

Who is the rich man?**Scripture**

⁹ Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, ¹⁰but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. ¹¹For 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. (NKJV)

Questions

1. Is the rich man of the brethren in Christ, or of the world?
2. Is he taking glory or pride in his position, or gloating over the poor man?
3. Is the flower falling just referring to the outward beauty, which as a believer the rich man won't miss, or is it very important to him, even his eternal life?
4. Is the poor man to rejoice in his position in light of what he shall one day receive, as opposed to what he knows will happen to the rich man's temporary earthly splendor and ultimate demise?
5. Is this written to both the rich and poor brethren to help them deal with their station in life, keeping them in an eternal perspective?

Commentary

Commentaries are men's opinions and therefore can be fallible. While they still might be a clear revelation from a heart inspired by the Holy Spirit, they cannot be leaned upon as Holy Canon. They must be compared to the whole council of the Word and against other's thoughts as well.

The same must be said of Bible translations – this has to be so, for there are discrepancies between them as we are seeing here in this study. The task at this point must be to get as close to the source as possible for the literal expression, and on a whole, a grasp of the true context and intent of the writer. In the end, however, it may still be possible to say one, the other, or a few interpretations are worthy.

Of the seven translations of James 1:9-11 considered here, among them they allow for 3 possible scenarios:

1. Both the poor man and the rich man are saved, but a third man is present, who is rich and is not saved.
2. The poor man is saved, as well as the rich man.
3. The poor man is saved, but the rich man is not.

The notion that there is a third man is only possible using the Worldwide English translation. The rich man can be assumed to have been rich first, then later saved, and now rejoicing because he recognizes his true position before God and that his wealth will perish too on the Last Day. In this case then, there must be a poor brother, a rich brother, and a rich pagan. However, since the WE translation is not in agreement with any other translation here considered, and also in v.10 'he will pass away' is referring to the first reference of the rich man who will later pass away in v.11, the third person cannot exist.

The question then is if the rich man is of the brethren. There seems to be no question of the poor man's position; instead, who is the object of the humiliation associated with the rich man, and in v.11, is the fate of the rich man good or bad to him?

Across the translations considered here, everything hinges on the inclusion of the word 'glory' or 'boast' in v.10. This is important, because the only way the rich man can be a believer here is if he is glad, in the bigger scope of things, for the demise of his riches in v.11. If he is a believer, then in looking toward the Kingdom Eternal, he will 'glory' or 'boast' of the loss of his earthly stature in wealth. If 'glory' is not included in the translation, the text is not hindered and continues to flow and hold context – so there is room, at this point, for both views. The NIV, NASB, and WE are the only one of those considered here to include 'glory' in v.10. The KJV, RSV, YLT, and NKJV do not.

In this case it seems best to also look to the 'original' Greek. I am using a literal interlinear translation by Alfred Marshall, based on the 21st Edition of Nestle's Greek New Testament. I do not know upon what the 7 translations are based, but here we'll consider Marshall's to be the closest to the base original.

The literal here is as follows: ⁹**But let boast the brother humble in the height of him, ¹⁰and the rich one in the humiliation of him, because as a flower of grass he will pass away. ¹¹rose For the sun with the hot wind and dried the grass, and the flower of it fell out and the comeliness of the appearance of it perished; thus also the rich man in the goings of him will fade away."**

Note that 'boast' is in v.9, but no mention of it is made in v.10. The question then must be, who is the 'him' in v.10, the subject of the humiliation? This must be answered with a question; from where does this humiliation come?

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If the humiliation comes from within the rich man, then he must be of the elect. As a believer, in his clearer understanding of his place before God, he will see himself in the truth of his humility. But consider the fate of the rich man in v.11, remembering there is no 3rd person here. He is found to be concerned of his 'pursuits', is 'going about his business', is shown 'fading away in his ways', and he 'shall wither in his goings'. If he is saved, then why does it appear that he is not pursuing anything but his wealth?

These things are associated with the rich man in v.10 through the flower, the image of beauty, which is shown as temporary like all things of the world. This man, in the splendor of riches, is not watching for the Bridegroom. Therefore, the flower of v.11, in being the same one as in v.10, shows the backward association to the fate of the rich man in v.10.

Further, why would the rich man, even as a brother, take pride in his stature finally falling? Wouldn't he instead be humbled in this? If James meant this, perhaps he would have shown the rich man being mindful of his place in the Kingdom. Remember, the original text only shows the poor man glorying in his position.

Therefore, I believe the humiliation of the rich man instead is imposed from the outside of himself, from the Truth which will reveal his true stature when the end comes and all is revealed. Considering the concept of someone 'made low', isn't it true that all will be made low when Christ returns and every knee bows? Believing that Jesus/God is to be bowed down to requires recognizing His position; recognizing His position requires being 'made low'; the separation of the wheat and the tares will hinge on our timing of when we bow down, in a sense.

In this assumption of James' intention, the frame of context around this verse is still held intact. The lowly brother is shown suffering the trial of poverty, and under the ridicule of the well off around him. Yet, he is assured that in the final analysis he will be held high in Eternity, while the other's stature will pass away on the Last Day. These verses might also be seen as encouragement to the lowly poor, a sentence on the rich pagan, and as a solemn, loving reminder to the rich brethren of what awaits if he does not keep his priorities straight in his life.

Finally then, I would paraphrase v.9-11 as this:

Go ahead, let the rich man gloat in the humiliation of the poor man – go on, let him think himself strong in his standing. For in the end, when the burning sun of judgment brings about this world's destruction, the rich man's splendor and position will pass away as flimsy grass, a delicate flower under the heat. And let the poor man rejoice in his future exaltation before the Host of Heaven for his present lowliness.

Scripture references*New International Version (NIV)***James 1**

- 9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.
10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.
11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

*King James Version (KJV)***James 1**

- 9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:
10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.
11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

*New American Standard Bible (NASB)***James 1**

- 9 ^{<1>} But the ^[1] brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;
10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because ^{<2>} like ^[2] flowering grass he will pass away.

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11 For the sun rises with ³ ^{<*3>} a scorching wind and ^{<*4>} 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.

1. I.e. church member
2. Lit *the flower of the grass*
3. Lit *the*

1. [Luke 14:11](#)
2. [1 Cor 7:31](#); [1 Pet 1:24](#)
3. [Matt 20:12](#)
4. [Ps 102:4, 11](#); [Is 40:7f](#)

*Revised Standard Version (RSV)***James 1**

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,
 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like the flower of the grass he will pass away.
 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

*Young's Literal Translation (YLT)***James 1**

9 And let the brother who is low rejoice in his exaltation,
 10 and the rich in his becoming low, because as a flower of grass he shall pass away;
 11 for the sun did rise with the burning heat, and did wither the grass, and the flower of it fell, and the grace of its appearance did perish, so also the rich in his way shall fade away!

*Worldwide English (NT only) (WE)***James 1**

9 A Christian brother who is poor should be glad: he is in a high place now he is a Christian.
 10 A Christian brother who is rich should be glad: he is in a low place now he is a Christian. A rich man will pass away like a flower on the grass.
 11 The sun shines and is very hot. Then the grass dries and its flower falls off. It was nice at first, but now it is not nice any more. In the same way, the rich man will die while he is going around trying to make money.

*New King James Version (NKJV)***James 1***The Perspective of Rich and Poor*

⁹ Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, ¹⁰but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. ¹¹For 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.

Commentary references

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John Darby

If we only seek that which God wills and that which God does, we depend securely on Him to accomplish it; and as to the circumstances of this world, which might make one believe that it was useless to depend on God, they vanish away as the flower of the field. We ought to have the consciousness that our place according to God is not that which is of this world. He who is in a low station should rejoice that Christianity exalts him; the rich, that it humbles him. It is not in riches that we are to rejoice (they pass away), but in the exercises of heart of which the apostle had been speaking; for after having been tried we shall receive the crown of life.

The life of one who is thus tried, and in whom this life develops itself in obedience to the entire will of God, is well worth that of a man who indulges all the desires of his heart in luxury.

John Gill

Let the brother of low degree...

By "the brother" is meant, not one in a natural, but in a spiritual relation; one of Christ's brethren, and who is of that family that is named of him; of the household of faith, and is in church communion: and whereas he is said to be of "low degree", or "humble", this regards not the affection of his mind, or his conduct and deportment, he being meek and lowly, and clothed with humility, as every brother is, or ought to be; but his outward state and condition, being, as to the things of this world, poor, and mean in his outward circumstances, and so humbled and afflicted. This appears from the rich man, who, in the next verse, is opposed unto him, and distinguished from him; see ([Psalms 62:9](#)) such an one is advised to

rejoice in that he is exalted;

or to "glory in his exaltation"; in that high estate, to which he is advanced; for a person may be very low and mean, as to his worldly circumstances, and yet be very high, and greatly exalted in a spiritual sense: and this height of honour and grandeur, of which he may boast and glory, amidst his outward poverty, lies in his high birth and descent, being born from above, and of God, and belonging to his family; in being an adopted Son of God, and so an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ, and of the heavenly inheritance and kingdom; in the present riches of grace he is possessed of, as justifying, pardoning, and sanctifying grace; and in the high titles he bears, as besides the new name, the name better than that of sons and daughters of the greatest potentate, even that of a Son of the Lord God Almighty, his being a King, and a priest unto God, and for whom a kingdom, crown, and throne are prepared; and also in the company he daily keeps, and is admitted to, as of God, and Christ, and the holy angels: and this height of honour have all the saints, be they ever so poor in this world, who can vie with the greatest of princes for sublimity and grandeur.

But the rich, in that he is made low...

That is, the rich brother; for there were rich men in the churches in those times, and which James often takes notice of in this epistle. Such an one should rejoice or glory in his lowness, or low estate; in the consideration of the low estate, out of which he was raised, by the good providence of God, and was not owing to any merit of his; and in the low estate into which he may be at present reduced, through the violence of persecution being stripped of all his riches for Christ's sake, of which he might make his boast, and count it his greatest glory; or in that low estate he may quickly expect he shall be brought into, either in the above manner, or by some calamity or another, and at least by death, which will put him upon a level with others: or this may have respect to the temper of his mind, which he has, through the grace of God, and the station he is in, in the church of God, being a brother, and no more than a brother, and upon an equal foot with the meanest member in it; and which yet is matter of rejoicing, that he is one, and that he is so blessed with the grace of humility, as not to lift up himself above others, not to mind high things, but to condescend to men of low estate; and such a deportment the apostle exhorts rich saints unto, from the consideration of the instability and inconstancy of worldly riches.

Because, as the flower of the grass he shall pass away;

shortly, and suddenly; either he himself by death, or his riches at death, or before, and therefore are not to be gloried in; nor should the possessors of them be proud and haughty and elate themselves with them, but should behave humbly and modestly to their fellow creatures and Christians, as knowing that in a short time they will all be upon a par, or in an equal state; See ([Job 14:2](#)) ([Psalms 90:5,6](#)) ([102:11](#)) ([103:15,16](#)). The metaphor here used is enlarged upon in the following verse, for the further illustration of the fickleness, perishing, and transitory nature of earthly enjoyments.

For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat...

As it is about the middle of the day, when it shines in its full strength, and its heat is very great and scorching, especially in the summer season, and in hot climates:

but it withereth the grass;

strikes it with heat, causes it to shrivel, and dries it up;

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and the flower thereof falleth;
drops off from it to the ground:

and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth;

its form and colour, its glory and beauty, which were pleasant to the eye, are lost, and no more to be recovered. This shows, that earthly riches, like the flower of the field, have an outward show and glory in them, which attract the mind, and fix an attention to them for a while; they are gay and glittering, and look lovely, are pleasant to behold, and desirable to enjoy; but when the sun of persecution, or any other outward calamity arises, they are quickly destroyed, and are no more.

Geneva Study Bible

1:9⁷ Let the brother of^h low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

(7) He returns to his purpose repeating the proposition, which is, that we must rejoice in affliction, for it does not oppress us, but exalt us.

(h) Who is afflicted with poverty, or contempt, or with any kind of calamity.

1:10⁸ But theⁱ rich, in that he is made low: ⁹ because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

(8) Before he concludes, he gives a doctrine contrasted to the former: that is, how we ought to use prosperity, that is, the abundance of all things: that is, so that no man pleases himself, but rather be humble.

(i) Who has all things at his will. (9) An argument taken from the very nature of the things themselves, for that they are empty and unreliable.

1:11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his^k ways.

(k) Whatever he purposes in his mind or does.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown

9, 10. Translate, "But let the brother," &c. that is, the best remedy against *double-mindedness* is that Christian *simplicity* of spirit whereby the "brother," low in outward circumstances, may "rejoice" (answering to [James 1:2](#)) "in that he is exalted," namely, by being accounted a son and heir of God, his very sufferings being a pledge of his coming glory and crown ([James 1:12](#)), and the rich may rejoice "in that he is made low," by being stripped of his goods for Christ's sake [MENOCHIUS]; or in that he is made, by sanctified trials, lowly in spirit, which is true matter for rejoicing [GOMARUS]. The design of the Epistle is to reduce all things to an equable footing ([2:1](#), [5:13](#)). The "low," rather than the "rich," is here called "the brother" [BENGEL].

10. So far as one is merely "rich" in worldly goods, "he shall pass away"; in so far as his predominant character is that of a "brother," he "abideth for ever" ([1 John 2:17](#)). This view meets all ALFORD'S objections to regarding "the rich" here as a "brother" at all. To avoid making the rich a brother, he translates, "But the rich glories in his humiliation," namely, in that which is really his debasement (his rich state, [Philippians 3:19](#)), just as the low is told to rejoice in what is really his exaltation (his lowly state).

11. Taken from [Isaiah 40:6-8](#).

heat--rather, "the hot wind" from the (east or) south, which scorches vegetation ([Luke 12:55](#)). The "burning heat" of the sun is not at its *rising*, but rather at noon; whereas the scorching *Kadim* wind is often at sunrise ([Jonah 4:8](#)) [MIDDLETON, *The Doctrine of the Greek Article*]. [Matthew 20:12](#) uses the Greek word for "heat." [Isaiah 40:7](#), "bloweth upon it," seems to answer to "the hot wind" here.

grace of the fashion--that is of the external appearance.

in his ways--referring to the burdensome extent of the rich man's devices [BENGEL]. Compare "his ways," that is, his course of life, [James 1:8](#).

Matthew Henry

The holy humble temper of a Christian, both in advancement and debasement, is described: and both poor and rich are directed on what grounds to build their joy and comfort, v. 9--11. Here we may observe, 1. Those of low degree are to be looked upon as brethren:

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Let the brother of low degree, etc. Poverty does not destroy the relation among Christians. 2. Good Christians may be rich in the world, v. 10. Grace and wealth are not wholly inconsistent. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was rich in silver and gold. 3. Both these are allowed to rejoice. No condition of life puts us out of a capacity of rejoicing in God. If we do not rejoice in him always, it is our own fault. Those of low degree may rejoice, if they are exalted to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God (as Dr. Whitby explains this place); and the rich may rejoice in humbling providences, as they produce a lowly and humble disposition of mind, which is highly valuable in the sight of God. Where any are made poor for righteousness' sake, their very poverty is their exaltation. It is an honour to be dishonoured for the sake of Christ. *To you it is given to suffer*, Phil. 1:29. All who are brought low, and made lowly by grace, may rejoice in the prospect of their exaltation at the last in heaven. 4. Observe what reason rich people have, notwithstanding their riches, to be humble and low in their own eyes, because both they and their riches are passing away: *As the flower of the grass he shall pass away*. He, and his wealth with him,

People's New Testament

9-11. Let the brother of low degree. In the humble walks of life. **Exalted.** To be a child of God, a brother of Jesus Christ. **10. The rich, in that he is made low.** The one should rejoice in exaltation; the other in humiliation. He is taught that his riches have no power to save, and that his life is as uncertain as that of the grass of the field. **11. For the sun.** When the fierce sun of summer arises the grass in Palestine dies. Thus shall the glory of the rich man fade.

Robertson's

But (de). Return to the point of view in verse [James 2](#). **Of low degree (o tapeinoß).** "The lowly" brother, in outward condition ([Luke 1:52](#)), humble and poor as in Ps 9:39; [Proverbs 30:14](#), not the spiritually humble as in [Matthew 11:29](#); [James 4:6](#). In the LXX **tapeinoß** was used for either the poor in goods or the poor in spirit. Christianity has glorified this word in both senses. Already the rich and the poor in the churches had their occasion for jealousies. **Glory in his high estate (kaucasqw en twi upsei autou).** Paradox, but true. In his low estate he is "in his height" (**upsoß**, old word, in N.T., also in [Luke 1:78](#); [Ephesians 3:1](#); etc.).

In that he is made low (en th tapeinwsei autou). "In his low estate." Play on **tapeinwsiß** (from **tapeinow**, [Philippians 3:7](#)), like **tapeinoß** of verse [James 1:9](#), old word in various senses, in N.T. only here, [Luke 1:48](#); [Acts 8:33](#); [Philippians 3:21](#). The Cross of Christ lifts up the poor and brings down the high. It is the great leveller of men. **As the flower of the grass (wß anqoß cortou).** From the LXX ([Isaiah 40:6](#)). **Cortoß** means pasture, then grass ([Mark 6:39](#)) or fodder. **Anqoß** is old word, in N.T. only here, verse [James 1:11](#); [1 Peter 1:24](#) (same quotation). This warning is here applied to "the rich brother," but it is true of all. **He shall pass away (pareleusetai).** Future middle indicative (effective aoristic future, shall pass completely away from earth).

Ariseth (aneteilen). Gnomical or timeless aorist active indicative of the old compound **anateillw**, used here of plants (cf. **anaqallw** in [Philippians 4:10](#)), often of the sun ([Matthew 13:6](#)). **With the scorching wind (sun twi kauswni).** Associative instrumental case with **sun**. In the LXX this late word (from **kausoiß**) is usually the sirocco, the dry east wind from the desert ([Job 1:19](#)). In [Matthew 20:12](#); [Luke 12:55](#) it is the burning heat of the sun. Either makes sense here. **Withereth (exhranen).** Another gnomical aorist active indicative (Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 837) of **xhrainw**, old verb (from **xhroß**, dry or withered, [Matthew 12:10](#)), to dry up. Grass and flowers are often used to picture the transitoriness of human life. **Falleth (exepesen).** Another gnomical aorist (second aorist active indicative) of **ekpiptw** to fall out (off). **The grace (h euprepeia).** Old word (from **euprephß** well-looking, not in the N.T.), only here in N.T. Goodly appearance, beauty. **Of the fashion of it (tou proswpou autou).** "Of the face of it." The flower is pictured as having a "face," like a rose or lily. **Perisheth (apwleto).** Another gnomical aorist (second aorist middle indicative) of **apollumi**, to destroy, but intransitive here, to perish). The beautiful rose is pitiful when withered. **Shall fade away (maranqhsetai).** Future passive indicative of **marainw**, old verb, to extinguish a flame, a light. Used of roses in Wisdom 2:8. **Goings (poreiaiß).** Old word from **poreuw** to journey, in N.T. only here and [Luke 13:22](#) (of Christ's journey toward Jerusalem). The rich man's travels will come to "journey's end."

John Wesley

1:9 Let the brother - St James does not give this appellation to the rich. Of low degree - Poor and tempted. Rejoice - The most effectual remedy against doublemindedness. In that he is exalted - To be a child of God, and an heir of glory.
1:10 But the rich, in that he is made low - Is humbled by a deep sense of his true condition. Because as the flower - Beautiful, but transient. He shall pass away - Into eternity.
1:11 For the sun arose and withered the grass - There is an unspeakable beauty and elegance, both in the comparison itself, and in the very manner of expressing it, intimating both the certainty and the suddenness of the event. So shall the rich fade away in his ways - In the midst of his various pleasures and employments.