

THE
LETTER OF

JAMES

WILLIAM MACDONALD



Developed as a study course by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.

The Letter of James

William MacDonald

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Course Components

This course has two parts: this study course and the exam booklet.

How To Study

This study has twelve chapters, and each chapter has its own exam. Begin by asking God to help you understand the material. Read the chapter through at least twice, once to get a general idea of its contents and then again, slowly, looking up any Bible references given.

Begin studying immediately, or if you are in a group, as soon as the group begins. We suggest that you keep a regular schedule by trying to complete at least one chapter per week.

Exams

In the exam booklet there is one exam for each chapter (exam 1 covers chapter 1 of the course). Do not answer the questions by what you think or have always believed. The questions are designed to find out if you understand the material given in the course.

After you have completed each chapter, review the related exam and see how well you know the answers. If you find that you are having difficulty answering the questions, review the material until you think you can answer the questions. It is important that you read the Bible passages referenced as some questions may be based on the Bible text.

How Your Exams Are Graded

Your instructor will mark any incorrectly answered questions. You will be referred back to the place in the course where the correct answer is to be found. After finishing this course with a passing average, you will be awarded a certificate.

If you enrolled in a class, submit your exam papers to the leader or secretary of the class who will send them for the entire group to the Correspondence School.

See the back of the exam booklet for more information on returning the exams for grading.

1

TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

(JAMES 1:1-17)

Introduction

While the letter of James may be the first book of the New Testament to be written, and thus has a strong Jewish flavor, its teachings must not be relegated to another age. They are applicable to us today and very much needed. D. A. Hayes comments: “The letter speaks to us where we are in language we can understand. Its short sentences go like shots straight to the mark. We feel the impact and the impress of them. There is an energy behind them and a reality in them that makes them live in our thoughts.”

The perspective on the letter taken in this course is on the theme, “faith on trial.” Within its five short chapters, James seems to be putting our faith to the test. Is my faith genuine, or is it a cheap imitation?

The letter is strangely silent concerning the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. For instance, neither Christ’s incarnation nor His resurrection are mentioned. In fact, the name of Christ is found only twice (1:1 and 2:1). But this is not so strange after all. James’s purpose was not to teach doctrine so much as to show us how Christ the Word should become incarnate in our lives, and how we should display the life of the risen Christ to those about us. This he has done exceedingly well.

To achieve his goal, James draws heavily on the teachings that the Lord Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. This will be readily seen by the following comparison on page 6.

JAMES	PARALLEL IN MATTHEW	SUBJECT
1:2, 12; 5:10	5:10-12	Adversity
1:5; 4:3; 5:13-18	6:6-13; 7:7-12	Prayer
1:8; 4:8	6:22-23	Focused Vision
1:10-11; 2:6-7	6:19-21, 24-34	Wealth
1:19-20; 4:1	5:22	Anger / Wrath
1:25; 2:1, 12-13	5:17-44	The Law
1:26-27	6:1-18	Mere Profession
2:8	7:12	The Royal Law
2:13	5:7	Mercy
2:14-26	7:15-27	Faith and Works
3:11-12	7:16-20	Root and Fruit
3:13	7:24	True Wisdom
3:17-18	5:9	The Peacemaker
4:11-12	7:1-5	Judging Others
5:2	6:19	Rusted Treasures
5:12	5:33-37	Oaths

There are frequent references to the Old Testament law in this letter. It is called “the perfect law” (1:25), “the royal law” (2:8) and “the law of liberty” (2:12). James does not teach that his Jewish readers are under law for salvation or as a rule of life. Rather, portions of the law are cited as instruction in righteousness for those who are under grace.

There are many resemblances to the book of Proverbs in James’s letter. Like Proverbs, his style is rugged, vivid, graphic, and difficult to outline. The word “wisdom” recurs frequently. Another key word in the book is “brethren.” It occurs fifteen times and reminds us that James is writing to believers, even if at times he seems to address the unconverted also.

In some ways, the letter of James is the most authoritarian in the New Testament. That is, James issues instructions more often than any of the other writers of the New Testament. In the short space of 108 verses, there are 54 imperatives (commands)!

The Greeting (1:1)

The writer introduces himself as “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Which James is this? Because several are mentioned in the New Testament, we cannot be absolutely sure which one wrote this letter. Most evangelical Christians assume it was James, the Lord’s brother (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), but we cannot be certain. We can be glad that this in no way affects the inspiration of the letter or the benefit we can get from it.

If the author *was* the Lord’s brother (as we suppose), then a wonderful change had occurred in his life. At one time, he had not believed in the Lord Jesus, that He was the Messiah God had promised to send (John 7:5). He may have shared the view of many, that Jesus was out of His mind (Mark 3:21). But our Lord patiently sowed the seed of truth in him. Though unappreciated, He taught the great principles of the kingdom of God. Then the seed took root in James. A mighty transformation resulted. The skeptic became a servant—and he wasn’t ashamed to say so!

James speaks of himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, correctly putting God and the Lord Jesus on the same level, as equals. He honors the Son even as he honors the Father (John 5:23). James knew that “no man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24), yet he spoke of himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus. There is no contradiction here, because God the Father and God the Son are co-equal.

The letter is addressed to the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” or “which are of the Dispersion” (RV). These people were Jews by birth, belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel. Because of Israel’s sin, the people had been driven from their native land and were now dispersed in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean.

The original dispersion took place when the northern kingdom of Israel (the ten tribes) were carried into captivity by the Assyrians in 721 BC, and when the southern kingdom of Judah (the other two tribes) were taken captive by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Some of these returned to the land in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, but only a remnant of them. On the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:5, devout Jews visited Jerusalem from every nation of the then-known world. These could properly be called “Jews of the Dispersion.”

A dispersion of *Christian* Jews took place later on, however. In Acts 8:1, we read that the early Christians (who were mostly Jews) were scattered abroad throughout Judea and Samaria by the persecutions of Saul. This dispersion is referred to again in Acts 11:19 where we read that believers were driven to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Therefore, the people to whom James wrote could have been Jews who had been dispersed in any one of these crisis times.

Since all true believers are strangers and pilgrims in this world (Phil. 3:20; 1 Peter 2:11), we can apply the principles in this letter to ourselves, even if it wasn't written directly to us.

A more difficult question is whether James is addressing non-Christian Jews, Jews who had been converted to Christ, or both believing and unbelieving Jews. Primarily the author seems to be writing to true born again believers (1:18). Yet there are times when he seems to be addressing professing Christians, or even the unconverted.

Trials and Temptations (1:2-17)

In this section, James deals with the subject of temptation. He uses the word in two different senses. In verses 2-12, the temptations are what we might call holy trials or problems that are sent from God. They test the reality of our faith and produce likeness to Christ. In verses 13-17, on the other hand, the subject is unholy temptations, which come from within and which lead to sin.

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Problems that are sent from God test the reality of our faith and produce likeness to Christ.
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1. Holy Trials (1:2-12)

The Christian life is filled with problems. They come uninvited and are often unexpected. Sometimes they come singly, and sometimes in droves. They are inevitable. James does not say “*if* you fall into various trials” but “*when* . . .” We can never get away from them. The question is, what are we going to do about them?

There are several possible attitudes we can take toward the testings and trials of life.

1. We can rebel against them (Heb. 12:5) by adopting a spirit of defiance, boasting that we will battle through to victory by our own power.
2. On the other hand, we can faint or give up under the pressure (Heb. 12:5). We say, “What’s the use? What’s going to be is going to be.” This is nothing but fatalism. It leads us to questioning the Lord’s care for us.
3. We can grumble and complain about our troubles. This is what Paul warns us against in 1 Corinthians 10:10.
4. We can indulge in self-pity, thinking of no one but ourselves, and trying to get sympathy from others.
5. We can be exercised by the difficulties and concerns of life (Heb. 12:11). We can say, in effect, “God has allowed this trial to come to me. He has some good purpose in it for me. I don’t know what that purpose is, but I’ll try to find out. I want His purposes to be worked out in my life.” This is what James advocates. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” Don’t rebel! Don’t faint! Rejoice! These problems are not enemies, bent on destroying you. They are friends come to help you in the development of Christian character.

God is trying to produce likeness to Christ in each of His children. This process necessarily involves suffering, frustration, and difficulty. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be produced when all is sunshine; there must be rain and dark clouds. Trials never seem pleasant—rather, they seem very difficult and disagreeable. But afterwards they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by them (Heb. 12:11). How often we hear a Christian say, after passing through some great crisis, “It wasn’t easy to take, but I wouldn’t give up the experience for anything.”

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**Trials never seem
 pleasant, but
 afterwards they yield
 the peaceable fruit of
 righteousness.**
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James speaks of “the testing of your faith” (v. 3). He pictures faith as a precious metal that is being tested by the Assayer (God) to see if it is genuine. The metal is subjected to the fires of persecution, sickness, suffering or sorrow.

James reminds us that the proving (testing) of our faith produces “patience.” A better word for patience here would be steadfastness or fortitude. As our faith is put to the test, we become strengthened to meet problems still to come. We may liken the process to a tree that is exposed to the winter gales. The pressure of the stormy winds causes the roots to go down deeper, and the tree itself becomes stronger. Without problems, we would never develop endurance. Even men of the world realize that problems strengthen character. Charles Kettering, a noted industrialist once said, “Problems are the price of progress. Don’t bring me anything but problems. Good news weakens me.”

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**Without problems,
we would never
develop endurance.**
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“But let patience have its perfect work” says James. Sometimes, when problems come, we become desperate and use frantic means to cut short the trial. Without consulting the Lord as to His purpose in the matter, we rush to the doctor, for instance, and gulp down large doses of medicine in order to shorten the trial. By doing this, we may actually be thwarting (frustrating) God’s program in our lives. And it is just possible that we may have to undergo a longer trial in the future before His particular purpose is accomplished in us. *We should not short-circuit the development of endurance in our lives.* By cooperating with God we will become mature, well-rounded Christians, lacking in none of the graces of the Spirit (v. 4).

We should never become depressed or discouraged, either, when passing through trials. No problem is too great for our Father. Some problems in life are never removed. We must learn to accept them and to prove that His grace is sufficient. Paul asked the Lord three times to remove a physical infirmity. The Lord did not remove it, but gave Paul grace (divine strength) to bear it (2 Cor. 12:8-10). A verse of the well-known hymn “How Firm a Foundation” goes:

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

When we face problems in life that God obviously isn’t going to remove, we should be submissive to His will. Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn-writer, wrote these lines as a girl of eight:

*O what a happy soul am I
 Although I cannot see;
 I am resolved that in this world
 Contented I will be.
 How many blessings I enjoy
 That other people don't.
 To weep and sigh because I'm blind
 I cannot and I won't.*

Peace comes through submission to the will of God.

Some problems in life are removed when we have learned our lessons from them. As soon as the Refiner sees His reflection in the molten metal, He turns off the heat. Most of us lack the wisdom needed to view the pressures of life from God's standpoint. We adopt a short-range view, occupying ourselves with the immediate discomfort. We forget that God's unhurried purpose is to enlarge us through pressure (Ps. 4:1).

But we don't have to face the problems of life in our own wisdom. If, in the time of trial, we lack spiritual insight, we should go to God and tell Him all about our confusion and our ignorance (v. 5). All who are thus exercised to find God's purpose in the trials will be generously rewarded. And they need not worry that God will scold them either; He is pleased when we are teachable and compliant. We all lack wisdom. The Bible does

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**Spiritual wisdom
 is the practical
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not give *specific* answers to the innumerable problems that arise in life. It does not solve problems in so many words, but it does give us general principles. We must apply these principles to problems as they arise day by day. That is why we need wisdom. Spiritual wisdom is the practical application, in daily life, of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

We must approach God in faith, with no doubts (v. 6). We must believe He loves and cares, and that nothing is impossible with Him. If we doubt His goodness and His power, we will have no steadfastness in the hour of trouble. One minute we might be resting calmly on His promises, but the next we feel that God has forgotten to be kind. We will be like the surge of the sea, rising to great heights, then falling back into valleys, troubled and tossed. God is not honored by the kind of faith that alternates between optimism

and pessimism. He does not give divine insight to such vacillating, unstable men (vv. 7-8). One characteristic of genuine faith is perseverance.

Note the following in verses 5-8.

- The source of wisdom is God
- It is obtained by prayer
- It is available to everybody
- It is given liberally and without reproach
- The crucial condition is that we ask in faith, with no doubting

At first glance, verses 9-11 seem to introduce a completely new subject, or at least a parenthesis. James, however, seems to be continuing with the subject of holy trials by giving specific illustrations. Whether a man is poor or rich, he can derive lasting spiritual benefits from the calamities and crises of life. For instance, when a poor brother finds himself dissatisfied and discouraged, he can always rejoice that he is an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ (v. 9). He can find consolation in the truth that all things are his, and he is Christ's, and Christ is God's. The brother of limited means probably has no control over his humble circumstances. There is no reason to believe he is lazy or careless. But God has seen fit to place him in a low income bracket, and that is where he has been ever since. Perhaps if he had been rich he never would have accepted Christ. Now that he is in Christ, he is blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. What should he do? Should he rebel against his station in life? Should he become bitter and jealous? No—he should accept from God the circumstances over which he has no control and rejoice in his spiritual blessings.

Too many Christians go through life rebelling against their sex, their age, their height, and even against life itself. The Christian attitude is to accept from God things that we cannot change. They are God's destiny for us, and we should make the most of them for His glory and for the blessing of others. We should say with the apostle Paul, "By the grace of God, I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). As we forget our limitations and lose ourselves in service for others, we will come to realize that spiritual people love us for what we are, not for our appearance, for instance.

Next, James turns to the rich man. But strangely enough he does not say, "Let the rich man rejoice in his riches." Rather he says that the rich can rejoice that he is made low. He agrees with Jeremiah 9:23-24: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his

might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, for in these I delight, says the LORD.”

The rich man may actually find real cause for rejoicing should he be stripped of his material possessions (vv. 10-11). Perhaps business reverses would bring him to the Lord. Or if he is already a Christian, then he could take joyfully the losing of his goods, knowing he has in heaven a better and more enduring possession (Heb. 10:34). Earthly riches are destined to pass away, like the flower of the field (Isa. 40:6-7). If a man has nothing but material wealth, then all his plans will end at the grave. James dwells on the transiency of grass as an illustration of the fleeting life of a rich man and the limited value of his riches. He will “fade away in the midst of his pursuits.” The point is, of course, that neither sun nor scorching wind can affect *spiritual* values. Any trial that weans us away from the love of passing things and sets our affections on things above is a blessing in disguise. Thus the same grace that exalts the lowly (v. 9) humbles the rich (v. 10). Both are cause for rejoicing.

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In concluding his discussion of holy trials, James pronounces a blessing on the man who stands up under afflictions (v. 12). When such a man has been “approved,” he will receive the crown of life. The crown here is the victor’s wreath, not the king’s diadem. It will be awarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. There is no suggestion, of course, that eternal life is the reward for enduring testings, but those who have endured with fortitude will be honored for that kind of life and will enjoy a deeper appreciation of eternal life in heaven. Everyone’s cup will be full in heaven, but people will have different sized cups, that is, different capacities for enjoying heaven. This is undoubtedly what is in view in the expression “crown of life”; it refers to a fuller enjoyment of the glories of heaven.

Let us now make this section on holy trials practical in our own lives. How do we react when various forms of testing come into our lives? Do we complain bitterly against the misfortunes of life, or do we rejoice and thank the Lord for them? Do we advertise our trials or do we bear them quietly? Do we live in the future, waiting for our circumstances to improve, or do

we live in the present, seeking to see the hand of God in all that comes to us? Do we indulge in self-pity and seek sympathy or do we submerge self in a life of service for others?

2. Unholy Temptations (1:13-17)

The subject now shifts to unholy temptations (vv. 13-17). Just as holy trials are designed to bring out the best in us, so unholy temptations are designed to bring out the evil in us. One thing must be clearly understood: when we are tempted to sin, the temptation does not come from God (v. 13). God does *test* or try men, as far as their faith is concerned, but He never *tempts* a man to commit any form of evil. He Himself has no dealings with evil, and He does not entice to sin.

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**When we are
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Man is always ready to shift responsibility for his sins. If he cannot blame God he will adopt the approach of modern psychology by saying that sin is a sickness. In this way he hopes to escape judgment. But sin is not a sickness; it is a moral failure for which man must give account. Some even try to blame

inanimate things for sin. But material things are not sinful in themselves; sin does not originate there. James tracks the lion to its den when he says, “Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (v. 14). Sin comes from within us, from our old, evil, fallen, unregenerate, nature. Jesus said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19).

The word James uses for “desires” in verse 14 could refer to any form of desire, good or evil. The word itself is morally neutral. But with few exceptions it is used in the New Testament to describe evil desires, and that is certainly the case here. In verse 14, desire is likened to an evil woman parading her allurements and enticing her victims. Everyone of us is tempted. We have vile desires and impure appetites constantly urging us on to sin. Are we helpless victims then, when we are drawn away by our own lust and enticed? No—we may expel all thoughts of sin from our mind and concentrate on subjects that are pure and holy (Phil. 4:8). Also, in the moment of fierce temptation, we may call on the Lord, remembering that “the name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Prov. 18:10).

If that is so, why then do we sin? The answer is in verse 15: “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.” Instead of expelling the vile thought, we may encourage, nourish, and enjoy it. This act of yielding is likened to the marriage act. Desire conceives, and a hideous baby named SIN is ultimately born. This is another way of saying that if we think about a forbidden act long enough, we will eventually do it. The whole process of lust conceiving and bringing forth sin is vividly illustrated in the incident of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1-27).

“And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death,” says James. Sin is not a barren, sterile thing; it produces a brood of its own. The statement that sin brings forth death may be understood in several ways: First of all, the sin of Adam brought physical death on himself and on all his descendants (Gen. 2:17). But sin also leads to eternal, spiritual death—the final separation of the person from God and from blessing (Rom. 6:23). There is also a sense in which sin results in death for a believer. For instance, in 1 Timothy 5:6 we read that a believing widow “who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.” This means that she is wasting her life and utterly failing to fulfill the purpose for which God saved her. To be out of fellowship with God is, for a Christian, a form of living death.

It is not unusual for people who fall into sin to blame God instead of themselves. In effect they say to their Creator, “Why have you made me like this?” But this is a form of self-deception (v. 16). Only good gifts come from God (v. 17). In fact, He is the source of every good and every perfect gift.

James describes God as the Father of lights (v. 17). The word *Father* in the Bible sometimes has the meaning of Creator (see Job 38:28). Therefore God is the Creator, or Source, of lights. But what is meant by “lights”? Certainly it includes the heavenly bodies—the sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14-18; Ps. 136:7). But God is also the Source of all *spiritual* light as well. So we should think of Him as the Source of every form of light in the universe, “with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” God is unlike the heavenly bodies He has created. *They* undergo constant changes, but *He* never changes.

Perhaps James is thinking not only of the declining brilliance of the sun and stars, but also of their changing relation to the earth as our planet rotates. Variableness characterizes the sun, the moon, and the stars. The expression “no variation or shadow of turning” may also be translated “neither shadow caused by turning.” This could refer to the shadows cast

on earth by the rotation of the earth around the sun. Or it could refer to eclipses. A solar eclipse, for instance, is produced where the moon's shadow falls on the earth. With God it is quite different; there is no variableness in Him, or shadow caused by turning. And His gifts are as perfect as He is. It is therefore unthinkable that He would ever entice man to sin. Temptation comes from man's own evil nature.

Now let us test our faith on the subject of unholy temptations. Do we encourage evil thoughts to linger in our minds, or do we expel them quickly? When we sin, do we say that we couldn't help it? Do we blame God when we are tempted to sin?

THE
LETTER OF

JAMES

EXAM BOOKLET
AK '09 (1 UNIT) JAS

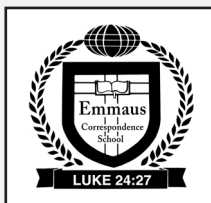
STUDENT NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP

COURSE GRADE: _____

INSTRUCTOR



Exam developed by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.

A NOTE ON THE EXAMS

The exams are designed to check your knowledge of the course material and the Scriptures. After you have studied a chapter, review the exam questions for that lesson. If you have difficulty in answering the questions, re-read the material. If questions contain a Scripture reference, you may use your Bible to help you answer them. If your instructor has provided a single page Answer Sheet, record your answer on that sheet. This exam contains the following types of questions:

MULTIPLE CHOICE

You will be asked to write in the letter of the correct answer at the space on the right. Here is an example:

The color of grass is

- A. blue C. yellow
B. green D. orange

 B

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Questions headed this way are designed to help you express your ideas and feelings. You may freely state your own opinions in answer to such questions.

RETURNING THE EXAM

See the back of this exam booklet for instructions on returning your exam for grading.

DO NOT PHOTOCOPY THESE EXAM PAGES

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CHAPTER 1 EXAM

TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

EXAM GRADE

Before starting this exam, write your name and address on the front of this Exam Booklet.

Directions: Read each question carefully and write the letter of the correct answer in the blank space on the right. Use the separate answer sheet if provided.

1. James draws on the Sermon on the Mount in writing his letter. Which of the following is not an example of this?
His reference to

A. anger	C. judging others	
B. submission to God	D. wealth	_____

2. James's style is similar to that found in

A. Proverbs	C. Paul's letters	
B. Genesis	D. Acts	_____

3. James describes himself as

A. the brother of Jesus		
B. the son of Zebedee		
C. the servant of God and of Christ		
D. an apostle of Jesus Christ		_____

4. The "twelve tribes scattered abroad" to whom James writes

A. refers only to the dispersion of Israel by Assyria		
B. refers only to Judah's removal to Babylon in 586 BC		
C. refers to the Jewish Christians scattered by Saul's persecution		
D. could refer to Jews who had been scattered on any of the above occasions		_____

5. James's counsel to those who are facing trials is to

A. weep and mourn	C. rejoice	
B. complain to God	D. demand justice	_____

6. God's purpose in allowing trials in a believer's life is _____
A. to make us more like His Son
B. to strengthen us in the face of further trials
C. that they would be the means of our maturing spiritually
D. all the above
7. When we don't know how to handle our problems we should _____
A. consult a psychologist
B. read a "how-to" book on problem solving
C. ask God for wisdom
D. just hope the problems solve themselves
8. Which one of the following has reason to rejoice? _____
A. The brother in lowly and modest circumstances
B. The rich man who has just made a big profit in business
C. The poor believer who has come into a large inheritance
D. The young man who doesn't have a worry in the world
9. This passage in James teaches that being tempted to sin _____
A. is experienced only by the unsaved
B. starts in our own hearts
C. is as bad as committing sin
D. is God's way of testing our faith
10. James likens the "desire-sin-death" process to _____
A. fishing with a lure C. bribing a judge
B. falling in a pit D. conceiving and giving birth

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Describe your current circumstances and the way you can see God's hand in them.
