

A Study in James

The Tests of a Living Faith

Introduction & James 1:1–12

November 16, 2012

Background

Who is James?

James was the half-brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19) and was a witness to many aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3) and resurrection (1 Cor 15:7). He was also the first pastor of the church in Jerusalem and presided over the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal 2:9, 12).

Who is James writing to?

The expression "12 tribes" is used in Scripture in reference to Jews. The term *dispersed* is a technical term used of the Jews who are part of the diaspora. These are Jews who, because of persecution, were forced to live outside of Israel among the Gentile populations.

These particular Jews are also Christians. The phrase in 2:1, "do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ...with partiality" clearly points to believers.

When was this letter written?

The evidence points to a date sometime before the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 49. This would be at the most 17–19 years after Jesus' resurrection.

Why was this letter written?

There is no formal purpose statement in the book of James. Therefore the theme of the book must be identified from the overall content. James does not give us an extended theological section like we would find in many of Paul's letters. Instead he focuses on practical exhortations. In 2:14–26 it is apparent that James is writing to counter a superficial faith, or what we might call a "hollow orthodoxy." James is arguing for the necessity of good works as the evidence of genuine faith, and thus, of true salvation.

James is writing to Jewish Christians, exhorting them to demonstrate the reality of their faith in conforming to the biblical pattern of godliness in various areas of life.

What is the theme of the book of James?

Some have viewed the book of James as a random collection of practical exhortations. But these do have a unifying theme. Several commentators have identified this theme as *the tests of a living faith*. In other words, James is showing how a living faith will respond in various areas of life. James wants his readers (and us) to do a self-checkup. We are to examine ourselves and see if we're passing these tests, to see if our faith is measuring up to how a living faith evidences godly conduct (2 Cor 13:5).

James anticipates that his readers, having examined themselves, will see that their faith is a living faith and have assurance that they have been born of God (Jas 1:18).

However, for some tests, James assumes his readers are not passing. But even in these tests, assurance of salvation is still the goal. If we are convicted of sin in a particular test, James anticipates that we would respond with repentance and confession. If we do this, we can have assurance of salvation even in these tests. The Bible teaches that repentance and confession is the mark of a living faith when convicted of sin by God's word and Spirit (1 John 1:9).

Introduction (v. 1)

James is writing to former members of the Jerusalem church who have been scattered because of persecution. As their former pastor, he wanted to encourage them to demonstrate a living faith.

Notice here that James is writing as an official servant of God. James is not an apostle (a group made up of the twelve plus Paul). He is functioning here as a New Testament prophet.

Test #1: A Living Faith and Trials (vv. 2–18)

Three Responses to Trials (vv. 2–8)

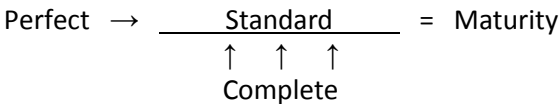
1) When you face a trial, count it a good thing (vv. 2–3).

One of the assumptions of verse 2 is that you *will* face various kinds of trials. We can find ourselves in all kinds of difficult circumstances in life. Whether it be problems with work, our health, family issues, or even outright persecution — there are many ways in which we can be tried. But the response of a living faith is to regard our trials as beneficial. This doesn't mean that they're happy experiences. It means that we should rationally consider them to be joyful in light of our Christian faith.

2) When you face a trial, patiently allow God to produce spiritual maturity in you (v. 4).

The temptation for many of us is to jump ship after we've experienced ten minutes of suffering. We prefer the easy way that is trial-free. But that is not what God would have us do. Only by enduring patiently the trials of life can God produce the fruits of spiritual maturity within us. If we don't allow this work to be done in us, we may have some serious short-comings in our faith. God doesn't want us to be immature, but rather well-rounded, spiritually mature Christians. Also consider the wisdom of Solomon:

“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.” ~Ecc 7:14 NKJV



Perfect = Meeting the Standard

Complete = All Attributes are Attaining to the Standard

3) When you face a trial, ask God for wisdom (vv. 5–8).

Wisdom is needed in trials, and God is poised ready to give it...if we ask! When you're not sure what to do in a situation, pray, and God will provide you with wisdom. But the wisdom He supplies is not merely a clever approach to things. It is skillful living in light of God's word and the fear of God.

Notice in verse 5 that James is addressing the need for more illumination, not more revelation. We don't need a new Bible

answer book. We just need to understand the book we already have! Also remember the context when you think of this verse. God is not some genie in a lamp that will grant our every wish. The promise here is the provision of godly wisdom to all who ask.

Verses 6–8 teach us that we are not to ask God in some offhanded way. Rather, we should believe God’s promise of verse 5 and expect Him to answer. Thinking to yourself, “This is another pointless prayer, but I may as well go through the motions” is not asking in faith. That is doubting God’s word, and God will *not* respond! The doubter will be pushed around by all of life’s trials because he lacks godly wisdom and will fail to grow spiritually.

The Consequences of Trials (vv. 9–12)

The Poor Brother (v. 9)

“Poor” should be understood in socio-economic terms. It is not referring to the attitude of the heart. This brother has no other means to rely on than the Lord, and the Lord will spiritually deliver (or “exalt”) him in the trial.

The Rich Brother (vv. 10–11)

By contrast, the rich brother will be spiritually humbled. When a trial comes, it will reveal that material wealth is not of ultimate value. Wealth cannot deliver the rich from trials. Only God is able to deliver. What He supplies in redemption is of true and lasting value. This is what the rich brother should glory in!

The One Who Perseveres (v. 12)

While the previous verses have described the present consequences of trials, this verse describes the future consequences — but only for a true believer! A true believer will persevere in trials and be proved genuine. This is not to say that we won’t ever fail. But trials will reveal the character of perseverance in a true believer. The reward for such perseverance is the crown of life — literally, “the crown *which is* eternal life.”

Note: This is not saying that believers must persevere in order to *merit* eternal life. Rather it is saying that all true believers will *necessarily* persevere! All believers must not only persevere in *the* faith, but also in faithfulness. The catch is that not all believers will persevere in faithfulness to the same degree. So let’s strive to do our best! ~AWB