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A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION
TO THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
AND
AN EXPOSITION OF JAMES 1:2-18

Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements
For
Religion Special Study
H 492

Roger Schoeniger

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Ouachita Baptist University
Arkadelphia, Arkansas

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER OF JAMES

I. Authorship

A. External Evidence

1. Church Tradition - According to patristic tradition, it was James, the half-brother of Jesus, who wrote the epistle.¹ Origen (c. 230 A.D.) is the first church writer who explicitly quotes this epistle as Scripture. He ascribes the epistle to James, the Lord's brother, although in another place he refers to it as only an epistle under the name of James.²

2. Biblically - There are four Jameses (James is the Greek form of Jacob)³ mentioned in the New Testament: (1) James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John. He was beheaded under the reign of Herod Agrippa I not later than the spring of 44 A.D. (Acts 12:2). It seems unlikely that an apostle would write a letter of this type before 44 A.D. as the matters presented in the epistle were hardly acute in the Jewish-Christian world by that date. There is also no record of his ever attaining a special position among the Jewish-Christians which would justify his writing of the type of letter that James is; (2) James, the son of Alphaeus, also one of the twelve. He

¹Bruce Metzger, The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, Content (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 253.

²Alexander Ross, Commentary on the Epistle of James and John (in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F.F. Bruce. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 11.

³A. T. Robertson, Studies in the Epistle of James, ed. Heber F. Peacock (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), p. 1.

is little known even as an apostle. There is no biblical record or church tradition that he was ever in the position of authority which this letter claims. It is highly improbable that he write the epistle; (3) James, the father of Judas "not Iscariot" - one of the twelve. He is ruled out because he is virtually unknown except for his relationship to one of the apostles as listed in the Bible (Lk. 6:16 and Acts 1:13); and (4) James, the brother of Jesus.⁴ The exact relationship of James (and his "brethren") to Jesus is often disputed. Some have regarded them as children of Joseph by another marriage, while others, wishing to maintain the virginity of Joseph as well as Mary, have argued that they were Jesus's cousins on his mother's side (or on Joseph's side). In Luke 2:7, however, Jesus is listed as Mary's "first-born son". The most probable view is that James and the other children (listed in Matt. 13:55 and Mark 6:3) were the children of Joseph and Mary born after Jesus.

One is left only little in the way of references as to what effect the ministry of Jesus had upon the other children of Joseph and Mary. We do know that during the Lord's ministry Mary and other children came to get Jesus because "He is beside himself" (Mark 3:21). This, plus the incident in John 2:4 where the other children scoff and ridicule Jesus for doing his work in secret, but claiming publicity, add up to a rather skeptical attitude on the part of James and the other children toward Jesus's ministry. It is no wonder at the crucifixion that Jesus commends his mother to John rather than one of the other children.

⁴D. Edmond Heibert, An Introduction to the Non-Pauline Epistles (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1962), p. 38.

In I. Corinthians 15:7 Paul mentions that James received a special appearance of the Risen Christ. Whether James had been converted before or after the encounter is not known. The next biblical mention of James (in chronological order) is in the Upper Room in Jerusalem waiting with the rest of the disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14).

James rose as a person of authority in the Jerusalem church. In Galatians 1:19 Paul calls James an apostle. In Acts 12:17 Peter clearly recognizes James as occupying a position of authority in the church. He later is the president of the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15:14-21) in about 50 A.D. James retains this position of leadership throughout the record in Acts.⁵

Church tradition tells us that James died a martyr's death. The account which probably is the most accurate is that given by Josephus (Ant. xx ix 1). He places James's death about 62 or 63 A.D. According to this account, James was killed by the Sadducees through Ananus, the high priest. It happened after Festus died and Albinus, his replacement, was still in his way to Judea. Josephus reports that Ananus called for a Sanhedrin of judges and accused James of being a transgressor of the law. James was then stoned to death.

James acquired the name, "James the Just" (according to church tradition) as a reflection of his character. Everything in the biblical

⁵Robertson, Op. Cit., pp. 1-27.

account points to James as being a person of high authority within the Jerusalem Church who was respected by Jewish-Christians.⁶ James, the brother of Jesus, is the only James in the biblical record who had the authority to write such a letter during the time it probably was written.

3. Other Possibilities - Two other possibilities are sometimes set forth for authorship: (1) The product of a later-day Christian who affixes James's name to the epistle to gain its acceptance; and (2) A Jewish writing which has been "Christianized".⁷ These two possibilities are based on internal elements which will be discussed in the following part.

B. Internal Elements - The internal evidences of authorship speak the loudest for James, the brother of Jesus, as the author.

1. Elements in favor of James: (1) The atmosphere of the letter is clearly Jewish-Christian. He speaks about Abraham as "Our Father" in a literal sense (2:21) and writes about the Jewish heritage (such as Rahab, the prophets, Job and Elijah). God is spoken of in the Hebrew's term, "Lord of the Sabaoth" (5:4). James knows the Mosaic Law and takes it as a binding and final authority (2:9-11; 4:2). He uses "synagogue" to indicate the place of worship (2:2); (2) The setting must be Palestine, for only there in ancient times did farmers employ hired labor rather than slaves (5:4); (3) The author was deeply impressed by the moral teachings of Jesus. This epistle contains more

⁶Hiebert, Op. Cit., p. 46.

⁷Burton Scott Easton, and Gordon Poteat, "The Epistle of James", The Interpreter's Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 6.

verbal recalling of the teaching of Jesus than all the other apostolic writings taken together⁸; (4) There are some coincidences between the epistle, the speech of James at the Jerusalem Council, and the letter he wrote: (a) The letter and the epistle have a similar greeting; (b) Hebraic use of "your souls" (James 1:21; 5:20); (c) The verb "to turn" for conversion (Acts 15:3; James 5:19,20); (d) The expression "upon whom my name is called" (Acts 15:7; James 2:7); (e) "To spend" (Acts 21:24, James 4:3); and (f) "To purify" (Acts 21:24,26; James 4:8); (5) The epistle is the work of the type of person which the New Testament and church tradition reveal James to be: (a) No doubt James had a strong attachment to the Jewish Law (Acts 21, gathered from Galatians 2:12); (b) His keeping of the requirements of the Jewish Law won for him the admiration even of unbelieving Jews according to Josephus; (c) His epistle reflects a great deal of knowledge about the Old Testament; (d) Tradition says that he was especially known for his earnest prayer which may be reflected in James 5:16⁹; (6) The fact that he does not trouble to identify himself more fully, plus the fact that the letter is encyclical and it speaks in an authoritative tone, would all indicate that the author was the well-known James of the Jerusalem Church.¹⁰ It is also argued that if someone else was using

⁸Metzger, Op. Cit., p. 253.

⁹Ross, Op. Cit., pp. 14-18.

¹⁰Samuel A. Cartledge, A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1938), p. 156.

James's name they would have elaborated more so that there would have been no doubt as to who was meant.¹¹

2. An objection is to be considered: Some say that the rhetorical style of the letter presupposes a good Greek culture which would be improbable for one born and bred at Nazareth. This objection is countered by bringing in the fact that Palestine was of a necessity thoroughly bilingual. Having been reared in Galilee, James, like Jesus, learned Greek from his boyhood. Later, in Jerusalem, James probably came in constant contact with Hellenistic Jews and further refined his knowledge of the language.¹²

C. Summary - Although the external evidence is not conclusive by any means, it helps to support the strong case established by the internal evidence in favor of the traditional authorship view of James, the brother of Jesus.

II. Date - The date of the epistle and its authorship are closely related.¹³ If an early date can reasonably be shown, this would also strengthen the argument in favor of James, the brother of Jesus. On the other hand, if a late date is affirmed, this would weaken, if not destroy, the case for James, the brother of Jesus.

¹¹Hiebert, Op. Cit., p. 36.

¹²R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), p. 511.

¹³Cartledge, Op. Cit., p. 159.

A. External Evidence

1. Reference in other writings - The Epistle of James is thought to be reflected in "The Shepherd of Hermas", which has been dated between 100 and 150 A.D. Many scholars feel that the number of similarities are more than coincidental. The themes explored and their conclusions plus the terminology used point to a knowledge of James on the part of the author of "The Shepherd of Hermas".¹⁴

Some have felt there is also a great deal of closeness between the Epistle of James and the Epistle of Clement of Rome, which was written about 96 A.D. There seems to be some similarity between the two, although it is far from positive proof.¹⁵

B. Internal Evidence

1. Elements in favor of an early date - The following evidence argues in favor of an early date: (1) The simplicity of the greeting; (2) The use of "Synagogue" (2:2) for a place of worship suits the early church rather than a later date; (3) The mention of "elders" (5:14) as the only officials of the church would indicate that the church had not structured itself into other offices; (4) No mention of the issues which summoned the Jerusalem Council of 50 A.D. is made¹⁶; and (5) No allusions are made to the Jewish War of 66 - 70 A.D. and its aftermath, indicating it had not as yet happened.¹⁷

¹⁴Hiebert, Op. Cit., p. 32.

¹⁵Ross, Op. Cit., p. 12.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁷Joseph B. Mayor, The Epistle of James (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1913), p. cxiv.

2. An objection to be considered: Some object to the early date on the grounds that there is no allusion to any particular historical setting. They say that this better fits a 2nd Century date. Actually, this argument can be reversed and used in favor of an early date. It could be said that the lack of any definite historical event could be that none which are common to the book of Acts had happened as of yet.¹⁸

C. Summary - The evidence furnished by the epistle itself and in the historical data embodied in Acts, plus a few items found in other writings, argue in favor of an early date. The early date would strengthen the case of authorship by James, the half-brother of Jesus. If this is the case, and it will be assumed to be, then the epistle would have to date before 62 A.D., the date of James's death. Considering the lack of a historical setting, especially the Jerusalem Council (50 A.D.), the date for the epistle probably is between 44 and 50 A.D.. This would make James one of the earliest books in the New Testament, if not the earliest.

III. The Destination and Point of Origin

A. Destination - The letter is addressed to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion (1:1).

1. Possibilities - (1) Unbelieving Jews only; (2) Believing Jews only; (3) Both; (4) Jewish and Gentile Christians regarded

¹⁸Cartledge, Op. Cit., p. 160.

separately; (5) The same regarded as one body; (6) Jewish Christians primarily with references to Gentile Christians and unconverted Jews; (7) Gentile Christians primarily (since they are the true sons of Abraham, because the Jews had rejected Jesus).¹⁹

2. Internal evidence - The internal evidences favor the theory that the epistle was written to Jewish-Christians. They are: (1) The author speaks of Abraham as "Our Father" (2:2) in a literal sense. This would have great meaning for Jews, but probably would have to be explained to Gentiles; (2) The use of "synagogue" (2:2) to indicate the place of worship; (3) A familiarity is assumed on the recipient's part not only with Abraham (2:21,23), but also Rahab (2:25), the prophets (5:10), Job (5:11), and Elijah (5:17). Again, Gentile readers would require more explanation; (4) God is spoken of in the Hebrew's term "Lord of the Sabaoth" (5:4); (5) The vices which are exposed were common to both the Gentile and the Jewish community at the time of the writing. One cannot assume that the Jewish community was any more moral than the Gentile; (6) The author assumes a knowledge on the part of his readers of the Mosaic Law and assumes that they take it as a binding and final authority (2:9-11, 4:2) where a Gentile would not²⁰;

¹⁹Alfred Plummer, "The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude", The Expositor's Bible, ed. W. Robert Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), p. 566.

²⁰Ibid., p. 567.

and (7) if the address had only been to the Dispersion, then a Gentile audience might be possible, but James adds a qualifier in the form of "the twelve tribes". This is best taken as meaning Jews.²¹

3. Area - At the time of the epistle there were three major divisions of the Dispersion recognized: (1) The Babylonian, which ranked as the first; (2) The Syrian; and (3) The Egyptian. Although these were the major divisions, the Dispersion was not limited exclusively to these areas. The Acts record of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11) reveals that there were visitors from the Dispersion from all over the known world.²²

It is known that the Epistle of James was better known in the East than the West. It was included in the Old Syrian Version of about 200 A.D. This would indicate that the epistle was probably originally sent to the Dispersion in the East, most probably the Syrian Dispersion.²³ This would help account for it showing up earlier in the East than the West and would help locate its recipients.

4. Summary - The Epistle of James is an encyclical, originally addressed to Jewish-Christians in the Eastern Dispersion - probably Syria.²⁴

B. Point of Origin

1. The interior evidence points to Judea: (1) The reference

²¹Ibid., p. 566.

²²Ibid., p. 568.

²³Hiebert, Op. Cit., p. 51.

²⁴Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 5.

to "early and later rain" (5:7); (2) The results of hot winds on vegetation (1:11); (3) The presence of salt and bitter springs (3:11); (4) The cultivation of figs and olives (3:12); and (5) The picturing of the sea as nearby (1:6; 3:4).²⁵

2. Summary - Add the interior evidence to the conclusion that James, the Lord's brother, wrote the epistle between 44 and 50 A.D. and the logical conclusion for the point of origin would be Jerusalem.

IV. Purpose and Occasion

A. Purpose - The internal evidence indicates that James's purpose in writing the epistle was for the edification of his readers. He provides ethical instruction as to the type of lives Jewish-Christians should live in the midst of unconverted Jews with whom they associated in the different cities in which they lived. The letter also provides a standard by which its readers could determine that their faith was of the quality required for salvation.²⁶ It is perfectly clear that one purpose James does not have in mind is that of explaining or clearing up doctrinal matters.²⁷ James alludes to some basic doctrine points, but never seeks to expound on them, rather assuming all the time that his readers are well aware of these basic doctrines. For these reasons the epistle is sometimes compared with Amos, the Old Testament prophet.²⁸

²⁵Hiebert, Op. Cit., p. 52.

²⁶James Hardy Ropes, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James (in International Critical Commentary, eds. Samuel R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles A. Briggs. Edinburg, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1916), p. 2.

²⁷Easton, Op. Cit., p. 14.

²⁸Hiebert, Op. Cit., p. 31.

B. Occasion - James does not give any personal details, such as what prompted the letter, but by analyzing the contents of the epistle one can recreate much of the situation which prompted the epistle.

James probably is writing in response to information he had received concerning certain conditions in the lives of the Jewish-Christians of the Dispersion which needed correcting. The image given in the epistle is that of Jewish-Christians of the poorer classes, with a small number of richer brethren (1:10), struggling for existence in the midst of social and economic difficulties.²⁹

The epistle also shows that James found that these peoples' lives were not matching the faith which they professed. He wanted to show them that a saving faith is matched by a saving conduct.³⁰

V. Theme and Content

A. Theme - The epistle states no formal theme. Its rather miscellaneous contents are probably best characterized as general ideas of a "working faith". The author applies to this theme two basic principles: (1) The hatred of sham of every kind; and (2) The conviction that man cannot serve the world and God at the same time. Neither of the principles could serve as a title to the epistle, but they help to unite the various subjects which the author touches upon as he relates them to the quality of faith demanded of a Christian.³¹

²⁹Ross, Op. Cit., p. 31.

³⁰Hiebert, Op. Cit., p.23.

³¹Ropes, Op. Cit., p. 31

B. Content

1. Literary forms - The epistle has several types of literary styles present: (1) Epistolary; (2) Diatribe; (3) Wisdom Literature; and (4) Protrepticus (parenetic tract - a string of pithy moral sayings).³²

2. Likeness to other literature - (1) Jewish: The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Letter to Aristeas, Mishnah Aboth, and even the Hellenistic-Jewish apologist Philo; (2) Greek: The diatribe style of the Cynics and Stoics; and (3) Christian: Hebrews 13, the Writings of the Apostolic Fathers (I Clement, Barabas, the Didache), and the parenetic portions of Paul's epistles.

3. Language - (1) Type - The author writes in smooth and easy Koine as one would expect of a gifted and cultivated Jew of Palestine. This shows that the author was no Atticist in his style nor did he try to imitate the classical Greek writers;³³ (2) Usage - The language of James is clear, simple and straight to the point. It resembles a sermon in that: (a) Except for the introduction, there are no formal parts which usually are found in ancient letters; (b) It is Epigrammatic in style; (c) It is Hortatory in content; (d) There are 54 imperatives in 108 verses; and (e) There are short paragraphs linked by catch words.³⁴

³²Ibid., pp. i-xi.

³³Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 6.

³⁴Metzger, Op. Cit., pp. 251-252.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

OUTLINE³⁵

1:1 Epistolary Salutation

I. 1:2-2:26 On Certain Religious Realities

(1) 1:2-18 In the formation of character

- (a) 1:2-4 The real nature of trouble is an aid to a well-rounded character.
- (b) 1:5-8 Real prayer requires unwaivering faith.
- (c) 1:9-11 Poverty is real wealth.
- (d) 1:12 The endurance of trouble brings the crown of life.
- (e) 1:13-18 The real cause of sin is not temptation sent by God, but lies within yourself.

(2) 1:19-2:26 In religious instruction and public worship

- (f) 1:19-25 Hearing is indeed better than talking, but the real response to the word of God is not to listen only, but to obey.
- (g) 1:26-27 Real worship is inconsistent with reckless speech; the best worship is kindly service and inner purity.
- (h) 2:1-7 To court the rich and neglect the poor in the house of worship reverses real values.
- (i) 2:8-13 For such conduct it is a futile excuse to urge that the law of love requires it.
- (j) 2:14-26 Equally futile is it to pretend in excuse that the possession of faith dispenses from works.

II. 3:1-18 On the Teacher's Calling

- (a) 3:1-12 Against ambition to be teachers. The teacher is under heavier responsibility than others; yet the tongue (the teacher's organ) is as powerful as the little rudder of a great ship, as dangerous as a little fire in a great forest, and is untamable.

- (b) 3:13-18 The true wise man's wisdom must be meek and peaceable; such wisdom alone comes from above, and only peaceable righteousness receives the divine reward.

III. 4:1-5:20 Worldliness and the Christian Conduct of Life
Contrasted

- (1) 4:1-5:6 Worldliness in rivalry with God as the aim of life.
 - (a) 4:1-12 The cause of the crying evils of life is the pursuit of pleasure, an aim which is in direct rivalry with God and abhorrent to him.
 - (b) 4:13-17 The practical neglect of God seen in the trader's presumptuous confidence in himself; and the futility of it.
 - (c) 5:1-6 The practical neglect of God seen in the cruelty and luxury of the rich; and the appalling issue which awaits it.
- (2) 5:7-20 Counsels for the Christian Conduct of Life
 - (d) 5:7-11 Constancy and forebearance; and their reward.
 - (e) 5:12-18 The religious expression of strong emotion; and the efficacy of prayer.
 - (f) 5:19,20 The privilege of service to the erring.

³⁵James Hardy Ropes, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James", The International Critical Commentary, S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs, editors (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1916), pp. 4,5.

AN EXPOSITION OF JAMES 1:2 - 18

INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

Man has long been plagued by the problem of why the righteous suffer. Since the dawn of time, man has sought an answer to this problem. The Old Testament book of Job is wholly devoted to this problem. Job and his friends try to discover an explanation as to why Job is suffering, but as is usually the case, no answer can be agreed upon.³⁶ In fact, no single answer has ever been given which is completely satisfactory. Even as these words are being written, the problem still exists and no suitable answer has been offered. The next best thing to a suitable answer would be a way for a suffering individual to deal with his problem.

The author of the Letter of James is the first to approach the problem from a Christian prospective.³⁷ Although he does not attempt to give a definite answer to why the righteous suffer, he does give some practical advice as to how the righteous can suffer and what might be the results of such suffering.³⁸

³⁶Clayton K. Harrop, The Letter of James (Nashville: Convention Press, 1969), p. 18.

³⁷Mayor, Op. Cit., p. 189.

³⁸Howard P. Colson, The Practical Message of James (Nashville: Convention Press, 1960), p. 14.

TEXT

JAMES 1:2-18

(2) All joy regard it my brothers when various kinds of temptations should fall upon you (3) knowing that the proving (by testing) of your faith works out endurance (4) but let endurance have complete work, in order that you may be complete and whole, in nothing lacking. (5) But if anyone of you fall short of wisdom, let him ask from God who gives to all generously and not reviling, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith, nothing being doubted; for the one who doubts is like a surf of sea being moved by the wind and being blown here and there. (7) For let not that man think that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) a man double souled, unstable in all his ways.

(9) And let the poor brother boast in his exultation, (10) but the rich man in his humiliation, because as a flower of grass he will disappear. (11) For the sun rose with the heat and it dried out the grass, and its flower fell off and the beauty of its appearance perished. Thus also the rich man in his conduct will be destroyed.

(12) Blessed is a man who is enduring (lit: remaining under) trials, because having become approved he will receive the crown of life, which he promised to those who are loving him. (13) No one being tempted let him say, "From God I am being tempted" for God is evilly entemptable and he himself tempts no one. (14) But each one is being

tempted by his own desires, being dragged away and being lured. (15)
Then the desire having conceived bears sin, and the sin having been
completed brings forth death.

(16) Stop being deceived, my beloved brothers. (17) Every good
act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from
the father of lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of
variation.³⁹

³⁹Translated by the author from The Greek New Testament, ed. Kurt
Aland, Matthew Black, Bruce M. Metzger and Allen Wikgren (New York:
American Bible Society, 1966), pp. 779-780.

I. TRIALS FROM WITHOUT (1:2-12)⁴⁰

A. Variety in Trials (1:2)⁴¹

James opens his letter by dealing with two aspects of the Christian life. In verses 2 and 12 James is speaking of the experience of suffering. He uses a noun in verse 2 which may be translated "temptations" or "trials" to describe the cause of this suffering.⁴² In verses 13-14 a verb is used which is built upon the same root and has the same general meaning. In the context of the first chapter, it is probably best to translate the noun as meaning external trials and the verb as meaning internally oriented temptations.⁴³ By viewing verse 2 as meaning external trials instead of temptations, it is then easier to harmonize this with Jesus's admonitions to avoid temptations (Matt. 6:13, Luke 11:4, and Luke 22:40).⁴⁴ James is speaking of those external trials into which all men fall. They are unsought, unexplained and unwelcomed.⁴⁵

Verse 1 is devoted to describing the proper attitude that a Christian should take when confronted by these external trials.

⁴⁰Ross, Op. Cit., p. 23.

⁴¹Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 33.

⁴²Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. and eds. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 646.

⁴³Harrop, Op. Cit., p. 18.

⁴⁴Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 34.

⁴⁵Plummer, Op. Cit., p. 63.

James gives no explanation as to why they occur. The most that can be said is that God allows trials to befall his people.⁴⁶ Psychologists have long insisted that it is not what happens to an individual that causes personality problems, but how that individual responds to what happens to him.⁴⁷ One should rejoice and consider it a challenge when the many and different types of trials come. It is not James's opinion that one should be passive as a stoic or cynic might be, but one should be aggressive and overcome the trials.⁴⁸

B. The Product of Trials (1:3)⁴⁹

From the experience of meeting trials with joy, the Christian will see his faith being tested. This testing is the kind which validates something as being true or false.⁵⁰ This proven faith will in turn produce endurance. The Greek noun which is translated "endurance" is from a cognant verb used in verse 13 and which literally means "to remain under". A person with endurance is able to "remain under" the terrible pressures which external trials are able to bring to bear upon an individual. One will be able to stand fast and fight the problems of life rather than fleeing from them.⁵¹

⁴⁶Harrop, Op. Cit., p. 20.

⁴⁷Colson, Op. Cit., p. 15

⁴⁸Mayor, Op. Cit., p. cxxvii.

⁴⁹Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 36.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 37.

⁵¹Bauer, Op. Cit., p. 853.

James contends that we are to strive to correct all of the ills of life, and try to eradicate ignorance, poverty, disease, and crime. In truth, some of these things will never be changed; some may be alleviated in the future, but social ills will always persist in one form or another. With this in mind, the Christian is commanded to meet the problems of life with an active "stick-to-itiveness" in spite of the overwhelming odds. "We can conquer the bitter results of these evils by the joy in Christ that drives away despair"⁵²

C. Perfection by endurance (1:4)⁵³

Endurance has the ability to strengthen one's character. If endurance is incorporated into one's personality over a period of a life-time, without being interfered with by impatience and needless complaining when things go wrong, a complete and mature character will evolve.⁵⁴ The goal of the Christian life is spiritual maturity. The word which is translated "complete" means completeness in the sense of maturity or being fully grown.⁵⁵ This type of maturity only comes through the testing experiences of life. These experiences may be harsh, but should be viewed with the idea that they have the ability to bring maturity.

⁵²Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 37.

⁵³Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁴Ross, Op. Cit., p. 28.

⁵⁵Bauer, Op. Cit., p. 819.

Trials are not to be sought after. This would indicate a sick outlook on life. Rather, James gives practical advice for the handling of these calamities when they do come. Life provides ample opportunity for trials without an individual looking for them. The rejoicing is not in the trial, but what is in store for one if he conquers it through his faith.⁵⁶

D. Shortage of Wisdom (1:5)⁵⁷

James continues his theme of facing trials by telling his readers that if they "lack wisdom" they can receive it from God by just asking. He has moved from discussing the proper attitude that one should maintain while facing trials to the motivation of a person to face trials. Man has a need to know. He is a rational creature which must have an understanding of his life. This satisfaction does not come through knowledge alone. For James, wisdom is the proper use of knowledge. It is the right use of one's opportunities in righteous behavior. "It is living like Christ in accord with the will of God."⁵⁸

The Old Testament sometimes uses wisdom in the sense of the intelligence of God (Prov. 8:22-30). This wisdom can only come from God, for only a god could have a complete and integrated understanding of reality. Only a god could devise an uniform pattern of life in which man can find the answers to his problems.⁵⁹ The Christian can be

⁵⁶Harrop, Op. Cit., p. 22.

⁵⁷Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 40.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁹S. E. Frost, Jr., Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1962), p. 273.

thankful that he knows God and that God will give generously to those who will ask in faith. He does not bargain with man over the giving of wisdom, but gives it without condition to the man who asks in faith.⁶⁰

E. Doubting Prayer (1:6-8)⁶¹

A man gains insight into wisdom by demonstrating his faith in prayer. One must be firm not only in the belief that God is capable of having the right answer, but also that He will answer man in his time of need. James compares a man who doubts with the surf of a raging storm which is being driven by the wind and tossed about. In such an experience there is no foundation to which anything might be anchored. So it is also with the man who approaches God in prayer. A true prayer of faith requires a singleness of motive. A man without this singleness of motive is a man without a foundation to which he is anchored.

James describes such a man as "double minded".⁶² This man is "unstable in his ways" and not reliable. For prayer to be true, the asker must have a motive which is pure and which will not conflict with what he is wanting. A man asking in faith must desire God's will and be willing to follow it not matter where it may lead him.⁶³

⁶⁰Harrop, Op. Cit., p. 24.

⁶¹Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 42.

⁶²Ross, Op. Cit., p. 30.

⁶³Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 44.

F. The Democracy of Faith (1:9-11)⁶⁴

James now gives an example of what he has been speaking of. Poverty was a common problem in early Christianity. James uses a person's attitude toward materialism as an index to the individual's spiritual vitality.⁶⁵ The characters in the illustration are a rich man and a poor man. James uses them to show that no matter what the external circumstances might be, one can find reason for exaltation in them.⁶⁶ These circumstances are God's way of developing one's character. The true Christian approach to a situation is not to dwell upon the materialistic aspects of life, but to look to God and to find God's will within that situation. In doing so, the poor man is made high and the rich man is made low; the poor man finds that he is of immense value in the sight of God and the richer man finds that he is a miserable sinner in need of the grace of God. They find a common meeting level in Christ. "Each is as high and as low as the other - no more, no less. The rich man is not to glory over the poor man, nor is the poor brother to cringe in the presence of the rich brother. This is the democracy of faith, the universality of Christ."⁶⁷

G. Standing the Test (1:12)⁶⁸

The section concerning external trials is now ended. James's aim is to show an individual what he can expect if he is able to effectively "remain under" the pressure of trials. If one is successful

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 44.

⁶⁵Colson, Op. Cit., p. 17.

⁶⁶Ross, Op. Cit., p. 30.

⁶⁷Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 46.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 48.

he can expect to receive "the crown of life". The crown or reward is life. Life in this context refers to a quality of life which is marked by fullness and richness.⁶⁹ The rewarded person has found the secret of life by recognizing Jesus and by remaining faithful to him as the giver of life.⁷⁰ The winner of the "crown of life" has capitalized on the words of Jesus recorded in John 10:10b, "...I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

James also indicates that such an endurance shows those who truly love God. It is easy to be a "fair-weather" friend, but when the going becomes difficult, then a person's true devotion and loyalty are revealed. This also shows that faith to endure is grounded in a love of God.⁷¹

⁶⁹Ross, Op. Cit., p. 32

⁷⁰Colson, Op. Cit., p. 19.

⁷¹Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 49.

II. TRIALS FROM WITHIN⁷²

A. Blaming God (1:13)⁷³

The emphasis is now shifted from external trials to inner trials - temptations. As previously mentioned, in verses 2 and 12 the noun which is translated "external trials" is used and in verse 13 and 14 the cognant verb is used which is translated "internal temptations". The ideas are as closely associated as the word forms. The verb denotes inner temptations which are a specific type of trial. All temptations are viewed as trials, but not all trials are temptations. An external trial is forced upon one, while an internal temptation is the result of our being (temptations are part of "human nature").⁷⁴

It may be that James is writing in response to a particular situation, or he may be engaged in a diatribe where he is arguing with an imaginary opponent who seeks to make excuse for his sins in light of what James has just said about external trials. This person's logic may run something like: because trials are from God, then temptation to sin must also come from God because they are often brought on by external trials.⁷⁵

⁷²Ross, Op. Cit., p. 33.

⁷³Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 49.

⁷⁴Harrop, Op. Cit., p. 74.

⁷⁵Ross, Op. Cit., p. 33.

James dispells any such notion by stating that God has no moral weaknesses nor is he morally inconsistent by tempting any man. These statements are grounded in God's immutable character. God has "no variation" (verse 17) in that he is absolutely holy and ethical.⁷⁶

B. Snared by One's Own Bait (1:14)⁷⁷

The charge of inconsistency is made concerning the one being tempted, not God. Temptation occurs when man lets his desires gain control of his thoughts. These desires wage war to have their way.⁷⁸ Two hunting and fishing terms (drawn away and lured) are used to indicate the force desires have upon an individual. This whole process goes on within the individual. The blame for temptations rests with man and not God.⁷⁹

C. The Abortion (1:15)⁸⁰

The fact that the individual is being tempted does not constitute sin within itself. Only when the desire of man reaches out and embraces the forbidden object and a union is formed is sin born. Man must give volitional consent to the desire before it can be termed sin. James used the act of conception as an analogy. The seeds of destruction are the desires within man. When these desires take

⁷⁶Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 51.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 52.

⁷⁸Mayor, Op. Cit., p. 198.

⁷⁹Harrop, Op. Cit., p. 31.

⁸⁰Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 53.

control, an embryo of sin is produced. This embryo of sin then grows into full maturity and brings forth death.⁸¹ Probably both spiritual and physical death is meant here. Sin's immediate effect is to bring about a spiritual split between man and God. It has a numbing influence on man's soul. He no longer can see or feel the influence of God. If this process is allowed to go on, it ultimately brings forth physical death. This dying process could go on for an eternity without the grace of God.⁸²

D. God, the Source of Good (1:16-17)⁸³

James concludes this section by showing God's character as it is related to man. Harrop states it like this: "Whatever good may come in life comes from God, and whatever God gives is good."⁸⁴ This is supremely shown in the gift of his son for the redemption of man. Man needs a God who loves him and will and is capable of giving him gifts. Not only can and does God give good gifts, but he is consistent, and man can count on God because of God's consistency. He is wholly pure and unchangeable. He does not tempt men, for this would be inconsistent with his character, but is completely trustworthy of man's faith.⁸⁵

⁸¹Ibid., p. 54.

⁸²Ross, Op. Cit., p. 34.

⁸³Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 55.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 34.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 35.

E. The New Birth (1:18)⁸⁶

The greatest blessing God has given man is the possibility of redemption. This act is the antithesis of temptation; God is so far from tempting anyone that he can only bring regeneration. God still is the creator of the Genesis Act, only now he is creating new spiritual being by his word of truth. The "word of truth" is the good news that there is yet hope for man, even though he is subject to being "dragged away" and "lured" by his desires. The New Birth is proof positive that God's only wishes for man are good and pure and that he is incapable of bringing forth a situation whereby man could be destroyed.⁸⁷

⁸⁶Robertson, Op. Cit., p. 57.

⁸⁷Ibid.

SUMMARY

Joseph Mayor sums up James's view of trials and temptations concisely:

STAGES OF TEMPTATION

Pre-Moral Stages:

1. Internal nature with its impulses which often require some external stimulus to rouse them, otherwise remaining dormant.

2. Excitement of particular impulse through external stimulus of present or prospective pleasure or pain.

Moral Stages:

3. The impulse thus roused is brought under the purview of reason and conscience, and if unsanctioned by them, constitutes full temptation.

4. The two ways. Action of will under temptation:

a. Passively yielding under Satanic influence.

b. Actively resisting under Divine influence.

5. a. The understanding cooperates with the impulse, suggesting modes of gratifying it, and picturing the pleasure of gratification.

b. The will summons up the other powers of the mind and above all seeks aid from God to enable it to resist temptation.

6. a. The will identifies itself with the impulse and resolves on the steps required to attain the desired object.

b. The will identifies itself with conscience and refuses all parley with temptation.



7. a. Sinful act.
b. Virtuous act.
8. a. Habit of vice formed by repetition of vicious action.
b. Habit of virtue formed by repetition of virtuous acts.
9. a. Final result, death.
b. Final result, crown of life.⁸⁸

⁸⁸Mayor, Op. Cit., p. 198.

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