

The Believer and Adversity

James 1

Overview – Introduction: *James 1:1*

The book begins with a humble introduction, with James referring to himself as the servant of God. There was no boasting to be found in this letter but a straightforward appeal to practical spiritual living. In his opening James also recognized his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, whom he placed on par with God the Father (John 10:30). This simple statement is a reminder that one cannot serve God the Father without accepting His Son Jesus Christ (John 5:23, 14:6).

Unlike many letters, this one was not written to a specific church or person but to Jewish believers in general. The Jewish people had been dispersed several times and as the

years passed many chose to remain outside of Israel. The gospel probably made its way to these people shortly after the Day of Pentecost, when those that heard the message of salvation returned to their homes (Acts 2). These believers in foreign countries were not forgotten but encouraged to live for the Lord where they resided. This letter called for them to apply the teachings of God to their life.

Overview – Tested Believer: *James 1:2-12*

Purpose of Adversity

Adversity is something all have to deal with, whether we want to or not. Most have discovered that difficulties come in various forms without discrimination. "The man who thinks to pass through this life without trials understands neither his own nature nor yet the environments in which he is placed."¹ The Bible does not offer false hope but gives understanding concerning trials. The word 'temptations' means putting to proof, usually by experiment, and implies a testing for verification. When we understand that every trial is a test, we realize that adversity has a purpose, which enables us to continue while trusting God to work (Romans 8:28).

Adversity may be burdensome but the results are tremendous. It is in difficult times that faith is verified and the believer strengthened. Since adversities provide opportunity for spiritual growth they

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Examples of Adversity

Criticism, Failure, Fear, Loneliness, Loss, Misunderstandings, Persecution, Rejection, Unfulfilled Dreams, Unmet Expectations etc.

¹ W. B. Riley, "The Bible of the Expositor and the Evangelist, Vol. 16," (Ohio: Union Gospel Press, 1931) p. 13.

should be viewed with joy. Remember, it is not the trial but the results that lead to rejoicing (Psalm 119:71). Knowing this, it is best to submit our will to God, while patiently trusting Him to lead. In doing so, patience will have her perfect work. The word for 'perfect' means complete and refers to a full man, a grown up or mature individual. This verse does not imply sinless perfection but spiritual maturity. When patience is complete so is the believer, because they have grown spiritually. Though it may not be easy, adversity is good because it produces mature Christians.

Prayer and Adversity

When adversity arrives, and it will, we are to seek wisdom from God. Trials will not always be understood, so wisdom is essential to live correctly. The blessing is that God gives wisdom liberally or bountifully (Matthew 7:7-8, 21:22; Mark 11:24). He does not hold back or refuse to bless those that ask. The only requirement is faith. When asking there must be confidence in God and no wavering. The example provided is of a wave in the sea being driven by the wind. It goes wherever the wind chooses. Likewise, those that lack faith will go wherever the world takes them. They will be influenced by emotions, trends, and popular teachings. Their prayers will not be answered and rightly so, because they remain skeptical. The Bible says they are double minded and unstable in all their ways. People like this are always changing and never settling on truth. If we want to have wisdom we must have faith (Hebrews 11:6). When we lack wisdom it is not God's fault, we either failed to ask or wavered when we asked.

Partiality and Adversity

There is no partiality when it comes to adversity. Both the poor and rich can expect hardships. The poor believer might not be on par with the wealthy in social circles but they are before God. They enjoy all of the blessings God has for His children. So when tested they should rejoice knowing God has exalted them. The rich believer is encouraged to rejoice when humbled. Recognizing what is important in life, they should place value on eternal treasures and not worldly ones, which fade away like the flower in the burning sun. Worldly riches are uncertain at best (1 Timothy 6:17). Here both poor and rich were encouraged to rejoice. No matter what we have or don't have we can praise God.

A reward is waiting for the faithful believer. It is not for those that are tried but those that continue through the trial (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Adversity provides a test of the faith. The believer will continue, though the road may be difficult, while the worldly person will eventually quit because of the troubles. The crown of life will be given to the ones that endured, it is promised to those that love Him (Revelation 2:10). We find that adversity proves the believer's faith, displaying whether it is true or not. It is the true believer that will continue when tested.

Overview – Tempted Believer: *James 1:13-18*

Source of Temptation

It is natural to look for a reason for our troubles. To find the source so we can put an end to the hardship or place blame. In this passage the subject is the action of temptation, the sin that may result from being tempted. The Bible makes it clear that God cannot be blamed for temptation or sin. Being a perfect God, He is unable to sin and tempts no man to stumble into wickedness (1 Timothy 1:17). Since temptation does not come from God that leaves two options, the individual or the devil.

The devil often receives blame for our sin but the Bible places the guilt somewhere else. Sin begins with us being drawn away, compelled to forsake that which is good. We are then enticed, deceived by personal lust. This lust is a longing for that which is forbidden, a strong desire of the soul for sin. Yes there may be outward enticements but it is the inward desire that leads to sin. Once deceived the individual will rationalize the lust and justify how it is needed. When lust is conceived it results in sin. Conceive means to clasp or take hold. It is at this moment sin takes hold of the heart and the individual is trapped (Matthew 5:27-28). With sin in control the mind will plan and plot how to fulfill the lust, and then the outward act of sin will follow. Contrary to popular teaching, it is evident that men and women are sinners with wicked desires (Romans 5:12). Clearly the blame is not with God, or even the devil, but with the individual.

Guarding Against Temptation

Be renewed and transformed. *Romans 12:2*

Be saturated with the word of God. *Colossians 3:16*

Be in control of your thoughts. *2 Corinthians 10:5*

Be desirous of the things of God. *Colossians 3:2*

Be aware of your thoughts. *1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 4:8*

Source of Blessings

During trials it is common to believe that God is not looking out for us. That He is being unkind and withholding His blessings. The devil tempted Eve with the thought that God was keeping something good from her (Genesis 3:1-5). However, James reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from above, so anything that is good or pure can be traced to God. He does not send evil or cause people to sin. The Lord is not out to confuse or discourage. It is because of Him we have life and are able to enjoy living. When tempted, remember in this world of uncertainties we can trust God, knowing He will never change.

The greatest gift is our new life, which is from God who begat us with the word of truth (John 3:16). It was His choice, not our will and it was through His work, not our efforts (Ephesians 2:8-9). God has chosen to make us His children through the word of truth. Yes we are saved by grace and through faith but it is His word that provides the seed for regeneration, "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). James concludes that temptation followed by sin brings forth death but the word of truth gives life. It is God alone that provides power to live eternally and correctly.

Overview – True Believer: *James 1:19-27*

Self Control

The believing Jews were directed to pay attention to their conduct, especially since they were facing adversity. Firstly, they were to be swift to hear. Many want to be heard but few are willing to listen. They were to listen to God through instruction provided in His word (Proverbs 22:17). Since this is mentioned first, as believers our attitude should be one of learning. Secondly, they were to be slow to speak, choosing their words wisely (Ecclesiastes 5:2, 9:17; Proverbs 10:19, 13:3, 15:2). Words are an important part of life and when used correctly can be a blessing. Since words cannot be taken

"Men have two ears, and but one tongue, that they should hear more than they speak."
Anonymous

back, it is always best to think before they are spoken. Thirdly, they were to be slow to wrath, having control over their temper (Proverbs 16:32). The wrath of man is opposed to the righteousness of God (Proverbs 22:24). It produces troubles and results in the breaking God's law. Many lives have been destroyed in a moment of anger. They were going to be tested, so the letter appealed to the readers to display self-control in their actions.

Because of the destructiveness of sin, the Jews were challenged to set aside all wickedness so they could receive the word of truth. It is impossible to grow spiritually until moral impurity is forsaken (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). Sin and spiritual growth are not compatible. One has to give way for the other to cultivate. Once separated from filthiness they could receive the engrafted word with meekness. Here we are reminded that God's word is engrafted or implanted in us. There is no divine spark to be found within each individual, all are born with a sinful nature (Romans 5:12). It is God that makes the difference between spiritual life and death. Since they belonged to God, they were to submit to His word.

Sincere Conduct

It is not enough to hear the word, the Bible demands action. First it must be read, studied, and meditated upon (Psalm 1:2). Then it must be applied to life. The example given is of a man looking into a mirror. Generally one looks into a mirror for examination, to find imperfections. Action is taken if something is incorrect. The man that looks into the mirror, views himself, leaves, and forgets what was seen has been deceived. What good came from looking into the mirror? Many are like that concerning God's word; they read it, are challenged, but never apply the teachings. They are deceived believing that reading the Bible was all that was required. Sadly, they are missing out on all that God has for them. The Bible is a blessing to those that obey it, the true believer (Psalm 19:7-11).

Our words give away our heart's condition. What we say, and how we say it, is who we are (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:34). If an individual has no control over his tongue, his other conduct is worthless. The entire person is changed with salvation, not just the appearance (2 Corinthians 5:17). Like the bridle restrains the horse, we must control our tongue. When the tongue is uncontrolled it is evidence that the soul has not been changed and evil remains. An individual like that is only religious and far from righteous. True religion considers others in both words and actions. The righteous will visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, those that require assistance without benefit (Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 10:14, 82:3). They will also seek God's ways instead of earthly gain, because of this they will separate from sin, choosing to live for the Lord. Basically, their new life will be evident by their conduct, even when there is adversity present.

Questions for Consideration

What do trials reveal?

What positive results may come from facing trials?

How do you respond to trials?

Looking back, have you grown through trials?

Do you seek God when tested?

What is the result of sin?

How can the believer overcome temptation and sin?

How is God's Word valuable?

In what way is the Word of God a blessing?

Do you read and apply God's word?

Points to Ponder

Why do we face difficulties?

The general purpose for trials is to test the believer's faith. It is a time to discover where our spiritual life is and to grow closer to God. The more we are tested, the stronger we become. Knowing there is a purpose will help us get through difficult times.

How should we deal with adversity?

The only successful way is with wisdom from God. Wisdom is the correct application of information – the proper use of knowledge. We are encouraged to pray for wisdom and not the removal of the trial. With God we can endure any difficulty.

What is it to be double minded?

The literal meaning of double minded is a man with two spirits. It implies a man that is impatient, restless, fickle, unstable, and unsettled. People like this, straddle the fence and attempt to live for both God and the world. So their prayers remain unanswered.

What about God?

We serve a wonderful God, who is unable to sin because of His perfection. Unlike men, He is not driven by pride, power, or possessions. He never loses control of His passions and always does what is correct. We can place our trust in Him.

Why the Bible?

It is compared to a mirror, which always shows the truth and never flatters. Likewise, God's Word tells us the truth about our sinful condition and evil conduct. It also provides the answer to both of those problems - Jesus Christ, with whom all things are possible.