



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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Lesson 2

James 1:9-18 Commentary New American Standard Bible

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

(James 1:9) But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;

James wrote to Christians of every social status and walk of life, and he had a message for everyone. James encouraged the poor and lowly Christians by telling them that through faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior God had raised them up. God had made them brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and they now lived in the family of God. Jesus had filled them with the Holy Spirit and He had given them the fruit of the Spirit and various gifts. In the Church, a lowly slave in society could be gifted by God to become a pastor, teacher, elder, or evangelist in the Church, but he was not to consider himself better or worse than the ones he led and taught. Someday, the poor and lowly would go to heaven and be with Jesus until He returned; then, they would rule and reign with Him in a new heaven and earth. They were not to boast as an arrogant person would; rather, they were to tell others the truth about Jesus Christ and how Jesus had raised them up in several ways, even though they were poor by this world's measure. In Christ Jesus and through His spiritual gifts, they had become spiritually rich, and Christ had called them to share their gifts with others and tell others that He would do the same for them and grant them eternal

life, if they repented of their sins and trusted Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

(James 1:10) and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.

The Church included rich Christians. We know from the gospels that two rich believers in Jesus had provided His tomb and the spices for His burial after His death on the cross. In John 19:38-40, we read about Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two rich men who cared for the body of Jesus after His death as the Lamb of God: “After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.” No doubt some of the rich and powerful lost their leadership positions in the Sanhedrin and the synagogue and even their wealth after accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The gospel of Jesus Christ can humble the rich when they learn how they need to depend on the leadership, teaching, and spiritual gifts of poor and lowly Christians in the Church for their spiritual growth. Depending on their spiritual gifts, some of them may be taught and led in spiritual matters by a servant in their home. They faced the fact that someday they and their wealth would disappear, but they too would go to heaven to be with Jesus because they trusted in Jesus and not in their wealth. James also wanted to warn them not to fall back into sinfulness. When Paul wrote to Philemon about his runaway slave, Onesimus, who had become a Christian through Paul’s teaching, Paul told him that Onesimus had now become his brother in Christ. In Philemon 1:15-17, we read, “Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.”

In the Book of Acts, we read of two rich people, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who pretended to be followers of Jesus Christ. After they lied to God, they immediately died in the Church at the feet of Peter (see Acts 5:1-11). Every rich person will eventually disappear from this earth, their wealth will not save them, but every follower of Jesus Christ (rich or poor) will spend eternity with God and receive from God what we cannot even imagine. Through Isaiah and Paul, God promised rich blessings to those who love God, “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’” (see Isaiah 64:4 and 1 Corinthians 2:9).

(James 1:11) For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

The rich and powerful in this world can dress in splendor, own many homes, and control the destiny of thousands, if not millions of people. Some seek to control the whole planet! The Letter of James reminds us that they will come to an end in the midst of their busy lives just as the heat of the sun can bring a swift death to the grass and flowers of the field, or they may just wither away from sickness, from an unhealthy lifestyle, or from old age that their wealth cannot cure or prevent. Riches can become a snare and rich people can be tempted to trust in their riches instead of God, who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. If the rich trust in their riches to save them, they will be disappointed, because their riches can be lost, and no amount of money can save them from some diseases and old age. Nor can they buy their way to heaven or earn their way through impressive charitable giving. Some of the rich and famous who have lost their worldly goods in this life, or their places of power and position, or their hope for a better future, have cut their lives short thinking life is no longer worth living. But taking one’s own life is not the answer, because at death unbelieving people simply change locations and forfeit the opportunity to grow in their faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In his letter, James warned rich Christians that they would face various trials and temptations as followers of Jesus Christ in this world, and he did not want them to fall

into the temptation of trusting in their riches instead of trusting in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in every situation.

(James 1:12) Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Whether rich or poor, those who endure temptation and do not sin are blessed or happy in this life and will be happy in heaven. Temptations of various kinds will come to all Christians. Rich and poor will face different, but just as deadly, temptations to sin and not believe the Bible with its promises and warnings. Some temptations will be severe; for example, persecutions can become so severe that the only things we can do are pray and endure. No matter what happens, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can refuse to turn from faith in Jesus Christ and keep on trusting in Him. Sometimes, all we can do is endure our sufferings and surroundings and keep trusting in Jesus Christ as the Lord of the universe despite all appearances to the contrary. The Bible teaches that those who endure temptations can be happy that God gave them grace, the power of prayer, the love of God, the Holy Spirit, the presence of Jesus in their lives, the Bible, and wisdom to keep on believing and persevering when their suffering seems unchanging. During their trials and temptations, Christians can look forward with confident faith as they endure because they know that the Lord Jesus will reward them as He promised. They love the Lord more than their own lives in this world. They love Jesus more than the sins they are tempted to commit. They remember the words of Jesus in John 14:23, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

(James 1:13) Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Some always blame others for their mistakes and sins. The Bible teaches people to take personal responsibility for their choices and ways of living. James warned against shifting the blame for our sins to others or to God. Even today in various ways, some attribute everything that happens to God.

They say they do not blame God when evil occurs, or they say when God does evil that God does not sin. The Bible reminds us that God is so loving, merciful, powerful, just, and wise that God cannot be tempted by evil to commit a sin and God will not tempt others to sin. Nor has God preordained or planned every evil that has or will ever happen in this world. God did not and does not cause evil or sin, and God certainly will not tempt anyone to commit a sin or do evil. Since God has promised He will not tempt anyone to sin and God is not tempted by evil, we know that God did not preplan all the evil that has happened in the world or in our lives. God is loving, just, and merciful; therefore, God will execute just judgements in this world and in the next upon those who do evil, sin, and refuse to repent and turn to God. Obviously, not all the evils we experience are God's judgements. We experience many evils because of what others intentionally or unintentionally have done to us or the consequences of our living in a fallen world unlike the good world that God originally created. When God executes a just judgement, God does not do evil—God justly punishes the one or ones who have done evil. God's just judgements are always in accordance with God's warnings in the Bible. When God extends mercy toward sinners, He does so according to His promises in the Bible. God the Father extended mercy to sinners with He sent Jesus into the world to live, die, and rise again so He could be merciful and just when forgiving repentant sinners who believe in and trust Jesus. Among other expressions of God's character, God's justice (or just punishment) and God's mercy toward sinners by grace through faith in Jesus Christ express God's love and truth. Just as Jesus suffered from temptations, but did not sin, temptations that come our way are not sins; rather, temptations are evil influences that can prompt us to turn away from God and turn to selfishness and sinfulness.

(James 1:14) But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

James pointed out that many of our temptations are no one's fault but ours, for they begin within us. James did not philosophize or psychologize about human nature as some philosophers, theologians, and scientists have done for centuries; instead, he wrote simply so both the lowly and the rich could

understand with divine help. The Bible teaches that God created people in His image with the ability to think, reason, experience emotions and desires, and make choices. The world, the flesh, and the devil can use our thoughts and emotions to stimulate our desires and influence us to take actions contrary to the way God made us and intended us to live. We can use our reason and choose to follow God and our conscience (and if we are Christians we have the Bible, its teachings, the example of Jesus, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help us do what is right), or we can choose to follow the ways of this world, our emotions, and our desires wherever they lead. As James warned in verse 15, the second alternative can lead to spiritual and eternal death. Before we turned to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we were slaves to sin and easily followed our desires, the world, and the flesh with the devil's help. As Christians, after we are born again, we are not yet mature and complete as God intends to make us. Our desires can still entice us to sin; however, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and God has set us apart for a holy use and helps us live more consistently as faithful followers of Jesus (a process called sanctification). With the help of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, God has given Christians the power to follow Jesus and refuse to sin. God changes the direction of every Christian's life when they are born anew and become new creatures, and James wants us to understand what can lead us to sin so we will be aware and prepared to overcome our temptations and keep obeying God when tempted to sin.

(James 1:15) Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Jesus was tempted but always obeyed and pleased His heavenly Father. People can experience a desire to do wrong or be tempted to do evil, and they can turn to God for help to endure so they will not disobey God. Or they can use their minds and unreasonably conceive or think of a plan to fulfill their desires (usually involving someone else in their sins or sinning against someone else). After they have conceived a plan to sin, they can still turn to Jesus and ask Jesus to help them avoid following through with their plan to sin, or they can turn from Jesus and put their plan into effect. Sinful living, rebelling against God, or practicing evil will give birth to death, spiritual and eternal death, which includes separation from God and all that

is good, true, and beautiful forever. James wrote his warning to help believers know how to avoid sinning by recognizing how temptations can lead to sin; then, when tempted, believers can turn from their temptations quickly before their desires lead them into the planning stages and eventually to practicing sin. If not repented of, living in rebellion against God and practicing sin will lead to eternal death—eternal separation from God and all that is good.

(James 1:16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

The command “Do not be deceived” may relate to the preceding verses regarding temptation and sin, or stand alone as a dire warning in general, or relate to the verses that follow verse 16. Both Christians and unbelievers are susceptible to deception and deceivers. No one should deceive themselves into thinking they can continue to practice sin and not receive the wages of or consequences of sin—death (see also Romans 6:23). No one should be deceived into thinking that the “gifts” of devils and those who do evil are gifts from God. James offered these severe warnings to those he loved because God and he loved them.

(James 1:17) Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Rather than doing evil, planning evil, or tempting people to do evil, God gives generously beyond what anyone can deserve, expect, or imagine. God gives perfectly whatever is best suited to each person. God inspires people to give generously and rightly according to His will. God gives light, which reveals reality, what is, and what remains to be completed. God’s light reveals what is outside and within a person. God shines His light from within true Christians out into the world to make new Christians. God is perfect light and God gives perfect light for perfect reasons. God will always do what is loving, just, truthful, wise, and merciful. God will never do anything that is unloving, unjust, or unmerciful. God does not and will not change His moral character and nature, and His warning that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death is a sincere warning for all to heed.

(James 1:18) In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Jesus Christ is the Word of Truth who came into the world in human flesh to save us and give believers eternal life. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus came and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. The Bible is the Word of God written, the truth of God in written form. The Bible is also full of grace and truth that with the help of the Holy Spirit will lead sinners to repent of their sins and receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. When people come to true faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are born again; they become new people and receive a new beginning from God. They come to true faith because the light of God gives them understanding and the ability to read and rightly apply the word of truth (the Bible) to all of life. God chose to use Truth, the Word of Truth, as the means of creating Christians; so, millions have come to believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Savior of the world and their personal Savior.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How should we face trials? What is their purpose?
2. What will happen to everyone? What will happen to rich unbelievers?
3. What happens after a believer endures temptations and passes the test?
4. Why do people sin? What are the consequences of practicing sin?
5. What is one of the things God uses that James mentioned that lead people to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? What are the types of gifts that God gives to believers?

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