the first of the 27 New Testament books. Being Jewish and having a Jewish congregation, his heart was burdened for his people. Most Jews did not live in Jerusalem but had been scattered due to deportation and persecution. Like a chain reaction, James wanted this letter copied and multiplied until it reached the ends of the earth. He wanted every Jewish Christian in every nation to know and find comfort in these words.

### WHAT'S THE POINT OF PAIN? (1:2-4)

Strength in numbers lay within Palestine where the Jews remained fiercely monotheistic. In the first century they refused to worship Roman deities, and Rome tolerated it. Outside of Palestine where the Jews scattered into smaller numbers, society greeted them with contempt. Christians, especially Jewish Christians, received worse.

The Romans despised Christianity for being monotheistic but also for following Jesus Christ, a condemned criminal. Thus, Rome had an added reason for its disdain. Worse, the Jews held their countrymen who followed Christ as heretics and excommunicated, if not persecuted, them. To be a Jewish believer meant mistreatment not only from the government but from family and friends.<sup>1</sup> It was a hard path, and these believers needed to be instructed and encouraged by one of their leaders.

James is a man familiar with persecution. He lived in the real world and understood pain—trials are not a joy for anyone. This is why he encourages his readers to “count” their trials as a joy. He uses an accounting term (*hegeomai*) to say that trials must be counted, considered or reckoned as joy (cf. Jas 1:2). Contrary to all we might feel as our heart cries out to God for relief, trials are actually one of His good gifts (cf. Jas 1:17).

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**BIBLE STUDIES**

**MONDAYS @ 12:30 P.M. STRATTON BUILDING ROOM 205-N**

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Is this merely positive thinking or a case of “fake until you feel it”? James understands that the believer’s joy is rooted in the unshakable promises and character of God. Emotions rise and fall as waves blown by circumstances. Joy does not, for it is anchored in God Himself.

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” — Psalm 139:23-24*

James calls us to zoom out, for in times of testing a loving God is at work (cf. Jas 1:3), and His goal is that His people would be “conformed to the image of His Son” (cf. Rom 8:29). As a believer, is growing in holiness your goal? Do you want to be like Christ? Then remain under your present trial, learning endurance and seeing the goodness and sufficiency of Christ in it. Only then can you mature towards lacking in nothing (cf. Jas 1:4), and only then is the reality of a real faith tried and proven true (cf. Job 23:10).

### SEEING WITH NEW EYES (1:5-8)

It has been said that, “Our values determine our evaluations.”<sup>2</sup> If we value the temporal more than the eternal, then the possibility of joy during a trial is forfeit. James argues that we must have the wisdom to value what is eternal. Without heavenly wisdom, our values are skewed, and we feel a sense of joy only when all is well.

Wisdom values the eternal and rejoices in what makes the believer more fit for eternity. If joy is lacking, it is a sign that wisdom is fledging. In no way does James say it is easy, but as a man who has suffered he knows the nature of joy in his own trials. Jesus also understood as did Paul and Peter (cf. Luke 6:22-23; Heb 12:2; Phil 4:4; 1 Pet 1:6-7). Christ offers a life of great joy, but quite often it is a painful joy.

Hebrews 11 offers hope by looking at the lives of different believers in Scripture. Each suffered, and we ask: “Why didn’t they just give up their faith?” Noah spent 120 years building an ark as the world mocked him. Abraham parted ways with all he had ever known. Moses forfeited the riches of Egypt to identify with slaves.

What kept these and many others going? Each could have given up at any point—why didn’t they? Hebrews tells us they endured their trials, “as seeing Him who is invisible” (cf. Heb 11:27). The thought of God, the emptiness of a fallen world and the glory of Heaven radically affected their perspective on life (cf. Heb 11:10, 15-16, 27). They took comfort in the promise of a glorious future and in the knowledge that God had a design in their distress.

Unable to see and lacking in joy, James says to ask the Lord for wisdom (cf. Jas 1:5). He is the source (cf. Job 28:12-28) though sometimes a believer will doubt, question the very goodness of God or wonder how his life turned out a certain way. Confused and hurt without answers while plunging into despair, such a man is “driven and tossed by the wind” (cf. Jas 1:5-6). His anchor is lost as he doubts that God has a good purpose for his trial.

A believer’s mind may become divided and unstable at times (cf. Jas 1:8; 1 Kings 18:21), wavering between faith and doubt on God’s character. Yet, James urges us to walk by faith believing God and valuing eternity. This is true wisdom, biblical knowledge being applied when it hurts. Wisdom opens the door for joy to flourish even in the midst of adversity.

### A TEST CASE AND A CONCLUSION (1:9-12)

Social classes have always existed, and all classes have their trials. The early church was poor with a few wealthy members. Those with little were easily exploited, and in a Gentile world, Jewish Christians were notable targets. Believers with much were scoffed at for associating with the lower classes.

James says that the poor should remind themselves of all they have in Heaven. Though socially and economically humiliated in this life, the one who is poor and knows Christ is rich and will exalt in the life to come. To the wealthy Christian, James says to remember life’s transience (cf. Jas 1:9-10). In the blink of an eye this life will end—plan accordingly. Store up treasure in Heaven, and exalt in true riches (cf. Luke 12:15-21).

The first of many trials that James mentions is finances. Whether having much or little, how a believer handles his wealth confirms or condemns his profession of faith. This trial, like any other, manifests what is within—a true faith made of gold or one so misleading as pyrite.

A day is coming when the last chapter of every life will be written. The old will break forth with the new, and eternity will descend upon time. History marches with every day unto this end, and God is tirelessly preparing His people for it. Those who have a faith that is “steadfast under trial” love Him and will receive the crown of life (cf. Jas 1:12). Their faith will be made sight, their trials will end and great will be their reward.

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<sup>1</sup>For the first few decades, the Romans made little distinction between Jews and Christians. Thus, most early persecutors (preceding Nero) were Jewish, not Roman.

<sup>2</sup>Warren Wiersbe. *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Colorado Springs, Co.: Victor, 1989; reprint 2001), 2:338