

S E S S I O N T W O

RIGHTLY RESPONDING TO TRIALS*James 1:1-18***I. INTRODUCTION**

If we look at the book of James as a whole, there are three broad themes involved:

- (1) The proper response to trials and suffering
- (2) A challenge to obey the Word and repent of certain sins
- (3) The tension between rich and poor (and worldly desires)

We could draw a broad diagram of the book in this way:

The Broad Movement of the Book of James

A Call To Respond To Trials By Enduring In Faith and Truly Obeying The Word	A Summons For Expected Obedience To The Word (selected examples)	Final Exhortations For The Rich (who inflict suffering) and For Those Who Suffer
1:1-27	2:1—4:12	4:13—5:20

Chapter One forms the initial movement within the book, comprised of four sections:

Chapter One of James

The Author and His Greeting	The Proper Attitude Towards Trials	The Proper Attitude Toward God In Our Trials	Anger and Hasty Speech Must Be Replaced By A True Reception Of The Word In Humility
1:1	1:2-11	1:12-18	1:19-27

II. THE AUTHOR AND HIS GREETING

As mentioned in the Introductory Notes, the author is most likely James, the brother of the Lord, and the leader of the early church at Jerusalem. The letter is addressed to those Jewish Christians who have been forced to scatter from Jerusalem. This "dispersion" of the early

church helps us understand the subject of trials and suffering which is prominent within the book. He reminds his readers from the outset that they are the "twelve tribes," i.e., these Jewish Christians are the true Israel of God and the ones whom God will fulfill His good promises unto (cf. Mt 19:28; Rom 9:6-8).

III. THE PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD TRIALS (1:2-11)

A. God's Good Purpose for our Trials (1:2-4)

1. A Joyful Attitude Toward Trials (1:2)

This is a *faith* attitude. The trial itself is certainly not joyful, but our perspective of that trial can be. Vv 3-4 explain why there can be joy—because of the spiritual outcome this can potentially produce in our lives.

2. The Benefit of Trials (1:3-4)

a. The Natural Reaction to Trials

We are tempted to seek relief from the trial, rather than gaining every possible spiritual benefit.

b. "let endurance have its perfect result"

The word translated "perfect" is the Greek word *τελειος*. Basically this has the idea of something reaching its intended goal or for something to become complete, to reach maturity. Thus our responsibility is to endure the trial, so that the complete result can be achieved in our life.

What is the "complete result"?

To be perfect and complete means to reach maturity. The author is thinking of our character. The idea of "complete" may reflect the Hebrew idea of a man who was "complete" (*קָמַל*). Noah was such a man (see Gen 6:9).

B. The Availability of God's Wisdom for Our Trials (1:5-8)

1. Sometimes vs 5 is mistaken as an invitation for wisdom generally. But we must observe the context. This offer is made in relation to trials—it is the wisdom we need in the midst of our trial. God stands ready to give this generously.

2. God's wisdom is also available "without reproach"

Gk = *μη̄ ὀνειδίζοντος*. This word can mean to "cast insult" (as in Mk 15:32), but that is not the sense here. Notice the use in Mk 16:14—"He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart." So, the point is that when we approach God for wisdom in our trials, He does not respond by rebuking us. Rebuke is

appropriate when one is resisting God. The person who turns to God for wisdom in trials obviously show that he is submissive to God and desirous of His help.

3. Prayer for God's wisdom in trials must not be done with doubt (1:6-8)

C. The Blessing of Trials For Both the Rich and Poor (1:9-11)

1. Trials in relation to the Poor (1:9)

- a. The "brother of humble of circumstances"

This is a reference to the Christian who was financially and materially poor. Support: the contrast with the "rich man" in the next verse. This seems to be a major concern for James, as the subject surfaces again in Jas 2:1-13; 4:13-17; and 5:1ff.

- b. What is meant by the poor Christian's "high position"?

He is reminded of his spiritual riches—this is his consolation. In addition to the eternal life he possesses, James is also thinking of the kingdom riches that will be available to those who are faithful (2:5). Also, the reward available to them (1:12).

2. Trials in relation to the Rich (1:10-11)

- a. Is this a reference to rich Christians or the unsaved rich?

Commentators debate this, but probably a Christian.

(1) Despite the financial struggles of most of his audience, there were some rich people in the churches (note 2:2)

(2) Verse 10 is a deliberately shortened statement of vs. 9. Notice that the verb "let . . . glory" is an ellipsis (not actually in the text—but understood).

(3) The Gk construction for "the rich" is the same as that for "the poor." (ὁ ταπεινὸς -- ὁ πλούσιος). This suggests that "the rich" is also understood to mean "the brother who is rich."

- b. How is the "rich" brother to glory in his humiliation?

The rich brother is encouraged to *glory in*, that is rejoice in, the humiliation that he must endure as a Christian. There is a shame that he must endure as a believer, that is, his identification with Christ. But he should rejoice in this *more than* worldly riches, i.e., he should take greater joy in things of the Spirit than in what the rich would normally be expected to treasure.

Furthermore, he should welcome trials that will help keep him humble, and prevent him from being deceived by earthly riches.

- c. The rich man is reminded of the temporal nature of his present estate (1:10b-11)
 Whatever financial success and blessing he may presently enjoy is short-lived at best. He will certainly have to give this up at death. It is his status as "rich" that will pass away (not him).

IV. THE PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD IN OUR TRIALS (1:12-18)

A. The Blessedness of Successfully Completing Trials (1:12)

- 1. Verse 12 is a Hinge Verse

It reflects back on what has just been said, and it points forward to the next subject of discussion. There is great reward for enduring trials (backward), and it reminds us of the importance of our attitude and respect for God in the trials ("those who love Him")—which he will begin to talk about in vv 13ff.

- 2. "Approved" By God (δόκιμος)

This looks at the Lord's commendation (note 2 Cor 10:18)—obviously for successfully enduring in trials and achieving the character God desires to see in us. It can also be *now*, in this life (cf. Rom 16:10). The idea of character is suggested by the use of the related noun δοκιμη in Rom 5:3-5.

- 3. The Reward for Successful Completion: "the crown of life"

In Rev 2:10 (the only other place where we have this phrase), this refers to a special reward for those who are faithful unto death. It is certainly not to be confused with the gift of eternal life (which is not dependent upon human faithfulness). There are two things from the context that suggest this may be some kind of enrichment of our temporal experience.

- a. There is a similarity of vs 12 with Jas 5:11 ("blessed" and "endured")
 Following Job's great trial, there was an outpouring of the Lord's compassion and gifts on him.
- b. The following context speaks about sin which results in death. So, it looks like the outcome of sin is being contrasted with the outcome of faithful endurance.

TRANSITION

During trials, a Christian should "love God" and respect Him. But this is not always the case. Due to the stress of being under trials, the Christian may experience evil thoughts or actions. And there can be a temptation to blame God for any inclination towards evil that he may have.

B. A Warning of A Wrongful Attitude Towards God (1:13-15)

Job's case is a perfect illustration. He was made to undergo a trial he did not understand. In the midst of this, there was a temptation to "curse God" for his difficulties (Job 1:11; 2:5,9).

1. Any moral failure must not be blamed on God.
The real fault lies within. If our own evil impulses are not kept in check, we will go through a vicious cycle that results in sin and death.
2. What kind of death is in view? Probably spiritual death (parallel to Gen 3)
 - a. People don't usually die physically when they sin (although they can—Prov 10:27; 1 Cor 11:30)
 - b. We will all die eventually, regardless of the extent to which we have sinned
 - c. The text doesn't say that death *may* result, but that it will!
3. The probable nature of this "death"
 - a. Feelings of estrangement from God (loss of fellowship)
 - b. Despair over the guilt of sin (sin often makes us miserable—never good). This would include feelings of failure and worthlessness.
 - c. Loss of desire for righteousness (the flesh will not want to please God)
 - d. Your relationship with the Holy Spirit will be hindered—not "filled"
 - e. Loss of vision

C. A Defense of God's Character and Goodness (1:16-18)

1. He begins by warning us of a deception that can infect any of us (1:16)
One of Satan's mightiest tactics against the Christian is to get him/her to doubt God's character (remember what Satan did with Eve in the Garden).
2. It is God's nature to give us good things, not evil (1:17)
The imagery in this verse is of God in contrast with the heavenly luminaries such as the sun, moon and stars (cf. Ps 136:7-9; Jer 31:35). They may vary, but He does not. The point is that God's character and actions towards us are perfectly consistent. He does not waver in that. Only perfect gifts come from Him.
3. A reminder of God's loving attitude toward His children (1:18)
 - a. The Interpretation of Vs 18
Verse 18 is looking at our redemption and new birth—the greatest gift any of us could ever receive. Support: the phrase "the word of truth"—this is used in 4 other places in the NT to refer to the Gospel (2 Cor 6:7; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5; and 2 Tim 2:15).
 - b. The Point of Bringing This Up
This is meant to remind the reader of God's perfect love. He who loved us with the cross loves us in the midst of our trials! He is not going to suddenly turn and bring evil against us.

FINAL LESSONS FROM OUR STUDY

Character building does not come easy. Left to ourselves, we might not always change. It takes divinely designed lessons—often painful—to prompt true heart change. In the long run, you can see the difference.