



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Catholic Epistle of St. James

Chapter 1

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Introduction

- Author: St. James (1:1)
- There are three men who bear this name in the New Testament
- James, son of Zebedee and brother of John: A fisherman called by Christ who later became an apostle. He was killed by Herod in 44 A.D.
- James, son of Alphaeus: Another one of the apostles, he may be "James the younger," whose mother, Mary, the sister of St. Mary the Virgin



Introduction

- James, the brother of our Lord: his cousin, he could be the same James son of Alphaeus
- He became the Bishop of Jerusalem and he is the author of this letter
- Tradition describes James as man of prayer, which explains the emphasis on prayer in his letter
- It was said that he prayed so much, his knees were as hard as those on a camel



Introduction

- He was martyred in 62 A.D., either by being cast down from the temple, or beaten to death by clubs
- It is reported that as he died, he prayed as did the Lord Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
- Recipients: The epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1)
- This naturally leads one to think of Jews living outside the land of Palestine



Introduction

- Since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, many Jews were scattered in the world
- While Jews, the epistle makes it clear that they were also brethren in the Lord, i.e., Christians
- Nineteen times St. James calls them "brethren" and at least one time he definitely means those who were brethren "in the Lord" (2:1)
- It appears many of these Jewish Christians were poor and oppressed



Introduction

- Being Jews, they would often be rejected by the Gentiles. As Jewish Christians, they would also be rejected by many of their own countrymen
- The letter indicates that most were poor, and some were being oppressed by the rich (2:6-7)
- Because it was not addressed to a single church or individual, it has been categorized a "General" or "Catholic" (universal) epistle along with 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude



Introduction

- Time and place of writing: With no mention of the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts 15 (A.D. 49), and the use of the word "synagogue" (assembly, 2:2), 48-50 A.D. is the date
- This would make it the first book of the New Testament written
- If James, the Lord's brother, is the author, then he probably wrote it in Jerusalem



Introduction

- Purpose: practical aspects of the Christian life
- In 108 verses, there are 54 commands, prompting some to call James "the Amos of the NT"
- True religion endures trials (1:2-18)
- True religion is doing, not just hearing (1:19-2:26)
- True religion displays wisdom (3:1-18)
- True religion is based on humility (4: 1-17)
- True religion is blessed through patience, prayers, and love (5: 1-20)



Introduction to Chapter 1

- After the salutation (1), St. James begins with a call to view trials as occasions to grow (2-5)
- If wisdom is needed, ask God with faith (5-8)
- The poor are to rejoice in their exaltation, while the rich for their humiliation (9-11)
- Motivation to endure temptation is given (12-15)
- God is the Father of every good and perfect gift which comes down from above (16-18)
- Be doers of the word and not hearers only (19-27)



Greeting to the Twelve Tribes (1:1)

- Bondservant of God: not that he was not an apostle; but as addressing the Israelites generally, including even indirectly the unbelieving, he in humility omits the title "apostle"
- To the twelve tribes: The Jews
- Which are scattered abroad: of the Dispersion, a term applied to Jews outside of Judea
- The dispersion of the Israelites, was a divinely ordered means of spreading Christianity

Profiting from Trials (1:2-8)



- Instead of murmuring over trials, rejoice in them
- Trials are given to test our faith
- We are strengthened by trials because they produce patience, experience and victory
- Let endurance not be passive, but have perfect work (he who endures to the end will be saved)
- When we endure to the end we will grow in perfection and completion, that nothing may be lacking in our lives

Profiting from Trials (1:2-8)



- If you lack wisdom, the wisdom whereby you may "count it all joy when you fall into various trials," and "let patience have its perfect work."
- Then let him ask of God. This may be one of the things you lack, if so, go to God for it
- God listens to us and in answer to our requests He gives liberally, more than we ask or understand
- Also he never reproach us on account of our requests as men so often do

Profiting from Trials (1:2-8)



- Faith is an essential condition to prevailing prayer
- He who doubts the power of God
- Driven with the wind: from without
- Tossed - from within, by his own unstableness
- Anything: namely, of the things that he prays for
- The one mind is directed towards God, the other to something else
- He is not a hypocrite, but a "wavering" man

The Perspective of Rich and Poor (1:9-11)



- Sometimes we do not doubt God but we doubt our worthiness resulting in double mindedness
- “Rejoice” is the most effectual remedy against double mindedness
- Exaltation: To be children of God, and heirs of glory, given because of His unconditional love
- The rich man should not glory in his riches because the world will pass away, rather he should humble himself and this will be his true glory

The Perspective of Rich and Poor (1:9-11)



- Riches can cause double mindedness: sometimes he trust in God, other times he trust in riches
- If he glory in riches, this riches will be his humiliation, because he will also pass away
- Those who trust in riches, when the sun of trials rise with a burning heat, they cannot rejoice but rather they will fade away in his pursuits
- Pursuits: In the midst of his various pleasures and employments

Loving God Under Trials (1:12-18)



- He that endures and continues faithful shall have the crown of life. His enduring proves his love, for it is love only that endures all things
- Some men when they fall try to throw the blame on God, as if God had tempted them
- It is impossible that God be tempted of sin, nor does he ever tempt men to sin. God does not send trials on you in order to make you worse, but to make you better

Loving God Under Trials (1:12-18)



- In the beginning of the temptation, he is drawn away of God by his own desire when he allows his own lusts to lead and entice him
- We are therefore to look for the cause of every sin, in, not out of ourselves
- There can be no temptation unless something within us causes a sinful desire
- Even the attacks of the devil cannot hurt before we make them our own

Loving God Under Trials (1:12-18)



- Every one has desires arising from his own foundation, tempers, habits, and way of life
- The power of Satan lies in his ability to entice us
- The sinful desire is the conception when the will joins; the sinful deed, is the birth; moral and eternal death is the final result when sin grows up to maturity (no repentance)
- Do not be deceived either about the source of sin or of all good gifts

Loving God Under Trials (1:12-18)



- All Gifts are from God, the Creator of every light of the material world, and also all moral light
- God is unchangeable, always the same, nor does he cast a shadow of turning like the sun
- The allusion is to the constantly changing shadows of objects in the sunlight caused by the movement, not of the sun, but of the earth
- He is mere light. If there is any such turning, it is in ourselves, not in Him

Loving God Under Trials (1:12-18)



- His own will: Most loving, most free, most pure, just opposite to our evil desire
- Brought us forth: by baptism to those who believed in the word of truth: the gospel
- Firstfruits: in resurrection (1cor 15: 20, 23)
- Of all God's visible creatures, believers are the noblest part, and like the legal "first-fruits," sanctify the rest; for this reason they are much tried now

Qualities Needed in Trials (1:19, 20)



- So then: as your evil is of yourselves, but your good from God, here is a good way of escaping temptation arising from yourselves
- Let each saint hear and learn, but be careful not to speak rashly, and especially in anger
- Slow to wrath in becoming heated by debate
- Or the indignant feeling of nervousness under the calamities to which the human life is exposed
- Hastiness of temper hinders hearing God's word

Qualities Needed in Trials (1:19, 20)



- Man's angry zeal in debating, as if jealous for the honor of God's righteousness, is far from working that which is really righteousness in God's sight
- True "righteousness is sown in peace," not in wrath (Jas 3:18)
- An angry man will show forth something very different from God's righteousness
- The righteousness of God here includes all duties prescribed by Him, and pleasing to him

Doers—Not Hearers Only (1:21-27)



- Laying aside as a dirty garment every impurity of life and every known sin
- Wrath would cause such an overflow
- With meekness: modesty, and anything that is contrary to a haughty and proud spirit
- Receive - Into your ears, your heart, your life
- The word: of the gospel implanted in your hearts
- The hope of salvation nourishes meekness

Doers—Not Hearers Only (1:21-27)



- The word will save us when we do it
- Not merely "Do the word," but "Be doers" systematically and continually, as if this was your regular business (Mt 7:21-23)
- Deceiving your own selves by the myth that the mere hearing is all that is needed
- As a man may behold his natural face in a mirror, so the hearer may perceive his moral features in God's Word

Doers—Not Hearers Only (1:21-27)



- Goes away to other business of the world or to relaxing the attention after hearing i.e. letting the mind go elsewhere, and the interest of the thing heard pass away
- The impression of the word on such a man is soon forgotten. The word is impressed by doing it
- Perfect law of liberty: the gospel, which sets men free. He who looks into it, is impressed by it, and obeys it shall be blessed in the doing

Doers—Not Hearers Only (1:21-27)



- Religious: He who professes religion
- He who does not control his tongue is deceived
- Unless he is serious to rule the tongue, he religion is useless in respect of salvation
- The pure religion which combines pure hearts and pure outward lives, has two elements
- First, kind and loving deeds, as in helping the helpless, such as widows and orphans
- To live pure, unstained by the sins in the world



Conclusion

- How should Christians view trials in their life? Why?
- What is the value of developing patience?
- If we lack wisdom, what should we do? Why? How?
- What is one who doubts like? What can he expect? Why?
- In what should the lowly brother glory? The rich man?
- What is the rich man like in his pursuits?
- When is the man who endures temptation blessed? How will he be blessed?



Conclusion

- What should no one say when they are tempted? Why? Then how is one tempted?
- When is sin born? What does sin produce when full-grown?
- What is the source of every good gift and every perfect gift?
- How has God brought us forth (given us birth)? Why did He do this?
- What does James desire of his "beloved brethren"?
- Why should one be "slow to wrath"?



Conclusion

- What needs to be laid aside?
- What needs to be received with meekness? Why?
- To avoid deceiving ourselves, what must we be?
- What is one like who hears the word but does not do it?
- Who will be truly blessed in what they do?
- Whose religion is useless?
- What is pure and undefiled religion before God?