

The use of the Greek *xairō* as a standard way of giving a friendly greeting in the ancient Greek world, is based upon the general meaning of the word: “to be in a state of happiness and well-being, to rejoice, to be glad.”¹ Used here as a greeting, it portrays the author’s desire that his letter would find its recipients in a state of wellness and joy.

Thus, the greeting itself has a clear connection to the opening exhortation of the epistle in the next verse, which likewise speaks of “joy.”

2–3 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

The opening command, “Consider,” translates the Greek imperative *ἡγήσασθε* (*hēgēsasthe*) from the verb *ἄγω* (*agō*) which carries a basic meaning “to direct the movement of an object from one position to another” or “to lead or encourage” in a particular direction. This exact form of the verb *agō*² is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. Thus, in these opening words, James immediately is teaching us that we must know and affirm the truth as it has been given to us by God Himself, through the Incarnate Word Yeshua, and in the inspired, written word, the Scriptures. We must take our daily experiences, including the trials we encounter, and understand them in light of what God has said and the eternal salvation He has procured for all those who are His through faith in Messiah Yeshua. We must commit ourselves to viewing all of life through the lens of what God has said is true.

At the very beginning of our Epistle, we encounter our author admonishing us to find joy in trials, which seems shocking at first. Did not Yeshua teach His disciples (and us) to pray for deliverance from trials? Indeed, the last request of the Disciples Prayer is this:

And do not lead us into testing, but deliver us from evil. (Matt 6:13)

Granted, the traditional translations of the prayer (Matt 6:9–13; Lk 11:2–4) have the last request this way:

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matt 6:13)

But it should be stated that the Greek word translated “temptation”

1 BDAG, “χαίρω,” p. 1074.

2 2nd person pl. aorist middle imperative

(πειρασμός, *peirasmos*) in the common English translations of the “Lord’s Prayer,” has as its primary sense that of “a test” or “a trial” and only secondarily that of a “temptation” or an “enticement.” And this is the same word that is used by James in our text when he writes about our encountering “various trials.”

That various modern English versions of the Bible have it correct by using the word “trials” in our verse is strengthened by what James will teach us later on in this first chapter, namely, that when a believer is tempted to engage in that which is sinful, they should know that such temptation is not something from God but from one’s own sinful nature.

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. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. (James 1:13–14)

Therefore, when Yeshua gave his disciples a “model” for their prayers, He did not teach them and us to pray “And do not lead us into temptation,” for we take it as an essential truth that God tempts no one and does not lead anyone into temptation. Rather, the prayer He taught is this, “And do not lead us into testing, but deliver us from evil.” How then are we to reconcile this with what James is teaching?

Historically this opening exhortation of James has, by some, been entirely misinterpreted, for on the basis of this verse they have taught that “suffering should be a part of an authentic Christian experience.”¹ Clearly James is not teaching us here that the mark of a true believer is that he or she is constantly suffering. Rather, these inspired words of James are given to us so that we might be encouraged to exercise a growing faith in the face of trials when they are encountered.

How then, are we to understand both the text of James as well as the admonition of Yeshua Himself, that we pray not to be led into times of testing? The first important clue to the proper interpretation of our text is the use of “various” in the phrase “when you encounter various trials.” The Greek word translated as “various” is ποικίλος (*poikilos*) which helps us understand that James is referring to trials of all kinds as experienced in this fallen world. These can be external trials, which come to us from circumstances entirely out of our control, or they can

1 See Allison, *James in the International Critical Commentary* (Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 136.

be internal trials, the things we deal with personally as a result of our own decisions and even our own weaknesses and sinful flesh.

It appears that the request in the “Lord’s prayer” may pertain particularly with times of testing that are the work of the evil one, for the concluding phrase in the “prayer” is “but deliver us from evil.” To put it in a positive sense, we are admonished by our Savior to consistently pray for His strength in overcoming the schemes of Satan and for protection against his evil schemes. In other words, to pray as the Lord instructed us to pray is constantly to remind ourselves that the victory over the evil one is gained through the strength He provides and not by our own strength.

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and
I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do
nothing. (Jn 15:5)

James admonishes us to “consider it all joy,” that is, as we encounter the trials of life, we are constantly to be reminded that such trials offer the believer yet another opportunity to prove the genuineness of his or her faith. For the ultimate proof of God’s saving power is that the child of God is enabled to persevere through the trial, not only with their faith intact, but also with their faith strengthened. Perseverance is the ultimate and final proof of saving faith.

... *knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* Surely the trials we encounter in this fallen world and in the battle we wage against our own sinful flesh, put our faith to the test. We sometimes may question whether our faith is genuine or if we’re just “playing religion” and do not possess the reality of saving faith in Yeshua. Yet James gives us the necessary key in the opening word of this phrase, the word “knowing.” The Greek has the word “knowing” as a present participle, which indicates that this is to be the normal, ongoing characteristic of the believer in Yeshua. We have come to confess the truth about Yeshua and about our utter need of His saving grace, and we also have come to affirm that

faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of
things not seen (Heb 11:1).

Here, once again, we see the utter importance of reading, studying, knowing, and applying God’s word, the Scriptures, to our lives and to our current situations, for this is to be that which characterizes the true

believer in Yeshua. The truth of God and all that He has done for us is the constant “spiritual food” by which our souls are nourished.

When we face trials, we must be prepared with the armor of God and especially the “sword of the Spirit which is the word of God” (Eph 6:10-17). To the utter necessity of knowing and applying the Scriptures, Paul adds:

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.... (Eph 6:18)

James likewise will admonish us in the matter of prayer in vv. 5-8 of our chapter. Thus, knowing the truth and seeking God to supply us with the spiritual strength to live the truth, always go hand-in-hand.

It is a very sad thing that in our modern times, the so-called “Prosperity Gospel” has become the common message of some of the most popular “Bible Teachers” of our times. They are teaching that if a person has genuine faith in Jesus, their lives will be essentially free from trials and all will be wealth and happiness. Obviously, the message of James (and the Scriptures as a whole) is entirely opposite. Our new life in Yeshua does not isolate us from the trials of this fallen world, but by His strength and the power of the indwelling Spirit, we are enabled to face the trials of life, to persevere, and thus to gain the victory. Surely a great part of our strength is knowing and affirming what God has promised, namely, that when our faith is tested through such trials, we gain spiritual strength that produces endurance.

Furthermore, as we bear up under trials and proceed victoriously through them, we do so by having the goal of our faith well in mind, namely, that our lives should forever give glory and honor to the One Who has saved us. For He has redeemed us to Himself for all eternity, and one day we will see Him face-to-face. And then we will forever be with the Lord. Knowing this to be a reality is the means by which we are enabled to comfort one another in the midst of this world’s trials.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1Thess 4:16-18)

Knowing the truth and living it out through the strength provided by the Ruach, we grow in our spiritual strength to endure the trials as they are encountered. We see this principle illustrated in our physical world, for the runner who seeks to win the race must train by running so as to strengthen his body to endure the race. Indeed, the life of faith is characterized by the author of Hebrews as a race in which we must have endurance but also must have our eyes upon the goal.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Yeshua the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:1-2)

The Greek word translated “endurance” in our text is instructive. It is *ὑπομονή*, *hypomone*, which literally has the sense of “to remain under.” The word may have been constructed from the common occurrence of a person bearing a heavy load upon his or her shoulders, and the ability to remain under the load and to carry the burden to its intended destination was picturesque of what it means to “endure.” Thus, endurance in our text means “not giving up” but maintaining what one knows to be true and committing oneself to living in accordance with the truth even when the burden (the trial) is difficult to bear.

And how does this bring inner joy, a joy that one can only explain when persevering through a trial by God’s grace? It brings the settled reality that God is faithful to His word, and that once again He has given the strength and ability to His own so that they are enabled to maintain through the trial with their hope and faith strengthened. In short, once the trial has been overcome, the child of God is even more sure of being “in Messiah” and forever a child of the King.

One commentary has summed it up this way:

God stands behind every trial and test. He wants us to know this by experience, so that we not only see his hand but also feel it. We place our hand in the hand of God. Then, in every adversity that we face, we keep our trust in our heavenly Father, for we know that he sends us these trials to test our faith. We believe that he is in complete control of every situation. And God gives us exactly what we need: joys and sorrows, trials and triumphs. An Arabic proverb succinctly

states, “Sunshine alone creates deserts.” Consider it pure joy when dark clouds gather above your head; they will give you showers of blessings. These showers cause your life of faith to develop and grow.¹

4 – And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The previous verse ends with the word “endurance” (*hupomonē*) and our verse begins with the same word and the NASB has signaled this by using the English “endurance” in both instances. How does “endurance” prove itself to be, in fact, “endurance?” The answer is obvious: by not giving up but by bearing under the weight of the trial and thus continuing, even within the trial, to show forth the power of God to enable the child of God to persevere.

Personifying “endurance,” James instruct us that we are to give endurance its “perfect result.” The word “perfect” (τέλειος, *teleios*) carries the primary sense of “complete” or “whole,” i.e., “fully developed.” Endurance, in whatever realm we may envision it, is only what it is suppose to be when the event is completed. The point is obvious: “endurance” does not “give up” or “fail to finish the race.” Thus, when “endurance” is all that it, by definition, actually is, the trial is borne and completed. In the NASB, the word “result” is actually the Greek word “work” (ἔργον, *ergon*). “Endurance” is defined as “completing the task.”

In the final phrase of this verse, it is the believer who demonstrates the life of endurance, whose life is more and more conformed to the very will of God Who is “bringing many sons to glory,” for Yeshua stands as the ultimate example of “endurance” and it is through His victory that all who are “in Him” will likewise endure to the end.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.
(Heb 2:10)

...so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. – The same Greek word is used, translated “perfect,” as was used in the first clause of the verse and carries the same sense of “mature,” and thus made clear by the added words, “complete, lacking in nothing.” The Greek

1 Simon J. Kistemaker, *James in New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1986) , p. 33.

word translated “complete” is *ὁλόκληρος* (*holoklēros*) which carries the sense of “complete, undamaged, intact” and portrays the picture of a runner who has completed the race without losing anything.

There are those who have interpreted this verse as teaching “sinless perfectionism,” i.e., that the believer is enabled to come to a state of maturity in which they would never sin again. But that is not what James is teaching. He is instructing us about living with our eyes upon Yeshua and upon the goal of eternity, and in so doing, persevering through whatever trials may come our way, so as to be living testimonies of God’s greatness and of the salvation that has been won for us through the work of Yeshua Himself. Surely in the process we become more and more like Messiah and are thereby enabled to increasingly put to death the deeds of the flesh and to grow in practical righteousness. But it is only when mortal will have put on immortality that we will no longer have the sin nature and will be fully restored to be fully righteous in all of our being.

5 – But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

This admonition of James is connected to the previous verses, and particularly to the opening imperative to “consider it all joy when you encounter various trials.” As noted above, the ability to actually consider it joy when undergoing various trials is based upon true, spiritual knowledge, for the text continues “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance...” Such knowledge needed to persevere through trials is therefore the wisdom that is only obtainable from God. For it is only by knowing God through faith in Yeshua and accepting His revealed word as true and right, that one is enabled, by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, to endure trials as the means by which God builds spiritual strength in His people.

Wisdom is the proper application of knowledge, and particularly the skill to make sound judgments and in this context, the divinely given ability to live in a way that gives glory to God, and especially in times of testing.¹ While such wisdom can be learned from other more mature believers, the ultimate source of such wisdom is God Himself.

When James writes “If any of you lack wisdom,” his words are not to be understood as though there are some who do not lack wisdom.

¹ James will develop this theme more in chapter 3, and particularly in 3:13–18.